BOOK FOUR

We are entering a time of great bloodiness. In such a period passion speeds up. It is not a time for faint signals. Our new lipsticks will be the gaudiest ever—such reds as you have never seen.

Frost R. Felder, President
To the board of directors
Agape, Inc.
September 10, 1939
Miami, Florida

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Chapter one

In Herman Felder's suite at the Edgar Allan Poe Motor Lodge, Condominium and Adventure in Living, Willie tried to pray. It was 3 A.M. and he was very tired. He sat under a huge depiction of the famous poem, "The Raven." In gilt letters under the painting were the words: ED POE WAS A GOOD AMERICAN. HE FOUGHT MONISM WITH SOMETHING MIGHTIER THAN THE SWORD. *Clement "Clem" Thrigg, 44th President of the United States.*

Willie could hear the low voice of Joto ministering to Herman Felder in the next room. Thatcher Grayson had returned to his own hotel—one of the players had got stuck

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in an elevator. ("Sin has caused them to make errors off the field as well as on.")

As he sat there, eyes closed, trying to compose himself for prayer, a door opened noiselessly and a human tree took shape before him.

A full minute passed before he felt its presence. Then he opened his eyes.

With a little cry he flew to the branches of the human tree.

"Truman! Oh Truman!"

Truman kissed his hair, bending down a little.

"My dear brother, my brother."

Truman hugged him close, closer.

"Where—do you come from? Oh Truman—how are you? Father Benjamin? The brothers? Where?"

Truman, smiling, waved his great airplane arms: *so many, many questions.*

Willie laughed. "I'm sorry, dear friend. Here." He led Truman to the chair he had been sitting in. "Come now. Sit down. Rest. You must be hungry. Let's get some food for you."

As he sat down, Truman made a vaguely comic sign about his size.

"Some tea? No. Wine? Let me find some good wine for you."

Truman shook his shaggy head. Then he made a sign as if to say he could eat downstairs—he lived here, in this suite.

"You're staying with Brother Joto and Brother Herman?"

Yes, nodding.

"But you were in prison."

Yes.

Truman then told his story in sign, making the beautiful gestures that Willie loved to see.

Truman, after leaving the Servant camp in Texas, had gone to substitute for a convicted rapist in Trenton, New Jersey. The rapist himself had been a Servant substitute.

Truman had transferred from this jail to three other jails, eventually landing in a prison in Maryland, where Joto Toshima and Herman Felder were serving short sentences.

(Truman made a little sign here to indicate parentheses. In the parentheses he showed an old law being changed—a new system coming in. Under the new law, prison substitution was much easier than before: anyone could serve anyone else's sentence as long as the number of prisoners in the country was proportionate to the number of crimes committed in any given year.*)

Several weeks ago Father Benjamin had asked a sister Servant to substitute for Herman Felder. On his release Felder went to Atlanta, where he spent several days visiting Benjamin. A week later two brothers came to the Maryland prison to release Truman and Joto. Since that time, Truman's signs indicated, the trio—Felder, Joto and Truman—had been moving about.

"To the riots?"

Truman nodded.

Then a sign that said *illness*: Herman Felder.

Willie nodded sadly.

But now, this minute, Truman signified, things would get better. His craggy face brightened. He and Willie and Joto were going on a mission of great love that would manifest God's tenderness—Truman's sign for the tenderness of God was that of a father cradling some infant creature he loved more than himself. Then he added: *if there were a God.*

An airplane sign. Truman's eyes shone like the eyes of a boy with a shiny model monorail. Herman Felder had a beautiful jet and he, Truman, would fly it.

"Where do we go?" Willie asked.

Truman made a wonderful baseball of the world out of his great fist.

"Tell me about Father Benjamin. Has his health been all right through these years?"

Truman gave the thrive sign for the White Beard and the same for the other brothers.

"Oh Truman," said Willie. "Such happy news you bring!

*Truman referred to the Freedom of Punishment Amendment to the U.S. Constitution.

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And do you know—I've never seen you smile before."

It was true. Under the depiction of Edgar Allan Poe's famous poem, the Man of Sorrows was for the moment the Man of Laughter, except that he did not have the equipment to laugh.

Joto came from the other room, shirtless, exhausted.

Truman and he exchanged the friendship sign.

"Brother Herman is all right now, Joto?" Willie asked.

"All right now because sleep. All right in morning when first drinks make young. All right until early afternoon. Then start to get old. From four o'clock to midnight, go from forty to eighty. Regular procedure."

"But why?"

Joto and Truman looked at each other unhappily.

"Is most complicated, Willie brother," said Joto. "Too complicated for me, too complicated for maybe anyone."

"Mr. Grayson said he had stopped drinking for three years. Why does he drink now? There must be some reason."

Joto sighed. "Movies play on in head that cannot be made. Try to stop movies but hard to stop. Now worry too about mission. Brother Herman tell you of mission?"

"Only a little."

Joto groaned. "He was to brief you on all that. Main men of church coming tomorrow. You were to be ready."

"But what will we do with Brother Herman?"

Truman signified that Herman Felder was going on the mission with them.

"He is in no condition to travel," said Willie.

"Only on mission will movies stop," said Joto. "Stop movie, stop drinking. Mission save Brother Herman from art death."

Willie tried to follow this thought.

"Besides," said Joto, holding up his strong hands, "even when drinking, Brother Herman very great organizer. Number one director."

"He can organize nothing now," said Willie.

"Mission is salvation," Joto replied. "Plunge in real. Then

all benefit."

"Maybe we could call his wife—Maybella?"

Joto shook his head. "She in space."

Confusedly the memory of the Pentecostal meeting came back to Willie. He saw the yellow-haired girl, singing.

"Maybe, brothers, if we listen for a while," he said then, "maybe we could get some helpful pictures."

Taking his Guidebook, he opened it at random and his eyes fell on the entry of Servant Sally Tea, of the twentieth century.

"Let's consider these words," Willie said, and he read the words of Sister Sally: *The cross is the perfect sign of J. The crossbar shows the earth part of life; the vertical beam, the divine. All truly human life is cross-shaped. But in today's world, life has become either-or: people are either crossbars or up-beams.* "Let's listen to these words a little while and ask the Loving One for good pictures so that we can help Brother Herman."

So they listened for a half hour, standing under the watchful eye of "The Raven." They then exchanged their *dona* in sign:

Truman: *Man fall into ground so far, have to dig to find him, but nobody digging: everybody looking up.*

Willie: *Man trying to fly on wooden wings. People say can't be done, but man flies off anyway. Then he reaches the sun, and wings catch fire. People say, We told you.*

Joto: *Without art, violence. But when art only ego-shine, then*—Joto showed an arrow traveling in a circle and coming back to strike his heart.

Willie said wearily, "We speak out of our own needs and with great sadness. The air we breathe is the life breath of a sad brother."

They went to bed.

* * *

All that night Willie dreamt his flight dream. He was soaring over very beautiful country with hills like the soft

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breasts of women, and the sky above was tinctured with rose and gold and the air was wonderfully sweet and fresh, as after a rain, and he did not want to stop flying and when he felt the pull of the weights on his wings, he shook himself in the air, struggling to fly free, and then there came the voice of Joto and it was time to get up.

"You were far under," said Joto. "Men are here. Herman in next room want to see you."

"Good morning, Joto," said Willie. "What men?"

"Of church."

Felder appeared at the doorway, carrying a carafe of coffee. To Willie's astonishment, he looked fresh and young. His voice, as he spoke, was lively and cheerful.

"The chiefs have gathered," he said. "Better have some coffee."

As he came nearer, Willie smelled the roses.

"Brother Herman, what's it all about? Who are the men?"

"Some of the men you know—Cardinal Goldenblade; his brother, the gunmaker and publisher; a young bishop named McCool; Cardinal Tricci, who is the apostolic delegate, and Archbishop Looshagger who seems to be archbishop of this city."

Willie could not believe how young Felder looked.

"But what brings them here?" he asked.

"The mission of course. I told you all about it yesterday, but you were too busy listening to Thatcher's Pentecostals. Incidentally, the flight plans are final now."

He looked like a youthful businessman, happy, relaxed, a man of thirty preparing for a holiday.

Joto eyed Willie over Felder's shoulders, watching his reaction.

"I am flying," Willie said carefully. "I know we are to fly. But where?"

"Oh well, the details they'll tell you about. Let's go face them. Remember, it's a show for them. It means something altogether different for us. Don't mention Benjamin by the way. He set this up, most of it, using the name of Archbishop Tooler."

Willie searched Joto's face for an explanation, but Joto's face told him he had none.

Into the room, behind the cloud of rose perfume, went Willie.

And there, around a gilt-edged table in the splendid parlor of the Lord Calvert Suite, with maps and charts and lists and strange documents spread before them, were the churchly and worldly powers, ruddy faces, excellent clothing, manicured hands.

Smiles, the manicured hands stretching out.

"Your Excellency—"

"Dear Bishop—"

All rose.

Goldenblade handled the introductions, immediately confusing Delegate Tricci by calling Willie, Bishop Brother. Since Tricci knew Cardinal Goldenblade was in fact the brother of G. D. Goldenblade, he concluded that G. D. Goldenblade had completely missed the point of the negotiations of the past week and believed the Vatican wished to send his own brother on the mission.

"Who then were this man?" said Tricci pointing to Willie.

"Bishop Brother," said Goldenblade.

"*I'm* your brother, George," said Earl.

Bishop McCool intervened. "This is the man, Cardinal Tricci, Bishop Willie." McCool put both hands on Willie's shoulders.

"Isn't that what I said?" Goldenblade demanded.

"You said Brother, brother," said Earl Goldenblade.

"But they *call* him Brother, Father," said George Goldenblade.

"Unless a man leave father and mother, he cannot be his brother's keeper," said Archbishop Looshagger, who had just been put on probation for car theft.

"My English were not fine," said Cardinal Tricci.

"It's certainly wonderful now," said George Doveland Goldenblade.

"Good Christ," murmured Felder.

Earl Cardinal Goldenblade, a man of great piety, took this

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to be an invitation to prayer.

"You are right, Mr. Felder. And since this is the age of the layman, I ask my brother George to lead us in prayer."

"Dear Mother Mary," said Goldenblade lowering his head, "while we stand here with heavy hearts in a city that has goldarned near burned itself to ash, keep our hearts chaste until just tomorrow. May the vision of Fatima keep our goshdarn minds clear of the heady fumes of monism and other rot. We ask the Holy Spirit to prevail upon your gracious heart to ask your son to look after His Father's business which today in a unique way becomes the business of Father Brother. Amen."

"Amen."

They took chairs around the gilt-edged table. Solemnly Cardinal Tricci put on his spectacles, broke the seal of a large envelope and extracted an official-looking document.

"I realized we does not speak American splendid. Nevertheless Holy Father moved me here to say this letter. I would endeavor to accomplish." Now he began to read the letter, translating from the Latin as he went. The letter was addressed to Willie.

"In view of your recent quellings of civil perturbations and in face of many unfortunate forms of civil alarm and catastrophe in many nationalities of universe, all over, our wisdom charity humility faith and goodness inspired us to accomplish through you new missions of peace mercy and quietness to some strife-torn territories where many evil things are going on which surpasses man's knowledge and power.

"We wish to send you around all those places where sins have caused men to break up the country all over and every which fashion and bring charity and peace of Christ to souls who have forgotten about wisdom and holiness and purity.

"Wherefore we suspend you of many duties—that is, *your* duties" here Tricci looked at Willie, "as auxiliary bishop of Houston, in Texas, United States, and other offices held by self in country of same and appoint you to special mission of bringing peace to disharmonious nations and justice to men which are tumulting and revolving—revolving?" Tricci

turned to George Doveland Goldenblade.

"Revolting."

"To revolting men and lead to calm refuge all those who are suffering atheistic monistic lies and evils and insufferabilities." Cardinal Tricci sneezed. "Signed at Rome, August 15, Assumption of Blessed Virgin Mary, eighth year of our Pontificate. Felix VII."

Willie looked at Tricci, then McCool, then Felder.

Felder was smiling.

"Perhaps," said Cardinal Goldenblade, "we could paraphrase that a bit. His Holiness, as you must know, Bishop, is very concerned about the rise of monist violence all over the globe. He has seen and heard of your miraculous way of calming the troubles here in the United States. Now he is asking you to use these God-given gifts to help restore peace and tranquillity and the spirit of brotherhood in all those places of the world where killing and bloodshed have caused men to forget the message of the Prince of Peace."

Through the window behind them, Willie could see the first of the bulldozers beginning to work on the burned tenements of Baltimore.

"My brother here, along with Bishop McCool, and with the help of many experts from Europe, and of course with the advice and assistance of Cardinal Tricci have been reviewing the appeals that have been coming into the Vatican this past year. To the new RevCon office."

"What is that?" said Willie.

"The Pontifical Commission for Relief to Distressed Nations." said Bishop McCool. "RevCon is just the slang for it."

"What do they want?" said Willie.

"Peace in their lands," said Cardinal Goldenblade. "An end to the violence perpetrated by Marxists, monists and counter-counterrevolutionaries."

"You don't imagine they enjoy murder, do you?" said George Doveland Goldenblade.

Willie said, "Is it just going to be like here?"

Bishop McCool: "Like where?"

"Like here in Baltimore," said Willie.

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"You don't get the idea," said George Goldenblade. He made a fat little airplane of his hands, flapping the wings. "The Pope is asking you to fly out of this country, out of Baltimore—that's where we are right now—to strange countries that maybe you heard about in your fifth grade geography class. Angola for instance, Etherea, Iraq, Zambia. You *have* heard of those countries. Think."

"Of course he has heard of those countries," said his brother. "Sometimes, George, you tend to be a little sarcastic, as mom always said."

"He's talking like Baltimore and Zambia are the same thing," said G. D. Goldenblade.

"There is a Zambia Boulevard in the city," said Archbishop Looshagger. "I was falsely accused there once for bike theft. That was ten years ago, or ten months, or was it ten days? Ye shall bear many persecutions until the abomination of desolation passes away. My words, however—"

"You will accept the mission, Excellency?" said Tricci. "It were most difficult. The Holy Father have knowed this much to sufficiency."

Willie had been trying to pray, but nothing was coming through. They were all looking at him.

"There is another matter," said Tricci. "Pope make you elector."

"Pardon me?" said Willie.

"You now become elector of pope. When pope go to God, you help elect new pope. Very much honor."

Willie was still looking out the window.

"Politics," said Tricci. He waved a thin finger back and forth. "No no no no. Papa say no. That were no."

Goldenblade whispered something to his brother. Bishop McCool lighted his pipe. A full minute passed. No one said anything.

"I think," Willie said finally, "it would be better to try to bring justice to those countries, as well as an end to the fighting."

"Certainly!"

"Assuredly!"

"Without doubt!"

"Otherwise," said Willie, "isn't it all just a false peace?"

They all talked at once then. Cardinal Goldenblade said that as Willie helped put down the violence, the church and its missioners would be working diligently to create better social conditions. George Doveland Goldenblade spoke of the food that had been sent by the church into the first countries Willie would be visiting. Bishop McCool said that the latest encyclical letter of Pope Felix made it perfectly clear that unless and until the wealth of the world was distributed more equitably, then the violence would continue and the fault would be with the rich countries—"Like our own," added Bishop McCool. George Doveland Goldenblade looked at Bishop McCool as if he had several noses.

"What is actually happening, though?" Willie asked. "The poor are hungry, the babies and the old people are sick, a few have all the money. That is my understanding of life in those countries."

Felder stage-coughed. Willie looked over at him. He was shaking his head.

Cardinal Tricci was looking at Willie intently, his forehead furrowed.

"You understood His Holiness asking you to do this. Also I give you to know not to implicate in political sector."

"That's understood, of course," said Cardinal Goldenblade.

"What's understood?" said Willie.

"That you're not going to join either side of the war—unless you go in for atheistic murder," said George Doveland Goldenblade.

Suddenly, as if he had come out of a cave in which he had been imprisoned for many years and had only a few minutes before he must return, Archbishop Looshagger said, "Did someone say this bishop is going to Angola?"

"Yes, brother," said Willie kindly.

"Why Rafferty is there," said the old man. "A priest named Rafferty. He went there long ago from this city. He loved the poor. I used to send him small things. He lost his

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hand in some war. Please give him my fraternal love in Christ Jesus."

Willie went up to the old archbishop, who had started to cry remembering his friend Rafferty, and embraced him.

"I will tell him that his friend remembers him, my brother."

Then Archbishop Looshagger went back into the cave. "The bicycle that was stolen was clearly marked with a Chi Rho. Heaven and earth shall pass. . ."

But nobody was paying attention to Archbishop Looshagger. They were all congratulating Willie and wishing him good luck on the mission. He had said yes, he guessed, or he had made it easy for them to understand that he had said yes.

"Mr. Felder has generously offered the use of his plane," said Cardinal Goldenblade.

"And Mr. Goldenblade," said Bishop McCool, "has opened up a $100,000 expense account for you and your assistants at the First Bank of Houston."

"I can't take that money," Willie said sharply. "I don't want it."

"Nevertheless," said Goldenblade to Tricci, "it will be applied to his expenses."

"Most generous," said Tricci.

Then they gave Willie the list of countries and went away.

When they were gone, Willie looked the countries up on a map Herman Felder gave him.

"The people there fight for food, and we are going to put the fighting down?"

Felder brought up a chair. "Will, what they think of this trip and what we think of it are two different things. This is the moment we've waited for so long—the sacramental moment, as Benjamin calls it."

"Father Benjamin really did approve the trip?"

"Every detail. He and I proposed it to RevCon, using various intermediaries."

Willie could hear the trip-hammers and bulldozers down in the streets.

"But who knows what to do, Brother Herman? Surely I

have no answers for those countries."

"We'll find the answers," Felder said firmly. "We'll make the answers."

Truman came into the room. He and Willie exchanged the sign of Christ's peace.

"One thing—we have the best pilot in the world," said Felder.

"I have no doubt of that," Willie said. Then he went to the rooming house to pack his few possessions in the plastic suitcase they had given him in Delphi.

Before he returned to the Poe Motor Lodge he called to bid Mr. Grayson good-bye.

Mr. Grayson was overjoyed at the prospect of the trip.

"You are going to bring the Spirit down upon the whole earth, my son," Mr. Grayson said. "How sin is going to catch it now!"

"If you see him again, Mr. Grayson, try to explain—that I am sorry?"

"O mi luri, o mi arithi lui!" said Mr. Grayson.

"My love with you always, Mr. Grayson."

"Rui oko gulio mihi sinrama tu!"

"Good-bye, Mr. Grayson."

"Okimiro."

Then Willie went back to the Poe Motor Lodge, where Felder and Truman and Joto were waiting.

On the way to the airport he spoke often to his heart and listened most carefully, and he knew that this was the definite end and the definite beginning of something.

And so began the sojourn that would lead him to many strange and bloody territories, to many traps and snares, and finally to the largest cage of all.

Chapter two

Out over the broad, blank face of the Atlantic, Felder's jet sped them toward the first stop, Angola. On board: Willie, Felder, Joto and, at the semiautomatic controls, Truman.

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The plane was a custom jet that Felder had designed in the old days, with a cockpit to accommodate Truman's huge frame, and with special racks for photographic gear. Recently the craft had been remodeled for ordinary travel and might be mistaken for a businessman's jet, except that its passengers would not pass muster as businessmen anywhere in the world.

Above the lounge chair, where Felder sat, the great camera swung to and fro with the motion of the flight, its lens flashing now blue, now green, now red—like a magical prism or a beacon in a dream.

At first Felder had talked sensibly about conditions in Angola, Etherea and the other stops on the tour. But one hour into the flight, he had uncorked a flask of the blue liquid. Now as he talked, he was aging visibly before them, and his account wandered to other things, starting nowhere, ending nowhere.

Willie sat beside him, trying earnestly to follow, watching the minute-by-minute withering of mind, emotion, even sensation.

Just at the moment Willie expected collapse, Felder caught him and slapped his arm jovially.

"But what the hell?" he said. "It was only a movie."

Willie nodded, hoping Joto would supply a reference point.

Felder stood up, stretched, then looked down at Willie.

"One time had the idea of doing the whole thing through a single character. Cowboy named Charley Main. Starts rounding up strays in France before there was a France."

Willie, biting his lip, strained to follow.

"Charley Main is a great pal of Marco Polo. Also cowhand, but different range. Goes east when Charley goes west. With Columbus. But I was starting at the wrong place. Realized too late."

"Too late?" Willie managed.

"Far too late," Felder said, grabbing the overhead rack. "Charley Main is—well let's see, Charley Main would be eight, nine o'clock, wouldn't he? Wanted to get back to 4:00 A.M. Even earlier. So kept going back. Beyond Corinth.

Beyond Jerusalem. Even beyond Ur."

He lit a cigarette and turned to Joto. "Joto tell you all about it, right?"

Joto said, "Maybe eat dinner now."

"I'm going forward," Felder said. "Want to sit with Truman awhile. Want to see the light go out down there—maybe see the Santa Maria coming the other way."

With only a slight stagger Felder went to the cabin.

Willie started to go after him but Joto took his arm.

"Must run its course," he said. "Already cross over now."

"We can't let him get like last night."

"Have medicine for later. Know all about taking care. Much practice."

"Those things he said—that's all a movie?"

Joto nodded.

"A movie he made?"

Sitting down beside Willie, Joto lighted a pipe. A sigh. He looked at Willie as if trying to decide what to say.

"Maybe you would rather not speak," Willie said, thinking of Recommendation 48 of the Guidebook, which discouraged the personal recounting of one's past life except in community listening.

"All right, Joto speak," the ex-artist said. "Maybe help you understand Brother Herman. But know this, Brother Willie: what Joto say itself untrustworthy. Joto himself struggle with truth."

Willie said kindly, "We all struggle with truth, Brother Joto. But please don't say anything just for me."

Another sigh. Joto drew on his pipe, looking down at his hands.

"You worked with him, Joto, I know that much," Willie said, trying to help. "I remember from the Guidebook, something about a film you made. You don't have to talk about it though."

"Ego-shine days," Joto said. "Secondhand real."

"The movie you made—the movie mentioned in the Guidebook?"

Joto laughed softly. "That not too bad. Cartoon about

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America. First work with Herman then. Cartoon about America beginning." Joto took the pipe from his mouth and really laughed this time. "Government not appreciate. Condemn movie. Very much funny."

Willie tried to share the memory but there was nothing to remember—and suddenly Joto's mouth reset itself in the same sad line.

He looked at his hands once more.

"Once Joto great painter. Great explainer of life in picture. Believe in certain beauty—one step away from life. That is reason Joto bad explainer."

"Brother Joto," said Willie. "Don't go on, please, unless it will help you and help Brother Herman. Really."

Joto, shaking his head, said, "Joto not judge Brother Herman. Joto love Herman. What Joto tell you now only maybe lie—but maybe also help you, Brother Willie, help Brother Herman. Up to now, we all fail to help."

Then and there, 35,000 feet above the Atlantic, Joto told the story of how he and Herman Felder had met and how they had worked together and how Felder had become what he had become. He spoke in both sign and speech, and the story took more than an hour.

It was a strange and complicated story that Willie would think back to often, though he would try not to. When he did think back, he would see again the signs Joto made with his hands, wonderfully crafted signs, not quite as beautiful as Truman's, but quick and deft, full of passion and life.

Looking at those graceful motions, Willie could understand how Joto Toshima had once been an artist, a citizen of that other kingdom he sometimes visited in his dreams.

I first met Herman Felder eighteen, nineteen years ago, Joto's signs said, when he and Truman were making a movie about a stunt pilot, a cowboy-flier.

Felder hired Joto to do a painting for one part of that movie.

A few months later, Felder came to Tokyo, again hiring Joto to do paintings for a film. This was the short cartoon movie about the beginning of America.

"Herman have big name then—great commander of film, best in America. People say genius director. Leader of others. Understand hard things. Also, engineer and technical man—top."

After the cartoon, the signs said, Joto Toshima, artist, lost track of Herman Felder. He understood, though, that Felder had invented a great camera—the first new camera in fifty years—a camera that reproduced reality better than any other camera ever made.

"Early version of that," Joto said, and pointed to the camera swinging in its holster above Willie's head.

With ordinary cameras, ordinary crews, Felder went on making movies about the West. Joto saw some of them. The movies were masterfully directed but most violent and very difficult to follow.

Somewhere, during this time of the strange Western movies, Felder met Father Benjamin—Joto did not know how—and became a Servant. But he continued making movies, movies so strange no one could understand them.

Soon Felder was making movies that he would not release or, if he released them, would suddenly withdraw from circulation.

Meanwhile, Felder worked steadily to improve the great camera.

Joto paused, carefully arranging his hands for a difficult sequence.

Two years pass. Felder again comes to Tokyo, again looks up Joto. Now Felder married but wife gone.

Earlier Felder hard to see now—replaced by another Felder, more brilliant but also near-mad.

Possessed man, the signs said, and possessing.

Felder drinking and talking—Willie caught the sense of a night and a day and still another night—Felder talking, talking, talking and Joto listening.

"He has plan to make movie about his father—why his father did what he did. But much more. Says movie will explain everything. Great movie to tell *why* of everything."

Joto's hand swept out across the whole history of man. His

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eyes went wild for a moment, filled with the memory of Felder's dream.

"Why everything happen the way it happen," he said again, as if trying to fathom it himself.

A pause, then mixed signs. The movie Felder planned would use painting, written words, sculpture, music, dance, every known art, new art.

His great camera and its accessories would animate it all, blending and weaving it together into whole cloth, so that the end could not be differentiated from the beginning.

The signs came quickly now, passionately: And the chief assistant blender, number one associate of the greatest movie in the world, would be the great—Joto's hand came to himself—the world-famous artist, Joto Toshima.

The bald dome gleamed with sweat: *pain.*

I, the signs said, *was—a dog, then the sign for offspring. Ego-ridden monster—artist! Great god-to-self.*

Here Willie interjected with the sign that in the Society meant self-forgiveness. But Joto shook it off.

"Maniac!" he said aloud.

Now slow signs of the slow passage of years: one, three, four. Work, furious activity: painting, carving, polishing, sketching, etching, plating, filming—endless work on Felder's all-explaining movie. Movie has name *Cowboys and Indians.*

Felder and Joto and crew traveling. Plane. Ship. Across desert. Riding camel somewhere. Desert nights. Felder trying to find place called Ur.

Then to Holy Land. Felder drinking in Holy Land.

To Greece. More painting, picture taking. A sea voyage. Felder quoting Saint Paul. Reading one letter over and over again. Drinking more.

"Herman, time to time, leave to make more perfect camera—leave for weeks, months. Whole crew idle."

To South America. Different art. Joto cannot do this art. Other artists. Felder spending hundreds of thousands of dollars on film. A million dollars. Three million.

Back to Europe. Kings. Wars. Popes.

England. Some man writing poem about sea voyage. A bird killed.

"Nether Stowey," said Joto. "One month." Felder drinking strange medieval drink.

Now to America once more. Arizona. Colorado. New Mexico. Back to Greece. Spain. Rome. Felder drunk, does something to a wall, a mosaic, in Rome. In jail. To trial. Barely escapes prison sentence.

To Paris. Felder and camera crew at great palace of French kings.

To Auschwitz. Ovens where people burned.

Back to U.S. Movie now cost $14 million. Movie runs thirty-seven hours.

Felder says *Cowboys and Indians* finished. (Joto here wiped his forehead.)

Then one day Felder changes mind. Decides movie needs more footage—different equipment. Goes away, has final camera made. Joto pointed to the great camera swinging in its holster above.

"He spend seven months having last camera made—one and half million dollars. When he come back, wants to do movie from beginning."

The signs once more: Joto says tired of movie. Felder going away alone, to take pictures with his camera. Gone a year, two years. Then comes back and wants to mix in ten additional hours to movie. Joto sick of whole project. Felder insists.

A fight breaks out. Joto and Felder fighting. A real fight.

In the fight Joto breaks the following parts of Felder's body (Joto sadly indicated them on his own person): back, right leg, left arm, nose, collarbone, interior parts. Willie shuddered.

"Still," Willie said, "you remained his friend?"

In sign, Joto showed Felder hiring a lawyer who successfully defended him against attempted manslaughter. Joto gave up painting then, joined the Silent Servants, and immediately went to jail on a dome-passing sentence with Felder.

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"We go from jail to jail, Brother Herman and I. Sometimes he go away. Take camera with him. He say he never film again and vow to not make film. But very difficult to give up. Easier for Joto because Joto lesser artist. Joto make vow. Easy. For him," Joto said pointing to the forward cabin, "kind of death required."

The plane droned on.

Willie tried to piece it together, the long story, the film, the man in the forward cabin. He seemed to recognize a part of the story and was about to say something when he saw how tired Joto had become. The tale had worn him out. Willie held out his hand.

"Brother Joto, it must have been hard to recall all those things, but you have nothing to hide from, or fear."

"You see why mission only answer!" Joto said emphatically.

"He will die to the desire on our mission?"

"Yes."

But when they went forward later, Felder had seemed to die not to his dream but to life.

Carefully they carried him down the aisle and propped him in the seat, under his shiny movie-gun.

"Oh Joto, his face," Willie said. "We have got to get him to a doctor."

Before them the face was withering quickly, like a print being lightened in chemical.

"Maybe in Angola," Joto replied. "But useless unless he decide to come back—back to self."

The cabin reeked of roses.

Night fell. Willie put a blanket over Felder's shoulders. Joto prepared food, taking the first tray forward to Truman. Later they picked at their own trays. Neither of them was hungry.

They chanted vespers softly then and dimmed the lights.

Toward midnight the jet entered a storm.

Lightning flashed through the cabin where the men were sleeping, all lost in a tangle of dreams.

There was a cry from Felder. Willie and Joto went to him quickly.

He was half standing, half crouching in the seat; a bottle of Regent Morphinis had spilled on the cabin floor. He said distinctly, "We have carved the ape and he cannot speak!"

Joto had a small black bag, a needle, and now Willie saw him insert the needle in Felder's arm. Immediately Felder slumped back, eyes glazed.

"I am—I'm your brother," he said to Willie.

Willie reached out to touch him, assure him, but Joto restrained him.

"Now sleep. Better tomorrow. Try again tomorrow."

"Want to help," Felder muttered feebly. He pointed up at Willie. "Want to—"

"You will help, Brother Herman. You will help the mission," Willie said.

But now Felder had fallen sharply away from them both.

Joto yawned, rubbed his eyes.

"I'll stay up with him," Willie said. "He might have convulsions."

"He sleep and wake from time to time, and I am here. Surely you must rest."

"No please, let me stay here with him."

God's mercy and tenderness, said Joto in sign tongue.

As Joto turned to his own seat, Willie said, "What does he mean by the ape?"

Joto hesitated, seeming to remember something that had happened a long time ago.

"Mystery," he said finally. "In old days he speak of ape often. During time we work on never-made movie. In Middle East. In days reading Paul. Especially when drinking. Now when crossed over, again see ape."

"You have a guess—what it means?"

Joto shook his head. "Man stuck. Everybody fixed. Brother Herman fixed. Only guess."

Willie tried to hold a picture he had then, but Joto went on.

"In prison Joto made vow not paint. But broke vow one time. In prison Joto thought maybe help release Brother Herman if Joto paint what he dream. If he understand demon of dream, he be Herman again. So Joto study Herman's

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dream. Listen when he rave. Paint what he say and scream."

"You did this painting?"

"Did painting of strange white dreams. Herman's dreams all white. So painting all white. When Joto finish, show him painting. See nothing—only white shapes."

Willie thought back to the night at the Servant camp in Texas.

Joto said, "Sent painting to Truman, who took it to Servant places, showing to all brothers and sisters. No one see anything but white. Truman then destroy painting."

The storm raged on.

The plane dipped in the sky. Sitting next to Herman Felder, Willie looked down on the world. When lightning spread out over the sea, it looked like a print from an old Bible.

He tried to think of where he was going and what he should do and what they expected him to do.

Then the faces came up to the window of the jet. He saw Clio opening his mouth and saying something he did not want to hear and there was that other face, too, that he couldn't bear to look at and that he had asked God to take out of his dreams, and there was also the sad, smiling face of the man at the top of the world.

He felt the red badge next to his heart.

Then he felt Felder's head slump against his shoulder. He said aloud, "Let him be free."

It was close in the cabin suddenly. He fell asleep.

In his sleep the red ink of the stop-sign badge mingled with the sweat on his chest so that his very flesh now was signed with blood, and the first word of an old argument was already written there.

Chapter three

The plane came down in a light drizzle and they could see the airport coming up fast, and beyond the airport a fringe of palm trees and beyond the trees, stretching back to where the rain clouds broke against the hills, the city of Luanda, still as a dream.

"It looks peaceful," Willie said. "It looks beautiful."

"We are far away," Joto said.

Then they were taxiing forward and Willie could see the officials all lined up. One man was wearing the robes of a cardinal.

"The great liturgical expert, Cardinal Torres," said a cheery voice behind them. Just awake, Willie could not connect it with anyone on the plane.

Felder, emerging from the aft cabin, was young and fresh again—just as on the previous morning.

"Brother Herman!" Willie cried. And inside he said the thanksgiving prayer, thinking that Brother Herman had been released. "You look—you look marvelous."

Dressed in a light tan suit of elegant cut, Felder did look marvelous, like a genial broker, all crackling with energy and life and purpose.

"Sleep well, Will? How about you, Jo?"

Willie turned to Joto, who had turned instead to the window, for he knew what Willie did not know.

An hour before Willie woke up, Felder was already drinking his breakfast—synthetic liquid cocaine mixed with champagne and B vitamins, a mixture that Joto himself had fixed when Felder had come trembling back to wakefulness. It was an old ritual that could sustain him an hour, maybe two. On the other hand, he might be drunk getting off the plane.

Now, as Felder went forward to get coffee, moving lightly up the still taxiing aircraft, Willie gave Joto the thanks sign, and Joto, not having the heart to tell him the truth, returned it.

"It is a miracle," said Willie.

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"Willie—" Joto began, but here was Herman handing coffee around.

They were still moving down the runway, turning a little now.

Felder said, "Torres—he's the cardinal archbishop of Luanda; then the fat guy—his name is Borges—he's governor general; the other man I don't know, there in front. The other dudes are Portuguese generals, of course, and. . . ."

And then the plane came to a stop and the door swung to, and they were going down into the rain to meet the ruling elite of Angola.

The men were kneeling to kiss Willie's ring. A sibilance of names.

"It is wiser to get into two cars," the fat man, Governor Borges, said. "The madmen are in the hills and may try to shoot you."

He pointed to the line of hills where the rain fell.

Cardinal Torres took Willie's arm.

"Please, Excellency, let us not get wet. This way."

The governor shouted something and Cardinal Torres replied in English, "A little patience, my dear Luis. It is not that important."

As the door of the limousine opened, Willie could hear the governor shout something back angrily.

"They want to brief you immediately," said the cardinal, getting in after Willie. "Mr. Felder, I believe? Yes, come in please. May I introduce generals Caldas and Hilar."

Two generals, quite young, one of them wearing dark glasses, turned their heads slowly from the front seat.

"I baptized them, and now they are generals, Excellency," said Cardinal Torres. "See how sad they are. Are men in America so gloomy, Mr. Felder?"

The black limo headed for the city.

Felder, sitting on the cardinal's right, said something that Willie could not understand, though he thought he heard the word *worms*.

"Excuse me, Mr. Felder?" said the cardinal, leaning away from Willie.

"The worms crawl in," Felder crooned, "the worms craw out."

The cardinal chuckled and turned to Willie.

"Mr. Felder jokes. It is good to joke in times of sorrow How is my old friend Cardinal Goldenblade?"

"Fine," said Willie, trying to see Felder's face beyond the high-domed, whimsical figure beside him.

"A splendid man, though not sensitive to ritual in the least I recall once in Miami Beach, a lovely city, if a bit gauche Cardinal Schell and I—you know him of course—thought i would be nice to celebrate under the stars, atop the Fontaine bleau. Something very *intime.* Karl and I were at Innsbrucl for a summer, and we asked Earl to join us." The cardina chuckled at the pleasure of the memory. "Earl, of course whose tastes run more to—"

"Where is de ape?" Felder said suddenly, and Willie knev now that no miracle had happened.

"The ape?" one of the generals said.

"He speak of the zoo," the other said.

"The zoo is closed during the emergency, senhor," sai the general with the dark glasses.

"Land of de antique ape," said Felder. "Ancient ape lool for talk. No talk, no banana."

"Mr. Felder," said Cardinal Torres genially. "You have th private humor. Very amusing. You are in the employ of Hi Excellency, I believe?"

Willie could see Felder now. Whatever it was he had in hi face before was gone, and instead there was only an insan smile, like something that had been painted on.

"New ape require new banana," said Felder, grinning a the cardinal. "You have de banana?"

Cardinal Torres turned to Willie. "Very amusing man. A paradoxist. I hear the early Eliot somewhere in the humor.

"Old ape," said Felder.

Both generals and the driver were straining now to se Felder's face.

The sunglassed general asked the cardinal in Portuguese Felder did not speak in a code, and also, what was th

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weapon the man carried in the holster about his neck?

In Portuguese the cardinal said Felder was drunk or crazy or both and that he was a known eccentric in the United States. As for the weaponry, Mr. Felder's holster contained the world's most expensive camera.

"He is a little—he has had a little to drink," said Willie very quietly to the cardinal.

Cardinal Torres lifted a bejeweled hand. "It is quite understandable, dear Bishop. These are days of stress. The poor man. Ah, the smell of bougainvillea. You have come to our beautiful country, and behold, the flowers blossom."

There were no blossoms visible along the roadside, but the fragrance in the car was very strong. The driver lowered the windows a little.

General Sunglasses turned to Willie. "Your reputation has preceded you, Excellency. We have scheduled you for a nationwide television appearance this evening. You will be briefed on the essentials. We are hoping that you will be able to persuade the counter-counterrevolutionaries to put down their arms so that Angola can return to normal once more."

"That is why I have come—to talk on TV?" said Willie.

The cardinal said, "That is the reason given us by our Roman visitor, Monsignor Nervi. Surely you know Giorgio? He still says private Masses in little crypts."

"To come all this way just to talk on television," said Willie.

General Sunglasses said, "His Excellency perhaps does not understand the nuances. His Excellency is symbol and hero here in our country. When he tell the insurgents to stop, they listen. Angola return to normal."

"Good old normal Angola," said Felder happily, his smile even more dazzling than before. "De old oil go back to Portugal and de old coffee and de old tobacco. Every-ting back to de old Portugal, home of de Lady of Fatima, where de ape is day-ed."

Both generals spoke rapidly to the cardinal in Portuguese. The cardinal smiled and said reassuring words to them and repeated that Felder was an eccentric. Then the cardinal

turned to Willie.

"Mr. Felder, of course, is in no way a spokesman for His Excellency. He is just a helpful private citizen, a loyal son of Mother Church."

"That's right, Beatitude," drawled Felder, slipping into another identity. "Felder just another son trying tuh do a job for ole mama. Shucks, Felder jes a happy fly-ah. Come ovah to lotus lan' of Angolah, gaze at de flo-rah."

The generals were whispering to themselves; the driver's eyes shifted back and forth from the road to the mirror. Felder caught his glance and waved, babylike, into the mirror.

Willie watched Felder but did not care so much, thinking only that he had come all this way to make words on television.

"You and ah," said Felder to no one, "we gonnah settle down and cahve us a new simian."

"*So* amusing," said Cardinal Torres.

One of the generals wrote furiously in a tablet.

The city began to form around them and Willie now saw the lesson plan—the barbed wire and the tanks and the gun placements and the soldiers looking gray and powdery as shadows.

Luanda had been shelled for a week, and it was now like that part of Baltimore near the Edgar Allan Poe Motor Lodge that he had just left. Once they burned and exploded, he thought, all cities looked alike, the final conclusion of the lesson always being the same.

He saw then the fleeting faces of children, black and small, and for a moment he was with them and not with the people in the car.

At the elegant Hotel Christopher, preserved among the ruins, Governor Borges summarized conditions for Willie.

The rebels (counter-counterrevolutionaries), mounting their insurrection six months ago, had managed to seize about a third of the country. They had support, Governor Borges said, among two classes of people, the illiterate poor and the overeducated university types, "many of whom we

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have jailed." Lately, the rebels had got new arms.

"The shelling," the governor said, "is quite sophisticated. You saw the results on the way in from the airport. The arms come from monist or Marxist factions in the Orient and Latin America."

Borges stood near a map of the long country, pointing now and then to rebel strongholds. He was a swarthy thick-set man in a green and gold uniform.

"Who are the rebels?" Willie asked.

The governor turned to General Sunglasses, who took up the briefing.

"As the governor has just said, the raw material, so to say, is the poor people of Angola, but the leaders are coming from the outside. Some come from China, some from districts of Latin America as the Governor said. They wish to make this a monist state, understand Excellency? They wish to make this ancient domain of Mother Portugal into a separate country, slave atheist state."

"Bloody cheek!" said Felder from his chair in the back of the room.

"Excuse me, Senhor Felder?" said Governor Borges. The generals whispered something into his ear.

"Please go on with the sermon, your highness," said Felder. "Ah was just agreein' with the point of view being expressed so—elahquently."

Governor Borges, Cardinal Torres, the generals and a CIA agent named Harvey L. Cooter spoke quietly among themselves.

Joto went to Felder, said something to him, and Felder got up.

"I'll be back, Bishop Will," said Felder bowing. "Ah got to bathe and anoint mah-self for de ordeal ahead. Y'all proceed with de acquisition of de ape. Don't succumb to the first biddah."

Willie started to go, but Joto waved him back. Truman sat down beside Willie and gave him the stay sign.

Meanwhile Cardinal Torres had summoned several black bellboys to his side.

"Go prepare the Vasco da Gama Suite for Mr. Felder so that he might rest."

Felder turned around. "Why, that's exceedin' kind of Yoah Holiness. Ah'm gonnah summon mah counsel an cut you intuh mah will."

The cardinal turned to Willie, eyes glinting. "Such a funny, funny gentleman."

General Sunglasses resumed the briefing.

"The message we hope you will be able to give the people tonight is peace. We mean especially those people who are confused and are wavering in their allegiance to Mother Portugal. Many, many thousands of people have been killed—slain by the vermin, that is, the rebels. The people are bewildered by events. The JERCUS nations do not wish to act in the crisis. The United Nations, as Your Excellency surely knows, has not been able to intervene because of the veto of the United States and China in the Security Council. Therefore, our only hope for peace lies in moral persuasion. That is what we hope you can provide." With this, the young general held out his hands like a small boy praying before a shrine.

Then Mr. Cooter of the CIA took the floor.

"Most of the people in your rebel section of the country are Catholic," said Mr. Cooter, a cum laude graduate of Georgetown University in Washington, D.C. "They are very strong, devout, obedient Catholics. If they knew the leaders of the counter-counterrevolutionary movement were atheistic monists, devoted to the overthrow of the church, the Virgin of Fatima and all the angels and saints of God, then of course they would have no dealing with them. But they are your ignorant poor.

"Now," said Cooter, glancing at a note he had written himself earlier that day in the consulate, "now this faith aspect should be appealed to. It should be stressed that to join the monist rebels is in fact to leave the church. Not that we in the CIA would presume to tell you, Your Excellency, what to say—and not that the CIA would ever meddle in the internal affairs of another country. No," said Mr. Cooter very sin-

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cerely, "we do not presume any of that. But we do think that it is our duty to our country and to our faith as well to point out this religious dimension of the problem. I believe Monsignor Nervi has more to say on that. Thank you and good hunting."

Monsignor Nervi, a very frail man with blue lips, came from Rome, where for forty years he had written many documents for the pope and had long ago dropped from his vocabulary the first person singular pronoun.

"We anguish over the thought of so much bloodshed and carnage. Our spirit is cast into deep sorrow at the spectacle of this war that has brought to our beloved Angola so much needless suffering. We pray to the eternal Father that peace may be speedily restored and that the ancient and honorable ties between our august see and our African flower might soon be renewed."

Willie could hear guns booming far away. He could hear the words that were spoken, too, but not so well as the guns. The shells were exploding somewhere on the edge of the city. He could see the children again.

The cardinal ushered the group to the Magellan Room, a magnificent glassed-in banquet room at the top of the hotel that overlooked the city of Luanda and the blue hills.

Champagne was served and Cardinal Torres proposed a toast.

"To peace and prosperity among all nations and to the arts, without which we are ever at war and ever in poverty."

The group turned to Willie for a return toast but he could think of nothing to say.

As they sat down to dinner—breast of pheasant, lobster, roast of lamb—Willie could see the evening coming down on the hills, and the guns firing now were like tongues of flame.

He could not eat.

"Tell me, Excellency," said Cardinal Torres. "What of the new mime liturgies at Woodstock? Are they successful, do you think?"

The mouths opened quickly, speaking words of flame, then vanished into night.

"Would you be interested in seeing one of our fado ballet liturgies? Very charming in my opinion, though of course Monsignor Nervi would think them suggestive."

Monsignor Nervi, seated across from Willie, worked at the breast of pheasant with his blue hands, and Willie saw that his face was blue and had the translucence of paper, and it came to his mind that this man was made of paper—were not the veins like the watery veinlike markings found on paper?

Suddenly Willie remembered the name of the priest Archbishop Looshagger had sent to Angola long ago. He turned to Cardinal Torres.

"Father Rafferty—where is he now?"

Cardinal Torres put down his fork. His face was suddenly pale.

"What do you know about him?" he said in a whisper.

"Archbishop Looshagger in Baltimore wanted to know about him. They are old friends."

"He was with them," the cardinal said, indicating the hills with a rolling movement of his eyes. "He chose violence and terrorism. And now violence and terror have chosen him."

"He is dead?"

"Executed last month for treason." The cardinal smiled brightly as the governor raised a glass. He said through the smile, "Do not mention the name again."

There were more toasts but the guns spoke again so that the words could not be heard, and the politicians and the generals were laughing and Willie could not eat, hearing the other words and the other thoughts in the hills.

Chapter four

In the Vasco da Gama Suite Willie found Herman Felder in much worse condition than before. Walking about with staring eyes, Felder was like a zombie, appearing neither to see nor hear anyone around him.

"Two strong hypos," said Joto. "Nothing happen."

Truman, Willie noticed, was whimpering.

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Willie gave him the sign of brotherly love and Truman returned it but continued to whimper.

"Guns," said Joto. "Since Indochina war, gun sound cause him to weep."

Willie took Truman's huge hands in his own.

"Nothing harms those who love," he said softly. Truman seemed to take little solace from these words.

Felder passed through the room again. Joto shook his head sadly.

"Doctor come earlier," said Joto. "Say nothing to be done except stop drinking."

Willie called to Felder but he did not hear. He paced the room like a man in a cell, blind and dumb. Neither Willie nor Joto could know that Felder was watching a movie about men being shot. They could not see the men falling in rows and they could not hear the bullets clipping through the leaves. The movie had started in the afternoon and Felder then had known it was a movie, but now he was not sure and it had come to him that he was watching the execution of his father. If he kept silent and did nothing to interfere, his father would give him the final, important message.

When Willie, Truman and Joto formed a little triangle and stood in long silence looking at the bare black cross that Truman carried with him, and prayed in the listening fashion, Felder paid no attention to them.

The focus of the prayer was the evening telecast, but the *dona* of Truman and Joto gave Willie little to go on.

All three *dona* were specific in imagery. The men exchanged them in sign tongue.

Truman: *Man—maybe Servant—standing in street in Paris saying, All commitments lies. God say, Beginning lesson—A plus.*

Joto: *Horse in stable. Much straw. Horse have magical speech men do not understand. Horse say, It* not *better light one candle.*

Willie: *Man or bird flying. Cannot come down. God reach out his finger and bird land. Bird land in small town in Midwest America.*

Then the church leaders and the politicians were at the door. With them was a lean, olive-skinned man with black-olive eyes who had not been at the dinner earlier in the evening.

"Cardinal Profacci," said Cardinal Torres, "the Vatican secretary of state. Just arrived."

"His Holiness sends kind personal wishes," said Cardinal Profacci. "I understand Monsignor Nervi has already conveyed to you the essence of what the Holy Father wishes to say on this occasion?"

"They merely chatted, Ernesto," said Cardinal Torres. "Don't be so solemn. Ah, Mr. Felder. I trust you enjoy the suite?"

Felder, passing through the room, gave the cardinal a baleful glance. General Sunglasses made an entry in his notebook.

"That man is surely Signor Felder, no?" said Cardinal Profacci.

"Yes," said Willie. "He brought us here."

Profacci pursed his lips. As he watched Felder pass into the next room, he appeared to suppress a comment.

"The entire nation will be watching," said Governor Borges. "Your Excellency, you do understand that we expect you to convince the rebels to cease firing?"

Willie looked at the governor, then Cardinal Torres, then Cardinal Profacci. He said slowly, "I will do my best."

"To be sure, to be sure," said Cardinal Torres genially. "Perhaps, Ernesto, you would like a strega?"

"Of course," said Willie, "you too will be expected to cease firing."

"Naturally," said the governor. Then to Torres, "Eminence, we should really be going."

General Sunglasses said to Willie, "We are willing to discuss peace at any time with these lice. The fact that they started the war—well, we shall try to be Christian about that."

"One thing to keep in mind," said Mr. Cooter, the CIA agent. "These revolutionaries are really just a lot of show.

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They haven't got your morale and your purpose to stick it through. So it shouldn't be hard to get them to see reason."

The guns seemed to get closer.

"We have lived with that poor poetry so long, it no longer affects us," said Cardinal Torres.

At that moment a shell hit the department store across the street from the hotel. The room shook, the hotel shook. Truman became more agitated. They all turned to look at him.

Cooter said, "Get hold of yourself, man. Aren't you an American?"

Truman drew himself up to his full height of six feet, seven inches. With his thick beard and heavy brows he looked very fierce but he was weeping openly.

"Cowardice is something I just can't bear to see in a man," said Cooter.

"Who asked you to bear anything?" said Willie.

"I intended no disrespect, Your Excellency," said Cooter.

"You disrespect my friend," said Willie.

Joto placed a hand on Cooter's shoulder. "Go find spy, why not?" he said softly. "Hate to forget way of Servant. Hate to break back four, maybe six time."

"Is that a threat, you Orient—?"

"Gentlemen, gentlemen," interjected Cardinal Torres. "Please, let us remember we are all Christians."

"Great inconvenience at times," said Joto.

Truman was still crying, but without making any sound.

"It is truly time to leave," said Governor Borges. "The nation waits."

They went to the station through the dark streets, past many barricades guarded by soldiers, and Willie could see the faces of the soldiers sliding past the window. Felder sat beside him seeing other faces. On the other side of Felder sat Cardinal Profacci, remarking upon the bloodshed and the folly of war.

"One thing I do not understand about the situation," said Willie.

The governor said from the front seat, "What is that,

Excellency?"

"The argument that the young general made earlier was that the revolutionaries are from the outside, from China and Latin America."

"This is true—foreign dogs all," said the governor. "Begging Your Excellency's pardon; it is an emotional matter."

"But are you not outsiders also, all of you who are from Portugal?" said Willie.

The governor laughed. "His Excellency jests."

"I know little about these matters," said Willie. "There is a simple answer?"

"Most simple, simple as one, two, three," said the governor, holding up three fingers. "Portugal owns Angola. That is the simple truth."

The car drove on another block. Willie said, "That is the question I guess I am asking then. How can one country own another?"

The governor drummed his fingers on the dashboard, then said something in French to Cardinal Profacci.

Cardinal Profacci said something in French to Willie.

"I did not hear what you said; I am sorry," said Willie.

In his confident smooth baritone, Cardinal Profacci said, "Your Excellency asks a truly simple question, much like a child asking why the sky is blue—please do not take offense. Like the child's simple question, however, it does require much explaining. It raises many questions of culture and history and political realities. Now, Excellency," Profacci leaned forward, speaking across the immobile Felder, who was staring still at the execution movie, "now, consider our role here. This role is not one of reviewing history or analyzing complex political relationships. Our role, *your* role tonight, is much different. This is to bring peace to the people, to stop the fighting and the killing. Is this comprehended?"

Willie gazed at a tenement or apartment building that had been shelled. He could see people standing about, turning to look at the official cars. How many were homeless here, how many needed warmth and food?

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"Still," he said hesitantly, "to stop the killing—does not this sometimes demand new political relationships? I mean, please forgive my slowness, one cannot have true peace without justice?"

Governor Borges, turning all the way around now, said, "Certainly His Excellency does not imply that Portugal has been unjust to Angola?"

"I only want to know," said Willie, "if it's possible for the people to be happy and to have peace when the country they are living in does not belong to them. I have wanted to know this for a long time. It was never explained to me in school."

The governor and Cardinal Profacci spoke in French, the governor a little excitedly. From time to time Cardinal Profacci would pat the governor on the shoulder as if to say it would be all right. Willie was thinking of something that had happened a long time ago in the Einstein seminary, only they had talked in English there.

Felder moved suddenly. "He isn't one of them," he whispered. "Some other execution entirely."

Cardinal Profacci and the governor broke off.

"It's all right, Brother Herman," said Willie.

"What does he speak?" said the cardinal.

"He is not well, he is like a man dreaming," said Willie.

The screen had gone black in Felder's mind, the last man had been shot. He turned to Willie, showing the face of a very old man.

"We are in a car. We are in California. Maybella and Lawson Thebes are having us up for dinner and a movie. Those are true facts?"

"We are in a car," said Willie. "We are in Angola. I am making a television speech soon. This is Cardinal Profacci from Rome."

"It is—good—to see you again, Mr. Felder," said Profacci. The cardinal sat very still, looking ahead.

Felder squinted at the rubble on the streets ahead of them.

"A war? A riot? What is going on?"

"You remember, Herman, we came here to speak to them about the trouble," said Willie.

"Do you have a drink?"

"I'm afraid not, Brother Herman."

Then Felder came to a little. "Willie," he said "*Oh God, Willie.*" He rubbed his eyes. "Fact number one, I'm stoned. Goddamn, goddamn, goddamn," Felder began to moan, holding his head.

"He should have stayed at the hotel," said the governor from the front seat.

"Where did you meet Mr. Felder?" said Profacci.

Before Willie could answer, Felder said, "Profacci—Rome—ten, eleven years ago."

"I remember, Mr. Felder," said Profacci.

"I need a drink," Felder announced.

"Brother Herman, we—"

"Stop the car," said Felder.

The driver actually braked the car, but the governor said, "Drive on."

"We'll get something for you at the station," said Willie.

"I can't wait," said Felder. "Really."

"Joto will be there."

Felder quivered and lay back against the seat and closed his eyes. Willie took hold of his arm.

When they reached the station, Felder broke out of the car and began running. Joto, alighting from the car behind, stopped him. Willie started after them but Profacci held him back.

"There is not time, Bishop."

Governor Borges said something in very rapid French to the cardinal.

Willie could see Joto leading Herman Felder into the side entrance of the studio. Truman was with them.

"It is twelve minutes, even less," said General Sunglasses, coming up from the second car.

They all went into the studio.

Cardinal Profacci again spoke French to Governor Borges. General Sunglasses asked a question. He seemed angry. Profacci turned and signaled to Willie. Then he led Willie into a small office off the lobby of the studio.

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"Signor Felder—you know very much about him?"

"He is my friend and brother."

Profacci looked at him with grave eyes. "You know his background surely?"

"I do not care about anyone's background," said Willie.

Profacci hesitated. "We have only a few minutes. Perhaps later we can talk about Signor Felder. There are things—"

"I do not care to know them," said Willie.

Profacci smiled, then frowned, then smiled again. His face was an instrument he had learned to control over long years of practice. Whatever was on it bore no relation to what he felt or thought but was designed by its possessor to communicate only the impression that one was dealing with an official, a spokesman, a representative.

"Governor Borges and the others are concerned about your speech," said the voice, which was confident and official-sounding. "The Holy See, of course, must always be sensitive to the political structure."

Overhead, there was a tiny circular speaker and through it suddenly came the voice of the old-time American singer, Frank Sinatra.

If you're feeling sad and lonely,
There's a service I can render.
Tell the one who loves you only.
I can be so warm and tender.

"Let me put the matter very simply, bishop," said Cardinal Profacci, "the Holy See does not, indeed cannot, interfere with the political life of a country. The exact relationship of the church to the temporal order is one that—"

When it seems your friends desert you,
There's somebody thinking of you.
*I'm the one who'll never hurt you.**

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Willie could hear the guns over the song and over the voice of the cardinal, and then he heard the voice of the old man in Baltimore asking of Rafferty.

"Who killed Father Rafferty?" he said.

"The affair of Father Rafferty must absolutely not be discussed."

"He was killed by the present government?"

Profacci's face remained calm. Only the hands, frozen, gave any evidence of tension.

"We have less than ten minutes," he said. "It is a delicate situation with Rafferty. He was killed because he joined the revolutionists. That is all we know."

Willie tried to think. Before Profacci could continue, he said, "Is this government treating the people right? Is it feeding them and helping them find good houses? Is it taking care of the health of the children? Or is it just being—powerful?"

"The temporal affairs of—"

"Please," said Willie, "I have to have an answer to this question. Is it a just government or not?"

Profacci rubbed his eyes. Now he spoke as a professor from a lectern.

"The Holy See appointed you to your present post not to meddle in the internal political affairs of nations but to bring peace—peace to all these countries that have known nothing but war for so long."

"But how can I, or anyone, bring peace without going into the internal affairs, or whatever you call them?"

"Ah," said Profacci, holding up a finger. "Permit me to explain." The cardinal leaned forward. He paused and pointed to the ceiling. "You make your appeal, Excellency, not to the temporalities, over which neither you nor I have any control in any event, but rather you make your appeal to the spiritualities. Politics and politicians come and go, but the spiritualities—they are changeless. That is what the church signifies for men—the spiritual principles which are the foundation of human salvation." He spoke passionately, as if he had been preparing this quick speech all his life.

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The guns made the night air tremble. The building where they sat shook. Willie looked at the cardinal's upward-pointing finger.

Maybe it's late but just call me,
Tell me and I'll be around.

"I'll try," said Willie standing up. "I'll try to say something."

"I'm afraid, Bishop, I must insist upon a pledge."

"Of what kind?"

"Not to discuss the temporal political situation."

The sad eyes that were blue and brown-flecked narrowed, opened wide, then fell in a sort of weariness.

"Peace," Willie said. "Isn't peace a part of the temporal political situation?"

"We mean you should not criticize the government," said Profacci briskly.

"I'm supposed to take sides?"

"Not at all, not at all," the cardinal said, putting on his patient smile now, a little like a teacher trying to establish the correct order of the alphabet for a very poor first grade student. "We wish you to deplore violence on both sides, to call for an end to fighting and to remind all parties of the," finger up, "spiritualities."

Willie sighed. "It seems to me that I should ask the heads of both sides to come together, to discuss the causes of the situation," he said.

"Ah," said the Vatican secretary of state, "now that is an excellent plan."

"The government people here—the governor and the military men—they will talk to the rebels?"

The cardinal smiled and shook his head as if to say, Do you think they are all monsters? Then he went to the door and asked Governor Borges, Cardinal Torres and the military men to come in.

"His Excellency wants to propose on television that the rebel leaders come to the city to discuss the situation with your honors."

"Splendid," said Governor Borges.

"Magnificent," said General Sunglasses.

"Marvelous," said Cardinal Torres.

"Truly viable," said Mr. Cooter of the CIA.

"Of course," said Willie, "the rebels would be given safe passage."

All laughed good-humoredly.

"His Excellency," said Governor Borges, "does not know it, but he insults us. That is because of his compassion."

All laughed good-humoredly.

"I can promise the leaders of the revolution that if they come to the city to confer with you, no harm will befall them, even if your talks come to nothing?"

More good-humored, good-natured laughter. The slant-eyed black-brown-red-gold bishop was a wonderful, innocent, crazy man, who insulted you and did not even know it, and, well, what could be done with such a child?

So Willie went on the air, sitting at a plain wooden table with Cardinal Torres on one side and Governor Borges on the other, and made his plea for peace.

The lights were bright and hot, and Willie tried to see the faces of the people of Angola but he could not see faces, not even the faces of the officials before him or of his friends, Joto and Truman, who stood a little to the side, supporting Herman Felder by the shoulders as Felder gazed dumbly at the show, trying to fit it into the show that had just turned off in his mind.

In his speech Willie asked both sides to put down their arms.

Nothing, he said, could be gained by violence.

If representatives of both sides would come together tomorrow morning to discuss their differences, that would be the start of something, maybe justice, at least an end to the fighting.

"The men here, the people in charge, have promised safe passage to all of you who lead this uprising. They have given me their word that you will have safe passage into the city tomorrow morning. They have shown their good will. Now it

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is up to you."

Cardinal Torres nodded approvingly with a smile. Governor Borges nodded approvingly with a fine smile also.

"So," said Willie, "isn't it worth it—at least to try to talk it out? If the dispute cannot be settled, then you will have safe passage back to the hill country, though I am sure if both sides have good will, that will not be necessary."

Going inside himself, Willie spoke most urgently now.

"Please, my brothers and sisters, for the sake of all the children, for the old people and the sick people, for the people who will lose everything no matter who wins, whatever it is that is to be won, please put the guns away, and each side come to the other as true brothers and sisters.

"Remember, do not be afraid to trust. Do not fear being open even if it means giving in a little bit.

"Do not be stubborn, but rather try to see the other person's viewpoint.

"And above all, remember that no viewpoint in Angola or anyplace in the world is worth the price of a child's life.

"Lord Jesus come into your hearts," Willie said, and then he blessed the people of Angola, and his blessing went out to them in the hills, and the blessing came down on bloodied faces and on the bones of the dead and on old people who could not think any more and on the blind and the starving and on listless children, moving dimly in man-created wilds.

The camera's red eye closed then, and the studio burst with applause.

"A simple, eloquent plea!" sang Cardinal Torres.

"They cannot resist!" shouted Governor Borges, pumping Willie's hand.

"Truly viable," said Mr. Cooter of the CIA.

The cardinal had arranged a party at the episcopal palace. There would be a paraliturgical peace ballet, which would scandalize Giorgio and Ernesto, according to the cardinal, but which Willie, the cardinal thought, would certainly enjoy.

"The truth is," Willie said, "I am very tired."

He looked around for Joto, Truman and Felder but they had gone. So he left the officials, congratulations ringing in

his ears, and went down to the streets.

It was quiet now. The guns had stopped firing. Only a few patrols moved about.

There was the fragrance of flowers in the air, and the sky was salted with cold, clear stars. Looking at them, Willie felt a bubbling joy in spite of his fatigue and in spite of his lack of faith in speeches.

When he got to the Vasco da Gama Suite at the Christopher Hotel, he found Joto ministering to the prone Herman Felder.

"At least he feel nothing now," said Joto. "His pulse okay and he seem resting."

Willie felt his brow. "What are we going to do, Joto?"

"Just before he go out, he seem halfway sane. Said we fly out tomorrow and hope mission go well."

"Maybe he will be better then."

"Maybe he hit bottom," said Joto. "But hit bottom often before and crash through."

"At least he is sleeping and seems calm in his head."

"This is consolation."

"I'm going to sleep awhile myself," said Willie. "Let us praise God that the guns have stopped and that maybe peace is on the way."

"Sleep well, Brother Willie. I praise God while watching Brother Herman. Then I, too, rest."

"Where is Brother Truman?"

"Walking and thanking."

Then Willie sprawled upon a bed and fell into a deep slumber and he dreamed his dream of the long, lone flight and he was above the earth and out among the stars, which were not cold anymore but were like fine, clear, true eyes of many old friends who loved the world even when it was crazy.

At nine o'clock in the morning the rebel leaders came to the capital city of Luanda, driving jeeps. They came up the long driveway of the governor's mansion, six of them in all, the general of the rebel army and his five top officers.

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Governor Borges himself met them, cordially inviting them to breakfast on the sun-drenched terrace that overlooked the fields where the yellow flowers were blooming.

As the rebel leaders took their places at the table, General Sunglasses appeared with a company of twenty-four officers, all dressed in their splendid white and gold formal dress uniforms.

A photographer was summoned.

Many pictures were taken that showed the government officials and the military men shaking hands with the rebels. Everyone was smiling.

When the photographer was finished, a platoon of government soldiers came through the wide French doors of Governor Borges' mansion and moved quickly onto the terrace with machine guns drawn.

The rebels were too astonished to move.

They were permitted a cup of coffee while the governor read the indictments against them.

The attorney general of the republic and six justices of the national court were then summoned.

On the terrace in the harsh yellow light, the trial took twelve minutes.

The rebels were condemned to death on charges of counter-counterinsurgency, terrorism, sedition, theft, arson, murder and treason.

A priest was called to hear the confessions of the condemned men. Four of the six, weeping, told the priest of all the sins they had committed.

The revolutionary general also said he wished to confess his sins, but when the priest came to his side, he spat into his face.

A soldier then struck the revolutionary general in the genitals with the butt of his rifle.

Five of the rebel leaders were led into a grove of lemon trees and shot.

Their bodies were sacked, loaded into an army van, driven to a garbage dump that had been abandoned, and burned.

In one hour and forty minutes an extra edition of the

Angolese *New Day* was on the streets.

The paper carried many splendid full-color pictures of the happy revolutionaries shaking hands with the leaders of the government.

BLESSED PEACE! said the headline of the Angolese *New Day*.

In exchange for his life, one of the rebel colonels had promised full cooperation with the government.

This man went on television at midday to announce that reforms were underway and that all the men and women fighting in the mountains should put down their arms and surrender to the government.

The colonel made several versions of the speech, in several dresses of uniform and against several different backgrounds, so that the tape of his talk could be replayed and no one would become bored with it.

Governor Borges congratulated the colonel for his sense of practicality and recommended him for the Fatima Courage Medal.

Then the colonel was driven to the garbage dump where the bodies of his brother rebels were still smoldering and he too was shot.

As Willie left Angola late that afternoon, 18,000 people came to the airport to bid him farewell.

The international press gave extensive coverage to his leave-taking, and Willie's picture appeared in newspapers and on TV screens across the world.

Singlehandedly he had brought peace to a war-torn nation.

Men of all faiths hailed it as a miracle.

That night as the plane flew into the continent toward the model nation of Etherea, where 300,000 people were starving, Herman Felder sipped tomato juice that was purple. He looked young and he spoke reasonably and he told Willie and Joto what he knew of the land they were flying to, where he had once made a film about a humanitarian who was in fact possessed by the devil.

"It was a comedy," said Felder, "made at a time when

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nobody knew the funny from the sad."

He spoke cheerfully, and Willie thought that perhaps he had hit bottom, as Joto said, and Joto rejoiced to see Herman Felder take the tomato juice, even if it had been doctored with the blue fluid.

It was the first time they had been even a little relaxed together, and they all wanted to believe that something fine had happened in Angola. They kidded Willie about the pictures in the *New Day* and the things that were said of him in the printed stories.

They had not seen Truman board the plane and they had not seen Truman prior to the take-off and they did not know he was weeping again without making any sound and in exactly the same way as when the guns were firing except a little worse, because now it was the weeping of true shock.

Truman had not gone to bed the night before but had walked under the quiet sky, praying in the thanking manner and rejoicing that the guns had stopped firing.

He had made a complete circle of the town and had said many prayers, though he did not believe in God, and had done much listening, though he did not believe there was anyone speaking, and then he had seen the sun shy up over the palm trees and he had seen how the blue mountains took a fine, definite shape when the sun moved up higher in the sky and he had stood in a field watching golden flowers swaying to and fro in the slight breeze.

Then he saw many soldiers entering a grove of lemon trees at the edge of the flower field and the soldiers were forcing other soldiers to walk before them and the other soldiers were made to stand in a line and while they stood there, some of them raising their hands to the heavens, they were shot. He saw how they flew back as if hit by invisible hammers that drove them back suddenly in the air.

He had gone into shock and had walked back to the hotel, still in shock, and through the day he kept seeing the men being driven back by the invisible hammers and he saw the newspaper that day and he saw the faces of the men in the photographs of the newspaper and he knew then what had

happened, but knowing what had happened did not take the shock away.

Truman's natural state was shock and had been so for many years. Still this was a more perfect shock that was not getting any better, and every so often his body would jerk suddenly, as if electric wires were attached to his arms and legs sending a current through him.

He tried not to let these jolts interfere with the handling of the plane but in this he was not entirely successful, and once, when the hammers slammed swiftly through the air, the plane jerked downward and Willie and Herman Felder and Joto glanced out the window to see how near the storm was.

Chapter five

In the model nation of Etherea, twenty-nine days old and the youngest country in the world, 1,000 people were starving to death every twenty-four hours.

All men were free in Etherea; all men had dignity; all that was missing was food.

Etherea was a country shaped like an exclamation point in the east central interior of the continent of Africa.

When people saw the new editions of the world map and saw that bright mark of gold, their hearts beat faster. Etherea proved self-determination did work after all, and men remembered their own best dreams of themselves.

In Etherea itself hearts were not beating so fast except in the breasts of the men who had created Etherea a month before.

"We have overthrown the forces of imperialism, colonialism and tyranny," said President Lirithi. "After 500 years, we have come into our own."

"But the people!" Willie cried as they toured the capital city, recently named Lirithiville. "The *people.*"

Everywhere the long, grand car went, there were the thin arms and bloated stomachs of kwashiorkor.

Everywhere the unnaturally large eyes of the children, who

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were already part of the old professor's lesson, with the life drifting out of them as they sat dumbly on the curbstones.

Everywhere the bodies in the streets, some of them old and some of them young, but all of them now beyond any age.

And the rats that were like rabbits, tamed and well-fed, and walking about Lirithiville in broad daylight, with an air of rat boredom.

"The people," said Willie again, sickened and disbelieving and shocked and angry all at once.

"Ah, the starvation," said President Lirithi, at last getting Willie's point. "Without doubt, it is unfortunate."

"But better to starve in freedom than feast in chains," said the vice-president, as if reciting a slogan from a speech, which he was. "Soon we will eliminate all this."

"The people will be eliminated first," said Willie. "You have to get help. Fast."

"Etherea needs no help from imperialistic nations," said President Lirithi. "Etherea can handle her own problems."

"The people are *starving*!" said Willie. He spoke like a man trying to tell a neighbor that his house was on fire when the neighbor could not see or hear.

"His Excellency must read this," said the vice-president, handing Willie a gold-framed parchment. "Our constitution. We think it a masterpiece of political philosophy and a literary document of great value as well."

"But the *people*," Willie said once more, pointing now to a row of corpses that lay under a banner saying, THE FUTURE OF ETHEREA IS IN THE HANDS OF ETHEREALISTS!

"Why do you concern yourself with these momentary sufferings?" said the president. "After all, there was suffering before. So then we came and made the change. And in all change there is hardship. These people suffer for a greater good."

Willie's mouth went dry. He felt he had come to a death resort.

At the Hotel Saint Mark, President Lirithi, resplendent in a shiny black uniform, showed Willie architectural drawings of the new capital.

"My own residence will be black marble. Black to symbolize the dignity and beauty of the black people of the world. Marble to symbolize our strength."

The president stood before a large, open window. Willie could see a shuffling line of refugees over the shiny black shoulders and he could see the people who had once been refugees and had gone to the final refuge and were lying in the streets. It was a grim procession that began somewhere beyond the city and continued through the main street of the city and stretched on out of sight.

"In our country," said the president, "everyone owns everything. That is written into our constitution and that is why we are a model nation, neither monist nor capitalist nor communist. We are a family here."

Herman Felder gazed down at the streets and said, "What do they own?"

"You too are a sentimentalist?" said the vice-president.

Felder turned away slowly, went to the telephone and asked the operator to put him through to the nearest Red Cross station.

The vice-president took the telephone from Felder's hand.

"We do not need the help of fascist groups," said the vice-president.

"So they starve?" said Felder.

"If they starve, it is the business of Etherea," said the vice-president.

"It would appear to be the biggest business in the country," said Felder.

Truman and Joto made signs to Willie, asking what should be done. The minister of protocol noticed the signs and saw the scowl on Felder's face. The president opened a bottle of champagne and offered drinks to all.

"I wouldn't drink your booze if I was getting the DTs," said Felder. Then he opened his own flask and drank of the blue liquid.

"Mr. Felder is a jokester," said the president.

"Does not like see people die for stupid ideas," said Joto. "Very big jokester."

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"Gentlemen," said the minister of protocol, "this is to be a short, peaceful, amicable visit. The Holy See informed us that you could give our people a certain—should we say, solace?—during the present crisis. Though we of the People's Government of Etherea, hope of the world, do not need religion and in fact regard religious institutions as reactionary, still we are sensitive to the value of poetry. Men always need dreams."

Felder, taking another swig from his flask, moved to the window. He whispered something into the afternoon air, then solemnly blessed the refugees.

An aged priest was brought into the room.

"This is Father Angelicus, who has been a missionary in these parts for forty-seven years," said President Lirithi. "Once he taught me catechism. Say something, Father Angelicus."

The old man looked about confusedly, then approached Willie.

"O liri mega wita mogo soo," he said.

"Father Angelicus," President Lirithi said. "Why did God make man?"

"Kimi o mogo soo orithi mora danzi luma," the old man said, looking at his former pupil.

Willie took the old man's hands, which were very cold, and said, "I hope you are happy, Father Angelicus."

The old priest looked at Willie as if he were not a person but something written on a page in very small writing.

"O liri mega soo."

"His Excellency will no doubt preach a similar message on television tonight?" asked the president.

"I do not speak in tongues," said Willie.

Truman came up to the old man and studied his face, and then he too took the old man's hands and tried to comfort him. But the comfort was very strange, even the old man knew, since Truman was still numbed and still whimpering without making any sound as he had been on the plane.

Felder swung away from the window and, coming up to the old man, offered him the flask.

"Herman, please," said Willie, taking the flask from his hands.

Felder snatched the flask away and said, "Legates of de ape."

Willie spoke to Joto with his eyes, and Joto led Felder into a bedroom for whatever medicine Joto had left in his black bag.

"Mr. Felder is a very odd man," said the president. The vice-president and the minister of protocol laughed.

"Miku soo logo rithi?" cried the old man and laughed with them.

Truman was sobbing all the time without making tears or without making sobbing sounds.

Willie asked him in sign what was wrong, but Truman, instead of answering, went into the bedroom where Joto was trying to find the medicine.

Willie said, "Father Angelicus has been working here?"

The men were still laughing. President Lirithi, lighting a cigar, said, "He has been selling his magic up and down the river to anyone who still buys such things. The tribes, you see, still revere the medicine men of old."

The old man thought he was at a grand feast, like his fiftieth ordination anniversary, which had been celebrated three years ago, when he had first begun to speak exclusively in the spirit tongue.

His brother priests, who were dead now, had thought Father Angelicus had come down with a bad nervous illness, but all that had happened to him was that he had lived long enough to see the children he had baptized grow up to cut off the genitals of other children he had baptized.

President Lirithi gave the old man a glass of champagne, then poured a glass for himself and raised it to Willie.

"To the success of the telecast."

"That is all I am to do here, go on television?"

"That is all the Holy See stated and that is all we require," said the president.

"What about the people?"

"The people? We take care of the people."

"The people have TV?" Willie asked.

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"We are a progressive technological society," said the president. "Many of our people have television." He went to the chair and picked up Felder's camera. "Soon our people will have great conveniences—advanced things that make life easier."

"They do not have *food*," said Willie.

"Man does not live by bread alone," said the president, examining the camera. "Besides, the shortage is temporary."

Willie said, "I will speak to the people only if you permit representatives of the United Nations and the Red Cross to come here and to bring food and medicine and whatever else is needed."

The leaders began arguing among themselves in a language Willie could not understand. Father Angelicus kept speaking in tongues.

The director of information said finally, "His Excellency does not understand the political impracticality of his request. Etherea is a model nation."

The president said, "We are a sign to the oppressed people of the world. If it becomes known our people are starving, we cease being a sign."

"You must make your choice," said Willie.

"One moment please," said the president. "We were given a firm guarantee by a very high representative of the Holy See that you would offer our people a message of hope and consolation. That is all. It was understood that you would not interfere in the affairs of our country or speak of conditions here to people outside the land. We have a news freeze concerning the shortage of food, and we have made this fact known to the Holy See."

"To whom did you speak in the Holy See?"

"Cardinal Goldenblade."

"Cardinal Goldenblade is an American. He cannot speak for the Holy See."

"Still he is a high official of the church," the president said.

"I do not know Cardinal Goldenblade very well, but I am sure if he knew the conditions here, he would want to get help," Willie told the president. "In any case, I won't talk to

the people on TV unless you promise that you will get help."

The officials of the model government began arguing among themselves. While they spoke, Father Angelicus sang in tongues. Willie stepped into the next room, where Felder was groaning on the bed.

"Much worse," said Joto.

Willie touched Felder's forehead; it was burning with fever.

"Something happen just now," said Joto, "while I fix medicine. Truman signify something to Brother Herman and Brother Herman nod. Then he ask Truman question I do not hear. Then Truman give many sign and Brother Herman empty this." Joto held up a pint of the blue liquid.

"Where is Truman?"

"Went out a minute ago, down to street, I don't know."

Joto gave Felder a shot of the special medicine he thought would keep away the delirium. Felder lapsed into unconsciousness.

Willie rejoined the officials of the model nation in the next room.

"You have made a decision?"

The president answered. "We will allow the emissaries of the Red Cross to parachute supplies into the country. But we will allow no outsider to come in with cameras, no newsmen or reporters, no one, not even Red Cross personnel, only the supplies."

"You need doctors," said Willie. "Nurses, other medical people."

A brief and even more impassioned discussion broke out among the officials.

"All right," President Lirithi said finally. "We will allow a dozen medical personnel."

"Two hundred are needed," said Willie.

More argument. This time the president listened carefully to the minister of information.

"Two hundred," the president said at last.

"I can tell this to the people?"

"Yes," said the president.

"Good," said Willie. "And I expect that by tomorrow the

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supplies and the medical people will begin to arrive."

"We will attend to it immediately," said the minister of information.

The night began to come down on the land of Etherea and the trees sighed a little and the locusts sang in the trees, and Willie spoke to the people of the nation.

He congratulated them on their beginning a new country.

He said that he was sorry that so many people were starving, but that help was on the way.

He said that he hoped the new nation would always be a peaceful nation and not one that went in for making trouble with others.

"If you do not love peace," said Willie, "you are not a new nation but one of the oldest in the world."

Then Willie spoke of the love the people should strive to have for one another.

The officials of the government in their shiny black uniforms stood behind glass windows and watched Willie, smiling and now and then whispering among themselves.

They had written many wonderful documents after they had taken control of the nation, and they had come to power in the usual way and there were many dead along the trails behind them, and so they smiled as the black-gold-brown-red bishop spoke and the minister of education called him a romantic.

After the speech, as in Angola, they crowded around him, opening bottles and speaking words of congratulations.

"Even in the model state, there is room for poetry," said President Lirithi.

"Perhaps we should consider introducing some of the better literature of the Bible into the next edition of *Lirithi Speaks*," said the minister of education. "Job, for instance."

"I should not go quite that far," the president replied. "But perhaps one or two days a year the people should be allowed their little feasts of superstition."

He turned to offer a toast to Willie, but Willie had left the studio and had gone out to the dark streets to look for Truman.

Two blocks from the Hotel Saint Mark there was a bank building that had once contained many lock boxes laden with gems and treasures. When General Lirithi and his men had laid siege to the city during their long campaign to overthrow the old government, they had often had their men train the largest gun they owned on this bank. The gunners had learned to hit it after a while, though there had been many misses, and after they hit it once, they continued to hit it, thinking of the bank as the capital building of the old regime, and each time they hit it, they imagined they were killing millionaires and they cheered and praised Lirithi with each successful shot.

Nothing of the superstructure of the bank now remained, but the floor was still there, and under the rubble of bricks and timber, the squares of blue and white marble were still quite beautiful, though some of them had been cracked. Under this floor there were two basements cased in steel, where the old government had once kept its money, and these basements also were intact and now served as a residence for many children who were about to die and for many old people who were also about to die. At the moment this bank basement was the only hospital Lirithiville had, and it was here that Willie found Truman, walking from dying child to dying child whimpering and moaning, his crying at last having found a sort of voice.

The children, tiny and black, were already half out of the world, but there was still enough life in some of them that they could turn their enormous eyes to Truman and see him as a giant from a strange land, a marvelous being out of a story they had heard somewhere.

Truman himself must also have thought of it this way, for when Willie found him he was moving oddly on his feet, making a little pantomime for the dying children, thinking perhaps that before they died they would see one funny thing in their lives and close their eyes believing there was joy to be found somewhere, perhaps in their sleep.

The solemnity of the dance froze Willie. It was like a dream or a story from a nursery book—the giant or the bear at play

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with the children. But when Truman turned in his slow, terrible ballet, Willie saw that his face was sadder and more terrible than anything he could invent for a mask, and it was not at all like the face of a giant from a nursery tale who would turn out to be friendly at the end, but only the face of a man whom the world had killed not once but a hundred times and would keep on killing until it became bored or found some other man made out of the same material.

The children's eyes were trying to see Truman, but death was already pressing down on their eyelids, and if they smiled, it would be with the last energy of their lives.

Willie watched as long as he could stand it, then he went to Truman and embraced him even as he continued his dance, his hands going up around the huge shoulders.

"It's all right, it is all right," he said over and over, until Truman stopped and came back from whatever dream he had tried to make for the children, still moaning and crying and seeing that picture he had seen on the green fields of Angola.

"Come Truman," said Willie. "Come. There is nothing more we can do here. The doctors are coming tomorrow."

Truman shook his head, a fierce no. He looked at Willie with anger and dread. Then slowly, painfully, he bowed to the children. Raising his hand to his chest he rendered them a heart salute, long-lasting, unbearable to watch. Then he moved away, toward the door that led to the street.

Following him, Willie reached up to place a hand on his giant shoulder.

"It is all right, Truman. Terrible as it is, tomorrow the doctors come—and it will be better."

When they reached the street, Truman stopped under a lamppost that threw a dingy yellow light over the rubble.

"Come," said Willie.

Truman looked back at the door to the basement. Then he made a series of hurried knifelike signs that Willie could not understand.

"More slowly," he said in sign.

All men, Truman signified with a gesture that took in the whole human family, *all men,* he repeated, and then brought

his hands to his lips, *tell lies.*

Willie considered this terrible message and then said softly, "Come, let's go back to the hotel."

So they walked back through the streets, passing a corpse that had once been a young man, and Truman's moaning was like a dirge but sadder and more solemn than any ever composed by a writer of music.

At the hotel Felder was sitting up. Willie was amazed. Joto was sitting beside him. They were gazing out at the city of Lirithiville.

"Thank God, you are better, Brother Herman," said Willie.

Both men looked up, first at Willie, then at Truman. Neither spoke.

Willie could not believe Felder felt well enough to sit up, and he tried to ask Joto a question with his eyes.

Then he saw that Joto did not want to answer any questions, and he knew then that something very bad had happened.

"What is it?" he said.

Still whimpering, Truman pulled a chair away from the wall and Willie turned around in time to see him swing it into the television set, smashing its screen and shattering glass around the room.

"Truman!" he cried.

Felder and Joto seemed not even to notice Truman's act, but after awhile Joto made a sign to Truman and then pointed to the sofa.

Truman, still holding the chair, looked about the room. He seemed to search for other things to break. Slowly Joto got up and went to him and spoke to him and took the chair from his hands.

Willie sat down beside Felder, whose face in the lights of the city looked more than ever like a death mask.

Willie saw that Felder was drinking a bottle of the blue liquid. His great camera rested on his chest, flashing in its holster.

"What is it, Brother Herman?"

Felder said nothing, only stared at the deathbound city.

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"My speech tonight? The conditions here? What?"

Felder tilted the bottle to his lips.

"Herman."

Felder leaned forward a little. He seemed about to collapse.

"Perhaps we had all better rest," said Willie.

But Felder made not a move.

"Tell me what it is, Herman?" said Willie.

"The ape is dead," said Felder.

"Speak plainly."

Felder lifted the bottle once again and this time drained it. Then he threw it through the window. The glass went flying and crashing around them again.

"For God's sake, Herman!"

Felder struggled up from his chair. For a moment Willie feared he would jump through the window.

Joto came up behind him and pinned Felder's shoulders.

"Goddamnit," said Felder, "Goddamnit." He wrestled himself free and, moving to the side of the window, grabbed the drape and hung there like a weary clown.

"What's it all about?" Willie demanded, his voice tightening and thinning so that it was not his voice at all. "Tell me."

Joto gazed at Herman Felder, who was hanging on the gold drape, the camera dangling from his neck.

"Tell him," Felder gasped. "Plainly."

Joto's eyes shifted away.

"Whatever it is, Joto," said Willie, "let us speak as brothers in truth and charity. It cannot be bad—because we live in love."

"It very bad," said Joto. "In Angola we were betrayed."

And then Joto told Willie what Truman had seen in Luanda, how the revolutionary leaders had been murdered, how the government had lied about the peace talks. Joto spoke until he could not say any more.

Willie sat down in the chair that Herman Felder had been sitting in. He felt very heavy, as if his body had become a foreign object that someone had thrust unexpectedly upon his shoulders.

The lights of Lirithiville shone feebly before him.

Down on the corner he could see the small form of a child's sleeping body, and even from this distance he knew that the child was sleeping death.

So it had all been a joke and a lie. So he had come to bring peace, and so men were murdered instead of the peace coming.

There was a shattered wedge of glass still sticking up in the window, and Willie could see his face in it.

And then he saw the face of the old professor leering through his own, the immemorial headmaster of the world, who had once more made his lesson clear.

He stood up suddenly. As he swung away from them, he did not hear Felder shout, did not hear Truman moan, did not feel Joto's arms trying to restrain him as he went through the door.

He found a stairway and went down to the street where the stench of the dead brought him to. He went on for a while down a very dark street and was sick among ghastly white flowers. He realized he had come to a park.

He staggered toward a pond where a fountain gurgled and splashed in a maddening babble.

He sat by the pond, looking but not yet seeing.

There were lights strung about the fountain, and suddenly he saw his slanty eyes reflected in the water.

Then through his came other eyes, bulging from a skull.

He was sick again.

An old man approached him, teetering and swaying.

Coming out of his fugue, Willie went toward him, but the old man fell before he reached him.

Cradling his head, he tried to comfort the man and pulled away a sort of scarf that the man had wound around his face, perhaps to keep the stench of death away, and when the scarf fell away, Willie saw that it was Father Angelicus, the old priest he had met earlier in the day. He was bleeding from the mouth.

Father Angelicus said something that Willie could not understand, and then his head lolled back and he was dead.

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Automatically, as if in a trance, Willie blessed him and said words of absolution. He knelt for a while in silence.

He coughed. A fit of coughing seized him.

He put his coat over the body of the dead missioner and walked past a row of corpses, stacked more or less like wood, near a trench grave that had been dug at the edge of the park.

He felt the world recede from him for an instant. Then it came back in a frieze of blue lights that were startling and insane in the night.

CAFÉ NAPOLEON, the lights said.

Under the lights Willie could make out figures seated at tables.

There was laughter in the air, the clink of glasses.

The men were wearing shiny black uniforms that caught the blue light and gleamed with a strange luminance.

These were the men of the victorious revolutionary army, and they had been drunk for many days in celebration of their conquest and their heroism and their forging of a new nation.

There was a small band playing somewhere, and the music floated out into the night, where the dead lay in the victorious air.

Willie took a step forward, and another sign, this one in green neon, caught his eye: VIN REGENT—ET LE MONDE C'EST BEAU.

Someone, a thin man wearing one of the blue-black uniforms, stood suddenly before him.

". . . for the celebration?"

"What?"

"Would His Excellency pay us the honor of joining our little celebration?"

The man was a colonel Willie had seen at the television station.

"I have been with the dead," said Willie. "The dead," he gestured to the park beyond.

"Let the dead bury the dead," said the colonel. "You see, I remember my Scripture. Please, join us."

Willie turned and ran.

He ran through the park, past the cord of bodies, past Father Angelicus, past the pond, toward the hotel.

It started to rain.

Chapter six

The tears of God fell upon the bodies of the dead children and fell upon the blue tiles of the Café Napoleon and Willie knelt by the shattered window in the Hotel Saint Mark and he prayed and listened and he could not hear the rain and could not hear the breathing of Herman Felder who had fallen where he had clung to the drape and could not hear or see Joto who sat sleeping in a chair by Felder's side and could not hear Truman who whimpered continuously on his sofa because the men were filing through the green grass again, and the rain came down, washing away the blood from some of the corpses so that there were little red rivers and lakes in the streets of the capital of the model nation.

Willie knelt by the window and he did not see anything and did not think anything except what he had read when he had come back to the room, the words someone had left for him to read, there in the Guidebook still open on the floor by his side, and he did not know who had opened the Guidebook to that page but the words were in his brain and he knew the words were for him now like no words had ever been for him before.

The words were the words of Recommendation 40, written long ago by the mysterious Carlos Lull, and if Willie had read them before, and he had, it was different now because of what had happened and the words were like fire in his head and there was no doubt what they meant even if he knew he had to pray and to listen very hard about them.

The words Carlos Lull had written in 1574 were: *When the treachery of the world seems unbearable and the lies of men prove more powerful than the force of love, then to the most treacherous men submit thyself, and in the presence of the most mendacious, stand as Christ before Herod, saying nothing and*

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inviting death that the foul enemy might be drowned in the blood of thine innocence. Thus for a time the Lie will be crushed, and even fools shall see their defeat.

There could be no question what the words meant, he thought, but still he listened and the harder he listened and the more he gave himself to the silence, the more his spirit seemed to empty itself until it became like an empty hall, and the words repeating themselves reverberated like a shout on a flat plain surrounded by high mountains.

No, there could be no question, but the more he listened, the more the echoing words confused him, and he had never had such difficulty in listening. The rain fell but he did not hear the rain falling, only the words echoing back to him, and the words of Recommendation 40 began to mix with each other and the individual words were like separate angry voices magnified as if by loudspeakers and when this shouting became very loud, Willie, out of the habit and knowledge of years of prayer-listening, knew that he had to concentrate on certain basic principles, beginning with Recommendation 19.

Recommendation 19 stipulated that when death became the application of any particular recommendation, then the believer had to question himself of every virtue (the recommendation contained an outline "inventory" of fifty-five questions) and review the listening monitions as well.

He opened the Guidebook to the listening observations that had been written by members of the Society who lived at different times and places over a period of 800 years. His eyes fell on Observation 11.

It is of the essence of the listening prayer that the listener put himself away from the pleas and suggestions of the normal self, especially when a life-giving action seems the recommended course, for the normal self will suggest many false deeds for the sake of pride or guilt removal or vengeance or for the satisfaction of desires that go back to the time before love spoke.

He turned a page.

In all true listening the listener opens his spirit to the Loving One, the Power and the Strength, as some call Him-Her, the YOU, who is wholly Other and yet also wedded to the true self. And it is of the essence and perfection of true listening that once the demands of the normal self have been completely put aside, the voice of the self wedded to Truth and Love speak in such a way to the heart of the listener that he is assured it is no other than the voice of the Loving One Him-Herself. And the listener knows this with the exact same degree of certainty that he knows that he exists.

Gloss of Marion Byrne: *Has nothing to do with the lying and insanity of hearing voices, as the Fools of Spain believed. Entirely a matter of opening self completely to Other so that Other might enter and be joined to self so that when self speaks, it is the Other speaking in true wedlock, with utter clarity even though the language may be obscure to the normal self and even unknown to the mental workings of the normal self.*

Willie then turned to Observation 61, and his eyes fell on the gloss of Vora Lyons, American, d. 1894.

In any situation where the sacrifice of one's own life is required, one realizes it with a serene joy and absolute confidence because the road is so clearly marked, and there is never any doubt. If there is hesitation or confusion, the purest listening is required.

Willie read a little further in the Guidebook, then put it down and began to listen once more. Was it not clear? What could be clearer? He was not yet listening, but asking questions.

He was to go back to the court of the treacherous and there, challenging the lie, offer his life that the lie might be destroyed. He was not yet listening.

He let the words of Recommendation 40 come to him again. Then he forced them out of his mind, or tried to, so that he could receive an answer.

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But the words would not go away. They were as loud and shrill as before.

He did not feel the certainty or the confidence or the serenity but only the desire to do what Recommendation 40 asked him to do.

The words were echoing back and forth again and he prayed simply that the echoing would stop.

He kept up this prayer until the words did stop and finally there was the silence he had been looking for and then he was in the silence altogether, and the silence was all around, stretching out around him, and in the silence he was alone.

The rain fell and the sky became gray and Willie knelt by the window unseeing and trying to listen and did listen, except that there was nothing to hear and after an hour he still did not hear, and then there was a longer silence, an emptiness of everything, even of his own life, a blank, and then things started to come back. He had the vague idea he had heard something, a word that sounded like *Wait,* but he could not be sure. He listened more closely, but the listening broke down, and he was telling himself that to die there would be an act of revenge—but a second later he wondered why that would be so.

The sky turned white. It was dawn, and he was still kneeling and again he heard quite clearly the word that sounded like *Wait,* and he felt an excitement and he thanked God and he came back a little once more and he knew where he was, and he thought in the morning they would all have Eucharist and share their thoughts and he felt the Presence for a second and it warmed him in spite of everything and he knew then what he had always known—that He had swallowed down all the lies and arrangements that made for the murder of men.

"Brother Christ," he said distinctly. And then distinctly a voice replied: "Wake."

He opened his eyes and there was Joto and there was something Joto was trying to give to him, a handkerchief, no a paper, no a telegram.

"You were sleeping kneeling," said Joto.

Willie groaned. His body ached. He got to his feet and tore open the telegram.

WHATEVER THE CIRCUMSTANCES GO IMMEDIATELY TO ROME. BENJAMIN

"Just arrive," said Joto.

Willie passed the telegram to Joto, who passed it again to Truman, who was still whimpering and weeping without tears.

"What does it mean?" said Willie. "Father Benjamin is in jail."

"He know what is happening," said Joto. "Even in jail."

Willie looked down on the gray streets and the refugees who were already commencing the long day's march, and he could see the park where a group of the refugees had been put to work burying the dead. The night came back to him.

He read the telegram again.

"It says immediately," said Willie.

"Whatever circumstances," said Joto.

"What can it mean? What possibly can it mean?" said Willie.

He did not know, though he would learn in the next hour, that early the previous day the chauffeur-driven Cadillac of the Pope of Rome, Felix VII, traveling at ninety-eight miles an hour on a gravel detour near the Via Appia had struck a stone marker that had been unearthed by workmen and left carelessly to lie on the edge of the road. The Cadillac had hit the marker and sailed into the air, and the chauffeur had cried to God and the pope had blessed the chauffeur and asked God to take away his sins, and then his own neck had been broken as the Cadillac hit the ground.

The stone marker, erected in 50 B.C. during the reign of the great emperor Julius Caesar, said: *Ite Lente.*

* * *

When they came down into the oldest idea of the Western world, it was already past midnight and the great Rome airport was nearly deserted.

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Joto and Truman and Willie carried Herman Felder on a stretcher into the customs office, declaring him and their bodies as their only possessions.

Felder had not been awake since the time he clung clownlike to the drape. His pulse was low, and on the long flight north, Joto said that he had never seen him that far under.

The night shift of bored customs officials came forward to meet them, and in their midst Willie saw another figure, an old man emerging from a long time ago.

The years in prison had withered and bent him, and he looked more than ever like the American poet who wrote *Leaves of Grass,* but it was the poet now who had suffered the second stroke and looked out the window all day long and tried to hear the songs Camden, New Jersey made.

"Father Ben—" Willie began, but his voice went out.

He and Father Benjamin embraced. Then Father Benjamin wordlessly and solemnly embraced Joto and Truman.

They stood there for a little while warming themselves in their fraternal love, then gently, tenderly, they placed Herman Felder on a cushioned bench.

Over him the four men held out their hands and chanted one of the well-loved songs of the Servants: *Ubi Caritas et Amor Deus Ibi Est.*

The tableau of the strange men—the old man dressed like a ragpicker, the others like workmen from a road gang, the still figure on the bench and the sound of that ancient chant—brought a spell upon the airdrome.

The police and the customs officials and the sleepy travelers waiting for early morning planes and the night workers in the restaurant stared at the scene in the way people linger before a curious figure in a museum, drawn toward it by memories that are engraved on the deepest places of the heart, so deep that they do not know they are there.

There was an American reporter sitting at the counter of the restaurant. He was tired and very bored. When he heard the chanting, he turned to stare with the others and was caught in the spell for a moment before he recognized the

red-haired slanty-eyed man among the others in the group. He had been waiting through most of the day for the arrival of this man, he and a thousand other reporters, and now he had him alone.

Grabbing his camera, he rushed into the customs area and took a flash picture of Willie absorbed in the prayer chant, a picture that would appear on world telenews the next morning.

The chief of customs stepped forward then and asked for papers.

He looked at Willie's passport a long time, then at his clothing. He searched for the ring Willie was not wearing and at last made a hesitant half bow.

"Welcome to Rome, Monsignor. The Vatican has living arrangements prepared, I believe. We hope your stay in Rome will be pleasant." He thought this over. "We are of course in mourning for our beloved Holy Father."

"We need to get this man to a hospital," said Willie.

"One moment, please," the customs official said, for the first time noticing Felder's camera riding in its holster on Willie's back. "You have permit for the firearm, Monsignor?"

"Not firearm," Joto said. "Camera."

The official inspected the lens of the camera poking up from the holster.

"Please—the man is so ill," said Willie.

At last the official quit his inspection of the camera.

"Very well. Who is this man?"

"Herman Felder."

A fat man in a white suit, standing at the edge of the customs area, stepped forward.

"*Prego,*" he said. The customs officer turned to the man and handed him Felder's passport.

The fat man studied the passport with eyes that spoke no emotion.

"Signor Felder," he said to Willie, "Signor Felder is—how say?—nonwelcome. He is the man *non grata. Capische?*"

"Where is the nearest hospital?" said Willie.

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The man in the white suit produced a card and handed it to Willie. The card identified him as Antonio Suggio of the National Internal Security Service.

"Signor Felder is not a lawful man," the fat man said.

"He is very ill, my brother," said Willie. "He is close to death."

"Even dying persons sometimes are unlawful. It is not a question of health. Great murderers often enjoy splendid health."

"He needs to get to a doctor," Willie said imploringly.

The fat man's eyes came to life. "Men need many things. I for instance need money. Am I to steal for that reason? Think, Monsignor, of the law. We come into this world, we make our way badly or well, and there is always the law to guide us. We change, many things change, but the law is above us, outside us, immortal."

Father Benjamin left Herman Felder's side then and came up to the fat man and handed him a letter.

It was written on the stationery of the consulate of the United States and was signed by Lawson Thebes, the ex-brother-in-law of Herman Felder.

The letter said that the legal charges brought by the Italian Court against Herman Felder eleven years earlier were no longer binding and that Mr. Felder was free to visit Italy. The letter was countersigned by the head of the Internal Security Service.

The fat man awkwardly clicked his heels. "I am happy. There is much trouble in the world. It is good some of it is gone."

An ambulance was summoned. Joto and Truman boarded it with Felder while Willie and Father Benjamin followed in a taxi.

"He is so ill," said Willie.

"I have seen him so in the past," said Father Benjamin.

"Why didn't they want him in the country?"

"Once he did something to the golden mosaic of a great church—or was accused of such a crime. He was ejected from the country. Later, there were papers found in his hotel room

linking him with other activities."

"Oh, Father Benjamin, we have all had such trouble. But then so have you. All these years in prison."

Benjamin turned his blue-white face to Willie.

"The hardest time of all is just beginning," he said.

Ahead of them in the ambulance, in the brain of Herman Felder, a great blizzard stormed across vast unknown fields.

A ragged group of men, weary from a long journey, huddled about a fire for warmth.

The snows were thickening and the winds driving them on had all but extinguished the fire.

The men were starving.

Felder knew there was food just ahead, but no one believed him.

"We'll all freeze then!" he shouted.

"No," a voice answered, "we'll starve before that."

"Cold! Freezing cold!" he shouted in the ambulance rushing through the darkened streets with its mournful wee-waa, wee-waa.

One of the attendants, knowing a little English, said to the driver: "A crazy one. It is eighty-nine degrees at this moment."

"Did you see the others? All crazy," said the driver, and he turned sharply onto the Via di San Gregorio where, straight ahead, the lighted Colosseum blazed on in the night.

Chapter seven

It was a very large church; it was the largest church in the world, and for nine days its main business was to serve as a funeral parlor.

The people came from all over Rome and Italy, and there were many tourists who had come to Italy for other reasons and they all streamed into the great church that had been named after the first pope to look at the body of the dead pope, and for the tourists who had come from Michigan and

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Scotland and Lebanon it was a great stroke of good fortune that this extra sideshow had been included in the itinerary and it cost nothing except a wait in line.

The city of Rome slowed a little. It had seen many popes die and Caesars too, and all over the city there were the reminders of the greatness of those who had died. Rome loved to slow down a little and play the sad music on the radio, and the mourning was almost a sexual feeling when the girls came into the sunshine on the Via Veneto wearing bright yellow dresses and there was a fever in the air, and the men looked at the girls and everyone felt death and the sheer brevity of life speeded up the inner emotions even while, on the outside, everything was slower.

At night the television cameras, set high among the arches and the columns of the great church, stared fixedly at the stiff doll-like body of the pope, and the commentators said whatever they could think up, and people all over the world watched and listened and derived the secret thrill from it.

The commentators on the third day were running out of material after they had told the people of the pope's accomplishments, after they had told the people that this pope would go down in history as the computer pope because he had held an ecumenical council of the church and had run the council entirely by computer, with the bishops of the world submitting their ideas on special punch cards which were even now being processed by the Vatican RevCon office. The commentators were running out of material, but it made no difference since the message that interested the world was the doll lying there among the columns and the marble statuary and the people filing past the bier and the mournful music.

The commentators sometimes spoke of the great art masterpieces of Saint Peter's basilica, and they sometimes showed films of cardinals and other electors arriving at the airport for the burial of the dead pope and the election of the new one, and sometimes they held interviews with individuals who were said to be experts on the subject of who the next pope would be, but there were many long stretches of silence

and the music played on, and in the United States the fourth night of the telecast brought the largest viewing audience in the history of television.

The sun beat down on the piazza of Saint Peter and made it a cobbled grill, like the basin of an oven, and people fainted in the six-hour line and when they revived, they rejoined it because it was important to them to see the doll and tell others about it since the opportunity might never come again.

The body of the pope was like one of the statues and they regarded the body with awe and fear and delicious gratitude.

On his fifth night in Rome Willie went to the Vatican to register his arrival with the officials of the conclave.

An Italian monsignor, a worried-looking man, with large brown eyes and thinning hair, met him and introduced himself as Monsignor Taroni and said that he would be Willie's guide.

The monsignor, touched by Willie's sadness, gently steered him to the papal bier.

Willie wept a little, not for the doll-body of Pope Felix, but for the death-struck men and women coming forward in their numb procession.

The monsignor gestured towards a priedieu, but Willie did not notice; his eyes roved the arches and the columns. The shadowy figures of angels and saints and prophets and dead churchmen were grotesque illustrations, and the statues he saw were not masterpieces of art but only stick figures of the ancient lesson.

"A tomb," he said softly. "A tomb after all."

Monsignor Taroni, thinking the red-haired bishop wished to see the crypt that had been prepared for Pope Felix, took the sleeve of his jacket.

"This way, Excellency."

But Willie could not move. His eyes were on the people and beyond the people, on those others he had left behind in the darkened streets, that other procession that did not stop to gaze at bodies costumed in gold cloth.

Suddenly over the shuffling sound of the crowd and the

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steady buzz of their whisperings came a soft, sweet, unexpected call—the cry of a child.

Willie turned around. Directly across from him, on the other side of the bier, a man was holding up a three- or four-year-old girl, holding her high in the air so that she might see the body of the dead man.

The father seemed to be saying, Isn't it special? Isn't it extraordinary?

The child cried out louder, either in delight at the giant flickering candles or the colors of the Swiss Guard, or in fright at the sight of the dead pope.

Willie quickly crossed the bier area and held out his arms to the child. She looked at him hesitantly, then smiled, returning his grin.

"Beautiful one," he said, "did you say hello to Mr. Moon tonight?" He held out his arms for the little girl to come to him.

The father looked at him doubtfully, but now the child was holding out her arms. Willie took her.

Holding her in his arms, circling slowly in a little dance, he said some nonsense words and the child laughed.

The father attempted a smile, nodding his head, and then held out his arms for the return of his baby.

Monsignor Taroni, nonplused, spoke solemnly to the father.

"He is an American bishop."

"Ah," said the father.

Willie, jogging with the child now, held out his hand. The man took it. "Part of the program," said Willie, nodding to the bier. "We have to accept it—but to pay it tribute!"

In nervous, very fast Italian the man said to the monsignor, "What's he talking about?"

"He is an American bishop," Monsignor Taroni repeated.

Still dancing with the child, Willie introduced himself. "I'm Willie."

"Giovanni," said the man, and then shyly indicating his daughter, "Felicita."

"Felicita, Felicita, Felicita," said Willie. "Such a pretty

name. *Felicita.*" And he spun around very fast and the little girl shrieked with laughter.

The death-bound crowd had been watching the stir, and now the sound of Willie's name went pulsing backward through the basilica.

"Giovanni," said Willie, handing Felicita back to her father, "there is an ice cream store down the street. They have good ice cream I am sure. Maybe even moon-flavored ice cream. You and Felicita have some ice cream as a present from someone who is your friend." Then Willie gave Giovanni all the money he had in his pocket, which was four dollars and thirty-six cents.

Monsignor Taroni, wearing a pained smile, led Willie away from the bier area to the *Confessio* before the high altar with its thick serpentine columns, which were considered wonderful works of art by all who saw them and which Willie found ugly at a glance.

They stood at a balustrade before the snake-works in the glow of eighty-nine burning lamps.

"It is here," the monsignor said pointing down a flight of marble steps, "that the Apostle is buried."

Willie could see the doors of gilded bronze and a statue of a holy-looking pope.

"It's good they found a place to bury him," he said.

The monsignor said, "You desire to inspect?"

Willie shook his head.

The crowds were streaming into the great vault, and the individual men and women were immediately small as they came into the presence of the alabaster and the porphyry and the bronze and the gold, into the place where Michelangelo and Raphael and Bernini had executed their paintings and statues and mosaics, which depicted important matters of consequence to everybody and which had the effect of making everybody use the words *masterpiece* and *genius* whenever they looked upon them, and it seemed to Willie that the people's faces were like the faces of unhappy children being led to school after a long vacation.

Then Monsignor Taroni took Willie out of Saint Peter's

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basilica, into the howling night of Rome. Going down the steps of the church, they passed under a great angry statue of Paul and they crossed the piazza of Saint Peter and entered a marble corridor where there were many other statues and paintings and a gloom that seemed designed.

They came to a great hall full of still more paintings and statues and full also of red-robed churchmen speaking in many languages and looking like they had stepped out of the paintings.

"Bishop Brother!" someone called, and Willie, glancing around, saw Cardinal Goldenblade coming toward him over a rug that looked like a tapestry.

"How good to see you again, dear Bishop Brother!"

"In Etherea, the people are starving!" Willie said. "We—"

"The conclave begins just after the funeral Mass. We gather in the Sistine. You are allowed two assistants—I would suggest Bishop Jim Casey and Bishop Phil Lee, both young fellows, grand golfers. Where are you staying?"

"In an apartment near the hospital."

"You're not sick, boy?"

"It's Mr. Felder—he's very ill. And in Angola, they gave us a promise—"

"We're at the Excelsior, and if there is anything, *anything* you need, will you call me? I'll offer my rosary for Mr. Felder tonight."

"The officials in Angola—" Willie said, but Cardinal Goldenblade had walked away and struck up a conversation with Cardinal Tisch, a computer expert and the most powerful churchman in all of Germany.

A notary of the cardinal prefect, holding a clipboard, came up to Willie.

"The name of your conclavists?"

"Father Benjamin Victor."

"Only one?"

Willie nodded, trying to get Cardinal Goldenblade's attention but seeing now that he was moving into another room.

Monsignor Taroni showed Willie out of the palace and Willie found a cab and the cab took him past the old Forum

where Julius Caesar had once walked and thought up many arrangements for the people he ruled, and as the cab raced nervously through the streets, Willie heard Death humming as he counted the take.

"You can have the tuition," said Willie to Death. "We'll take the students."

Death went on humming and counting.

* * *

Later that same night in a small room of the second floor of the hospital of Saint Pius X, Herman Felder's heart stopped beating.

Willie and Benjamin and Joto were at his bedside; Truman was at the apartment sleeping.

When they saw his breathing stop, they moved quickly, each to a different task. Joto pushed every button that the room held, Benjamin hurried into the corridor and called for help, Willie turned to the patient himself.

Tearing the oxygen tent away, he bent over Felder's body, slipped his arms underneath and rolled him over. Then climbing on the bed he began to apply artificial respiration.

"Come on, Herman! Come on, we've had too much of this lately!" He pushed down hard, waited and pushed again.

"Come on, Herman! Play fair!"

Felder had been in the blizzard a long time now. He had seen the monkey man, one million years old, at the end of the cave. The monkey man was glazed with ice. It was when Felder saw that there was no way to get the monkey man to speak that his heart had stopped. Now forty seconds after the heart-stop, he heard a faint utterance from the thick frozen lips.

"Herman Felder, this is life calling!" Willie shouted.

Willie pushed down hard and sure, released, then pushed again.

When the emergency team arrived, shouting furiously, they dragged Willie off the bed, but Felder had groaned softly.

An intern applied an electrode to Felder's chest. The juice

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went on, the body jerked.

Felder felt the slap of a huge fist.

Another intern stabbed Felder with a needle and emptied a cylinder of clear fluid into his upper arm.

The room was a tumult of waving arms, shouts, curses, groans.

"He's coming around!" Willie shouted.

One of the doctors gave Willie to understand that his shouting was a distraction and a hindrance to his work. He placed his stethoscope over Felder's heart, and at that moment Felder inhaled lightly, coughed a little, then breathed several times deeply.

Willie and Joto both shouted again and Felder opened his eyes.

His eyes were glassy and it was hard to tell if he could see but he seemed to look at them. They shouted to him. The medical team began muttering obscenities.

"We cannot work in such a climate," one of the doctors said to Benjamin.

"If he hears our voices," Willie said, "that will help him come back."

One of the attendants said in Italian that Willie's brain was made of yak dung.

Herman Felder's brother-in-law, Lawson Thebes, came into the room, a handsome man of fifty, elegantly dressed. He was on his way to the nightly diplomatic cocktail party. He had an attaché case with him.

When he saw Willie and Joto and Benjamin, his nose twitched and he asked the doctor if there had been a change in Felder's condition.

"He died, in the technical sense," said the chief doctor.

Thebes furrowed his handsome brow.

"But he's going to be okay now," Willie said. "He's breathing and he opened his eyes."

Thebes's nose twitched again.

Felder seemed to breathe more easily all the time and once again he opened his eyes. His lips worked and Willie moved toward him but Lawson Thebes intervened, and bending very

low, he spoke into Felder's ear.

"This is Lawson, Herman. I want you to sign the papers."

Felder's eyes moved slowly to Lawson Thebes's face. His lips were still working.

"The papers," Thebes repeated.

Felder closed his eyes. He seemed to concentrate his every energy on something. He took a deep breath and opened his eyes and tried to make his mouth work. He managed to form four distinct words—a question: "How—melt—de—ape?"

The lips closed, then the eyes, and Felder went back to the ice world.

Outside in the corridor the chief doctor conferred with Willie, Benjamin, Joto and Lawson Thebes.

"It will happen again, alas," said the doctor. "His heart is weak; his lungs do not operate; his liver is an abomination. The blood count is low. The stomach," and with these words the doctor sucked in his breath.

"His mind is gone too?" said Lawson Thebes.

"Alas, yes," said the doctor.

"His mind better," said Joto. "Sees ape once more."

"I beg your pardon?" said Thebes.

"What we have here, gentlemen," said the doctor, "is the case of a man fighting for life. And losing."

"No," said Benjamin. "Brother Herman is fighting for death. The superficial symptoms you have just described are only signs of the underlying problem—the death messages sent by his spirit to the various organs of the body."

"Alas, Father," the doctor chuckled, "I am afraid what you call superficial symptoms are deep-down disorders in themselves and will bring about death."

"There is no disorder any deeper than the will to die," said Benjamin.

"You are referring to such things as the unfortunate drinking Mr. Felder indulged in before he came here?" said the doctor.

Benjamin shook his head. "The disappointment in life and the affair he began with death some time ago—the thing that brought about the drinking."

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"That is psychology," the doctor said, chuckling still.

"Bad psychology," said Thebes.

Benjamin shrugged. "You do not think men love death more than life? It happens very often. It is the sickness of sickness."

Thebes twitched his nose and addressed himself to the doctor. "I have to have his signature upon certain papers."

"You yourself see that his mind is gone," said the doctor.

"Mind is present," said Joto. "It is body that is gone."

"You of course are a renowned diagnostician," said Lawson Thebes to Joto.

"I am brother," said Joto.

Thebes left, walking away with the doctor.

Willie, Benjamin and Joto went into a little sitting room and stood for a moment in the prayer of listening.

Soon Willie put his hand in the hands first of Joto, then of Father Benjamin. Then without a word he left them and went back into Herman Felder's room.

Then occurred that strange, unexplained event, with all its consequences and interpretations—that legendary incident, which Willie himself never afterward discussed and Felder only once, a few short hours after it happened when the newsmen came rushing through the gray streets propelled by that lust for the extraordinary which, according to some, was the cause of the event itself and which, within a few hours, created the largest, boldest headlines since the Six Wars period and made for the most dramatic telecasts since the assassination of the last U.S. President and everywhere made it possible for men to have new poles of cynicism and superstition to fix bright banners to and for people of faith to gleefully renew that special superiority they had always cherished in their hearts.

Chapter eight

The earliest news came from the hospital workers.

When the head night nurse, a man named Sergio Pinza, looked in on Herman Felder a few minutes after four o'clock in the morning, he found the patient out of bed and fully clothed, pacing the floor.

"Signor Felder! What are you doing out of bed?"

"I would like to check out," Felder said calmly.

"You are dangerously ill—dying, signor!"

"Test my heart, my blood pressure, breathing, all the rest. I am perfectly recovered."

Pinza dashed into the corridor, calling for the emergency team.

The team came, took the tests. Felder was unquestionably restored.

"You will tell us what has happened," said the chief doctor, who had been called from a sound sleep.

"I am hungry," said Felder. "Could you get me something to eat? I will make a statement at seven o'clock on the steps of the hospital."

"Who treated you?" said the doctor.

"One statement—at seven. Take these instruments away for people who need them."

By five o'clock, 150 hospital personnel had jammed into the corridors around Felder's room. The word *miracle* went up and down the hallway, a verbal balloon that danced among the heads.

The superintendent of the hospital came to Felder's room, an aged nun who had baptized 5,000 dying unbelievers.

"God has saved you."

"Perhaps, Sister. I am hungry. Could I have a steak, some eggs perhaps, bread?"

"It will be done. I shall do it personally," said the nun. "It is said the American bishop—the Chinese Negro man—that he accomplished this?"

"I shall speak of the matter at seven."

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"Where is the bishop?"

"Went back to his apartment, I think."

The nun fell on her knees and kissed the floor that Willie had walked on.

Felder lifted her up.

"If you would get me a little food, Sister, and then go back to bed and rest. There are many sick people here who need you, I'm sure."

"It is the first miracle I have ever seen."

"If I should die now, would you have seen a miracle?" said Felder.

"You will not die, you have been saved."

"I could be killed."

"Impossible. God has saved you for some purpose of His Own. Please. Tell the particulars of the miracle."

"At seven, Sister."

At seven o'clock a crowd of nearly 500 thronged the entrance to the hospital. They were hospital employees, a few patients, relatives of patients, people from the neighborhood and newsmen, who had heard of the cure from the hospital workers.

It had been raining through the early morning hours and was still misting as Felder came out of the hospital and stood at the top of the stairway.

Felder smiled; he looked very fit. Later in the day when his picture appeared on television in the United States, people who had known him in the early days said that he looked almost as young and handsome as when he had married Maybella Thebes. He was wearing his white raincoat, and as he stood on the step gazing at the crowd, he looked, people said, like the French writer of older days, Albert Camus. His fabulous camera hung in its holster around his neck—he was once again the great director of films.

"Last night," he said speaking into a dozen microphones, "I died and came back to life. I don't know how it happened but I am certain that it did happen. After I came back to life, I was still very ill. The various parts of my body—heart, liver, lungs and other important organs—were functioning very

poorly, how poorly the doctors of this hospital will tell you. I felt very cold. I was conscious of being in a frozen territory between life and death. I felt my body turning to ice and I wanted to go to sleep, which is to say, I wanted to die. Then a man came into my room—"

"Weelie!" someone shouted.

"A man came into my room. He sat down on my bed and began to speak to me. I could not see him but I could hear him. I could not quite understand him at first. He said something like, All men are one, and so for a little while let my spirit speak in the name of your spirit. Then this man put his hand on my head, and I felt something happen there—a sort of warmth spread over my head and face, though the rest of me was still freezing.

"I cannot find the words to tell you what I experienced in the next few minutes. It was as if my own brain had stopped working and the brain of this man had taken its place. I felt new thoughts pouring into my brain, thoughts that I had not had before, or perhaps once had and then lost—strange, fundamental thoughts such as we take for granted or ignore most of the time. These thoughts came in a rush and with strange images and pictures out of our past life. I say *our* past life because during this time, this man and I were one person. I do not know how this happened but I tell you that it did happen.

"I do not know the meaning of some of the images I saw. One of them was especially vivid—an American city that had caught fire. It looked like a war scene. It was a city I had never seen before. It looked like it might have been a city in the South or Southwest.

"I began to feel warmer after a while. I had a picture of a fire and I had the sensation of standing before a fire, a great roaring bonfire set upon a plain. I was standing before the fire and I could feel the heat warming my feet and legs. At the very moment I had this picture, I opened my eyes and I saw the man holding my feet with his hands and then placing his hands on my legs. But in my mind, when I closed my eyes, the other picture was still there, the picture of the

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bonfire and I remember wanting it to go on because the bonfire—how should I put this?—the bonfire was life.

"I found myself fueling the fire, throwing things into it—pictures and papers and strange things that I knew I had possessed earlier in my life. I burned so many things, everything I could think of. I remember burning money, a carload of money, and laughing wildly as the flames shot up to this very cold, dark sky.

"I felt tremendously happy, as I have not felt since I was a child. A simple thing had taken possession of me—the idea of living. That's the one thing we kept shouting into the fire, LIVE! LIVE! LIVE!

"While I was in the ice world, there had been a voice whispering to me day after day, *Die, Go ahead and die. You know that is what you want. So do it. Go ahead and die.*"

Felder's voice dropped here. On the tapes, which were repeatedly played in the weeks and months afterward, he seemed to mutter an indistinct sentence.

Voice experts, playing the tapes at reduced speed and with the amplifiers turned up, said that Felder said, *We pay the rent when it's due and only when we're forced.* A language expert in London said the words were, *Pain or rent is a due (do). Only what a weird farce.* A team of language experts at the University of Michigan said the words were not the sounds of human language.

The vast majority of television viewers believed Felder had merely cleared his throat.

Felder went on, holding his hand over his heart. "When the man put his hand on my chest, I felt a terrific—a terrific joy, a feeling of wanting to live. I remember saying *I want to live.* I mean, I remember saying this out loud. Then we began to talk—*I* began to talk—to my body. I started talking to my legs first, then to my insides—liver, stomach, heart and lungs. I started with the feet and worked up. I can't remember everything I said but I remember giving this special encouragement to my liver. I said, My liver, be a good liver, what the hell is the percentage in screwing up? I—we—would concentrate completely on the organ we were dealing

with and we would try to cheer it up, scold it a little, or tell it to have courage, and we ended each little speech with a sort of set formula of words. The formula went like this: Be a liver, the rest of us need you. Be a lung, the rest of us need you. And so on.

"Finally I got to my head, my brain. It was like looking in a mirror, only it wasn't a material mirror, but a special mirror which let you see your own thoughts. My mind—or maybe it was his—was talking to my mind. I remember only fragments of what was said but I clearly recall one complete thought. He said, or I said, to my mind, *Herman, you are a screwed up son of a bitch but so is everybody else, goddamnit.* Then I thought, *Okay, life baby, let's roll.* My mind came back to a single track again and the man was gone. I said to myself, Herman, pal, go to sleep for a couple of hours and let these good messages run around in the corporal body. I looked at my watch; it was exactly four minutes after two. I fell asleep and woke up at four, feeling better than I had since my sixteenth year. Only I was hungry, starving even. I went through some medical examinations and then I had a good breakfast. And that—that, good folks, is the story."

Felder, nodding and smiling, started down the steps. The newsmen with their portable cameras and microphones followed him.

"It was Willie who cured you—the American?"

"You were drunk when you came to the hospital, Signor Felder?"

"Are you a member of the Silent Servants of—"

The crowd, thickening and growing excited, closed in on Felder. People reached out to touch him.

"Lord Jesus, cure me!"

"In the name of Saint Anthony of Padua!"

An old woman tried to wave his attention to a wheelchair at the edge of the crowd.

Felder, moving toward a taxi, spotted the old woman, stopped. Then, taking the world's most expensive camera by the straps of its holster, he moved to the twisted figure in the wheelchair. The old lady began to scream.

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The twisted wheelchair person was a paraplegic of twenty-five, all bones and eyes.

"Here," said Felder gently, and he rested the world's most expensive camera on the coverlet over the youth's useless legs.

He turned back into the crowd and fought his way to a taxi.

An exquisitely dressed man grabbed his arm.

"*Lawson!* How are you, Lawson?"

"I have some papers for you, Herman."

Felder said, "I burned all those last night, Lawson."

"Then you won't mind signing them over to Maybella."

"How is Maybella?"

"She's fine. She's in London and she's going to marry Monte Stonechap."

Felder took the papers and held them on the hood of the cab. He was still smiling but not in the same way.

"I didn't know she even knew Monte Stonechap."

"She didn't until last week at Palm Springs."

Felder started signing his name to the fourteen documents, surrendering control of fourteen corporations and giving his wife $59 million.

"Someday Maybella will burn these a second time," said Felder. "If Monte gives her the chance."

Lawson Thebes smiled for the first time in two years.

"I imagine the certificate of my incompetence is in here someplace," said Felder.

"Yes."

"Well, I never went in for competence much."

The crowd, screaming and shouting, pressed the men against the taxi.

"A miracle," said Thebes. "That must do a great deal for your ego."

"It does," said Felder. "You ought to try it yourself. By the way, I think I'll keep this."

He showed Thebes the transfer document for his film company.

Thebes laughed. "Go ahead and keep it. It's worth four million in tax losses. It doesn't exist anymore, if it ever did."

Felder smiled. "It's funny, I don't remember burning it last night." He looked at Thebes but spoke to himself, to a joke that had formed suddenly in his head. "Maybe I was filming the whole thing."

He handed the papers to his ex-brother-in-law and got in the cab.

"Give Maybella my best," he said through the window, but Thebes had melted into the crowd.

The people began beating on the car. Felder gave the cabbie the address of Willie's apartment and the car began to move.

"Miracle! Miracle!" the crowd shouted.

"Save me, Jesus!"

"Signor Felder, save. . . ."

Felder smiled and waved; the cab pulled away.

The newsmen, scurrying through the rain, got into their own cars and followed the taxi. Along the way other newsmen and a few police cars joined them.

In the little apartment on the Via Scossacavalli Willie and his brothers saw the procession spilling over the old stones.

"I've got to get out of here," said Willie.

"I stall them at door," said Joto. "Truman, come please."

"Go down the back stairway," said Father Benjamin. "Go to the Vatican and ask the cardinal prefect to admit you early to the conclave. I shall join you shortly."

Willie escaped them there, but when he reached the piazza of Saint Peter, the people who had come early to gaze at the doll-pope caught sight of him as he made his way across the pavement.

Over their transistors they had heard news of the miracle and they rushed toward him, trapping him among the columns of the great arcade.

Willee, Willee, Willeee! The piazza resounded with his name.

Willie tried to run but they caught up with him fifty feet from the first column. By the time the plainclothesmen of the Vatican could reach him, he had lost the jacket Joto had given

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him, his shirt was torn, and there were scratches on his face and arms.

As the security guards, forming a tight circle around him, led him away, the crowd grew more excited. Arms broke through the guards and fingers grasped at his clothing. The shouting grew louder, until it seemed the 162 statues on the frieze of the basilica of Saint Peter would topple from the roar.

Cardinal Profacci, the prefect of the conclave, watched the goings-on from a window of the papal apartment.

"So the miracle worker comes to us for safety."

"A bad business," said Cardinal Liderant, the world's leading canon lawyer. "It will be bad for the conclave."

"What is one vote to the conclave?" Profacci said, his eyes following the circle of men moving under the columns.

"It is a loud vote," said Liderant. He passed a hand through his thick white hair. "It will be a distraction."

"What is he? A young American with a sudden fame?"

"Look down there. They will tell you what he is."

"They are only people," said Cardinal Profacci. "They do not elect popes."

"You forget, Ernesto, that cardinals and bishops are people also," said the canonist.

Below them, Willie was being led into the marble hallway he had visited earlier. The gloomy weather had darkened everything and the art masterpieces and the statuary made an atmosphere so solemn and sacred and eternal that a human being felt himself an accident, an inconvenience.

At the entrance to the rich gallery where Willie had registered for the conclave, Monsignor Taroni met him, looking tired and worried.

"Maybe if you have a small room," said Willie.

"You are hurt, Your Excellency," said Taroni.

"It is all right, but I am tired," said Willie.

Monsignor Taroni led Willie up a stairway. On the landing Taroni stopped and looked more closely at the cuts and scratches on Willie's face and arms.

"I will get something," he said.

Willie was standing under a statue of the emperor Constantine, which had been executed in the fifteenth century by a man who thought that a statue of the man who made Christianity useful would be a good thing to look at. Constantine, standing on a thick marble pedestal, was reading from a declaration and it was 313 A.D. and the declaration was the Edict of Milan and Constantine looked very pleased with the arrangement he had made.

At the feet of Constantine a drop of Willie's blood fell on the burnished marble and Monsignor Taroni stared at the sight.

"You are bleeding," he said with a little gasp.

"Just a small room, with a bed," said Willie.

Monsignor Taroni led Willie into another great corridor and through a series of huge rooms, each filled with magnificent paintings from centuries past, masterpieces all, a thousand golden signatures of hands that now were dust.

In one of the great rooms the monsignor asked Willie to rest in a chair with arms that were carved to resemble the forepaws of a lion, and then he went away.

A moment later Cardinal Profacci, Cardinal Liderant, Cardinal Goldenblade, his conclavist, Bishop McCool, and a half dozen other officials came into the splendid room and welcomed Willie.

Willie said to Profacci, "In Angola the government lied to us."

Monsignor Nervi, the man with bluish parchment skin, whispered something into Profacci's ear.

"We are investigating the matter," said Profacci.

"What does Bishop Brother mean?" said Cardinal Goldenblade. Then he saw Willie's cuts and shrank back a little at the sight of the blood. "Why son, what are you bleeding for?"

Monsignor Taroni gave Willie a package of bandages.

"I need a room," said Willie.

"He's bleeding," Goldenblade said. "That's a disgrace here as anywhere."

"You wish to enter the conclave early?" said Profacci.

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"I need a room," said Willie.

Profacci, Liderant and Nervi discussed the matter in rapid, solemn Italian. Bishop McCool offered Willie his hand.

"Gee whiz, I'm glad to see you again," he said, smiling his most handsome smile. "This is something that arrived in Houston just before I left." He handed Willie a telegram.

Willie opened it while the officials argued in Italian. His eyes became more slanted as he read.

WILLIE. HEARD ALL ABOUT ANGOLA. YOU NEVER TOLD ME YOU RAN WITH MURDERERS. WHAT SWEET WORDS DO YOU HAVE FOR THOSE WHO WERE KILLED? JUSTICE? LOVE? IN SPITE OF EVERYTHING I THOUGHT YOU WERE SINCERE. YOUR EX-FRIEND. CLIO.

Willie read the telegram twice, then folded it and put it in his pocket over the red stain that was next to his heart.

". . . American citizen," Goldenblade was saying. "It's a crime."

Profacci spoke to Willie as if reciting Scripture.

"While one may enter the conclave cell at this time, one must understand that he is not yet a member of the conclave in the formal sense. The conclave in the formal sense is not yet convened."

Willie tried to picture Clio, what he looked like now, and he tried to see him putting those words on paper.

"We understand your need for a secure place," said Cardinal Liderant of the thick white hair. "We ask you, however, to understand our situation. We cannot have the conclave turned into a circus because of what happened at the hospital this morning."

Outside, the name *Willie* could be heard rising in a sort of chant.

"Once one takes possession of his quarters, one may not leave," said Profacci.

Willie, hearing the chant of the crowd in the piazza, suddenly saw the children in the bank basement where Truman danced.

Never knew you ran with murderers.

"Don't get so high and mighty, Henri," said Goldenblade, flushing. "Who caused the circus but the people of Rome? Bishop Brother, who is an American citizen in good standing, cannot be blamed for the wild emotions of an Italian mob."

What did any of them know or care about it? he thought. Maybe they could not care. Clio in Brazil with his soldiers and his guns. . . .

A trickle of blood ran down his arm and fell upon the rich carpet.

"Take the bishop to his cell," said Profacci to Taroni.

They watched him go in silence. As he went away, he seemed dazed.

"There will be those who will leap upon all this and call it a publicity stunt," said Cardinal Liderant. "Which it probably is—the Madison Avenue approach."

Cardinal Goldenblade, his face almost as red as his cassock, turned upon the French canonist.

"Henri, you are a very great scholar—I grant you that. But as a man, you are a conniving, suspicious, cynical jackass."

Bishop McCool, looking surprised and embarrassed, followed Cardinal Goldenblade to the door.

At the door Goldenblade paused, turned slowly about. "That was temper, Henri. It was also uncharitable. I apologize."

"We understand how sensitive you Americans are to just criticism," said Profacci, smiling tolerantly. "We all lose our tempers when we are in the wrong."

Goldenblade's face flushed again. "I take it back. Henri, you are not a jackass, but Ernesto, *you* are a jackass until further notice."

"*Fathers,*" said Liderant who believed in good manners. "Please."

Goldenblade flounced out of the majestic room.

In his cell that night Willie slept deeply. He flew out to the limits of all arrangements and asked to be released forever. He wanted to keep flying until he was beyond everything ever created—into a world of pure becoming where anything

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could happen.

But faintly at first, then insistently, came the sound that made that impossible—the cries of the children dying in Etherea.

The children were below him somewhere, in a forest, and if he dropped down quickly—

He woke up and found himself out of bed, kneeling.

He went to the window. The roar of Rome continuously disturbed the night air. In the distance he could make out a cluster of cement silos that might have been a housing development. A green sign shone at the top of a very large hotel. Its message diffused itself like a vapor over the city, and the longer he looked at it, the larger and brighter the words seemed: REGENT WINE—AND THE WORLD IS FINE.

Chapter nine

When the doll-body of Pope Felix had been put into the stone crypt that had been prepared for it in the lower section of the great church of Saint Peter, the electors and the other officials of the conclave assembled in the illustrated Bible of the Sistine Chapel and there, under the shining art masterpieces of Michelangelo and Botticelli and Rosselli, they took oaths swearing that what they did in the conclave would be a secret forever, and after that, many doors were locked and Willie thought he could hear keys turning in the hallways and in the apartments adjoining the chapel and he felt tense and lonely as he gazed at the picture Michelangelo had made of God creating Adam.

He did not like the picture Michelangelo had made because the God Michelangelo had created was an angry, worried old man and Adam did not look happy at the prospect of life, and in his mind Willie tried to make the picture right but it was impossible—Michelangelo had made it impossible to make new pictures there.

Cardinal Prefect Profacci read many documents about the

way the conclave would operate and he read about the many laws that governed the election of a pope and he seemed very serious and at the same time very self-confident speaking the Latin words, which were translated into English and French and other languages for those who, like Willie, could not understand Latin.

The cardinals and the other electors, men of all colors and nations, sat in their straight chairs and listened to their headsets wearing grave expressions, and there was an air of such serious business in the Sistine Chapel that Michelangelo's worrying God fitted in perfectly, and from time to time the men would look up at Him there on the ceiling and they could understand why His nerves were so bad.

Willie wished it was over, wished he could leave the city of Rome and go to some quiet place for perhaps two days, go with his brothers Benjamin and Truman and Joto and Herman and find other brothers and sisters of the Silent Servants of the Used, Abused and Utterly Screwed Up and with them form a plan with regard to Angola and Etherea. For even as the Latin words of Cardinal Profacci floated up to the God Michelangelo had made into the likeness of a sixteenth century Italian landlord, Willie knew that a young man was turning his black body in the street and trying to find the strength to ask for food but did not have the strength to do that, only the strength to lift his eyes to the sky in order to die a little better. And as Cardinal Profacci read on, Willie saw another man, standing before a court, and the man was trying to explain why he wished not to be killed, but the court did not care because it had the need to kill him. The judges of the court pretended to listen, but they had already made up their minds and the man knew it and they knew the man knew it. And Willie, letting his gaze fall upon a cardinal sitting opposite him in the chapel, saw the tortured face of a black man he had never seen before—or had he?—and the cherub in one of the paintings of Michelangelo became a child grasping for milk who, finding none, had cried until its voice had worn out and now opened its mouth only to gasp, but there was no one there to hear it. And when he looked at

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the archangel Michael, in a fury over the sin of man and intent upon driving man from the garden of his happiness, Willie thought of Clio, though Clio was not a white man like the archangel Michael and didn't resemble him except in the fury. And then Willie's reverie deepened and he was in a waking dream and he saw Clio again, this time standing in some green and savage place. He was raising a rifle to the sky, and Willie called to him but Clio could not hear. Then Willie saw the telegram once more and he could hear Clio shouting the words of the telegram in the tangled green place where he stood with his rifle.

Willie did not know that as he stared at the faces of the men in the Sistine and at the faces Michelangelo had painted on its walls, he was being stared at in return. He had been stared at from Profacci's opening words, and even before that. He was like a flame, and the eyes of men were moths that could not help going toward him wherever he went. For the news of what had happened at the hospital of Saint Pius X had by now swept across the world and swept back over it again. It had been on television and radio as the main story of every newscast in Europe, America and the Orient for three days. It had been the topic of a thousand interviews, analyses, explanations, interpretations. It had so dominated and colored and shaped the television coverage of the papal funeral rites that the cardinals, the electors and all the officials of the conclave and in fact of the entire Vatican establishment were shaken in ways they did not themselves understand, and their feelings had reached such extremes that any expression of them had the character of an outburst.

An hour before the conclave had convened, Cardinal Liderant, speaking for the prefect, released a terse announcement to the press: *This event, which is being investigated by the Holy Office, will of course have no influence on the conduct of the conclave.* But the conduct of the conclave had already been influenced. The influence was written upon those riveted faces in the Sistine, those staring eyes reflecting contempt, curiosity, pity, credulity, fear, exultation.

Over these four days lifelong friendships had been broken; rivalries and factions had formed, dissolved and formed again. Men spoke of great faith and grave scandal, of sanctity and madness, of a sinister group operating within the church, to undo the church or save her.

Every man in that illustration of a chapel had an opinion, but it was not the opinion he had had yesterday, and in truth his opinion had changed perhaps a dozen times in seventy-two hours. Every time the press spoke, a new opinion came into being, and the miracle itself, impacting on the world in continuously changing ways, kept begetting new opinions.

Twenty-four hours after Felder's recovery, a man living in Buenos Aires who was suffering from terminal lung cancer reported that he had been suddenly cured when he asked the favor of God "in the name of Bishop Willie."

A blind child recovered her sight in the same way in a small village in Poland.

There were similar cures and miracles reported in seventeen parts of the world the day before the conclave met.

Of all this Willie knew nothing. He had spent these days in his bare room, visited only by Benjamin, who refused to speak of events that were happening in the great world outside.

The night before the conclave Willie had prayed and meditated upon a single idea in the Guidebook, a few lines contributed by Sister Stella, who had spent fifty-one years in a Belgian insane asylum in the eighteenth century: *What is called sanity is just a stubborn clinging to a loop of the spiral. Dive down deeper and deeper so that the outer loops quiver and sway and are no longer safe. Then will not all descend to the lower places for survival?*

Not necessarily, a Servant had written in 1918.

This woman believed in private revelation and other nonsense, said another writer in 1951.

"She speaks of the DIVER," a recent glossist noted.

The words came to him now as he sat in the illustrated testaments of the chapel. Sane men, he thought, are still

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sane during the starving of the innocents, going about the routines and the arrangements in perfect sanity.

And all of us here, he thought, looking at his fellow bishops seated like unhappy children under the watchful anxious God, we too are sane, indeed the sanest of men.

Who shall accuse us of strange deeds, diving to the lower places in behalf of others, crashing through the made-up patterns, driving the spiral down so that the outer loops shake and become unsafe to cling to?

And are you any different? he asked himself. If you are, then why are you here instead of there? And who is that other, that man who looks like you, cradling the dying woman as she dies? And now over there—do you see?—the man standing before the court of insane justice?

Even as the question formed in his head, that unfathomable silence entered the art shrine and came over the conclavists like a cloud, except that it was a cloud that could not be seen or measured or felt by any of the senses. It was the silence the old men of the East had once understood, the silence that communicates more than the speech of humans, and it had no outward sign other than a portentous stillness that made the men gathered under the apprehensive God of Michelangelo look like men who had been frozen in a stop-action movie.

Profacci had come to the end of his instructions when this silence began, and even he sensed it, though in his case it was less a sensing of the silence than a sensing of its effect, which made the men before him almost indistinguishable from the art works around them.

Absorbed in the phenomenon, he lifted his eyes to the overwhelming figure of the Lord God. Perhaps he prayed, or perhaps he sought to find the source of the emotion that had taken possession of the assembly.

His black-olive eyes peered into all the outer space Michelangelo could see, but his gaze soon exhausted itself in those finite hues, and with an agitated sigh he turned to his comrade and fellow realist, Cardinal Liderant, as if to say "Well then, why do we not get on with it?"

But Liderant, he saw at a glance, was under the spell himself. He sat before him like a child bewitched by a ghost story—his white crown listing to one side, as if to hear better.

Profacci then saw for the first time that concentrated gaze of the crowd, grasped it in an instant, and turned with the others to its focus and object, the figure in the shabby suit, that lean orange Buddha who seemed to be sleeping.

Behind him someone moved—Nervi, all blue veins, a man of smoke.

He handed Profacci another document, and the movement broke the spell for some—Liderant, Orsini, Tisch. Profacci saw their plain faces again, and they exchanged curious glances with one another as if they shared an embarrassing secret. Profacci cleared his throat and looked wildly at the papers before him. He was like a man standing on the seashore who has sensed the coming of a storm. The sea is placid, scarcely moving, but the man knows the sea is restless, and when its restlessness disappears, it is because an unknown force has intervened and suspended its activity and set up a law of its own, beholden to nothing but itself.

"Fathers," he began, as calmly as he could, and a few heads stirred. "Fathers—"

At that moment the oldest member of the conclave, Cardinal Yamoto, Archbishop of Tokyo, rose unsteadily in the very last row of the chapel. His spectacles were thick and enormous and gave his eyes the appearance of being the eyes of a bear.

"I have a nomination to make," the old man said, speaking carefully and distinctly in excellent French.

Profacci raised his hand and started to say something. He saw the wave now on the horizon.

The cardinal archbishop of Tokyo held out his arm almost theatrically.

"To the office of Bishop of Rome, I nominate the auxiliary bishop of Houston, in Texas, in the United States," the old man said, his voice sounding firm and strong.

"Bishop Willie," he said. Then again, "I nominate Bishop Willie for pope." And he gestured toward Willie, lest anyone

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mistake the man he meant.

At first the stillness deepened upon the conclave; then the men turned to one another, whispering. Low voices murmured and ran together.

"If the archbishop—" Profacci began, but Cardinal Yamoto went right on.

"I call for his election *per inspirationem,*" he said.

There was another instant of silence, but this time it broke quickly. A group of electors in the front of the chapel, near Profacci, began shouting all at once.

"Scandal!" cried Liderant, who had jumped to his feet and turned his flushed face to Yamoto.

"Fake cures!" another voice shouted.

"Deceit!"

"The good of souls!"

The chapel became a scene of tumult.

"Order," Profacci said in that same controlled tone. "Fathers, let us have order."

Liderant was still standing; a few others had gathered around him. The protesting group numbered twelve, but the rasp of their dissent made it seem a hundred.

Willie neither saw nor heard any of it. He had turned the sky of Michelangelo upside down and had dived through it and had descended to a dark street where lepers cried for mercy.

The form of Yamoto seemed almost a skeleton—a configuration of sticks held together by some force that seemed to emanate from his spectacles. The sticks shook as Liderant and his followers shouted their disapproval, but one month later, on his deathbed, Yamoto would describe the shaking as a perturbation of supernatural grace. He had once done a paper on conclave law, and with enormous concentration he managed to phrase a sequence of words that demanded that the prefect acknowledge his resolution.

Profacci listened. His face wore a look of desperate patience.

"Fathers," he said once more to Liderant and the objectors; and then he turned to consult Nervi.

But Nervi shook his head. There was no possible point of order that could be raised against the voicing of the nomination.

"Trickery does not become a pope!" said Cardinal Orsini. "You know this, Profacci. You see all too well the consequence of a vote in this atmosphere."

"In the name of God, do your duty," said Liderant.

Profacci's lips made a thin line. "You are the canonist, Henri. What is my duty here but to follow the law of the conclave?"

The protestors fell into silence and once more the stillness fell—that quiet that was like the wave that could not be controlled.

Profacci felt the strangeness of it again and though he knew many things and had mastered many difficult brain processes that were too complicated for the generality of men, he knew too when that other world veered into his own. It was the world that had made a John the Baptist and the Penitentes, the world of humanity on the edge of things. He had known that world existed and he feared it, and he did not know it except through fear.

But the fear did not show. He had a horror of any feeling that reached to the outside and had permitted feeling to show only once in twenty years, when his mother had died in agony with the cry of Jesus on her lips, and on that occasion it was not that he permitted the emotion but rather that he could not stop it.

But he could stop this. The panic might trip his heart, might fill his stomach with acid. Still he would be the servant of duty and place his faith in reason. Had he not stood in that temple all his days and years?

Quite calmly, too calmly, he said, "It is clear, Fathers? Cardinal Yamoto has proposed the election of Bishop William—Willie—of the diocese of Houston, in the United States of America. The cardinal has asked for the mode of inspiration. According to the form," here he paused; if the calm were to break it would break now.

He steadied himself, took a little breath. "According to the

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form, the electors must signify their choice by acclamation of at least two thirds."

The electors leaned into their headsets, listening to the translation.

Profacci looked at Liderant and Liderant looked at Profacci—two men standing on a bridge that they both knew was rigged with explosives. Any minute now. . . .

Liderant stood up again. The possibilities of what could happen now stretched before him in a grotesque daydream. More imaginative than Profacci, he believed even more strongly in the strength and majesty of law. The law provided a fence that kept things in place. It was a harbor and a refuge, and he had known the fence and loved it and indeed had fashioned a section of it himself. But much as he loved it, he knew it could be hurdled. He had met men in his lifetime who had hurdled it, and he could see frightful things that Profacci did not prefer to see, and he had known sleepless nights in his lifetime and had often gone to Switzerland to look at the mountains so that huge, changeless things would fill his vision and he could fight that part of himself that sometimes made him see the world as raw flux, spontaneous and irrational, that did not point to any end that he knew absolutely for himself.

Profacci looked at him with pity, an ironic smile playing on his face.

"Excellency?" Profacci said, acknowledging him formally.

Liderant said, "*Domine, Domine,*" then, "Two thirds," and he sat down.

Profacci tapped a pencil on the edge of the lectern and acknowledged an obscure bishop from Nepal.

"I wish to have the honor of being the first to vote yes for the pope," said the young bishop. Profacci said nothing, stood without expression.

A Brazilian bishop, across the chapel, stood up. "*Si.*"

"Aye," said Cardinal McGregor of Glasgow.

One by one they began to stand up, saying yes.

"You don't know what you're doing!" Liderant cried.

Within three minutes, fifty men had stood. But then the

sequence seemed to stop. The fiftieth man, Bishop Oxblood of Durban, South Africa, repeated his vote.

"We understand, Monsignor," said Profacci. That same wan smile appeared on his face, like a moon that flies fast and dimly behind dense clouds. The black eyes glinted, and glinted more as the pause went on.

"It is necessary, as the distinguished Cardinal Liderant has pointed out, that we have a two thirds majority," said Profacci.

Liderant gazed up at the awesome portrait of Michelangelo's Last Judgment and prayed to the magistrate who was his Lord.

Even as he prayed, finding the beginning of hope in the break of the vote, behind him twenty rows the well-fed body of Earl Cardinal Goldenblade stirred.

Profacci fixed his eyes upon the travails and triumphs of Moses in the distance, trying not to see Goldenblade.

Goldenblade's eyes were huge. He stood very still, as if contemplating a movie that was being projected somewhere beyond and above the place where Profacci stood. When he spoke, his voice was husky like the voice of a tired Texas farmer.

"Ye-es."

The entire American delegation stood up immediately.

Then England.

Canada. Australia. Germany.

Silently now, row upon row of the electors stood up.

Willie, coming out of his reverie, turned to an aged black bishop beside him. "We pray now?" he asked.

The black bishop said, "For you," and stood up.

Willie, too, stood up, imagining that the prefect had called the assembly to prayer.

When the others saw him rise, they came to their feet at once, until there were no more than five electors still seated in a cluster around Liderant.

Two stood, then two more.

Finally the only elector not standing was Cardinal Liderant.

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When he saw the 235 bishops, cardinals and other electors arrayed behind him, Liderant began to weep. He looked up at the canonist Michelangelo had seen as the Lord of history and saw that the Lord was frowning.

He stood then, and the election was ended.

Profacci came down through the crowd to where Willie was standing, looking at the prophet Ezekiel, whom the Lord God had commanded to eat the scroll. The electors parted before the prefect like the Red Sea had once parted for Moses. Willie stepped aside with the others, thinking that the prefect was engaged upon some mysterious bit of ceremony.

But the cardinal prefect, his hands welded together in a sword of flesh, pressed on toward Willie, who kept backing away, stumbling into cardinals and bishops until he came flat against a mosaic of the Fall of Man.

Pressed against the picture of the protoparents going terrified into worldly life, Willie tried to figure out what Profacci wanted.

"Do you accept the result of the election?" Profacci said.

"If the others do," said Willie, thinking he had failed to register a vote.

The cardinal prefect beckoned him forward. Willie hesitated. Profacci made a more definite motion to come forward. Willie followed him.

He had made some stupid mistake, he reflected with a resigned smile, and now it had to be straightened out. Perhaps, he thought, he had even made a mistake in coming to the conclave. They had turned up papers to show he was not an elector, or else—

The cardinal prefect touched his arm lightly and indicated that he should stop. They were in front of the main altar of the Sistine, and Profacci, speaking in clear English, was asking an insane question.

"By what name do you wish to be called pope of the church?"

Willie's lips parted and his hand shot up to close over his heart. He felt his throat constrict.

"What do—" he started to say, but his voice failed.

Profacci asked the question again, and Willie had the fleeting impression of being one with the Israelites on a far wall and the man before him was a king of Egypt.

For once in his life the past seemed more real to him than the present or the future—it pulled him, sucking the breath out of his lungs and at the same time hoisting him into the dusk of a sky that the world had known a thousand years earlier.

Profacci, who had accepted the pained yes of four previous popes, studied him like a botanist looking at a sick plant.

"The name you wish to use as pope," he said very slowly.

Willie came back with all his senses to the absurdity of the moment.

For just a second he entered the conclave of his heart. Then with the sad eyes turning slowly over the multitude of electors, he said, "So this is what you meant?"

"I did not vote," said Profacci coldly.

Willie heard a distant thunder, the slow tearing and breaking of a vast bulk.

Stretching out his arms, he turned to the electors, his fellow pilgrims—at that moment so trustful and, he thought, so filled with faith that they looked like the altar boys they all had been once, in an uncomplicated world that had been wrecked forever.

"Peace, my brothers," he said softly.

"Peace be with you," they replied in a surprised, ragged chorus.

"What name?" Profacci said.

Willie clasped his hands together. He had begun to weep suddenly.

"Willie," he said. "What difference if the—"

"Excuse me?"

"Nothing."

"We have a pope," said Profacci to the assembly. "His name is—William." He stopped, looked curiously at Willie, then added in a lower tone, "Willie."

The electors regarded their pope. In his worn suit borrowed from Herman Felder, with his broken smile, face

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streaked with tears, he looked less like a pope than a man of the streets, a multihued hobo beset with innumerable vaguely comic misfortunes.

"Let us make our obedience," said Profacci.

Then they put the great jewel-encrusted tiara on his head, and they put the ring of Saint Peter on his finger, and they put a heavy golden cope over his shoulders.

They knelt before him, one after the other, each man pledging love and fidelity, while Willie wept and tried to reassure them.

Then they led him to the balcony of Saint Peter's basilica and showed him to the people of Rome, gathered 100,000 strong in the piazza, and the roar went up, an astonishing explosion of sound that was unusual even on that hill that had once been a circus.

It was six in the morning in New York as the pope stood before the people. Thatcher Grayson, manager of the New York Hawks, sat in his hotel room and watched the camera zoom in on the thin figure bending under the weight of more than the golden vestments.

"Eli moto tu marilithi o sugoso!" shouted Grayson, and grabbed the telephone.

"Mi ogo lu telemethi do nusima?"

"A few minutes after six, sir."

"They have made him pope of the entire universe. Morgo marilithi eli."

"I beg your pardon?"

"Mi lu telemethi."

"Would he be a guest here in the hotel?"

"I'm resigning," said Mr. Grayson. "The Hawks and I are finished. The Spirit has come to ring down the curtain!"

"Perhaps our chief engineer—or room service—"

"Mi ogo le nimi totarami!"

The people shouted *Viva Papa! Viva Papa!* with a rhythm and force that rocked the pillars of centuries.

Willie spread out his arms and wept.

VIVA, VIVA, VIVA!

The stone saints shook with the vibration. VIVA, VIVA PAPA WILLEEEEE!

A microphone swung toward him, and the world heard that first strange nonword of his reign.

". . . uuuuv?"

The voice was unnatural, pitched above its normal tone.

Holding out his arms, he seemed to be choking. He said the nonword again.

". . . uuuvvv?"

The people picked up the nonword and made a chant of it, and a new roar began.

On the tapes later, some people thought the word was *love.*

Others said that the word was a mystic code known only to a few others about the world.

No one heard the question mark.

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BOOK FIVE

Dragged a black Sgt. named Pitt from under flaming jeep overturned on Hwy. 3. His hands burned off. Kept asking if Jesus would come. "Will he? Will he?" Over and over, repeating it. I told him, By and by.

From the journal of
Major Milton Felder, USAF
April 9, 1969
My Lai, South Vietnam

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Chapter one

They dressed him in a white cassock and they put a white cap on his head.

They explained to him the numerous lofty titles he possessed as bishop of Rome.

They showed him the apartments where he would live, his dining room and bedroom, the place where, they said, he would study.

They took him to his offices and introduced him to the heads of the Vatican congregations and bureaus and special departments which conducted the daily affairs of the Roman Catholic church.

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The diplomats came to see him, bringing presents of gold and jade and silk. Most of the countries of the world had representatives in the Vatican, and they were anxious to meet Willie and have their pictures taken with him, posing as if they were old, dear friends.

Everyone called him Holiness, and it did not make any difference that he asked not to be called that name. They kept right on with it anyway.

They showed him the Vatican grounds, elegant gardens that were too trimmed and too neat. They showed him the Vatican post office. They took him around to the Vatican radio and TV studios.

"Holiness. Holiness."

"Willie's okay."

"Yes, Holiness."

They took him to the Vatican library and showed him the hundreds of thousands of books and manuscripts that were kept there and the rare documents that men had written centuries before and Bibles that were elaborately scrolled, huge tomes that had been made by monks back in the eleventh century.

The scholars in the library rooms looked at the pope as he came through, and some of them smiled and some of them frowned. Vague whispers followed him as he went.

There were thousands of scholars in the Vatican, ransacking the past for various proofs positive.

They took him to the new glass building which housed the RevCon office and the computers which were writing the documents issued by the recent computerized council.

Cardinal Tisch was in charge here. He tried to explain to Willie and Felder what the computers were capable of doing. "These council documents, you see—"

Felder said, "The pope is interested in Etherea at the moment—in getting food there."

"We can run the problem through," said Tisch.

"We want planes," said Felder.

"That is another department, Herr Felder."

Excitedly Willie said, "Do you really think you could

organize something, Herman?"

"I'd like to try," said Felder.

It took him three weeks to do it—three weeks of phone calls, telegrams, press releases and what Profacci called unseemly pressure on JERCUS diplomats—but Felder succeeded in organizing an airlift of fifty-nine planeloads of food and other supplies to Etherea.

The planes were turned back, but Felder moved into the RevCon office to organize whatever could be organized using the computers.

Willie, though saddened by the news of the planes, rejoiced in the Herman Felder who had been born into the world.

* * *

One fine afternoon the officials drove him to the palace at Castel Gandolfo where the popes of many years had spent their summers.

On the way they passed an old gate where the legions of the Caesars had once entered the city and which the government of Italy had spent a great deal of money trying to restore.

Monsignor Taroni and Cardinal Liderant and Cardinal Profacci explained the meaning of the gate to Willie.

But Willie did not hear their explanation. He was looking at the sprawling gold-tinted slums that rose on every side, an enormous crumbling jungle of tenements which had been built ten years earlier for the poor of Rome.

"This housing—" he began.

"Our urban renewal program," said Profacci. "Considered exemplary."

"Beyond the hill there," said Liderant, "is the catacomb of Priscilla. Perhaps you would be interested in a visit?"

The slums gave way to newer public housing, which featured much glass so that the poor could look at one another and also see the older slums they had left and the even poorer people who still lived there with the rats.

They were not the worst slums Willie had seen, but they

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were slums all the same, gold-tinted slums, with glass.

When they came to Castel Gandolfo, they were in the ancient times suddenly: flowers, little shops, quaint, cobbled streets, a sparkling sixteenth century village.

They showed Willie his castle.

Willie sighed. "It's very nice," he said, and made little circles with his hands.

"Perhaps you would wish to spend some time here?"

Willie said no but asked if Cardinal Profacci could arrange that the castle be turned into a playhouse for the children of the slums they had passed through.

"This is the *papal* palace," said Profacci.

"The children could pretend many things," Willie said, a little excited by his idea. "I'm sure we can make it a nice place to play."

"The value of this estate—" Profacci began, but Liderant cut him off.

"Let us go to the catacomb of Priscilla. His Holiness would find that interesting I am sure."

But Willie found the catacomb full of staleness and death. There was something in the depths that frightened him, and he wanted to leave as soon as they had descended.

"The heroism of the first ones," said Liderant.

Willie felt the chill of the place, the damp hand of the enemy reaching out.

"Let us go up, please," he said.

So they went up into the sunshine where hundreds of tourists stood about in bright summer clothes. When they saw the pope, they applauded and cheered and took pictures. Willie tried to smile, but it was sad to see them there. He could not understand the attraction of the catacomb of Priscilla.

On another day they showed him the works of art that belonged to the Vatican—sculptures and jewels and chalices and splendid paintings and gold mosaics.

They went from gallery to gallery, looking at it all until the art was a blur to Willie.

The paintings were of Jesus and the saints and the Virgin

Mary and the Fathers of the Church and emperors and popes and kings and queens and the heads of families from Florence and Naples and Milan.

Cardinal Liderant did much of the explaining, and Willie listened politely, but as Profacci said later, "It was all lost on him."

All the while Liderant talked, Willie made those same little circles with his hands that the three men puzzled over.

What Willie thought when he looked at those treasures concerned things the cardinals had no understanding of, the ways men have of trying to save things, of making something for after school that the professor could not claim.

At noon each day they led him to a window of his apartment that looked out over the piazza of Saint Peter, where the obelisk pointed a finger to the sun and the fountains splashed and where thousands of people were gathered, all looking up at the window.

Willie would wave to the people and then bless them and wish them happiness and ask them to help the poor a little more.

VIVA PAPA! VIVA PAPA!

Every two days there would be a public audience held in a huge room that looked like a hall out of an old-time movie dealing with kings and knights.

Willie liked the audiences because he could see the people and hear them sometimes individually, and they looked happy and exceedingly good to him as they stood cheering and waving their handkerchiefs and sometimes calling out the names of their hometowns.

They carried him into this hall in a chair that was fun to ride in, but Willie did not want to be carried around by men, so he took to walking down the long length of the corridor, though the security guards advised against it, and the journey often took thirty to forty minutes because everyone wanted to touch the pope or give him a white cap in exchange for the one he was wearing, and he would chat with the people as much as he could, though he could not understand anything not spoken in English.

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The people were happy and excited to see him, and it made him happy to see them that way.

"Viva!" they would shout. And, "Wee-leeee!"

Always and everywhere they wanted to take his picture with their shiny miniature TV cameras or their self-developing movie cameras and they would ask him to speak certain things and bless them or walk or motion to them in some way so that what they filmed would be personal to them, and though he tried to do all that they asked, there was never enough time to make a movie for everyone; and when the audiences ended an hour, sometimes two hours late, the men who were to keep him on schedule were always upset. Profacci told him that the audiences were not the main job of a pope, and Willie always promised to try to do better but instead, at the next audience, he would do worse.

He took to celebrating Mass in the evenings, at about six o'clock, with Father Benjamin and Felder, Truman and Joto, who were with him now almost constantly.

Felder had taken rooms in a small pension not far from the Vatican, but he spent most nights at the RevCon office. The other Servants lived at the Vatican with Willie.

The presence of the Servants in the Vatican bothered the officials, especially Profacci and Liderant.

"Who are they?" asked the vice-prefect of the Congregation of Rites.

"Strange, deluded, perhaps dangerous men," his companion replied. "Cardinal Profacci has warned the pope about associating with such people."

"Felder is not a lawful person," another official said in another office on another day. "Yet he controls RevCon."

"He killed a man once, it is said," his friend replied. "Cardinal Orsini is conducting an investigation."

"Who is Benjamin Victor?"

"The one man, the dumb man, is not even a believer in God. Yet the pope gives him Communion."

Willie heard none of this gossip, or if he heard it, he did not

listen. Nor did he listen to the other criticism he was beginning to stir up. Almost everything he said or did caused criticism somewhere.

When Willie told an audience that Christ was coming, the Congregation of Sacred Doctrine complained that the pope spoke as a Jew, as if the Christ had not come many centuries ago.

When he told a group of journalists that whoever had built the Vatican on a circus ground had made a great mistake in judgment because most circuses are holier than most churches, every ecclesiastic in Rome raised an eyebrow.

The next day the eyebrows went up even higher when Willie, joking along in the same vein, said that he had been giving the matter of the circus further thought and had changed his mind. The builders of the Vatican had been right after all—they had taken an old, tired circus ground and built a new perpetual circus where it stood, and he asked the people if they did not agree: had they ever seen such a funny circus as this one, with so many clowns running around, himself being the biggest clown of all? And with that he tilted the tiara he had worn for the occasion and winked at the crowd and did a little jig as the crowd laughed uproariously.

"Disgraceful!" said Cardinal Liderant.

"A travesty!" said Cardinal Profacci.

"A sacrilege!" said Cardinal Picalli, whose hands were always pressed into a thin white cathedral and who was regarded as the most pious man in Rome because he always looked at the floor and let other people go through the door first.

But much as Willie smiled and clowned before the people, he was deeply troubled inside. When he was alone, a look of unutterable sadness came over his face. He could not get his mind off the sufferings of Angola and Etherea and of the people in other places of the world who were sad, starving, in jail, ill, drugged or spirited out of their human ways.

When the learned men who headed the various congregations of the church came to him, Willie would listen to their problems attentively and with a sincere desire to understand.

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But their problems, the matters that concerned them, did not seem important compared to the sufferings he knew to exist in the world and he would ask them suddenly, "Yes, but what of Angola?" or, "We have got to help the starving people of Etherea."

The learned men, whispering among themselves, said the pope did not understand the problems of the church or the ways of the church, that he wanted to talk only of war and starvation and poverty, as if these evils were new in the world and as if they, the learned men, did not also deplore them and as if they were in a position to do anything about them.

One day Willie asked to see Cardinal Liderant, the canon lawyer who had temporarily taken over the chairmanship of the Papal Commission on International Justice after the death of a man who had held the office for thirty years. Monsignor Nervi came with Liderant as the chief writer of past papal documents.

Willie spoke of the conditions in the countries he had recently visited. He told his visitors of the people who were starving everywhere in the world and of the wars that were going on in Africa, the Middle East, Asia, Latin America. They listened to him with a weary air, Nervi making notes. In his briefcase, Liderant had a thousand pages of statistics on poverty, hunger, war and other illnesses of the world.

"I have to do something; we all must do something," said Willie. "Do you have any suggestions?"

The two men were silent for a moment. Then Liderant said, "An encyclical on these subjects would perhaps do no harm. Monsignor Nervi, the last letter the computer drafted for Felix—you have it with you?"

"Ah yes, *Peace, Joy and Light*," said Nervi and handed Willie a fifty-page booklet.

Willie slowly read the first paragraph of *Peace, Joy and Light* then put it down.

"Most people wouldn't understand that," he said. "I do not understand it, for instance."

With one blue hand Monsignor Nervi returned the booklet to his briefcase.

"We must remember that the world press received the work of our esteemed and august predecessor with great respect. Our hearts were full of joy," said Nervi.

"But what difference did it make?" said Willie.

"One can't expect immediate results, Your Holiness," said Liderant. "The problems you speak of are very old. And also very complicated."

"There's a better way than writing a statement."

"What is that, Holiness?"

"I don't know."

"If our conscience moves us to speak," said Nervi, "we could, with burning sorrow, begin a new encyclical. Our title might be *War, Sorrow and Darkness.*"

Willie said, "Something new is called for—a certain way of living—a way of being, I don't have the words for it," and he made the little circles with his hands. "It is not enough to only write and speak; I know that much."

"Writing and speaking are what a pope does," said Liderant, wiping his forehead. "Practically *all* that a pope can do. You must remember, Holiness, the nature of the office."

"Jesus wrote nothing but a few words in sand," Willie replied. "And after all he didn't say so very much."

Willie, going to the window, looked down at the fountains bubbling in the piazza.

"We are supposed to bring abundant life," he said, "not words."

Liderant said, "The recent council proposed various courses of action. But I am told those documents are being delayed. The computers work on other things."

"The council's proposals are only—principles," said Willie. "Like what we had in the seminary. Cardinal Tisch showed me the outline of what the documents will say. Brother Herman Felder then asked to use the computers to form a new strategy—a design he calls it." He turned from the window. "I have great faith in Brother Herman. He is a good organizer. I do not believe much in computers, but we must be patient and try all things. As we wait though, the children starve. Will you pray tonight that our hearts be ready to

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attempt completely new things?"

They went away, Nervi like a wisp of smoke, Liderant like a frustrated tutor.

"He doesn't know anything about anything," Liderant told Profacci that evening. "An absolute simpleton."

"We are proceeding with our investigation of the Society," said Profacci. "Meanwhile, perhaps we should investigate other possibilities?"

"Like what?"

"A pope judged mentally inadequate could be brought to retire."

"Talk sense, Ernesto."

"If he scandalizes souls—"

"Stop it, please. Be a little reasonable. There is no question of scandal. It is just the prospect of years of disorganization and nonsense."

"I do not think you appreciate the influence he has upon people. Tisch is beginning to come under the sway of Felder. Then there is Taroni."

"What about Taroni?"

"He was in my office this morning," Profacci said. "He said that the pope had told him that if people had greater love for one another, the problems of the world would not be so bad."

"So?"

"Why, it is such a stupid statement! Don't we all agree and understand that indeed it would be a fine idea if the nations of the world loved one another? Who can fault that? A pope must show some sophistication. A pope is a figure of world—respect."

"How does this concern Taroni?" said Liderant.

"Taroni said to me with a ludicrous expression on his face, 'He's right too, when you think about it. That's what really matters after all.' And Taroni is a man of the world."

"Ah well, there is something touching about the fellow."

"Don't tell me he's getting to you, Henri."

"Touching, I mean, to certain types of people. Simple people. I'll have another strega."

Chapter two

The lights of the RevCon office burned on, night after night.

At first the Vatican specialists distrusted Herman Felder, but soon they gave way to his obvious administrative gifts.

Even Cardinal Tisch, still the titular head of the office, admitted grudgingly, "He has a genius for directing a complicated operation."

Each morning Willie met with Felder, whose reports he did not usually understand. But Felder gave him the feeling of a great enterprise soon to be launched.

One morning Felder showed him a printout map of the world that had been prepared by one of the computers.

The map showed the global distribution of food and mineral and other resources, what Felder called the real productive wealth of the world.

The real wealth, concentrated in the northern JERCUS countries, appeared in red on the map.

The lower sections of the map were pink, shading into white.

"We've got seventeen, eighteen percent of the world using almost ninety percent of the goodies," Felder explained. "What we have to do is spread it around," his hand swept over the non-JERCUS nations, "through new economic strategies."

"How?" Willie asked.

"Not through any of the aid programs, which amount to only a fraction of one percent of GNP and come back to the rich countries anyway. We need big-push outlays—tremendous capital investment from the north, so that the twelfth century countries can get on their feet. We have the machinery for redistribution in the old World Bank. Long-term, low-interest loans—"

"Let's do it, Brother Herman, let's do it right now!" Willie cried.

"Whoa!" said Felder. "It isn't that simple, young pope.

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How do you convince the rich countries to give disinterestedly?"

"Why, it's only justice," said Willie.

"Only justice," sighed Felder. "But suppose people don't believe in justice. Suppose they never have."

"Brother Herman, you don't think that."

"Many of your predecessors tried to preach justice."

"It isn't a question of preaching."

Felder looked at him a long time. Then he said, "Would you be willing to speak to the people on Telstar TV on this subject?"

"I would be willing, Brother Herman. But you know I don't know anything about economic matters. Besides, haven't there been enough words and encyclical letters?"

"Not the right kind," said Felder. He picked up the phone and asked Tisch, Nervi and Liderant to come into the papal office. Ten minutes later they filed in carrying thick attaché cases.

"Gentlemen," Felder said, "the pope is willing to address the world on the economic situation on TV. Cardinal Tisch, can we put the A computer to work on a talk developing the theme of the material we worked up yesterday—three percent of GNP, no political strings?"

"It would be a difficult paper, Herr Felder, but—well, we can attempt it."

"Thank you. Monsignor Nervi, will you deal with the diplomatic corps—you and Cardinal Profacci?"

Monsignor Nervi, who had seen the rough notes Felder had worked up the day before, said, "Even our most socialist predecessor never went beyond a gift of one percent, Signor Felder."

"We're going to feed survival factors into the computer, Monsignor," Felder said. "The world now stands or falls as a whole, so we're hardly speaking of gifts. Cardinal Liderant, you have the hardest job of all. You'll have to deal with the church."

Liderant said, "When is the talk?"

"Let's make it a week from today."

They all said that was impossible.

"*Trés bien,*" said Felder, "let's make it three days from now."

"You are joking, Herr Felder."

"The computer can write the paper in ninety minutes, once we feed it. It will take us a day or so to translate it for the pope. Gentlemen, we are dealing with urgencies here that man has never faced before. Every day we delay adds to the toll of misery."

They went away, grumbling. But three hours later, computer A began writing the paper.

Felder met Willie after the four o'clock audience.

Willie looked at the twenty pages of dense text, showing it to Benjamin, then to Truman.

"I do not understand any of it," Willie said. "What does GNP mean?"

"Sit down, my brother," Felder said. "We're going to have a short course in economics. It isn't really a science so much as hunches and guesswork—and nobody expects you to be an expert."

"A pope deals with moral truths," Benjamin said.

Felder, waving the paper, replied, "This is moral truth now, Father Benjamin."

Three nights later Willie gave the talk from the Vatican studio. The diplomatic corps, the officials of the Vatican and many other distinguished guests sat in the live audience.

He was nervous with the words, tripping over them, trying to understand them as he spoke. Felder had broken down every sentence in the speech, but still Willie did not understand.

When he came to the heart of the message—redistribution of the world's wealth through JERCUS capital investment in the non-JERCUS community, using the facilities of the World Bank—there was an audible snickering in the audience.

Felder's face flushed.

"Who are these hyenas?" he whispered to the man standing next to him.

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Cardinal Profacci said in an amused tone, "Those hyenas, Signor Felder, are the ranking diplomats of the world. The ones you blackmailed on Etherea."

"Who invited them?"

"I invited them, Signor Felder."

"They defile this place," said Felder, and went to the other side of the studio.

When Willie was off the air, there was a polite applause among the tuxedos and satin evening gowns.

Felder shook Willie's hands, which were wet.

"Where is Father Benjamin?" Willie asked.

"With Joto and Truman in the slums," Felder said.

"That's where I should be," said Willie.

The ambassador from Australia knelt at Willie's feet, then stood, smiling under an enormous mustache.

"Lovely, Holiness, actually *quite* lovely."

Willie went out to find his brothers.

The speech drew little attention on the telenews or in the other press media of the JERCUS nations. *The New York Times* in a five-sentence editorial called it a venture in triviality. *The Wall Street Journal* said that the pope had a sophomoric grasp of economic realities. The European press devoted more space to the diplomatic function held in connection with the speech than to the speech itself.

In the non-JERCUS nations, the speech received more extensive press and TV coverage. But the *New Delhi Times* said, "The pope speaks for no one but himself, tragically enough."

G. D. Goldenblade in an interview in Houston called the speech a moment of monist madness.

General Clio Russell in Brazil called it a lie.

Willie saw neither of these two private statements and Felder tried to show him only the more flattering news stories of the non-JERCUS press. But Willie could not be fooled.

"Brother Herman," he said, "you are a kind man, but I have seen the telenews and heard some of the commentators. The speech wasn't a bad idea, but words—you see, words aren't enough, as our Society teaches."

Felder said, "I am a Servant also and I, too, am wary of word games. Still I believe we should try anything and everything that might help."

"I believe that too, Brother Herman," said Willie. "But we must be ready to take on the undreamed."

Felder went back to the RevCon office.

Now he drew technicians and specialists from around the world to the design center, as he had begun calling the RevCon office.

Tisch said, "These are anthropologists, psychologists, behaviorists, Herr Felder. This man, Professor Spinner, from your country—he does not believe in free will."

"He has views on man that our computers need to digest," said Felder. "We have to develop every tactic possible."

The tactic Willie developed, together with Truman and Benjamin and Joto, was to work in the slums. But every time he came to the slum areas, a spectacle would develop—a near riot. Finally the police asked him to stay away.

In his apartment he wept with frustration.

Felder told him, "We will keep on with the work in RevCon. We'll produce something."

But Benjamin said, "It is too late for RevCon."

Three weeks went by. Felder took his meals, slept at the RevCon office. He had all the computers working now, digesting the data of the Western world's greatest specialists. At the end of the three weeks, he came once more to Willie's office.

"There's no middle ground," he said, "no solid center for the church to appeal to."

"If we were a certain way, more truly human ourselves," said Willie, "wouldn't that be an appeal?"

Felder shook his head.

"There is no humanity to appeal to. People up here," he waved his hand over the map's red-colored JERCUS nations, "they are either in beastlike war or beastlike stupor. When they do not fight, they sleep before their great video icons,

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like beasts before the hearth. Or else they are just the opposite. They play spiritist games—to get out of the world which they despise."

"If *we* are different—" Willie began, but Felder went on.

"They choose to be either something much greater or something much less, either spirit or beast. And down here," Felder pointed to the southern undeveloped nations, "here you have the people living as beasts also, though not through choice, and surviving in the state through a sort of trance, calling the world an illusion or a punishment." His hand fell from the map. "People nowhere want to be people. Only spirit. Or beast. Why, within the past year alone, half the churches in the U.S. have gone over to worship exclusively in tongue. Hysteria—on a national scale—and it's getting worse."

"But we are beast and spirit together," said Willie slowly. "We are—"

"That, *that* is the old dream," said Felder. "Gone now. Everywhere we turn, no matter how we measure, we reach this same reduction, this either-or choice. It's the biggest division in society today and it cuts across everything: politics, religion, nationality, the oldest cultural affiliations. Beast people, spirit people."

Willie thought back to the people of Delphi.

"Surely you are too hard in your judgment, Brother Herman."

"You were in Angola," said Felder. "Etherea."

"We should go back to Etherea," Willie said. "That's the one thing I can grasp. Go back and be with those children."

Felder crossed his arms. "You know that tabulator in the little booth near the A computer?"

"You know I don't like to go there, Brother Herman."

"You have seen the tabulator though."

Willie had seen it. It was the counter that kept the starvation statistics.

"Yesterday," said Felder, "it hit 17,000. 17,241."

Willie tried to take it in, that impossible number.

"So, there are many Ethereas," Felder said. "And to the

beast mentality it's to be expected. Because, you see, it's all still the jungle. The spirit-minded ones think it's all right too. Because to them, the idea is to get out of the world anyway."

"Seventeen thousand two hundred forty-one," said Willie numbly.

"The human enterprise has simply disappeared," Felder said. "Granted, it was never a world goal, but now, now we can't pick it up anywhere."

Willie grabbed Felder's arm.

"Don't say that. You know that isn't true. If people have a choice, they will be people. Say you believe that."

Felder, looking him straight in the eye, said, "Beast or spirit, my pope. That is the choice people have settled on."

"The Lord Jesus has come to change that—we are here to change it. That's why, in spite of everything, you can't lose faith!" He took Felder's hands.

"Brother Herman, I am a stupid man. I don't know anything about economics. I don't know the first thing about computers. But there is a way for us to be, a certain way for us to share life and show life, that will help people want to be people once more."

"Once more," Felder murmured. "When was it so the first time?"

Willie, closing his eyes, fell silent. Then, from far away, from the old, warm country he had known once, he said softly:

"When you were a boy, did you like to play ball maybe? When the mornings were sweet, like apples? And the friends you had then, when nothing was complicated? And there was a girl with eyes so—"

Felder pulled away.

Quickly Willie went to him.

"I'm sorry—Brother Herman. I—I didn't mean to bring up anything sad."

"Perfectly all right."

"I meant—I was only thinking of—simple things."

"I understand."

"When just being alive was—wonderful."

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"Yes."

Feeling wretched, he took Felder's hands once more.

"You are such a brilliant person, Brother Herman. Better still, you are a man of love. If there is anyone in this world who can do anything at the RevCon office, you are the man. So—so go back once more. And do your best. God will help us."

Felder went away. When he was gone, Willie kicked a sixteenth century Flemish chair.

"Let him alone. Let him *alone*!" he said over and over again.

So Felder worked on, like a computer himself, for another week, a sleepless week and still another week.

Then one night he joined the Servants at table.

"They're right to call them computers," he told them. "They compute is all. They're just extensions of the prevailing mentalities. Sometimes beast. Sometimes spirit."

"You will convert them, Brother Herman," Willie said. "I'll come over there and baptize them."

"It's all—it's processing really," Felder said, "just a sort of acceleration. It can handle spirit data and it can handle beast data. It cannot handle the mix we're trying to feed it. If we could build different computers. . . ."

Father Benjamin looked up from his soup. "We need more than computers."

"It's all we've got at the moment," Felder snapped. "You see something I don't, Benjamin? Tell me. I'll be glad to work it into the program."

The Servants looked at Felder kindly, seeing his fatigue and frustration.

Two nights later Felder came to Eucharist wearing a haggard, desperate expression.

"You are all right, Brother Herman?" Willie asked.

Felder nodded, but throughout the evening meal he had nothing to say.

Joto tried to joke with him about the old times and the great movie they had never made, but Felder could not laugh.

At the end of the meal, Willie said gently, "Brother

Herman, you have worked so hard. Sleep tonight and let your hope build up. God will show us the way."

But Felder went back to the RevCon office, to his white-coated crew and the great computers.

Cardinal Tisch, in a tiny observation chamber, watched him carefully and made a note when at three in the morning, Felder beat his fists against the most sophisticated computer in Europe.

"Damned tin ape!" he cried, and burst into tears.

The next day Herman Felder was gone. He was out of sight for a week. When he came back, the Servants received him with joy. He said simply, "It's no use trying to go through that," and pointed to the RevCon office. "We need something beyond the newest of the new."

Willie thought Felder looked refreshed but somehow changed.

That night, at Felder's request, the Servants held a special listening service to trace what Felder called "another design."

The listening service, held in a small chamber just off the great aula where the audiences took place, began with Joto's reading of a text from the sixteenth chapter of John. Benjamin continued with several verses of Romans. Then Herman Felder read a number of the sayings of the child Servant, Sidney of Sydney, who had died in a substitution activity in South Vietnam in 1968.

Once one stops counting on God, one has no choice but to count on oneself. When that comes to nothing, one counts on others. When finally that gives way, one stops counting altogether. It is then that life can begin.

Fear is the only enemy. Who can love God who fears him? But God had to start with something. This enemy of man is sometimes a useful tool, especially in the beginning.

Should we hate any creature? No. Not even the evil one.

Life is without limits except as we make them. All our possessions are limits. Some would call death a limit but it is rather only a kind of staging, a regathering. We do not understand it at all except in X. This morning, at death-point,

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I am down to my last possession, my body, which was given to me by others and which is now being taken away. Still am I not part of limitless life? Assuredly, that part of me which knows this, that part of me which loves, remains after death, and even as you read these words, brothers and sisters, I live. Gentle peace to you all.

Felder closed the Guidebook, and the five men, kneeling in a circle, sat for thirty minutes in absolute silence.

Then they exchanged their remarkable *dona.*

Felder: "A gathering of men and women—here in Rome, it would appear. But not an audience such as Pope Willie has. Another gathering. It seemed to concern urgent matters. I saw the great hall next to the room we now sit in. I could see you, Willie, very clearly, sitting in the midst of this gathering."

Felder gazed at him steadily. There was something about the look that was not right, and Willie felt it immediately. It was not anger or excitement or unfriendliness or anything he could name, but something had moved in Felder's spirit, and he had caught its stir.

Joto: "I too see crowd, not very large, maybe 100 people. I see Eucharist. Then time pass and I see airport and other crowd, not the same. Then we all in plane together going someplace. Next we come to sandy place, a beach perhaps. That picture last only five seconds and once more I see the first meeting—in Rome. I listen hard for message. Word come: Get together ding-a-lings of universe. Very strange."

Truman, making the beautiful signs that he always made, showed people getting off trains, planes, ships, getting out of autos. He indicated that the travelers were coming here to Rome, to the Vatican, to this very place. He gave the sign that meant *advance,* and which in the understanding of the Society referred to evolutionary opportunity.

Willie, in the silence, had received nothing and had seen no pictures—only a fleeting image of an open field covered with snow. It did not seem worth mentioning.

"I am sorry," he said. "I could try a little longer."

Father Benjamin said, "We must not force messages."

"Yes, Father," said Willie in the tone he had used as a novice.

Father Benjamin rose. "Brothers, my message is similar to your own. A gathering is indicated, only in my own visualization—and let us recall that our visualizations are not always to be trusted—I recognized faces in this gathering, men and women who are members of our venerable society. As I let the message enter and come to me, I felt a sudden association of these people with this city, even though they are scattered across the face of the earth. Tell me, brothers, for this is crucial, did you feel the need to join these gatherings?"

"Yes," said Herman Felder immediately.

Truman gave the yes sign.

"Absolutely," said Joto. "Felt myself part of ones who come together."

Father Benjamin's eyes were suddenly brilliant with tears.

"Brothers, we are to have the first worldwide congress of our Society to be held in 500 years."

They shouted together, clapped shoulders, and Joto did a dance step he had invented when he had owned his own art gallery in Tokyo.

"It's wonderful!" cried Felder. "Wonderful!"

Not quite a part of the excitement at first, Willie gradually caught the spirit of the others.

"Our brothers and sisters will help us," he said in his slow way. "We will learn together. The Lord will instruct us and tell us how to be."

"Let us praise the Lord for His goodness," said Benjamin.

So they chanted the thanksgiving prayer of the Society, all fourteen verses, with its ninety-six names for God, and went joyfully to their quarters.

As he opened the door of the little room he had reserved for his sleeping place, Willie felt Felder place his hand on his shoulder.

"Sleep well, young pope."

"Good-night, Brother Herman."

Once again, that measuring glance, the bat squeal of some intricate message. Felder was young and smiling; he looked

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confident and happy. But there was something going on behind the eyes that filled Willie with vague fears.

He had a hard time trying to sleep. He could still see the dark streets of Etherea and Angola against the walls. The words of Clio's telegram came to him once more, as they did whenever he was alone. There was a night light burning near his bed. It threw a pale glow over the clothing he had washed earlier in the evening and strung across the end of the room to dry. He could see the red stain that would not come out of the shirt.

Who were you?

When he closed his eyes, he saw first her face, then the other, the face that was forever young and blooming in the square of the Richard M. Nixon Park. Then the faces melted together.

He woke up in the middle of the night. When he remembered the strangeness of Felder's expression, he felt the prickly sensation of the skin that he had felt when he pitched in New Orleans, the day he and Clio knew the owner was in the stands.

Chapter three

There was great rejoicing in the papal apartments the day that Thatcher Grayson arrived from New York, or rather from the jail of Saint Paul the Apostle in Rome, where he had been detained for seven weeks on charges of deranged conduct.

Mr. Grayson had reached the eternal city the evening of Willie's election but had come off the plane in what the police described as a delirious state shouting over and over again, "O mi tegurithi—the Spirit blasts us away!"

At the airport he had drawn a large crowd and caused a considerable disturbance and had not improved his situation when he told the Roman police magistrate that he had come to Rome to be with the pope so that together they might clear out.

Now, seven weeks later, Grayson came to trial and again spoke of clearing out.

"The court does not comprehend," said the judge.

The court-appointed lawyer tried to explain.

"Signor Grayson believes that the present dispensation of things is coming to an end. He expects the return of Christ."

"Not Christ!" Mr. Grayson shouted. "You've got it wrong, young fella. Christ has already come. Now we are going to get up to his level and jump."

"Jump where?" the judge asked.

"Out," said Grayson.

The court considered this answer briefly, then asked to speak to Mr. Grayson's lawyer.

"His intellectual cogs slip," the judge observed.

"Correct. However, he is harmless."

"He could create nuisances, public scenes, tumults."

"No more than the queens of the Veneto," said the defense counsel.

"He is a drinking man?"

"He is scarcely an eating man. He talks only of spiritual things."

"Jesus," said the judge.

"Jesus and the Spirit and the others," said the lawyer.

At that moment Herman Felder arrived in court.

"O mi tegurithi lama curi!" Thatcher Grayson crowed.

"*Ça va,* Thatcher," said Felder shaking his hand. He turned to the court. "You make a practice here of arresting people for their religious belief?"

The judge looked at Felder with the confused memories of ten years ago.

"Signor Felder, I have seen you before? Please identify."

"Movie mogul, financier, all-American winner," said Felder with a cocky air.

The prosecutor rose. "If there is anyone in any position in this city who still has the faculty of human memory who does not know that Signor Felder is an illegal human, then that man lives with his head injected into the anal tract. With all due respect to his honor."

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"Lama curi—and blast off!" Grayson cried, jumping up on a table and scattering the brief prepared by his counsel.

"Relax, Thatcher," said Felder. He handed the court a letter from Willie.

The judge read it twice. "It appears His Holiness expects this gentleman at the Vatican. Who am I to argue with the pope of the church. Release the man."

"It is a fraud," said the prosecutor. "The man is insane and Felder himself is a criminal."

"O mi tegurithi," Thatcher Grayson assured him, and handed the prosecutor a card. The card said, PLEASE ADMIT THE BEARER TO THE SOJOURN.

Grayson began distributing similar cards to all in the courtroom.

"Come on, Thatcher," said Felder. "We're holding up a convention."

Twenty minutes later the old coach met his pitcher, throwing his arms about him, and speaking rapidly in tongues. Though Mr. Grayson did not know it, they were in a large, most magnificent chamber, filled with splendid paintings and other objects, including people.

Mr. Grayson began to weep and even his glad gasps were of the spirit type. Willie was moved to tears himself.

"Old friend, you are such a good man, isn't that enough? Can't we talk as men do?"

"Li mi salornia curi!" laughed Thatcher Grayson, conniving with the spirits he thought he saw drifting among the sculptures of dead saints.

There were of course no spirits in the magnificent chamber—only ninety-one men and women, strangely dressed in odd bits of costume, rags and tags and shabby sandals. They were the most wretched-looking men and women to have ever assembled in this splendid room.

They had been in Rome three days now after Benjamin had called the meeting of the Silent Servants of the Used, Abused and Utterly Screwed Up. Benjamin had asked for a convention of the total membership, but these ninety-one—black and brown and white and red and yellow and olive—

were all who could attend. The other brothers and sisters were in jail or involved in substitution activities that could not be escaped.

Grayson moved among them, thinking their rag tunics to be odd clothing for spirits.

"O mi tegurithi," he whispered to Brother Andrei, a Russian brother who had once been a philosopher at the University of Moscow.

"Who is this spirit-crazed person?" said Brother Andrei.

"He's a brother," said Felder. "His head is broken here and there but he will be all right in time."

A sister Servant asked if she might perform the Servants' version of exorcism. Benjamin shook his head. Then Benjamin walked up to Grayson and gave him the sign of hominey, the thrive sign appropriate for a human being who had elected to be more or less than human.

Grayson said, "Tegurithi?"

"I command you in the name of man to be man," said Benjamin solemnly.

Mr. Grayson looked at Father Benjamin as if from a great distance. Benjamin repeated the formula of words.

Grayson saw a vague, white shape that he took to be a messenger of God.

"Man cannot be anything but man," said Benjamin.

The ninety-one brothers and sisters held out their arms in prayer for Thatcher Grayson.

"Let the human be," said Benjamin.

Little by little the vision Grayson saw changed, materialized in a white-bearded semihuman who reminded him of a figure from his college years when he had read the poetry and the novels of Old America.

"You are Mr. Whitman?"

"I am Benjamin, living human, and you are Thatcher Grayson, also living human. There is no getting around either of these two facts."

Grayson slowly began to see that the strange-looking men and women around him were after all—strange-looking men and women.

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"What needs—what needs to be done?" he asked.

"That depends on you and your understanding of your humanness," Benjamin said.

"Well," said Grayson, seeing now that the ninety-one men and women were really distinct from the statues of the dead saints and popes, "Well, I think first I would like to visit the men's room."

At this the ninety-one members of the S.S.U.A.U.S.U. burst into applause.

The two cardinals watched the outrageous visitors from the window of Saint Lucy.

"They are criminals, most of them," Profacci said. "Orsini is preparing briefs on them all."

"Such strange-looking people," Liderant said.

"I mean the original group. The dumb man has served innumerable jail terms in America. The Japanese thug, though it is beyond my belief, was once an artist of considerable renown. Orsini has an Interpol file on him that runs 100 pages. Felder—"

"What does he see in them? What do they give him that we cannot?"

"Birds of a feather," Profacci said. "They are his *sort*."

"I came upon him in the gardens yesterday. He was crying."

"He is a disturbed young man, Henri. A dangerously disturbed young man."

Liderant sighed. "He kept saying, *So won't you let them go? Can't you let them go?* What do you suppose he meant?"

"He is insane. And he will bring insanity to the church."

* * *

4:00 A.M. The brothers and sisters of the Society sit silently in a circle in the great aula, listening.

Willie sits with them wearing the ragtag tunic he had first donned at the Servants' camp near Houston.

From time to time the others turn to him with a questioning gaze as if to acknowledge that while Benjamin is father of the

Society, this man is the true leader, for he is pope of the utterly screwed up church. If anything can be done with that ancient sign, the doing of it will come through him.

The listening period followed a long discussion in which many proposals had been put forward. The discussion concerned the spirit-beast division of humanity, the boxes men had created as structures of life, the stupor and numbness of the JERCUS populations, the starvation and disease and suffering within the non-JERCUS southern nations.

Brother Sell of San Francisco, one of the more violence-prone members of the Society, argued that the papal buildings, the papal treasury, the papal properties and the papal art treasures should all be destroyed immediately.

This proposal was defeated on grounds that it would give the privileged and powerful the illusion of being persecuted.

Sister Nicole, the very beautiful weathercaster of Paris, declared that the pope should go on international television and infallibly pronounce that the world was conical, thus creating a trance-snap.

This proposal was considered to offer too many procedural difficulties and would merely be interpreted as a sign of the personal insanity of the pope.

An old one-armed brother, named Al-Tick, who worked as a maker of sweetcakes in a village of North Africa, said that the entire Society should travel to the most forsaken region of the planet and suffer a truly radical, unfathomable substitution experience in order to create, Al-Tick said, "a newer fire."

Al-Tick mentioned the fate of ninety-nine monist guerillas of Italian nationality who had destroyed two dozen JERCUS missiles in Germany and who had been exiled *in perpetuo* to the wastes of the Arctic as punishment for their crime.

Herman Felder, leading a passionate discussion of this idea, called Al-Tick's plan admirable in intention but pointed out that the world would soon conclude that the men who did such a thing were deranged.

"We must create a challenge that attacks society's understanding of sanity since it is the standards of sanity that are

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the principles of death. If the challenge does not defeat the first principles," said Felder, looking like the great Camus, "then what are we doing but serving those principles? Remember, each repulsed attack strengthens the case for death."

Thatcher Grayson, wearing his tunic now, had no proposals to make and had difficulty in following the discussion. From time to time he grabbed his head to make sure he was truly man. Spirits were still calling to him and he fought to stay in place.

Joto, with wonderful chopping and dividing movements of the hands, explained that the boxes of the world had to be broken most deftly and expertly so that the persons inside them would not be hurt, and yet the boxes had to be broken decisively so that it would be impossible to go back to them later on.

Not quite apropos of this observation, Joto proposed that the pope should establish his residence in the sewers of Paris or some other stinking and inaccessible place of the earth.

"Pope quit—people go mad trying to find him," said Joto excitedly. "Pope nowhere. People trample everything in path to get to pope who run away. At last find in filth. People say, Why? Pope say, Church toilet of universe. Pope only doing job. Big scandal. Very big!" And Joto's face became the shocked expression of the face of the earth.

The membership applauded and whistled in agreement with Joto's picture of things, but the discussion quickly turned to the question of how such a tactic would be interpreted in the long run.

Once again Felder's view held.

"They call *him,* the *pope,* mad, don't you see? Not their standards. When the pope," Felder gestured to Willie "passed to Easter, there would be the swing back to normalcy again, and the case would go down as one of Rome's crazy popes, like Celestine V. The *idea* of the gesture is correct, it is the specific that is wrong."

Brother Andrei suggested that the pope declare himself a Marxist and lead the church into communism.

"It is impossible to think of new structures while private property continues. The ownership of the goods of the earth by a handful of private individuals is the greatest evil in the world today," said Brother Andrei. "How can we create the conditions for true life as long as this demon reigns as king? Mind you, brothers and sisters, I do not deny that Marxism is also a box. I do not say that life flourishes in the Marxist states, which, as we all know, show many of the same tendencies of the old capitalist states and which are also today streaked with monist tendencies. I say only that the church cannot be a sign of human community as long as it condones and encourages and dignifies the concept of private ownership of the lands and the sources of production, since this ownership inevitably falls to the clever or the brutal or the strong or the acquisitive and makes most men slaves."

A long discussion followed Brother Andrei's proposal. Brother Lang Ti of Peking said that while communism in the short run seemed to solve what Lang Ti called the surface problems, it created in the long run a pseudocommunity with a new set of false standards, all the worse for claiming to be radically new.

"Look at the Marxist states of the world," said Brother Lang Ti. "Can you tell me that in those states people are any happier, any more self-accepting, any more loving of one another? Those poor people, so used to thinking of themselves as economic units and ever holding before their minds the goals of production and the aims of the glorious revolution —who can call them free? They are still in their chains."

"But the chains are not as bad as the other kind," said Brother Andrei.

"A chain is a chain," said Lang Ti.

"Today," said Herman Felder, "with the Marxist countries and the capitalist countries united in the JERCUS alliance, with the same basic holding philosophy, the same greed, the same selfishness, there is little to be won by the pope's conversion to Marxism or to any other economic philosophy, including monism. The social problems of man are partly economic, but economics is not the place to look for answers.

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We have to start more fundamentally."

So the discussion had gone back and forth and up and down and around and about for more than three hours. At 3:30 in the morning, Father Benjamin addressed the community.

"Brothers and sisters, let us bring to mind certain fundamental ideas. Man is a box builder. He needs boxes to put things in—the various experiences of his life, his plans and his ambitions, even his dreams. We do not deny that men need boxes. We only know that boxes must not be taken seriously.

"At the present time we have a world where instead of men carrying boxes, the boxes carry the men. The boxes and arrangements men have made have cut them off from life, from one another, from what they knew as children. Our mission, brothers and sisters, is to overturn the boxes so that men can breathe again. The boxes at the moment are suffocating human life, turning people into spirits on the one hand and beasts on the other. These are matters we have all known and understood.

"The question before us now is quite simple. What strategy can we propose for a pope who is a brother of the Society that might enable him to lead the church and indeed the whole world to question the boxed-in character of modern life? What can he do, as pope, to help men drop the boxes for a moment, then pick them up and turn them over in the sunlight, so that they see that they are after all just boxes, and to cause men to ask the question, Which boxes shall we keep and which throw away?

"Many worthwhile suggestions have been made here tonight. But the things that have been suggested are ideas, programs, methods, procedures which have come to us out of our past background and experiences. This is natural. Each of us sees things in a special way, depending on what we once dreamed and once knew, and depending also on how we suffered and how long and whether the suffering opened our hearts or closed them. The things we think, the things we believe, seem most important to us because of the needs that

have been born out of our own experience, and this also is natural. But then comes that subtle stubbornness, that unconscious pride, that causes us to prize our ideas above the thoughts of others. And the more we talk, the more persuaded we become that our view is the right one, and we tend to close our spirits to those around us, so that even the desire to rid men of box-death becomes itself a box.

"Our well-loved brother, Sam W. Wilson, of Cicero, Illinois, who lost his life in an impersonation in the early 1990s, says in our Guidebook, *What do you know when you're not thinking*? Those words are important for us now, for we all know what we merely think. Now it is time for us to turn to what we know, or rather what the Knower wishes to share with us.

"So then, my sisters, my brothers, let us enter the silence. I ask you to enter the silence with the special sense of Sister Margot of Trieste, who observes in the gloss of Recommendation 57 that one listens not only with one's ears, but with one's hands and feet and stomach and legs and all parts of the bodily arrangement. I join you in the silence with love and humility."

At the conclusion of these remarks the ninety-one brothers and sisters of the Society had given Father Benjamin the thrive sign and commenced the listening.

Willie closed his eyes, listening with the others. He did not know that they watched him. And they, as they watched, did not see him going away from them, his spirit gravitating to that territory he loved so well and that was his natural home, where he felt his partness with the wholeness of things and through the partness, the wholeness of all.

What was that place he went to? He never thought to describe it to others, believing that everyone moved to the same place themselves, at will, and he never thought it was extraordinary that when he listened to his breathing he could hear the turning of the world, and he did not think it remarkable that he understood certain matters before he knew them and that knowledge always came later, if it came at all, and that it did not matter.

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He was both entirely enclosed in himself and at the same time open to that enormous person stirring in the universe, opening a hand—or was it only turning, smiling in its sleep?

For a minute or so he was in the old dream then, soaring towards the sun, yet not so far away from earth that he could not see the steeple of the church in Delphi, the enormous bowl of the Regent Complex in New York, the colonnade of Saint Peter's.

Then he was standing in a field, a farm lot, it seemed, with dim buildings in the distance.

As he stood there, he had the sense that the Friend was there, and he turned around and saw him robed in fire with light pouring through his body. And Willie beheld him as he came nearer, stretching out his arms, and Willie went toward him and then he was gone.

Willie opened his eyes. There were his brothers and sisters listening and opening to life. *He has gone,* he thought, *to one of them.*

He resumed the listening. Once again he found himself in the same dark field, this time at a greater distance from the buildings. Trees. Other shapes that finally became tents. The faint glow of a lantern.

Someone laughed and he heard men talking somewhere beyond one of the tents.

It was very cold and there was snow on the ground. He began to walk toward the tents. The wind gusted suddenly and he felt snow cutting his face. He stopped under a towering tree.

Two figures, bundled in overcoats, came up from the tent area. They moved like bears. They were carrying something, a pole or stand of some kind. When they came to the tree, they paused and eased their burden to the ground.

"Only an hour now. Where is the idiot?"

"Praying."

"Will he come do you think?"

"Regent?"

"Who did you think I meant?"

The other man laughed.

"What are you going to do if the idiot is right? You don't know the Lord's Prayer."

Laughter.

"Come on, it's colder when you stand."

They went on, carrying the pole on their shoulders. Willie watched them go and then he saw the mansion for the first time. It was an enormous affair at the far end of the field, in the direction the men were walking. Its dark gables stood between the snow steppes and the sky. There were amber lights in the windows, and the light spilled out into the night and fell in oblong patterns on the ground.

As he stood there gazing at the mansion that was surely a palace from a childhood book, there was a commotion to his left, in the tent area. Shouts. The sound of motors. A powerful searchlight switched on and sent a white finger up to the sky. Into that column of light a helicopter floated—it was like a wasp with red eyes, fuming and buzzing and seeking a victim.

Willie came around the tree and immediately tripped over something, a dark shape he had not seen, and fell forward into the snow.

Angry grumbling. A man stood up.

"For God's sake, watch where you're going!"

"I'm sorry, I—" Willie got up. His hands stung from the fall.

"Where are you headed?"

"I just got here."

"From where?"

"Rome."

"With them?"

"I—came here by myself."

"Who sent you?"

"Nobody."

"What are you doing here?"

"I don't know. What's going on?"

"*What's going on?* This is L-Night."

"What is that?"

The man drew closer, but it was too dark to see his face.

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"You're from the village maybe."

"No, Rome."

"Then you're with them."

"No. What is L-Night?"

"You know—what the idiot has arranged. Everybody making up with everybody. Can't you find anyone in the village?"

"No sir. Who are you making up with?"

The man laughed. "My credit union."

Willie tried to see the man's face. The voice was raspy, big city.

"Why are you pretending like you don't know anything?"

"I'm not pretending," Willie said.

The man came closer still. He was only a yard away now. His voice dropped as he went on.

"Are you the second man—in case I fail?"

"I don't know what you mean."

"You can tell me," the man said, almost whispering. "I know there's a backup somewhere. I also know there's someone to take care of me after it's over."

"Sir—"

"Let me tell you something though, just for your own personal guidance. I have a man with me—someone to handle the ape who's taking care of me. Understand?"

"No."

The man laughed a nonhumorous laugh.

"But what does it come down to, brother?"

"I don't know."

"It comes down to this. If you aren't with them and you aren't my backup and you're not the man I paid to settle the difference, there's only one answer."

"Sir?"

"You're the one they hired to get me after it's over."

"No one hired me, I just arrived, I don't even know what—"

"Please, please, why insult my intelligence? Why work up a sweat? It doesn't matter anyway does it? I mean, there's so many people tied into this thing, who's to know you're not just an extra that somebody threw in?"

"I—"

"Let me ask you, brother, are you a man of faith? Do you believe in things? Do you believe, let's say, Jesus was a little lamb who took the rap for sin?"

"I believe in Jesus," said Willie.

"And the coming of Jesus? Do you believe that too, brother?"

"Jesus came and will come," said Willie into the cold wind, and he felt the cold now in his voice and the cold was coming up through his legs and taking over his body.

When the man laughed now, it was the laugh of a man who had been put into prison for life and would never be released and who found happy things sorrowful, and sad and terrible things that could not be helped, funny and gladdening.

"With such faith, brother, what shall you fear? What can harm you on L-Night, when according to the teaching of the idiot the J-bird comes again? Why wait, brother, why wait? There's only an hour left now anyway, if the idiot is right, and you believe he *is* right. That is what the Director also is thinking—the Director with the silencer that can help a man greet the Lord halfway."

The man raised the black shadow of an arm, motioning to something or someone behind Willie.

Willie turned, and there stood the other man, very close, and the scent of roses came to Willie and there was a sudden flame lighting up the face and then the fire in his stomach—and he woke screaming.

To the same face.

"Don't!" he cried softly.

"Easy," said Herman Felder. "You were dreaming."

The brothers and sisters were looking at him from far away. He palmed his eyes in embarrassment; his heart beat wildly.

Felder smiled and Willie felt the horror coming toward him from the eyes.

"You want to speak?"

"I have nothing to say," he said, trying to calm himself.

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"You said you wished to speak."

Willie said, "What is L-Day?"

Felder looked nonplused. "It is for you to answer."

Dizzy, his blood racing, Willie got to his feet. For a moment the dark fields stretched before him once more. Something had been said to him, he knew, but that grotesque face obliterated it.

What is it? he asked.

He moved into the circle of his brothers and sisters.

"Beloved," he said. "Let us listen for one more minute. Then we'll try to say what needs to be said."

In that minute, the longest of his life, he saw the whole plan clearly and fully—what he would do and what would be done—and he saw it all at once, as if it were a tapestry of living beings, and he saw himself throughout it and he saw it all and he knew it all, and in the tapestry he saw the beginning and he saw the ending and he saw how the figures who were living beings in the beginning became shadows in the end, strange quick-darting vapors, fishlike ghosts propelled by whispers and unearthly signals, creatures that turned continuously about a changing point of illumination that set fire to the whole piece.

A cloud lifted then, and for an enraptured moment he saw with human eyes the unutterable mystery that had always been buried in his heart, saw the abounding glory of life, the diversity of being and the kinship of being, the measureless lands and the bright-breasted seas, the blue fields and the green streams, and he saw the creatures of the world in all their numberless varieties and he saw the creature man in the rich raiment of his flesh—now red, now brown, now white, now golden—and he saw the tinctures of many faces glowing in a transforming light that lent fire to the sun and seemed to impart a pulsing energy to earth and beyond earth to worlds beyond, the luminous galaxies stretching away, wedded by that same radiance to one another and wedded also to earth, and he saw the incomparable majesty of being, its ceaseless becoming, its luxuriant playfulness, its opening-closing, rising-falling, lightening-darkening, striving to be one.

His lips parted and he tried to speak, but a shadow scuttled across the vision, and when it passed, he saw only the miniature of the immediate future and the tangled scenes of the agonized present.

He saw then the conventions of death coming down like a grid upon the living figures of this smaller tapestry, and he heard the cries of the trapped victims—murderers and murdered, starvers and starved, warriors and mutilated children—and he heard the low mourning of the world beneath the tumultuous discord of understood emergencies. Speeches, epithets, curses rang in his ears, and the flowing-together of life ceased and fell into chaos, and the eyes of man turned to the void.

Here! he whispered fiercely, *Here!*

But they would not listen.

Silence. The grand universal image came back a second time. Again he saw what he would do, what would be done. Then the vision slipped away forever. As it left him, he knew he had reached a limit of the structures that the world contained, and he knew too that the box that would carry him now was meant to be the nonbox of the world and was in truth the tarnished, forgotten sign of what he had just beheld, and he felt indistinctly the fear, which he tried to deny, that the box would be a coffin, and he tried to erase that earlier dull flash and the face of the man it identified as assassin—in that detail, he told himself, the dream had been mistaken.

He looked at them with love, the off-scouring of the world, the ragpickers of civilization, this remnant of fools who believed insanely against a thousand years of reason.

A lofty calm possessed him as he spoke.

"My brothers, my sisters," he said. "Since the Lord came into this world, we have never had a day of love, not a single day when the world was everywhere tender and solicitous of loving, more tender and more caring of love than of anything else.

"Now we shall have a day of love, alone, when brother shall forgive brother and sister forgive sister and parent child and

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child parent—so that for a few hours, enmity will vanish from the earth.

"So that the old deathbound world will pass away and a new one come to be."

And that is how the L-Day Plan began.

Chapter four

"To end the old world," the pope told the world four nights later, on live Telstar broadcast, "to make it possible for something new to start, we must have this one day, this one twenty-four-hour period, when no gun shall fire, brother shall not strike brother—one day when enemy will befriend enemy.

"Is it really so much to ask—just a single day?"

Willie spoke from the Vatican broadcast studio. Before him, beyond the camera, stood his brothers—Benjamin and Joto and Truman and Herman and Thatcher Grayson.

And beyond them were the others, disconsolate and shattered—Liderant and Nervi and Profacci and Tisch. Worn out with grief and argument, they were like men attending a funeral; Liderant wept.

"Some call this plan crazy. But is it so crazy, brothers and sisters, to try to be our best for a single day?

"Some say that a day such as this will interfere with the business of the world. Perhaps some of the business of the world needs to be interfered with. Will one day off from the making of guns and bombs be so bad?"

George Doveland Goldenblade, watching the telecast from his home in Houston, Texas estimated that the production loss would cost him $650,000, and took the name of the Lord in vain twenty-seven times.

"What can be more important than love and what day could be more important for the world than a day set aside for brothering and sistering, for forgiving and being forgiven, a day when all come together in the sharing of love?

"This is not a day for word prayer, not a day for going to church. Rather this is the day for the true prayer of deed and action.

"What does that mean? Just this. On this special day, let each man and each woman living in the world today, whatever their faith, whatever he or she thinks of God, of religion, of the church, let each go to that man, that woman, that person who is an enemy and embrace him in peace, forgiveness and love.

"This is the day when everybody will make up.

"This is the day of universal reconciling and coming together, involving everybody in the world, a day such as the human family has never known before.

"On this day no nationalities exist, all the barriers crumble, all the divisions cease to be. No one is a Russian or an American or African or Brazilian.

"There is no rich and no poor.

"There is no young and no old.

"This is the day when we are all only people."

Willie wore the white cassock (on Benjamin's advice) and he spoke very slowly and more formally than usual. Felder and Benjamin had talked him into preparing some of the speech ahead of time.

"I have the pope's job," he said. "They tell me I could make some sort of rule about the observance of this day for Catholics. But that would go against the whole idea, having a rule to make up with somebody you have hurt or who has hurt you. Besides, what about all the rest of you who aren't Catholics? No, I do not wish to rule, brothers and sisters. I come to you as one who asks, in fact, pleads.

"And I come before you as a fellow human being, not as pope, to ask you to do this hard, simple thing.

"I ask every human being in the world to set this day aside. All you of the Jewish faith, beloved of God. All you of the Islam faith, beloved of God. All you of the Hindu faith, beloved of God. All you of the other religions and faiths of the world, beloved of God. All you of no faith and no religion, but beloved of God all the same.

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"I ask you all to prepare for this day and give yourself to it and when it comes, to enter into it with all the trust and hope you ever had from your childhood or maybe what you can borrow from someone else, if you cannot believe yourself—and go out to your neighbor and be reconciled.

"What can we hope to gain by trying to come together and getting rid of the pride and the fear and the things that keep us apart?"

And what followed now became the most controversial part of the pope's speech.

"An end of the world that we have known, the end of the pattern of things as they are. Yes, the definite breaking up and dissolving of all those arrangements that we have allowed to press down on our human growth, those systems and—ways of doing things—those ways we have developed of thinking of things—that have trapped us and confined us and held us in boxes.

"We may go back to our boxes again. But I tell you that they will never be the same again.

"I tell you that we will bring such a flame into our affairs as to consume and utterly destroy the world as we know it—the world of master and slave and rich and poor and the world of the starving children. We shall burn it, we shall burn it away in a night!"

At that moment, the incident occurred which many people remembered after they had forgotten the words that the pope spoke. Many who saw it happen said that it had been accomplished by a trick of lighting, that it had been planned deliberately so that the pontiff's speech would seem more dramatic. There were a million explanations and opinions of it, though many people said they saw nothing at all.

His face, when he said the words *We shall burn it away in a night,* became wreathed with a sort of fire, and his countenance looked more Oriental than black or Latin or any other race or nationality he possessed, and it resembled, some said, an icon that seemed to flame and that, some said, they had seen before in the churches of Russia.

In the studio, Benjamin, Joto, Truman and Herman Felder

saw the transformation of the fire and accepted it and did not speak of it, though Benjamin wept as the vision held.

Liderant and Profacci saw it, too, but saw it differently.

"The eyes of a madman," whispered Profacci.

Liderant said nothing, but stared. The vision troubled him but he could not say how or why.

It lasted only fleeting seconds, then was gone. And Willie went on with his speech.

"I am leaving this place. I cannot live in a palace or great apartment and I cannot pray in a great church building that is a museum and a monument—not when so many have no place to sleep and not when so many have only the sky for their cathedral.

"I need to leave for other reasons. I need to come into your midst. For I, too, have a brother I have wronged, one whom I have raised my fist against. I have broken the sacred connection and now must do what I can to repair it.

"I must find that man and make amends."

Here he seemed to stumble a little, and if he had a speech, he let it go now and spoke directly to them in little disconnected wishes and requests.

"Good-night, brothers and sisters. Good-night, all you children of the world.

"Think well of yourselves, everybody.

"I will come to you again and speak of our day of love and reconciliation.

"Write me letters and tell me what you think of our plan. Maybe we have left something important out.

"Call me and—we'll talk.

"Have faith in this simple idea.

"We have all tried many difficult things in the past. Have they worked so well?

"We have to find a date for L-Day, as we are beginning to call it here. Think of a good date and send us your ideas.

"We shall all have to wait and listen for important messages that come to us from God and from our hearts.

"We can make plans to make up with that one person or maybe a couple of people we have hurt the most.

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"I think we will have to fast to get it straight in our minds—I mean those of you who can afford to fast, and that of course means the pope, who can afford so much.

"As for you who have nothing to eat, forgive this scandal—that we can speak of giving up food.

"Sleep well, brothers and sisters.

"Even to think about love is holy.

"You are the sacred now, remember, and the more people-like you become, the more sacred you become.

"Peace to you all, in the deepest place inside."

And Willie signed the world with the sign of J., and the storm broke.

From the newspapers of the world the next day:

Pravda: "Sentimental tripe. The last gasp of bourgeois religion."

New Delhi Times: "A new day for justice and humanity. A triumphant statement reflecting the best of the West."

London Daily Blade: "Theatrics, and poor theatrics at that."

Le Soir: "The pope is a conscious naïf. He believes in the show-business approach to the problems of the international order. A most unfortunate point of view."

The New York Times: "The pope is a singularly appealing figure, modest, warm, and humorous. He is also an exceedingly simple man. For all his personal qualities, however, we cannot help questioning the merit of a grand gesture at this moment of history. Does anyone imagine that the complex problems of international justice can be solved in a day of vague 'love'? Even more troubling are the pope's remarks about the end of the world. What can the theologians of the Christian church think of such a pronouncement? And does not the emphasis upon such a specifically Christian belief pose a discouraging roadblock to the achievement of the very unity within the human family that the pope is trying to bring about?"

Berlin Express: "The pope's argument for unstructured programs of life and for the human family do not make much

sense. From an economic point of view, they are positively harmful."

Recife People's Bulletin: "Reactionaries of the world will love the pope's words, which will leave all consciences untroubled and riveted even more strongly on incidental works of piety and old-fashioned private charity. It is indeed unfortunate that the pope cannot continue along the lines of his predecessors and at least approach the social problems of man from a rational ground."

Hollywood Mirror: "About time somebody came out and declared for old-fashioned neighborliness."

The Laguna Herald (Charismatic Newspaper of the United Heavenly Church of the Holy Paraclete Descending in Fire All Over): "IT'S OVER, SPIRIT TELLS POPE! Now even the most staid Roman Catholic must believe the message we have been proclaiming for years—The Judgment of God is at hand! ALLELUIA!"

Television stations all over the world immediately set up panel discussions of the pope's speech. Universities established seminars and institutes.

Political leaders in every country studied the text of the papal statement and made analyses of it. The analyses were beastlike or spiritlike, depending on the people who made them, and few of them dealt with the meaning of L-Day but dwelt rather on what were called its underlying motives and its long-range effects.

A few of the Marxist countries, departing from the line advanced by *Pravda,* said that the idea of a day of universal reconciliation had much to recommend it—especially in the capitalist countries which encouraged competition, aggressiveness and swinish acquisitiveness.

In his weekly press conference, the President of the United States, Clyde Shryker, said, "We applaud the pope's good will. Certainly we all need to rededicate ourselves to brotherhood—particularly those in the revolutionary nations, and in the monist and hard-line Marxist countries. They can learn much from the Christian leaders of the world even though they are atheistic in outlook and have refused to commit

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themselves, as we have so often committed ourselves, to the principles of the Judeo-Christian tradition. For our part, regardless of the brutality, tyranny, corruption and treachery of the monist and Marxist leaders, we shall receive them with forgiveness, ever mindful of the words, 'Father, forgive them for they know not what they do.'"

"LOVE FACTOR UNCERTAIN INFLUENCE ON ECONOMIC GROWTH," said a headline in *The Wall Street Journal.* "Pope's Plan May Harm Defense Industries." After the pope's announcement, the Dow-Jones Industrial Average dropped sixty-five points.

Everywhere, in every city of the world, L-Day was news. Nightclub entertainers made up jokes about it. Students debated the merit of the plan in their high school speech classes. It became the number one topic on radio call-in programs. In Lincoln, Nebraska a young composer named Stork R. Wether set to work on a ballad called *Willie's Song,* which in two weeks' time would become the most popular song in the English-speaking world.

Religious leaders of the world all made statements regarding the papal announcement. The majority of the leaders favored the idea of L-Day, but the more intellectual of the religious journals called the L-idea simplistic, melodramatic, naïve, individualistic, divisive and apocalyptic.

In Sauna, Georgia a woman named Margot de Menthe said that during the pope's telecast she had a vision, and in the vision she saw Christ playing with the world like a boy playing with a balloon. Then, in the vision, Moses came along—he was dressed like a Georgia state trooper—and he said to Jesus, What you got there, boy? Jesus said, The world. Then, according to Margo de Menthe, Moses took a branch from the limb of a nearby tree and struck repeatedly at the world, like a man killing a snake, until it exploded. Jesus, she said, sat down in some high grass and cried like a baby.

"It was very sad. I could see everything. It looked like Jed Mim's place up 101 where it happened. I could see beer cans along the road. All I can say is, Jed Mim better get his ass in

order. Someone who would make Jesus cry is not a right person, I don't care if God did give him the Ten Commandments. That goes for his companions too. As for the pope, I have nothing against niggers whatsoever because after all whose fault is it?"

In his hotel suite in Santiago, Chile Clio left the meeting of the Peruvian Liberation Council to watch a rebroadcast of Willie's speech.

He was very tired now. Brazil had been won, Peru lay ahead of them, and after Peru there was Mexico and after Mexico there was the new front—he had forgotten what it was.

The voice coming from the television set made him sad for a moment. He made himself remember what they had told him of Angola and he felt the anger again. But when he looked at the face of the pope, he found himself unable to keep it up. He hated many things now but the hatred was an effort and sometimes he did not have the energy required.

He listened to the voice out of the past and he thought of Martha and of the night they had met and he thought of many earlier things when he and Willie had been boys together.

"You listen to that fool?" his aide asked.

"Yes."

"His silly plan will cause us trouble, you are aware? Peru is Catholic. The peasants—"

"I know."

"A reactionary idiot."

"Yes."

"I realize he is a countryman."

"It is all right."

"Look at him," the aide said. "The man is insane."

At that moment the strange thing happened to Willie's face and Clio saw the shining and the glowing of his face and he remembered how his face had looked when he found he had the pitch.

He looked at the face and was moved by it because the past

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was something that still was precious in a way that he did not like to admit and because his hate was spent just then and because it had been a long time since he had seen a man's face transfigured by a dream.

Once, he thought, he too had a dream, he and his fellow revolutionists, and the dream was still there but it never did anything to their faces anymore if it had ever done anything to their faces. He did not know. The dream he once possessed had changed and he did not think so constantly of the long pull of the future, though he told himself he did, and he and his comrades talked frantically, sometimes through the night, trying to capture the sure old faith that they had once shared, but it was getting harder and there were so many things to get rid of.

Yesterday someone had told him that 228,000 people had been killed in the liberation of Brazil.

That did not seem possible to Clio, but he knew it was the truth whether he wanted to believe it or not.

The country was liberated, and now the trials were going on for those who did not share the dream that Clio and his comrades had had of the future, but the 228,000 would not have to worry about the trials and would not have to pay anything for the lack of a dream or for the many sins they had committed; they had paid all that could be paid.

No, the faces in the other room would not light up again. Once they had in common the splendid vision of a future and now the future had come and it was time to create still one more future. But the faces were gray and that would be the color from now on because their eyes had seen some of the 228,000 who had met death and the scent of death was in their nostrils and they carried the scent with them in their clothes and in their hair and it would not wash off their skins.

Willie's face had gone back to normal and he had reached that point in the speech where he said "Have faith in this simple idea," and Clio saw that the exultation was gone and thought that he, too, must fight to keep dreams living and that perhaps he too struggled with the necessities of death.

"You can imagine what we shall face in a city like Lima,

where the superstition is high and people feed on such things, having no food."

"Yes," said Clio and rejoined his fellow generals in the plotting of the liberation of Peru.

* * *

When they came to him that first time, two days after the speech, those trappers and custodians and museumkeepers and cage attendants, Willie was prepared in the best way he could ever be prepared—with nothing but his innocence to defend him, with nothing but his ignorance to speak, with that openness that could not be shouted down or argued away—and he was ready in the sense that he was always unready and he saw them only as people, and he greeted them warmly even as they set themselves against him.

Profacci acted as their spokesman—there were twelve of them in all—and Nervi was there, enveloped in blue, and Tisch and the canonist, Cardinal Liderant, and Orsini, the swarthy moralist.

"You intend to leave the city then?" said Profacci.

"Yes."

"You are the bishop of Rome. You cannot vacate your see."

"I am the vicar of Christ. You yourself called me that on the first day. And Christ had no home."

"Where will you go?"

"I don't know yet."

"Think of the scandal to souls! The agitation and the doubting and the harm!"

"My dear cardinal, perhaps there has been scandal all along."

"You pass judgment on your predecessors?"

"I ask only that you not pass judgment on me."

"But the problems of the Vatican. . . ."

"You can handle those as well as I, even better."

"We are not the pope."

"Cardinal, you do not need a pope to solve these paper problems that are sent to me."

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"Many, many things only you can decide."

"I can decide them anyplace in the world."

"Do you not love the Vatican?"

"Love? What is there to love? Buildings? Art pieces? Treasures? How can I love these things?"

"You would just turn away from them?"

"I would give them away."

At this, Profacci turned to the other officials and said, "You heard this? He wishes to destroy it all." Then to Willie: "You don't have the right to give it away."

Willie laughed. "Even if I did, who would want it?"

The officials murmured. They did not like the laughter.

"You will take good care of the Vatican," said Willie. "You can keep it for my successor."

"You are aware of the ancient tradition that the pope is the bishop of Rome?"

"A pope can travel about."

"You speak of leaving the see of Rome."

"I would have to leave in order to travel."

"But to leave for good—"

"It is good that is the reason for my leaving," said Willie.

Then Cardinal Profacci and the other officials went away, and from that day on, they began to plot against him, to find some way to depose him on grounds of insanity because he had scoffed at sacred treasures, laughed at the treasure of Rome.

* * *

The general convention of the Silent Servants of the Used, Abused and Utterly Screwed Up had ended and the members had returned to their far-flung homes, or nonhomes, to make ready for L-Day. Only Joto and Truman and Benjamin and Felder and Thatcher Grayson remained. They talked and planned together and prayed with Willie, and together they thought of the things that needed to be done to make the L-Day a success. One night they came together to discuss the date of L-Day.

"Christmas has its advantages," said Father Benjamin.

"To burn the present Christmas away and to create a Christmas of the other coming."

"Easter," said Felder. "Much more appropriate."

"Pentecost," said Thatcher Grayson. "After all, that is the day of the Spirit." Mr. Grayson still saw spirits from time to time and he tried not to look at them and he tried to keep concentrating on people, but often he did not succeed.

"Maybe it's better to find a new day entirely," said Willie. "All these days have so many memories."

"Well, that's the point, isn't it?" said Felder.

Truman, watching the conversation, made rapid hand signs that were hard to follow.

"Again," said Felder.

This time they saw what Truman said.

The day should fall on a date when men behaved most wretchedly—a day when hate prevailed.

They listened for a half hour about Truman's recommendation, days of horror swarming in their minds. But in Willie's listening, the days of horror were obliterated by a coming day, and he saw the ice fields stretching before him and the shadows of men weaving across a strange terrain and he felt the confusion coming upon him again and he tried not to look at Felder and tried not to think about certain pictures that came to him persistently in the times he was alone.

Earlier that day, he had felt an impulse to speak of the matter to Father Benjamin, but something told him to wait, and he prayed then, as he did now, for a message that would help him handle what he had seen, but there was no message and there was no method of handling what he had seen. Yet there was a thing, a fact, a truth, a faith building slowly in his heart, like a pillar of ice on the floor of a cave, and it was an assertion and a gloat and a cry of despair, and if it could be put into words, the words would be *The man with the slide rule is coming and you cannot change it and you will be in when he comes.*

His eyes met Herman Felder's now. He saw with a little shock that Felder was looking at him. He was smiling that strange smile once more and seemed to be asking a question.

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Willie thought he said *What difference does it make?*

But what Felder actually said was, "The date of the American bombing of Hiroshima. That was in the summer of 1945."

"Let us listen," said Benjamin.

So they listened once more. And this time Willie, hating his fear, tried to think only of the date and when he thought of the date, he knew that August 6, 1945, or any date like it was wrong because such a date rendered a sort of tribute to death and would cause people to forget that evil was everyday and seldom spectacular.

They discussed this point and at last decided to choose a date at random. Truman closed his eyes and stabbed at a calendar. His finger fell on November 24, a Sunday, the last Sunday of the liturgical year.

"That's the feast of Christ the King," said Felder. "My God, it couldn't be better."

"Most fitting," Benjamin agreed.

Joto opened a missal and searched out the feast.

"Readings from Daniel, Revelations, John," he said.

"The Spirit moved the hand of Truman," said Thatcher Grayson.

"Ah well, Mr. Grayson," said Willie, "maybe the Spirit moves everybody's hands all the time if you really get down to it."

It was late in the summer and November 24 was less than three months away, and the next day the announcement of the date went out to the world. There were many interpretations given to the choice of date.

"A Sunday, a nonworking day!" George Doveland Goldenblade crowed.

"Yes, but the unions have already declared the next day as a holiday," said his executive vice-president. "And the banks are closing too. Good will."

"Good will!" shouted Goldenblade. "You goddamn traitor, get out of here!" And then Goldenblade broke his own record for taking the name of the Lord in vain, and he fired the executive vice-president and brought charges of defamation

of character against the man when he tried to protest.

That night Goldenblade called his brother on the videophone.

"Eminence Earl, this nigra pope is goin' to wreck the business if we're not careful. And what he is doin' to Holy Mother Church is something that should not be done to a goshdarned diseased chicken that should have its neck wrung several times over for a lesson."

"O mi lugi telirithi," said Earl Cardinal Goldenblade. "Cui logo mi melithi?"

Willie began his secret fast.

He told himself that in the detail of Herman Felder he had been wrong.

He found a gloss in the Guidebook which he memorized: *To distrust even a known enemy serves the kingdom of death.*

Chapter five

The world hissed with rumors.

They came like snakes into the cities of man.

They coiled around the plan of L-Day.

Soon the plan could not be perceived, only the twisted creatures around it.

The rumors were of many kinds: the pope was insane; the pope and a few cardinals had a thermonuclear device with which they planned to terrorize and conquer the world on November 24; Pope Willie was not the true pope—the true pope was Les Garfield of Cape Girardeau, Missouri.

The rumors were more than rumors.

They were symptoms of what Herman Felder had called the fundamental schism.

They were epiphanies of man's oldest choice.

"Beast or spirit," Felder had told Willie.

On that either-or axis the world creaked slowly, like a Ferris wheel in a nightmare.

To the beast people of the world, here was proof positive.

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An enormous deceit was in the making, a vast betrayal. A magnificent dream was about to die.

In their kinder moments, the beast folk spoke of the L-Day Plan as a money-making venture, a promotional stunt, a program designed to win converts to the church.

In their true beast character, however, they reacted with fear, anger, derision. Many beast people called the plan a direct attack on the fundamental tenets of the free enterprise system.

Spirit people saw the plan in a different light. Bishop Mae M. Frapple of the United Heavenly Church of the Holy Paraclete Descending in Fire All Over spoke for many spirit folk when she told a rally in Madison Square Garden: "The Holy Spirit has sent this col-yured pope into the world to tell us the show is over! Come November 24, and Jee-sus Chee-rast is ridin' in on the clouds and is gonna break asses all over the nation. Alleluia!"

Crowd: "Alleluia!"

In the beginning only the most literal-minded spirit people took the L-Day announcement as a prophecy of the end of the world.

But once the idea got into the hands of the ministers of the United Heavenly Church of the Holy Paraclete Descending, it began to spread to religious groups once considered moderate.

Had not the pope himself prophesied that the world would be consumed by flame?

Repent before the twenty-fourth! became the theme of a hundred thousand radio spots sponsored by the International Council of Charismatic Churches.

IS YOUR HOUSE IN ORDER? asked 10,000 billboards erected along the major highways of the United States.

Similar announcements, proclamations and questions were printed, broadcast and televised in every nation of the world.

The spiritist churches found astronomers and physicists and men of other sciences to back up their claim that the world would soon become the victim of a cosmic accident.

"The earth has been slipping dangerously out of orbit for a million years," said Professor E. N. Magus, a Nobel prize physicist of London. "Now we have the ideal conditions for a burn. I would advise everyone to keep close watch."

At first beast folk scoffed at the predictions of the spiritists, but it soon became a mirthless scoffing.

Spiritist farmers refused to harvest the fall crop.

Spiritist workers in the steel and the auto industries and in the great national defense programs began walking off their jobs.

Suddenly there were shutdowns, production cutbacks, commodity shortages all across the industrial world.

Sales in the JERCUS bloc fell for the first time in ten years.

By the middle of September all the economic indicators of the world pointed to calamity.

"There can be no question," said *The Wall Street Journal,* "that this country, Europe, and much of the industrialized Orient is headed for the most ruinous depression of modern times. The entire JERCUS economy is in hazard."

A committee of international bankers called upon the pope to clarify his message lest disaster befall the market.

"Where have the bankers been during the years of starvation?" Willie asked his advisors.

But then another sort of news reached his ears, and he knew then that he had to speak to the world once more.

The news concerned the reappearance, in Texas, of a rite unknown since the days of the Albigensian heretics in medieval France.

A sect of spiritists calling themselves the Second Comers had begun to practice and encourage ritualistic suicide—"to go to the Lord generously and save *Him* the effort of coming to you," as an editor wrote in *Second Wind,* the newspaper of the Second Comers.

In Dallas, Houston, and several other Texas cities, 300 people took their lives in the third week of September, and the suicide rate began to climb in other parts of the U.S. and soon throughout the world.

The suicides occured among both spiritists, who wished to

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bring about what one of them called a personal L-Day, and beast-folk who had fallen into despair over developments in the stock market, real estate speculations and grain futures.

Fear seized whole populations; people phoned their lawyers to draw up wills.

"For whom?" the lawyers would ask.

When an asteroid struck the earth near Hangchow, China, Earl Cardinal Goldenblade, who had emerged as the leading spiritist spokesman for the U.S. Catholic church, told a nationwide TV audience that the asteroid was a heavenly sign, foretold in Scripture, that announced the coming end of the world.

Bishop Mae Frapple joined Cardinal Goldenblade in an hour-long network revival which called for a mass on-the-air Baptism of the Spirit and a universal outpouring of tongues, so that, in the words of Bishop Mae Frapple, "the Spirit will know we are on his wavelength."

That night 60 million Americans rushed into the streets shouting "Te legurithi mihi!"

The following night the Second Comers sponsored a nationwide telecast during which a young man named Cy Proust, who had worked for the largest mechanical bird manufacturer in the world, took his life, live and in color, at the climax of the oration of Bishop Mae Frapple, by firing a .38 revolver into his right temple.

The program drew the largest viewing audience in the history of U.S. television, and the network immediately signed Bishop Mae Frapple and Cardinal Goldenblade to produce a nightly show, called *This Is Your Death,* which, according to the contract, would "feature a live, on-the-air bona fide suicide certified by a representative of the U.S. Coroner's Association."

Sixty-five thousand Americans volunteered for the show the first day it was announced. According to the contract for the program, the show, using film and live interviews with friends and relatives of the volunteer, would recap highlights of the person's life. At the end of the program, an announcer's voice would say, "And so, (Arnold Morgan St.

James), this is your death." With a silver-plated revolver, engraved with his initials, the volunteer would shoot himself.

The program became the most popular program in the United States, and within a week similar programs began to be telecast in every country of the world where civilization had prevailed.

So the pope spoke to the world again.

"It is not the end of the material world," said Willie in tears. "It is the end of the world of slave arrangements and of barriers and traps and prisons—the things I spoke of earlier. It is the beginning of a new world.

"It is not a time to give up or take life. It is the time to begin life—the kind we have to live in order to be people."

He said more, he made more words, but the words did not make any difference because the confusion had gone too far, and on the night of his speech most of the people were watching the new death programs, and those who did see it became even more convinced that the pope prophesied the end of the world because he had used that phrase in his speech and even though he had qualified it, people could not make qualifications or understand them, and many of the spirit people said that the pope had actually gone farther in his second speech then in the first, and the beast people rejoiced at the scandal that was coming and at the fear, and they watched the suicide programs with relish, and around the world in the fourth week of September, the suicide rate quadrupled.

* * *

Dusk in the smallest room of the papal apartments, a bare blue cell stripped of everything, with only a single bulb hanging from a cord.

"What can I do? What can I say to stop them?" Willie asked his brothers. His eyes were red from crying and the lines of grief were deepening on his face, and he was older.

"Nothing," said Felder. "Another speech would accomplish nothing."

"In Germany yesterday, they said 138 people killed them-

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selves—138 people," Willie repeated, and wept again.

"The old fixes breaking up," said Felder offhandedly.

"They are *people,*" cried Willie. "I did not mean that people should be broken."

Benjamin said, "Some cannot stand the life which is new and therefore painful. Death seems preferable."

"Did I not speak the truth, Father Benjamin?" Willie asked.

"When the truth of life comes to nonlife, there is a great struggle and some cannot survive. Truth brings death."

Willie held his head in his hands.

"I don't want to deal with death," he said.

"You must deal with death before any of the others," said Benjamin.

Outside, the fall night was coming on and the air hummed with traffic and death's motors roared amid the old stones and the broken pillars.

"Man who care for RevCon," said Joto, "man who watch starve tabulator. Made strange discovery this day. In India, Africa and in South America and other lands where there is method of taking starve count, these numbers have been falling since announcement of L-Day."

"What—what could be the reason?" said Willie, his face brightening for the first time in two weeks.

"It seems, as I contemplate situation," said Joto, "in these areas, landowners, market bosses, growers and other wealthy large people become filled with panic for well-being. Look to flee territories, seeking treasures that they put away. When flee lands, leave food behind. Poor come and get food and eat well for first time in many years."

"Why, that's wonderful!" said Willie.

"Not so, Willie," said Joto. "Food must be replenished. Managers and in-between folk, processors of food and such, especially those of spiritist mentality, not bothering to plant for new season or even harvest in those areas where crop is in. Feel world ending and all. In few weeks, says statistics man, food supplies end all together and situation return to worse than normal."

Willie groaned. They all groaned.

Herman Felder made a quick, sweeping motion with his cigarette.

"A few thousand people die at their own hand—crazy wealthies. We get all hot and bothered. Where was the heat and the bother when the thousands were dying daily of starvation?"

"We were always bothered," said Benjamin. "What is the point you make, Brother Herman?"

"Well," said Felder, "everybody dies; there is a certain ironic justice to what is happening."

Willie stared at Felder, his eyes filling with anger.

"You think it good that poor, foolish people kill themselves just because those same foolish people, out of frailty and many other weaknesses, lacked compassion for the poor?"

"There is a certain compensation in the processes of life," Felder said gently. "And in great changes that make life better, it is to be expected that some will die."

"Oh God," said Willie, "I have heard that line until it makes me yearn for death myself." And he left them and went into the papal garden to pray alone.

Two nights later he spoke to the world once more, and this time he spoke so clearly that no one in his right senses could fail to understand, though in truth not all that many people were in their right senses—millions of people were playing spirit and millions of others were playing beast.

"Woe to those who take life," he said, "their own or another's. Woe to those who encourage the taking of life and who refuse to support life and who discourage the growing of foods and say that the material things do not matter.

"An old world is ending and a new one is being born, but the new one is but the old transformed.

"L-Day is not a day for acting as an angel or acting as a beast. It is a day for man acting the best he can as man.

"That is what I said in the beginning, and I grieve to see what is happening because of the meanings some have given to what I said.

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"It is a new world that will be reborn because *we* will be reborn.

"What have we asked of you but this—that you go to your enemy and make peace with him.

"That is all.

"But that is enough.

"Do not, in the name of God, put a meaning on this plan that brings death to a single person.

"For it is not the death of men that we seek but rather the death of death's kingdom—the fear and the pride and the greed and the power and the domination of man by man.

"That world of old arrangements needs to die, and it will die on the twenty-fourth of November if we are faithful and if we are pure of heart. Yes, it will burn away and we will be people.

"Just people."

That seemed to settle it in Willie's mind.

And for a little while, the worst of the excesses tapered off a bit and the world fell into a sort of melancholy daze, but there were interpretations given even to this lull, and some said it was the calm that comes before a great storm.

Bishop Mae Frapple killed her nineteen-year-old husband as a sacrifice to the Spirit and was jailed on charges of disorderly conduct.

This Is Your Death continued to be a popular television show, but after Willie's third speech volunteers fell from 90,000 a day to 20,000.

The stock exchanges showed a few tentative signs of recovery.

The laboring forces, half of them, went back to work.

October 1 came and went in a haze of blue and gold, but even the natural signs of fall became, in the eyes of many, portents of evil days ahead.

The leaves had fallen along the pathways where the popes had walked for 500 years.

It was twilight and the lights of Rome shone green in the distance.

Willie and Thatcher Grayson sat on a marble bench and watched the Tiber turn the color of wine.

"Tomorrow you meet with them again, the theologians and the officials?" said Thatcher Grayson.

"They want to prove me a heretic."

"I fear for you, son. They will press you on the Servants, L-Day, everything."

"I am ready for—anything," said Willie.

"You do not know how far men will go," said Mr. Grayson.

"But I do, Mr. Grayson," said Willie, thinking of Angola. "I know that men will do anything."

He looked down at the old river that was still as a sleeping snake.

"You know why I asked to see you tonight, Mr. Grayson."

Thatcher Grayson stood up suddenly. "You don't know what that man will do."

Again Willie thought of Angola and Etherea. He took Thatcher Grayson's arm. "Nothing is to be feared, my dear friend. How can I expect others to make peace with their enemies if I cannot make peace with him?"

"He will never make peace."

"Still I must try. I must find him and try."

Grayson turned his face to the shadow of Saint Peter's basilica. "He goes to a remote place in the last week of November. It is just after the baseball owners' convention. He goes to the place and shoots ploves."

"What are ploves?"

"Special birds that are bred for the hunt. They are his invention in a way, a cross between a dove and a quail and a pigeon. Very fast and difficult to shoot. He keeps them on the reservation he owns, and in the last week of November, he and his friends go there." Grayson spoke mechanically, as if he were reciting something he had been made to remember against his will.

"Where is this place?"

"The United States."

"But where?"

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"You can't go there, son, you can't! He will kill you."

Thatcher Grayson began to weep.

"You do not know—the meadows where the dead birds fall—thousands and thousands of them—a place of blood and death—the snows red—everywhere the dead creatures he made."

Willie shivered, feeling the horror and seeing the fields he had seen before.

"Where, Mr. Grayson?"

"Illinois," Grayson said brokenly. "Near a place called Babylon Bend. Not far from Springfield."

"He will be there for sure?"

"He will kill you!" Grayson cried.

"It is all right, Mr. Grayson. He will be there?"

"He will be there. In Regent Fields—where the dead bloody creatures. . . ."

Willie looked up at the reddened sky.

"We will be there too—to put an end to the enmity."

Grayson wept. "Sometimes, after the first day, they club the birds. . . ."

"You have been there?"

"Once, as a young man, I was in the party,"Grayson sobbed. "I butchered, killed with the others."

Willie put his arm around Mr. Grayson's shoulder.

"Now you are a man of peace and love."

Mr. Grayson could not stop crying, and when he looked at a cypress nearby he saw Michael the archangel.

"Te liri tegurithi," he said.

"It's just a tree," said Willie softly. "See?" He took Grayson's hand and touched it to a branch. "The tree only wants to be a tree."

"I have lost touch with so many things," Grayson wept. "I try to be a person, but the spirits keep coming."

"Laugh them away, old friend."

"I cannot laugh anymore."

Then Willie jumped away from Thatcher Grayson and did a cartwheel. He stood on his head like a circus clown and tried to imitate the talk of the spirit folk.

But Mr. Grayson only thought Willie had turned into a spirit and immediately began to talk in tongues.

They walked back to the Vatican apartments in the darkness..

"Everywhere the Spirit is calling and crying," said Thatcher Grayson.

"That is only the wind blowing the leaves about."

"But it *sounds* like the Spirit," said Thatcher Grayson.

"I have never heard the Spirit," said Willie. "What does it sound like?"

"The wind blowing the leaves about."

Chapter six

When the sun came up over the old blue hills and the deathbound birds chattered in the cypress trees and the first tourists came to the English cemetery to see where the young poet's name was writ in water, they came to him once more—the watchmen, the custodians, the keepers, the cage builders—they came to him with jeweled rings and rustling silk and met him in a vast arena of rose marble and gilt-framed masterpieces, and Willie smiled and they did not.

And with them came the fear and the doubt and the terror of the unfathomable future, and history made them walk slowly as if history were so many weights of lead that were strapped to their legs.

They were gray men, separate from the race, and they had been in the world before the New had broken through. Their faces were ash, their hands gray-blue and ash-veined, their eyes quick-darting but dull as dead birds' eyes.

Their faces were like the faces that one saw in many museums of that city, in pictures for which these men might have posed, in pictures of emperors and kings and generals and popes—the look of power and what power does to the human face being one of the permanent things—and those pictures were 500 years old, 1,000 years old, and these men were that age and older.

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The everlasting surprise of the sun was at their feet, dazzling the marble, but they took no notice. Their senses had been slain long ago, killed and closed off so thoroughly that they were senseless and considered the state of senselessness to be good.

They were men of reason, they were men of principle, they were men of order. They believed in logic, in fine arrangements that were 1,000 years old—devotion to the corporate structure, devotion to the pattern, devotion to the system.

So when they looked at him that morning, sitting on a plain bench wearing the tunic of a ragpicker or clown, they saw not a man, a person with a name, but a frightening idea, a mad cell, the elusive point of that hideous force that they knew to exist in the world that bore the name Chaos.

"You are a scandal to the church, a disgrace to the nations," said Profacci, whose face was the grayest of all. "Only look at the confusion and doubt and strange beliefs and the unspeakable practices that have risen among people all over the world since you launched this insane plan."

Willie, looking at the cardinal framed in the window where the sun flirted in the sky and seeing that the cardinal had not observed the sun or a tree or a bird or a hillside in forty years, felt the old, the fatal pity coming on.

There he stood, the most powerful man in Rome as they called him, splashed in scarlet and not even that burst of color touched him. He was unaware of it as he was unaware of all things that could be seen, smelled, touched, listened to—condemned as he was to safeguarding shadowy standards that he had once memorized in a dead language while his heart withered.

He was like a warrior—they were all warriors, Willie thought, warriors of a once great army and they wore the dress of battle, not knowing the war had ended and that the main forces had scattered and the old nation they were defending had ceased to be—and worse than that, they did not understand that a new war had begun, a war of which they had no knowledge even when they were hired by one side or the other, a war that was harder to define, that was going

on all over the world; they did not know of this other war but only the old war and the past battles and the old marching songs and the old enemies, who were dead.

"Scandal," said Willie, feeling sorry for the combatants of the unreal struggle. "What is scandal, dear Cardinal?"

And the pity deepened in him. He did not know, he could not guess, how, if they thought he pitied them, they would have moved against him that very morning. He saw them in their cell of fear but did not see how strong their fear had made them.

"Teaching false doctrine," Profacci said. "That is scandal enough for a pope."

"What false doctrine have I taught?"

"You have taught that the world is coming to its end and the Lord is returning," came a huskier voice—Cardinal Orsini, Profacci's assistant, a moralist who had been considered papable at the time of Willie's election, a swarthy, blunted figure of a man renowned for his skill as a chess player.

Willie looked up at them from his little bench. This then was the fundamental accusation, the single weapon they had selected from an arsenal of his casual infractions.

His eyes drifted from Orsini to Profacci to Liderant, with his white mane and sad eyes, Nervi, Taroni, Guilfoy, Tisch, Sanzer, Reider, Komil, the warriors of the old struggles.

From his boyhood, with the slow, uncomplicated workings of his mind, he knew that when people made accusations they did not do so to have the charge discussed or argued but to declare a course of action: *This is what we mean to do.*

They are going to try to stop L-Day, he thought first, and then, How far will they go?

Looking at Orsini once more, he did not know—indeed Cardinal Orsini did not know—that thirty-seven generations back he was the son of a papal assassin nor, for that matter, twenty-seven generations back, the son of a pope who had tortured heretics in Spain, but he sensed the odor of violence in that formal room, that sudden bitter smell of sweat and

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blood that clung to certain rooms of the Vatican and to certain sections of Rome and had been there since the days of the Caesars, that not even ten million honeysuckles could quite get out of the air.

Would they try to kill me?

Pity, not fear, possessed him still, even as he asked this question, because he did not see the power of their fear, and of these men he still believed that a basic love of truth and an essential charity prevailed in spite of everything, and in his uncomplicated way, he supposed they shared the Gospel.

He knew he had to declare his action too.

"The Lord comes every day, dear brothers. He comes to us in Eucharist and he comes to us in people. As for the end of the world, is not every new sunrise a new creation?"

"Can we forgo the poetry if that is what it is?" said Profacci. "You know very well that is not the way you have talked of your so-called L-Day Plan."

"I have spoken clearly of the plan," said Willie. "I cannot make things plainer. At the same time I know that many have given a false interpretation to the meaning of L-Day."

Cardinal Liderant, looking very tired, said, "You have put the faith of millions in jeopardy. What was firm and solid has become weak and uncertain. There is a panic among people everywhere. What has happened is quite obvious: you have imposed what amounts to a private opinion upon the universal church, and because you are pope, people believe that what you say, what you think, is the truth, infallibly spoken and to be held as faith."

"Ah, Brother Henri," said Willie, "so it is infallibility that worries you."

"It worries us," Profacci broke in, "that the vicar of Christ is insane."

Willie searched their faces—did they really think that? That would make a difference, he thought. It would mean that they would act in one way rather than another. He said softly, "A pope asks that men forgive their enemies and be

reconciled with one another. That is insanity for a pope?"

Cardinal Orsini, looking like a bulky rook, said in his basso profundo voice: "The pope says the world is ending and Christ comes again—*that* is insanity for a pope."

"Yet, it is of faith that the world ends and Christ comes again," Willie replied.

"You have given a certain date, man!" Profacci shouted. "You have made it possible for multitudes to believe that the world will end on the twenty-fourth day of November!"

"You are referring, Cardinal Profacci, to the false interpretations—"

"Which millions believe!"

The room was silent with the silence of the engine room when the engineer has thrown the switch from one generator to another. Willie spoke distinctly, slowly.

"What would you have me do?"

"Resign," said Profacci.

"Is that what all of you want?"

"Yes. Yes. Yes," each man spoke.

Willie went inside himself, considering what he would say.

"It is not only the plan," said Liderant, "it is the whole method that you have—the total operation of the papacy. And then there are those who associate themselves with you."

"You speak of the Servants?"

"A canonically irregular order," said Orsini.

"What have you against them?"

Profacci snorted. "It would require the rest of this day merely to recite the charges."

"We have dossiers on fifty of the present members," said Orsini. "Files, records, proofs." He waved to Nervi, a mist-creature almost invisible in the blazing light. "We have evidence of conspiracy, heresy, plots of violence. We have civil charges to be brought against many, if necessary."

Willie's glance fell on Taroni, who looked unhappy and ill and who seemed to be trying to communicate something with his fretful eyes.

"Suppose," said Willie, "suppose I were to elevate sixty

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members of the Society to the cardinalate."

The faces became still portraits and made a true gallery of shock and horror.

"That is—they are—" Profacci sputtered. "Outrage!"

"The pope has the right to make new cardinals," said Willie.

"They are outlaws!" Profacci cried. "Felder—Herman Felder is—" he stopped in midsentence.

Willie felt his skin prickling and stinging.

"What of Mr. Felder?" he said as calmly as he could.

"A criminal!" said Profacci.

The fields stretched before him once more and he could feel the ice wind coming fast, and the dark shapes moved as in the dream.

"Well," he said, managing to keep his voice steady. "You can fight, though of course in a fight, there is always the possibility of losing. Fight against your fellow cardinals, I mean, the sixty new ones included."

"The bishops of the world would be with us," said Profacci as if speaking to a great multitude. "That I can assure you."

"The bishops and the cardinals of the church fighting among themselves, to get the pope deposed—that would be healthy, a good sign?" said Willie, smiling hesitantly.

They had not expected him to think or speak like this, and Willie himself had not expected it, and after he spoke, he felt strangely ashamed.

"Let that be put aside," he said, standing up. "I don't plan to resign. I am going ahead with L-Day. If you move to depose me, I will still go ahead with L-Day. I will act as pope and be the pope until I am deposed—*if* I am deposed."

And with that he walked out of the marble hall, taking them by surprise.

Orsini called after him but he kept walking and then he was gone and they stood there arguing among themselves, each one raising an accusation he had rehearsed a hundred times.

They had been prepared to bring seventy-six charges against him. All the briefs had been prepared—they were

stacked carefully in Nervi's attaché case—and now he had left them before the charges could be made and they had made manifest only their intention.

They lingered there arguing and demonstrating matters that they already took for granted and angry because he had cheated them and angry too that he had taken their declared intention calmly and the more they argued, the more frustrated they became as they sought a way to depose him without causing tumult among the people.

They were old warriors who knew war and understood it, and they had learned to accept wars between nations, in which millions could be slaughtered, and they knew how to lament such wars and decry the inhumanity of such wars, but a war between cardinals and bishops they could not accept because such a war brought harm to souls.

"Dossiers, proofs, files, evidence," said Orsini, making a fist and pounding it into his hands. "For nothing?"

"One way or other, we shall stop him," said Profacci.

The gray faces turned grayer in the light; the argument broke out again.

A bird flew in through the window, startling them all. It fluttered above their heads, swooping this way and that in frantic little rushes to get back through the window, and they began to wave their arms to drive it away.

The bird, spying a huge portrait of the nineteenth-century pope, Pius IX, imagined that he could sail into the blue sky that had been painted behind the papal tiara and he sped toward it swiftly, thudding against it and crushing his head.

"We should have the new mechanical birds," said Orsini. "There were dead birds all over the city this morning."

With that he picked up the bird, a common sparrow, with blood draining from its beak, and handed it to Monsignor Nervi.

"Get it away from me!" Nervi squealed. "It has germs you have never heard of!"

"It dented the painting," said Profacci, looking at the portrait of Pope Pius IX.

"Filthy," said Nervi, twisting his hands. "They carry

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pestilence and filth. Wash your hands, Orsini. You don't know the diseases it carries."

Orsini laughed, then idly tossed the bird out the window.

Liderant, lost in his thoughts and oblivious to the incident of the bird, said, "Perhaps someone close to him can persuade him to resign. He is a man of faith after all."

The bird fell at the feet of one of the Swiss guards, a spirit man who looked continually for signs of the end.

When he saw the bird, he dropped his spear and shouted to his fellow guard: "O mi logo tegurithi!"

"It's only a sparrow," his fellow guard assured him.

But the man ran home to his wife and children, and that very night he and his family moved to the mountains to await the coming of the Lord.

Chapter seven

"We go when, Willie brother?" Joto asked.

"Soon."

"Where?" said Benjamin.

"To New York, the United States, and then to Illinois," said Willie.

Why? Truman asked with the question sign.

Before he thought of it, Willie started to give the sign of a word that began with *d*. They stared at him.

"It is in Illinois that I must make amends with my brother," he said then.

It was evening and they were eating dinner. The Vatican apartments were almost empty. That day Willie had given many things away, things that people had given him in audiences or sent to him through the mail, including much cash. He had tried to give away the pictures in one of the large galleries, but Cardinal Profacci had stopped him.

It had been a week since his meeting with the officials and Rome buzzed with rumors of secrets, plots, betrayals.

Through Joto, Felder, Benjamin and Truman, Willie had

heard some of the rumors, but not the worst ones. He was tired now, and sad. The morning mail had brought a one-sentence letter from Clio, the first since he had become pope.

Do you think you will change any of this
with your stupid plan?

Your Ex-friend. Clio

The envelope contained a group of pictures that showed children such as Willie had seen before, the matchstick children with bloated bellies.

There was no return address on the envelope. It had been sent from New Orleans by some anonymous intermediary. But Willie knew that Clio was in Peru, fighting. Reports of violence in that country and of the activities of the rebel army there came into the Vatican daily and he had followed the fighting carefully.

The brothers seemed happy; there was food on the table, wine, bread.

Willie pretended to eat, as he had been pretending for two weeks, but tonight they noticed that he ate nothing.

"You are not feeling well?" said Joto.

"I had something earlier," said Willie. He had had nothing but coffee and water in five days, and the first pains were going away, and the new ones coming.

They talked again of leaving Rome and Willie could see the faces of the children again and the food was there and the conversation was lively and they were happy together, except for Willie. He asked where Felder was.

"Brother Herman answers questions before grand court," said Joto.

"They wish to see if he believes in God," said Benjamin. "I went before them this morning. It is called the Congregation for Preserving the Purity of Doctrine. They wanted me to take an oath of allegiance, to swear that I believe and teach what they call the traditional teachings."

"And did you sign?" Joto asked.

"Of course. I signed it as I would sign a manifesto in favor of communism or monism or anything. I will sign anything

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as a way of confounding the powers and principalities of paper."

"Once signed into four opposing armies," said Joto. "Was pacifist at time."

Truman laughed in his silent way. They all laughed.

Willie listened to their laughter and lighthearted banter, but he kept seeing the pictures of the children, and there was a buzzing in the back of his head.

Thatcher Grayson handed him a piece of bread. He shook his head.

"But you haven't touched your food," said Grayson.

"I am not really hungry," Willie said.

In sign language Truman said, *You must have strength for the day,* and made a sunburst with his hands, *the day of glory.*

Willie signaled yes and thank you with a tired smile.

Later, after they had gone, Willie put on some clothes a workman had left in a closet of his apartment and went out into the streets of Rome. He wore a woolen stocking cap over his red hair and dark glasses to hide his eyes.

The city was in its usual nightly riot and L-Day did not exist and life went on as it had always gone on. The things that happened had always happened, the nights did not change, and whatever it was that men and women felt was the product of an emotional froth that had been 3,000 years in the making, and nothing was any different, not even the things that happened in certain hotels, that had been invented in this city.

Willie knew nothing of Rome's long history and did not understand why she was as she was, but walking through the streets, past the trattoria signs and the drugstore fronts with the ruins and the churches looming back of them, he could smell and feel and see and hear what he did not know from books. He sensed the unhealthiness and the pride and the excitability that was like a fever, and he could smell the stink of rotten ambitions and he could hear the slow death songs.

His melancholy deepened because wherever he looked, the children were there, and when the children weren't there, then he saw the white fields again, though he had worked

hard and had almost convinced himself that the white fields were false and not to be taken seriously—that part of his dream had been only an echo of the white dream Felder himself had dreamed when he died.

He came upon a dingy American bar that had been a popular gathering place after one of the great wars, when the conquering peoples had come to the old parent nations to see how magnanimous they had been to their enemies. It was a dark triangular cave cut into a 300-year-old building in which a saint had once lived. The saint's name was Lisa Loretti, and she had died at the age of fifteen rather than surrender her virginity to a janitor at the Vatican. The bar, lit with yellow neon signs advertising supreme hamburgers and Regent wine, was called The Virgin's Spot even now, 200 years after Lisa had been martyred.

There were a few tables set out on the darkened street, and Willie sat down at one of them and ordered a cup of bitter Italian coffee.

He sat in the shadow of a little hedge so that he could not be seen, and he tried to put away the hunger and the fear and the shapes that moved on the white fields.

The people came and went, men from the neighborhood mostly, boisterous fellows whose laughter, rising in easy bursts, began to cheer Willie a little.

"This will be number seven!" a man roared inside. "A boy I promise you—and I drink to number eight!"

"Old man, number seven has taken half your life—eight would finish you off!" came an answering voice.

Laughter. It was that casual laughter that people could always have when they were only themselves, and it came to him and entered him, and it warmed him as the coffee warmed him.

For a little while the world was precious again. The yellow glow of the neon sign spread out along the street and the old stones looked cheerful and the motor scooters zooming past were fine toys and people were out for fun, like children at games, and absolutely at their best and all that he had felt only moments before was gone.

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He felt that rush of tenderness that overtook him whenever he saw people being people, forgetful of everything else, even their own names, abandoned to the secret they could not admit in words—that life was magical after all.

Bemused, half-tranced, he did not see the two figures gliding across the terrace of The Virgin's Spot from the other side, and even if he had been looking, they would have been only shadows moving noiselessly behind him.

Nor did they see him when they glanced up, even if their minds had permitted them to see what they looked at, and even if they could have seen clearly, with human eyes, they would have noticed only the back of some laborer having a drink on his way home.

They had crisscrossed Rome a dozen ways, each man, to come to this place, losing the detectives they had hired to follow each other, moving from taxi to monorail to taxi again and tourist hack and private car, their bodies driven like parts of an intricate machine that must come together at one point in an elaborate process, and touch, and lock.

This was the touch point, this forlorn cafe, where no one would find them, no one but that shadow that was the reason for their meeting and the reason for the thousand other meetings that would be necessary in coming days in so many other places of shadow and darkness, to make the machine produce its single commodity.

At first, held happily to his vision, melting into it and gliding through it like a painted bark to the bright waters of the world, Willie did not even hear their voices. Caught up in what he took to be the carefree play of the race, listening to the music of the scooters and the toy cars and the trains that brought people swaying into the imaginary festival, listening to the joking talk and the clowning words and the ordinary music of ordinary speech, he could not have heard his own name shouted in his ear.

But he could hear the voice of a friend, especially if the friend were in suffering and especially if the friend had stopped in the sojourn and crossed a bridge and now called back in a language that was different, so different that you

knew that something had gone wrong in the dead inside center, the essential heartmeat of his spirit—he could hear that voice if the voice were only a whisper.

What he heard was the voice of Herman Felder ordering a morphini—that was all and that was everything.

He froze. His pretty dream dissolved. The laughter and the music stopped, and out on the street he saw only vehicles that were going too fast, ugly vehicles roaring and spewing gaseous fumes, showing gray faces, like *papier-mâché* masks, behind their window panes.

The other voice—*whose*? He dared not turn, he dared not move, he dared not even listen, but the voices had frozen him and he was helpless to move.

". . . Of course any loss of control," the other voice said, and Felder interrupted.

"You used that expression before the group this afternoon. What right do you have to criticize me?"

"One recalls the past stories."

Whose voice? He knew it but from where?

"That was all part of the strategy," said Felder. "Ask the Head, he knows about it. Do you think I would hazard something of this importance by a silly drink?"

"One recalls the African journey."

"That was different. I could explain it, but you wouldn't comprehend."

"It could happen again, Mr. Felder. That is what I *do* comprehend."

"Anything could happen, Your Excellency. You could die for example, well-connected as you are."

"With a man like me, Mr. Felder, sarcasm is wasted."

It was not Profact or Liderant. It was not Nervi. Who?

"That I should have to explain the matter to you bothers me a little," said Felder. "Do you realize where you and the whole group would be without me and my associates in America?"

"Please, Mr. Felder. Surely you are too sensitive. I do trust your sense—your sense of organization."

The clink of glasses.

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It was not T[illegible]ni. It was not Tisch. It was not Guilfoy.

"You know [illegible]finitely the place and the time."

"A small to[illegible] in Illinois on the night of the—"

"Please. I [illegible] not know the details. Only that you know them."

Felder laug[illegible]. "I keep forgetting your sinlessness and incorruptibilit[illegible]

"I ask, Mr. [illegible]der, only that we keep to our agreement. We are not invol[illegible] in any sense."

"Of course [illegible]t. How could you be?"

"We are a[illegible]ying the ancient principle of the twofold effect—tolera[illegible] an evil which cannot be prevented anyway—"

"Cardinal, [illegible] we skip that part? I ate too much of that when I was [illegible] young so that even a little taste of it now makes me si[illegible]"

"We do no[illegible] in for political crimes, no matter what you think, Mr. F[illegible]r."

"You only [illegible]ep with the criminals. Like me."

Felder laugh[illegible]d. A sigh from the other man.

"Mr. Feld[illegible] if I were sensitive like yourself, I should probably ta[illegible]ke offense at that. But my business does not permit me to [illegible] sensitive."

Felder laugh[illegible]d again. Patiently the voice went on.

"What *is* my business, you ask? My business, my concern is the church, [illegible]e continuation of its life, the safeguarding of its principles—all of which you scoff at, as you are scoffing now.

"But who are you, Mr. Felder? A man. A single individual mortal. Forgive me for saying it, but a single individual mortal who is not even very important—not the president of a great nation, for instance, not an economic king, though I understand at one point that opportunity was available to you. Who are you? A forty-five-year-old man, an eccentric and a dreamer who thinks that he has an idea or lesson or program to give to the world. What is such a man to us? What is such a man in the scheme of things, against the reality of the church?

"Many images come to mind. I think of a clock, Mr. Felder—an enormous clock, a clock that has been running for twenty-one centuries and more and that never requires winding because it was wound perfectly in the beginning and its parts are all perfect, designed never to go wrong, and it cannot make mistakes. If you were the most powerful man in the world, you and the energy of your lifetime and the influence of all your power and wealth and intelligence might disrupt the tick of one second in the running of that clock. Comprehend? One tick. That is, if you were the most powerful man in the world. If you caused the clock to tick wrongly, foolishly, tick out of time, the great clock would correct your mistake—because it is regulated with internal mechanisms that keep it free from error. Should it be false for the span of even one second, the next tick would correct it."

The voice was husky. There was a pause now. Felder struck a match. Then the voice went on.

"The ticks come and go—like the flame of your match, even faster. And when I look at you, Mr. Felder, I feel that very pity I feel for the idiot—who is nothing but a tick to be succeeded by another tick. In the long day of the clock, he is nothing. And you, Mr. Felder, how can I be sensitive where you are concerned? For what part of the minute do you count? A second? Hardly. A fifth of a second, perhaps, or less. And what does that mean—the fifth of a tick? Who can hear a sound so quick, so soft? No one. No one at all."

Felder said nothing for a moment. Then: "Suppose someone stole the clock?"

"No one can t[illegible]it but he who made it."

"We know who that is of course?"

"We of faith do. And with that same faith we also know we are sole keepers of the clock."

"Still you are men. Other men can contend with you."

The voice laughed. "It is a pity you know no history, Mr. Felder. We have known contenders in the past."

"I speak of an inside job."

"An inside job?" the other asked in mock surprise. "Mr. Felder, it may astonish you, but we have known inside jobs

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before. We even have a name for them. We call them heresies."

"I'm not speaking of a conventional heresy."

"What heretic thinks himself conventional? Is it not of the essence of heresy that it be unconventional?"

Felder ordered another morphini. There was nothing for a moment but the sound of mandolins and the high cackle of an old man's laughter. Then Felder spoke again.

"It is good you are so secure. If you were wary or fearful, we should worry."

"We fear things, as all men do," said the other man. "But with divine guarantees, we do not fear defeat."

"That is as secure as you can be, or pretend to be. Still, we think highly of our own strength and our own plan."

"Permit me an observation, Mr. Felder. It is something you and your associates might consider when this affair is ended. Whatever you have dreamed up, we have seen it before."

"Do I hear the cast of a fly on a trout stream?"

"Only simple advice."

"Let me pass a little advice in exchange. You have never seen anything remotely similar to our plan."

"The pride men take in their fantasies and visions."

"The faith men place in a lie."

"There is no need to be uncharitable, Mr. Felder."

Felder laughed. "Here we sit, taking drinks, having shaken hands this very afternoon on an agreement that amounts to murder—"

A chair grated on the tiles.

"Do not use that word in my presence! Do not—"

"Calm yourself. Now, now sit down."

"Fool! Fool! You prove yourself capable of the very stupidity I indicated this afternoon."

"Please, please, sit down. We are alone here. We are talking only to ourselves."

"Look, man," the voice urgent, low, the chair scraping again, "whoever you are, whatever your group, we are out of it, all of us, we know *nothing*."

"Agreed, agreed. Forget it—for God's sake."

"After it is over, we are shocked, we are ignorant of it, we are overcome. We deplore it. We call them criminals, the men who did it—whatever it is they will do—we cannot know, indeed we do not know. We are innocent—"

"Easy, easy."

"This is our part simply and completely," the other man said, as if he had practiced the words many times before. "A man sends a prearranged message to someone in the secret guard. The chief of the guard calls the men together for a special Mass of the Holy Spirit. The men leave their posts—to honor God in Holy Mass. What happens then—we are clear, *clear* of it. What you do, your people—"

"Yes, yes, yes," said Felder. "Please don't go on. I take it back, what I said. We are the sole organizers—and you have no knowledge. Be calm. Really."

"I do not wish to hear any more, Mr. Felder, not a word."

"Please, let's not quarrel. Surely we can trust one another in what is truly a simple business."

The other man said nothing.

Felder chuckled once more. "It seems you are a little sensitive after all."

"We are human."

"That is your weakness," said Felder. "That part of you will one day bring you over to us."

"There is as much chance of that as of our going along with the idiot."

"You do not know the plan."

"We know you. Besides, nothing would ever let us leave the Rock."

"What makes you think we will leave her?"

"You left her long ago, Mr. Felder. No one in his right mind would call you a Catholic, or even a Christian."

"I am breaking my rule in saying even this much," said Felder in a passionate whisper. "But I cannot bear to lose this philosophic point to you—you who do not understand that you are already working on our side, that you are a blind follower even in this early phase of things. Let me speak

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plainly. You had a chance until this afternoon to go with him, instead of against him, one chance to rescue all that you had and to make even the very oldest things look new again.

"You had the chance and you turned away from it, the chance that is in him, I mean. He is ours now. We will make him our own—an immortal, a martyr for the ages. We will have him forever—a hero, a saint, beside whom your clock will seem—just a clock. In a little while, perhaps within our lifetimes, you will seem pitiful against him, you and your whole crowd, small and pitiful against a martyr whose blood—"

"Martyrs," the man sighed. "You speak to us of martyrs? We invented martyrs, Mr. Felder. We have a book of a thousand martyrs. Have you not been to the Colosseum and the catacombs and heard the stories in Russia and England and France and Africa and even in your own country? Martyrs. Some of them we ourselves killed one way or another—and what difference did it make? When a martyr comes along, the world will pause for a moment with a sort of sigh, perhaps a momentary admiration, and then—tick—it goes on its way again. It is like going to one of your movies."

Felder said something that could not be understood. The other man said, "I am a realist. I know the world in ways you and yours cannot even imagine. But—I must go now. Keep me informed of any problems."

"What possible problems would there be? We go where he goes and on the night of the twenty-third—"

"I do not wish to listen to it."

"Wait, I'll go to the corner with you."

"Go to the opposite corner—the other way."

The chairs scraped again and now they passed him, Felder in trench coat and a shadow man.

When they walked out into the yellow light, they turned and muttered a farewell.

And he saw then the face of the other man. It was Orsini, the chess player who had come to look like a chessman.

He sat for a moment, then got up on legs of paper. He left a thousand-lire note on the table and began the long walk

back to the Vatican.

He felt strange, as if his body had already been disengaged and he had left it and was dead.

He crossed an ancient bridge with lampposts that were held up by angels.

He looked down at the Tiber and saw his head and shoulders and arms reflected in the water. "So they are going to kill you," he said to the image.

That night he dreamed he was flying above water. He had been flying for many days and he was weary and hungry. He was looking for land, but there was no land. He was flying in search not just of a place to come down but of something else—a message. He had been sent from a ship to find something—what? And then he awoke, in the dead of night, and he thought how the dream had changed, and he knew now that it was just the old story from the Bible.

He tried to concentrate on the story. The darkness of his room was like a curtain dropped over the bed.

Then he remembered the other dream, the real one at the café, and the fear came up to his mouth and he gagged and he went to the bathroom. But there was no use vomiting—there was nothing to vomit.

When he went back to his room, he knelt and raised his arms in the cross fashion and listened, but there was absolutely nothing to be heard except the buzzing monotone of a mosquito and, out in the distance, the drunken snore of the world.

Chapter eight

In the first week of November the world began to tense again, like an old fighter coming up for the bell in the last round of a long fight.

L-Day was only three weeks away now, and the television and radio began to increase the coverage of what people said and thought and what they were doing to be ready for it.

"L-MONTH—LAST MONTH!" said a headline in *Second*

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Wind. Every paper in the world carried features and picture stories of what was going on.

The President of the United States declared the day following L-Day to be a one-time national holiday.

Earl Cardinal Goldenblade, addressing a nationwide TV audience on the November 2 This Is Your Death program, called the President an unbelieving fool and sinner because he did not realize there would be no day after L-Day. In the studio audience that night, a group of Second Comers called for the immediate impeachment of the President, and Cardinal Goldenblade asked that the President set a personal example for the people of the country by starring on the This Is Your Death program.

Stocks on all the exchanges of the world went up and down crazily, but the money newspapers of the JERCUS nations expressed confidence in the future stability of the market, if there was a future for the market to exist in.

The United Nations entertained a motion by the ambassador from Etherea to make L-Day a truce day throughout the world. The Etherean minister said that the president or some other high-ranking official of any nation breaking the truce should be publicly hanged on live international TV as an example to the world.

Only this part of his motion carried in the U.N. The debate about the truce itself and how it should be arranged became very involved, each nation adding its own particular list of amendments, until there were sixty-five amendments to the motion, and the debate continued around the clock, twenty-four hours a day.

The Green Canary Expeditionary Force fighting in Peru had moved to within five miles of Lima.

The archbishop of Lima called upon the leader of the revolutionary army, General Clio Russell, to enter a truce agreement with the government forces for a twenty-four-hour period beginning at midnight on November 23.

General Russell sent back a telegram which recommended that the archbishop of Lima perform a difficult physiological

function upon his own person.

The archbishop did not understand and he asked his secretary to explain and the secretary explained and the archbishop said, "But that is out of the question, I am seventy-eight years old."

"Even if you were twenty-eight years old, it would be impossible, Your Excellency," his secretary said.

"Why does he write such a thing?"

"He is angry."

"What have I done to him?"

"What he recommends that you do to yourself," said the secretary.

"He is mad. An insane atheistic monist or Marxist, or both."

"Without a doubt."

"Is there a chance he could be killed or captured before L-Day?"

"He is a most elusive fighter."

"We must pray for victory. Order special masses said at every church in Peru next Sunday."

"Yes Excellency."

The archbishop read Clio's telegram again. He had led a sheltered life and did not undersand why men spoke such things. He was very old and did not know the world well, and the little he knew, he hated.

He called his canonist and asked him to find out where Clio Russell came from and whether he was a Catholic and if he was a Catholic what he, as an archbishop of the church, could do to interdict his person and his family and his followers and the place where he was and all the places he had been and all the places he might go.

"We will blast him with supernatural weapons," said the archbishop, "the supernuclear bomb of God's grace. That will finish him."

"Something better," said the canonist. "He has just taken your villa on the mountain."

"He will defile the relic!" cried the archbishop and burst into tears.

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"He wouldn't know a relic from his—rifle," the canonist assured him.

The archbishop went on a three-day retreat and prayed for the undoing of Clio Russell. The relic was a splinter of the true cross given him by a holy pope when he was a young priest, and he had carried it with him for many years and it had preserved him often from the world and he prized it above all that he owned, including his old and cursed body.

He was alone in the room that had been the library of his predecessor and the walls were made of books. It was afternoon of some day or other and he had come from the great hall where the audiences were held and the people had been calling him *papa* and he did not like being papa and he did not know why they had to have a papa forever and forever, and wasn't it enough to have the one papa who art in heaven and what if the papa was a mama after all and papa or mama, what did it matter?

He could not think, and the truth was he had never been able to think—that was the one thing he knew in the room that was made of books.

You cannot think, he said to himself and then to the Other: *You have made one who cannot think.*

The walls were composed of four thousand books that were like the bricks or building stones of a dungeon, and yet there must be men who could take the dungeon apart, he thought, brick by brick, and would not that be freedom?

He picked out one of the books. It was heavy in his hand. It was a book that had been written by an American theologian of the last century. His eye fell upon a paragraph and his finger moved on the sentences:

We have rendered into absolute our own dualistic postulate. We have rejected any eschatology in which the dualism is transcended. We have trapped ourselves within an eschatology in which the objective environment remains forever unchanged and impenetrable. However mighty we may reckon God's grace,

we cannot attribute to it the requisite power to resolve the dualism we have posed. Such a resolution would require the recognition of some kind of cosmic event, an image of a coming cosmic denouement. But by definition such an event would violate the true historicity of man. It would give faith an objectivist crutch rather than instill in it an existentialist power. We are therefore, in the name of faith (and of our dualistic presuppositions), restricted to a form of eschatology in which all cosmological terms are completely transposed into anthropological categories. This transposition, when complete, gives us as the object of Christian hope only the permanent futurity of God.

He read it again and a third time and he did not understand it and he thought it might just as well be in another language. Then he thought, It is already in another language. He wondered what it was like to know that language and use it, what it was like to understand things in an orderly way and not to have to depend on dreams and silence and things that had no explanation.

Through the window he could see the people pouring out into the piazza, and he knew they would go home now and tell their children and their neighbors and their friends that they had talked to papa and they would not be able to say why it meant whatever it meant to them.

He pitied them in the cold light because they looked very small from this place of books and because they seemed to need to come and see him and call him papa and because they hungered for more than all the things that were kept in this place, and whatever it was they got from seeing him and calling him papa, that too would go very soon, and they would hunger again, perhaps worse than before.

His mind spun around for a while and he started to fall asleep. He had not eaten in many days now and the hunger had gone into a new phase and he was weak and light-headed. He was like one of those little candy men that his father had given him one Christmas, that looked like solid

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chocolate but were hollow inside so that you had to be careful how you picked them up or they broke between your fingers.

He put the book by the American theologian back in the niche of the dungeon wall and then he saw a clock sitting among the books, under a glass dome. A card in English said that this clock, made by the Pemberly Clock Firm of Rochester, New York and presented by Mr. Roger Pemberly to His Holiness Pope Felix VII, would run for 1,000 years without error and was as perfect a clock as man had ever made.

He leaned close to the face of the clock to hear the ticking but instead of ticking, there was only a tiny hum. He listened a long time to the humming and put the glass dome back over the clock, and he considered how some things endured and how things would go on after it was over—and those people out there in the piazza—how they would come back to call another man papa, and then he felt faint.

He sat down and closed his eyes and fell into a dreamless sleep that was almost a coma, and Joto had a hard time waking him an hour later.

"Urgent, most urgent, Brother Will. That Mr. Golden from America on videophone. Says most important."

So he went sleepily to the next room where the videophone showed Goldenblade on the lawn of his Houston house with the golden statue of the Lady of Fatima behind him.

"Holiness Father Brother, can you see me all right? George Doveland Goldenblade, of course, Goldenblade Communications?"

"Yes, Mr. Goldenblade?"

"Turn your contrast a little will you, Father Brother, Excellency? You're coming in yellow."

Willie adjusted the knob on the side of the phone.

"Now you're greenish—my god, er, goodness—like a freakish monster out of the depths, ha ha ha, of the sea, ha."

Willie turned the knob once more.

"Why, Brother Holiness, you look like a godd—you don't look right. Hold up your hand."

Willie held up his hand.

"The color is off, but it appears to be you."

"It's me," said Willie.

Goldenblade brought Willie's face to close-up.

"There's been a lot of impersonating here in the States on the videophone—Communist and pervert monists and such, dressed up and pretending to be citizens. Or else they're clones. It is a threat to every American home I can tell you. But I see you really are Your Holiness even if your color is so putrid. What is it you have been eating, that crummy wop slop?"

"It is me," said Willie, almost blinded by the glare of the sun on the shrine behind Goldenblade.

"That's what sent Uncle Eminence Earl out of his switch—eating that Roman matter over there, which is outright slop, and not taking our new product, Goldenblade Hydrofood, which would have built up his blood, such as I told him time after time, till his godd—stupid head exploded, which it did."

"Sir?"

"The edibles did it!" Goldenblade roared, switching to close-up, so that only his eyes and nose were visible. "Right after that fu—that conclave when he was over there slopping it up, that's when his blood went. The tongues came on. Tongues of the Holy Spirit! Holy Chr—Holy Spirit! Don't you think I believe in the Holy Spirit, Holiness? Spirit!" Goldenblade was shouting at the top of his voice.

"It's me," said Willie.

"Walking around like an insane pervert, my own brother, my own Eminence Earl, who used to be a levelheaded businessman and still would be if his blood hadn't run to chicken soup. Chicken soup, Father Brother Holy! Chick chick chick! I could cry! Jeeeee—" Goldenblade, halfway through the name of the Savior, saw Willie's face on the screen, "pers! Forgive me, Your Brother, I haven't been myself since that man lost his computer."

"I'm sorry, Mr. Goldenblade," said Willie.

"You're forgiven, Pope," said Goldenblade. Then leaning closer to the phone-camera: "You are quite alone, Brother

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Holiness?"

"Yes."

"I have important news to give you."

"Yes."

"Bob Regent has been in contact with me."

Willie felt his body jerk in the chair.

"Bob Regent," said Goldenblade, "your former owner."

"What did he want? What did he—"

"Well, Bob and I chatted quite awhile about this L-Day Plan of yours. We both had given a lot of thought to this particular operation. To tell you the truth, Brother Father, I was opposed to it at the beginning. In fact right up to the time Bob called, I thought it was one of the most asinine capers that ever came down the pike, no disrespect to your nationality intended."

"Will Mr. Reg—"

"Please, please, Holiness, let me finish what I was saying. This plan has been creating havoc throughout our industry and has caused many numbskull workers and shiftless nig—personnel—dolts for the most part—to strike us and demand unreasonable pension settlements and the like. It has set off panic everywhere else too. Well, *you* must see the news over there. I don't have to tell you what this thing has done to people. Because of all these screwed-up happenings, I have been opposed to the plan all along, and frankly, I tried to do something about it, about stopping it, I mean, and then this call from Bob came in."

"Will Mr. Regent—"

"If," Goldenblade cried, *"if* you'll bear with me, Father Holy, I'll *try* to tell you about it. Bob called night before last, using the old audio, because as you know he has an abhorence of getting himself seen. This was about four A.M. and Bob did not want to say what country he was in—if he was in a country—because of his feeling about being in any one country at any one time, if you follow. He identified himself in that twenty-word drill he has been using the last few years so that there was no question it was Bob who was calling, from somewhere.

"Bob told me how the plan struck him. To my surprise he told me he thought it was wonderful, though as a human being he did regret so many people were taking it the wrong way, blowing their chicken-hearted brains out, and so on. He called it a splendid gesture and said he truly believed it would make the world a finer place to do business in."

"Did he—"

"Your Brother Holy," said Goldenblade, "I don't want to be impertinent or disrespectful, but I can't tell my story when you are constantly talking, not giving me a chance. Granted you are the pope, granted you are used to monopolizing the conversation, granted you are infallible, still with all that, don't you agree just as fellow Christian to fellow Christian, we all have to be silent once in a while and let the other man speak?"

"Yes, Mr. Goldenblade."

"Good," said Goldenblade. He lighted a cigar. "Well, Bob Regent is just delighted, just thrilled spiritually by this whole promotional thing of L-Day and especially by some message which you sent to him—about some meeting with him? Through some Grayson?"

Willie nodded to the camera.

"He has asked me to acknowledge that message for him and also to invite you to meet him and join him for the hunting party which he holds each fall up near Springfield, Illinois. He wants you to join him there, if that is possible—I mean join him and a few of his friends for the plove hunting. Now, Father Holy, I can tell you, this is a sport you will truly enjoy. These aren't your mechanical birds, you understand, but live birds, very fast, which Bob himself breeds for the hunt. The hunt lasts four, five days and is always held the last week of November. Bob thinks this would be a perfect manly American place and setting for you and him to get together, and I agree."

"Yes, Mr. Golden—"

"You accept then?"

"Yes."

"Splendid. Now Bob will be at his lodge during that time,

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you understand. He has a regular mansion right near this little town on the river, Babylon Bend it's called, a village of 200 or 300 yokels. You'll meet him there?"

"I will not be there for the hunt because I will be busy just before and just after," said Willie carefully. "But I will come up to the lodge at the earliest hour of November 24."

"Delightful! Brother Holiness, you are a man with true business intelligence. I can't tell you how happy this makes me. And I know Bob will be happy too."

"I—I'll see you then on the twenty-third, that night."

"We'll provide the press coverage if—"

"No," said Willie. "No press. I want to keep this personal, just between me and Mr. Regent. The press will find us anyway, but I don't want a public announcement of where I will be."

"That is absolutely insane public relations, Brother Holy, if you'll forgive the personal opinion. No one but a jackass would throw away such an opportunity, not that you personally are a jackass, if you understand. But—you're the boss, ha ha ha ha. Now I've got to get back to business."

"Yes, Mr. Goldenblade."

Goldenblade motioned to the shrine behind him and turned a knob on the phone-camera so that the golden Lady of Fatima came up huge on the screen.

"That's my mom," said Goldenblade. "When everything tears apart in business, when a pacification goes bust, when Earl makes a fool of himself, I come out here and talk to mom, and then—then I feel better. Maybe you would like to say something to mom."

Willie could think of nothing.

"Tell her you love her," said Goldenblade. "It's my mom."

"I—had a mother once."

"So?"

"I loved her."

"But my mom is the real mom, even *you* know that."

The statue got bigger and bigger as the camera slowly zoomed in, the eyes peering straight ahead, and the eyes getting larger.

"Sweet mama," said Goldenblade. "Sweet mama says get your color straight and lay off the wop slop or you'll rot your guts. Right mama?"

The camera got closer and closer, until finally there was only one eye, looking like a crater of the moon, staring at Willie, and then the screen went black.

* * *

The tension of the world grew and the world was coming up to a still later round and the late chill winds of November blew the leaves along the streets of Berlin and London and Paris and New York. The first snows had fallen, and Willie grew weaker, and the time was coming, and so he called them together again—the spokesmen and the officials of the Vatican—and he called them to the same great marble room where they had met before, but this time they appeared to be of firm pink flesh and he had become the gray man.

Even they noticed it, seeing the blotch of white that had appeared on the side of the red head, as if some chemical had been thrown upon that shock of hair while he slept.

They saw how thin he was and how his cheekbones stuck out and how the slanted eyes had receded farther into his head, and they heard how his voice had thinned.

"What is wrong with him?" Cardinal Liderant whispered.

"He's ill, obviously," said Profacci, eyeing Willie closely. "The cooks say he cannot hold food. And he will not see a doctor."

"Why, he is a changed man," said Liderant.

Orsini said in a slow, curious way, "Perhaps men have gone to a great deal of trouble for nothing."

"What men?" said Liderant.

"Never mind," said Orsini.

Willie stood a little apart from them. He seemed very weak and the colors of his skin had paled and he was like a poor watercolor painting of himself.

Liderant, surprising the other officials, moved toward him as if to help.

Willie saw this gesture and smiled but waved the help

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aside. Then he spoke to them.

"My brothers. In a short time now I shall leave Rome to go to the United States to celebrate the day of love. I must go there to ask the forgiveness of a man I once wronged. But last night I could not sleep because I thought of all you who will remain here in the city, though many of you, I am sure, will also make a journey to meet persons whom in your past lives you wronged.

"It came to me during the night that I have wronged many of you by the things that I have done. And I cannot leave you now," he looked at their faces—Liderant, Nervi, Profacci, "without saying that I think of you as my brothers and that if I have hurt you, I ask your forgiveness, even as I forgive anything you have done to harm me."

They stirred uneasily before him.

"You are my brothers. Is it so important," he whispered, unable to turn away from the eyes of Orsini, "is it so important that we agree on everything, each and every policy, each and every doctrine? What are ideas that they should separate brothers and stand in the way of life joining life?

"I was wrong, I know it now, not to have told you before, shown you before, that I truly do love you, my brothers, that I need you and that I will keep on loving you to the end."

His eyes fell on Liderant now, and Liderant in an instant became the young man he had once been and felt the sensation that he said later was like a knife wound, everything he had always thought important suddenly becoming useless and all that he held precious breaking and dissolving into slag.

He sighed deeply, as if something trapped in him had succeeded after a long struggle in getting out.

It was at once very fast and very slow, he said later in that strange interview that would appear with the rest of the story in tomorrow's paper. He did not know, he could not say what had happened, though he spoke of Willie's face, something he saw there, and of the words that Willie had spoken, reminding him of something he had once known and valued

and then thrown away, and the coming of this knowledge, of the older knowledge he once had, overpowered him, he said, and that was all he knew.

No one perceived any of this. They saw and heard only the cardinal falling, pitching forward in a faint.

There was a cry, a rush of scarlet; then they were bending over the prone, still body of the champion canon lawyer of the world, fearing that a stroke had killed him.

When his lips moved slightly, they fell back a little, one calling for cognac, others for red wine, water, holy oil.

Then Willie put his hand on Liderant's forehead, and the old man opened his eyes and asked a question about birth that made no sense to them, but Willie's heart welled up with joy for the first time in many days.

"He will be okay," Willie assured the officials who had called a doctor.

The Vatican doctor could find nothing wrong with the cardinal.

"Nothing wrong except all that went before," said Liderant to the doctor, and he got to his feet.

Among themselves, the officials said that Liderant had broken under the strain of the L-Day affair and had become disarranged, but Willie rejoiced because he had seen a man reborn.

The sad creases left the places around the slanted eyes, and the old smile came back once more. He did not know that when the cardinal had fallen, his head had struck hard upon the pedestal of the statue of Saint Margaret Mary Alacoque, who had received many promises from the Sacred Heart of Jesus in the year 1675, and that in the head of the newborn man, as a result of the fall, a group of blood cells declared war on the being of the cardinal so that his new life would last not even a day but only long enough to fix that final scandal that Willie would leave as his Roman legacy.

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Chapter nine

Late that night in a gallery where the masterpieces of art were only shadows, they talked, Willie and the new convert.

Over in the papal apartment, the Servants were packing their few belongings.

Felder's plane was ready at the airfield; they would be leaving at six in the morning.

Liderant had spent the afternoon in the crypt of Saint Peter's, where the popes of many centuries were buried. There he had read Willie's copy of the Guidebook.

When he had come up from the tombs, one of Orsini's detectives had written in his notepad: *Subject's face streaked with tears. Hands trembling. Disarranged.* Now in the gallery his hands still trembled and his whole body trembled because he had too suddenly left one world and too suddenly come into another, and the rebel cells in his body were beginning their war in earnest.

"What does a man do when he knows his whole life has been for the wrong reason?"

"Not think about it," said Willie. "When we let the past tell us what to do, we play death's game. We must go from here, from now."

"I do not know if I can do it," said the old man, shaking his white head.

"Brother Henri, think how far you have come this day alone. You are the youngest man in Rome at this hour. You have dropped all that heavy luggage you used to drag around and now you're ready for anything."

"But what can I do? They will think I am crazy if I now fight the law—the law!" he cried. "I've given my whole life to the forces of death."

"You are too hard, much too hard on yourself, dear brother. There are good laws, life-promoting laws, and surely you stood for many of those."

"I did not care for life," the cardinal said sorrowfully. "Never."

"Once you did, I know. Then maybe you forgot a little, but so have we all. You care now. That is the important thing. Think of what you can do in your work here to make new laws that serve life and love."

"Oh no, I must leave all that behind. I want to serve the poor!"

"You can serve the poor wonderfully well by making better laws."

They walked now in the great reception hall where Willie held his public audiences.

"You loved once," Willie said. "Then other things came along and made you forget. But God finally broke through those things; so now you love again and now—now you can make good laws. And you know, Brother Henri, what happened to you today—I expect that very same thing to happen to many people throughout the world on L-Day in spite of everything. Do you believe to this degree?"

"I did not until this morning. Now I believe anything can happen."

"God loves you very much, Brother Henri. Think of what he did today. Shall we praise him?"

The cardinal and Willie, walking along, prayed Psalm 146 and while they prayed, the mad blood cells in the cardinal's head began to mount their great attack.

When they had finished the psalm, Willie said, "Now let us listen for a while." And so they listened and walked on through the dark marble rooms trying to hear what God might say.

Willie was very tired but he did not know it, so great was his joy at the conversion of Cardinal Liderant, and his hunger had reached what the great fasters once called the white point, so that when he looked at things he saw them stand out very clearly as if they had been backlighted, and his fingers, when they touched surfaces, felt the little ridges and hills and valleys that made up the outsides of things, and though his body was running in low gear, the senses were in high, and things outside him seemed luminous and living and more than the matter they held.

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They entered a strange, dark room, Liderant still trembling and trying to listen, and there were stones dimly lit along a wall, and suddenly statues, many statues, loomed up before them, at first startling them until Willie remembered that these statues had been loaned to the Vatican by the Primate of Russia a few weeks earlier as a personal favor to the pope, though Willie had not taken time to inspect them, and until this very moment hadn't seen them at all.

The icons were of gold, silver, bronze and other metals. They pictured Eastern saints and patriarchs, and some were figures of Christ and the Virgin Mary with gems for eyes, and there was one huge icon of Saint John Chrysostom, who seemed to gaze at Willie as if he had asked an important question and expected Willie to answer. There were lamps hanging before the icons casting a flickering orange glow over their faces, heightening the sense Willie had of their substantiality and making them seem alive.

Just beyond the arrangements of icons were two thick bronze stanzes, or screens, standing upright like huge museum doors. The screens were most ornate and intricate and they told stories of Christ and of men before Christ—Moses, Isaiah, Jeremiah.

The screens had once served as shields in a great church in Moscow, but Willie did not see them as shields, only as wonderful stories told in metal, and the black and gold and yellow faces of the icons spoke to him in a way that statues never had, and he heard for the first and only time in his life those voices that certain well-made things possess and that speak the language men call art.

A black-robed, bearded Eastern priest appeared out of the shadows behind the great storied screens and bowed and then knelt to kiss Willie's ring.

"Stand, please, brother," said Willie. "We were only looking at these—these statues."

"Holy *icons.* Return to Holy Russia tomorrow. It is good His Holiness wishes to see them before they go back."

Willie's eyes feasted on the beauty of the icons. His mind raced and played on into the future. He saw the past clearly

and much of the present, and he saw calmly and clearly the pieces of a new mosaic and then it was as if he had left himself and become a part of this same story that flickered and moved and told itself before him.

The lamps, casting a constantly changing mist of light over the whole ensemble, contributed to this strange effect. As he looked at them, the figures dissolved and became other figures so that at one moment, where there were great teachers and scholars of the church of the East, there in the next moment were Liderant and Herman Felder and even the indistinct figure of Robert Regent. And a portion of the screen where Jesus fed the multitudes with two fish and five bread loaves became the white plains he had seen in his dream, and he came forward a little to see that dark, thin shape advancing out of the center of the screen, and perhaps in one more second he might have seen the figure clearly, but that one more second was denied.

A sudden strangled cry came from Liderant, that cry Willie would now forever hear, a sharp, fierce cry that had no humanity in it but was rather the sound of an animal being tortured to death.

Instinctively, Willie's arms flew out, but too late to stop what was going to happen, and he could only think with that abstracted clarity induced by the hunger, *How fast he moves.*

The Russian priest shouted something, but the shout was not going to stop anything either.

Liderant was already clawing at the screen, and the cry came again, conveying no thought or idea that could be understood but only the fury and the madness of the act itself.

He was halfway up one of the bronze screens, his feet moving from miracle to miracle, and Willie heard him use a French word that Father Benjamin told him the next day meant "spite fence," and then finally he and the Russian moved forward.

But the screen had already tilted under Liderant's weight and now as his foot flailed against the shoulder of Gregory of Nyssa, the screen began to come back, falling fast.

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If they had advanced one foot farther, they too would have been crushed under 3,676 pounds of Christian history.

Dazed, rooted to the place where he stood, the Russian priest set to screaming.

Willie, fruitlessly trying to lift the screen, could see the bulging eyes, rimmed with blood, of his new convert.

He searched through the twisted metal of the Transfiguration of Jesus on Mount Tabor and put his hand on Liderant's broken skull.

"Death," he moaned. "I bring death, my God, to them all!"

It took ten men with pulleys and a hoist to lift the bronze stanze up again, and two Swiss guards came with a cot and took away what was left of Henri Liderant.

The Russian priest could be heard crying hysterically through the dim corridors.

Policemen came and went.

Cardinal Profacci came and stood staring at Willie without saying a word. He went away and returned shortly with Nervi and Orsini.

Father Benjamin offered Willie a sleeping tablet, but Willie did not hear him.

The coroner did not know what questions to ask.

One of the Swiss guards, the first to have reached the scene, tried to explain how the accident happened, but the coroner only shook his head.

Truman, Joto and Herman Felder led Willie into a side room off the gallery where the icons flickered and they said various things to him which he did not hear.

Then the brothers began to pray silently, but Willie was unaware of their praying or anything else that was going on.

A brown and white cat came meowing into their midst.

Willie looked at the animal as if it were a strange and marvelous beast.

He picked the cat up.

The brothers watched him sadly.

Holding the cat, Willie wandered back into the gallery

where now many men were milling about—police, reporters, churchmen. The brothers, too, came back into the gallery.

Willie did not hear any of the things that were said to him, but after a while, quite suddenly, he came to recognize Cardinal Orsini. He walked up to him and said, "You are right to do what you plan."

"What are you talking about?"

"Men need clocks. Without clocks they cannot measure things. If there is nothing to limit things, men cannot stand it—so they destroy themselves."

Monsignor Taroni, coming up to Willie with grieving eyes, said, "You are disturbed, Your Holiness, you should rest."

Willie was still peering into Orsini's eyes.

"Your plan is for the best."

"I do not have a plan," Orsini protested.

Profacci said, "The situation is plain enough. The man is mad."

Willie went to the Russian priest, who stepped back hurriedly as he approached with the cat in his arms.

"The Annunciation, the Raising of Lazarus and the Transfiguration are ruined," said the priest.

Willie drew nearer.

"Keep him away," said the priest to one of the guards.

The cat meowed at the priest.

"The cat also keep away!" cried the Russian priest.

The cat jumped out of Willie's arms and bounded up the stanze.

The gallery fell into a hush as the cat crawled through Moses and the Prophets and the reign of David and up through the Old Testament entirely, fixing its claws on the slaying of the Holy Innocents and stopping to consider how far it wished to travel into the Gospels. The Russian priest began to scream again.

A spirit-minded guard, interpreting the cat's movements as an evil sign, fell on his knees and asked forgiveness for his many sins of the flesh.

A policeman called to the cat to jump down but the cat seemed content to remain with the dying Innocents.

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Willie whistled sharply then. The cat turned, hesitated, then leaped down and skittered out of the gallery.

Everyone turned to Willie, who stood quite still, holding his arms as if he were still cradling the cat.

"Cats—men," he said in a faraway voice, "need things to hang on. Otherwise, wouldn't everything fall away?"

The Italian word for insane rippled through the gallery.

The Russian priest saw that in the fall of the stanze, Saint Basil the Great had sustained a twisted neck and that his head was badly dented.

"The head is ruined," he said to Profacci. "You must repair."

Profacci, looking at Willie, said, "It would take all the psychiatrists in the world."

"That head is a thousand years old!" the Russian moaned, and he began to scream again.

Profacci concluded that the Russian also was insane and instructed the Vatican physician to give the man a pill that would prevent his becoming violent.

Willie walked up to the stanze and touched it and rubbed the figures of bronze and gold with his fingers, and they were watching him very closely, in silence.

He felt himself coming back to plain things a little; the rubbing made things less luminous and intense, and things became only themselves and he saw now clearly what had happened and he made himself understand what had happened and he began to see the world in the old painful way.

For an instant the stanze tipped once more in his head and he could see the cardinal coming back but he said *Be with me now*, just as the screen came down again and then he felt the calm and pain come into him simultaneously.

He made the surrender and the turnover and the total gift and he felt the strength of the Other, and then he turned slowly to the men who stood before him, watching.

"He was a very good man," he said quietly. "Very late in life he saw how things were, but what he saw was too strong for him because he was old. So he died."

The men were standing there and Willie saw them all and

he saw his brothers, Benjamin and Felder and Thatcher Grayson and Joto and Truman, and he saw them very clearly and it was very nearly the last time he would see them so plainly.

Addressing his brothers, he said, "He made a fast passage. The fortress of evil looked like something he could break, but instead he was broken."

Benjamin nodded.

Then Willie, looking at Orsini, said, "Now it is the advent time for L-Day. I travel to the United States in a few hours. You too will travel," Orsini's eyes did not move, "so that what will happen may happen."

Monsignor Taroni went to him and said, "You are so very worn and tired. Please rest."

"You are a good man who loves God," said Willie.

The Russian priest, having taken his peace pill, began to keen softly, "Is there no one here to fix the head?"

* * *

Willie went to his room and fell into the old flight dream, going very far out until the earth had dropped from view entirely and there were no points of direction and he was in pure space with only vaporous shapes floating obscurely in the distance which he supposed might be planets or on the other hand might be shadows of huge beings somewhere behind him in the world that he had left.

He was hurrying—he could not explain why. He seemed to be on an errand but an errand whose purpose had been forgotten.

His nondream self told him of a ship he had left behind and of how he was to find a sprig of green to bring back to the others so they could take hope and know the good earth was near.

But that was only the old story from the Bible, he told himself, and it did not apply.

He heard a voice then, very near, a voice he had not heard in months. Once the voice had been friendly, but it was not friendly now.

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"Fool dreamer, you run with murderers. You call yourself a hero, yet you do nothing but sentimental gestures."

"Clio!" he called.

But what was the point of expecting him to answer in a dream?

And do you remember when she looked at you, her eyes went to that soft brown and her mouth opened a little and she was firm and definite and more real than anything that—why did you go from me?

But how could she answer from death's other kingdom?

He felt pain spreading across his forehead as if someone had tightened a rope around his head. He was sweating.

"Water," he said.

"Here," said a voice.

Here was Herman Felder holding a cup and leaning over the seat of the plane, and Willie saw that they were airborne and it had begun.

Ahead was Benjamin dozing just behind the cabin where Truman and Joto piloted the plane, and now coming up from behind was Mr. Grayson. Willie stirred restlessly, and Grayson and Felder moved as if to restrain him.

"It's eight o'clock, son," said Grayson calmly. "That's eight o'clock in the morning. There was a commotion at the airport. People wanted to see you off."

"You should have awakened me," said Willie, feeling dizzy and tired.

"We couldn't bring you around," said Grayson. "It's just as well anyway. They were excited and started to tear at the plane."

Willie drank the coffee Felder had given him.

"Son, you got to eat more than coffee," said Grayson. "You have to have your strength."

Felder, wearing his old raincoat and looking like the man of film once more, nodded in agreement.

"What happened—finally?" said Willie.

Felder handed Willie the early edition of the *American Tribune*. The paper carried both the obituary of Henri Liderant and the interview he had granted the reporter the

previous afternoon when he had come up from his long meditation in the place where the popes were buried. Willie's eyes fell to the middle of the interview:

What was it like, the conversion experience you speak of?

Words cannot describe it. In the Scripture there are the stories of blind men seeing for the first time. I used to try to imagine what that sensation must have been like. I think I know now.

You compare this to a miracle from the Gospel?

It is a similar experience I believe.

Could you be specific?

It was as if all my life I had been walking upside down, walking on my hands—then suddenly something took hold of me and turned me over and I started to walk as men are supposed to walk. (Laughs.) That was when I got dizzy and fell. The fall hurt! Yet I knew I was all right. I felt a sense of tenderness and warmth.

A doctor said you had a fever and your blood pressure was up.

Perhaps my body fought against the new way I had chosen.

Now that you're reborn, as you said before, what do you expect to do?

It is more correct perhaps to ask what a man expects to be. I expect to be a lover of God and all his creatures.

Would you continue in your legal profession? After all you are considered the greatest lawyer of the church.

(Laughs.) In the days that remain, I hope I can do better than that. I would like to serve the poor.

Willie could read no more of it.

"He is with the Lord now," said Thatcher Grayson.

"He would still be alive if it were not for me," said Willie.

"You don't know that," said Felder, and Willie smelled the scent of roses. Felder's face was the face of the old Felder for a moment and then it became the mask of a handsome film gangster, a map of journeys yet to come.

Father Benjamin came back to Willie's seat and urged him to eat.

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"Truly, I am not hungry. The coffee is enough."

Felder was refilling Willie's cup.

"Surely it's not enough. How can you expect to see things with clear eyes unless you eat?" Father Benjamin said.

They were all watching him as he took another sip of the coffee, spilling a little of it. When he looked at their watching, he laughed a little, and Father Benjamin laughed in return.

They all began to laugh then; something about their watching him drink coffee struck them as funny.

Once they started, they could not stop.

The more Willie laughed, the more coffee he spilled, which in turn caused them to laugh all the more. They became as children giggling over some trifle in a classroom, who then begin to giggle at the phenomenon of their giggling, which only builds the laughter until they are helpless.

Soon they were in a fit, a paroxysm, of laughter.

Thatcher Grayson, whose frame was old and thin and long, jerked up and down, back and forth, and he laughed harder than he had ever laughed in his life.

Father Benjamin, laughing in his wheezy old voice, grasped his beard and hung on, acting as if he would come apart if this went any further, which it seemed likely to do.

Benjamin's manner had the effect of doubling up Herman Felder, whose laughing was of the convulsive type. He held a hand over his stomach as if the laughter hurt him badly inside.

But it was Willie who laughed the hardest and most helplessly. He stood up and the coffee went flying over the cabin, spraying all of them, which threw them into another stage of their fit.

They tumbled into the aisle like drunks, the four of them shrieking, and they were so gripped with the laughing madness that they were truly hysterical or ecstatic, or both. They had left their senses completely and come together at some nonsense point of understanding that united them as they would never be united again.

Hearing the uproar, Joto entered the cabin, and the sight of

him sent them into the last and most intense phase of the absurd chaos.

At first perplexed, Joto slowly joined the game, adding his throaty guffaws to the general chorus, and when they saw him step by step being caught up in the helplessness of it, they reached a climax that seemed to actually rock the plane.

So they roared on until they wept, and the plane swept forward to the dark comedy that was building before them, where the waves beat up against the old land of dreams and lies and farther on, in the white fields of Illinois, the man-made birds ate the man-made grain and stretched fast wings that their blood might be bright on the shroud of earth and cheer the heart of the hunter.

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BOOK SIX

ZACK TAYLOR: *As for your new film, Mr. Felder, COWBOYS AND INDIANS— can you tell us what you're striving for this time?*

HERMAN FELDER: *Ah wanna ride to the ridge where the West commences— 'N gaze at the moon till ah lose mah senses.**

ZT-HF Video interview
Undated
Hollywood, California

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Chapter one

To America then they came. The towers of New York rose up to meet their plane. The red eyes of television cameras blinked wide in amazement. There was a rushing of feet, a riot of shouts and finally, like the cry of a starved lover, that million-throated moan that was the tribute of memory to a dream that was dead.

Once there had been real heroes, garlanded and ribboned, and men could remember exuberant parades and marching bands and silver trumpets flashing in the sun and confetti swirling down from skyscrapers, making a blizzard in July.

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That had been long ago when people believed in celebration and when, even in unhappy times, there was a bustle in the air and one could hear an elusive song whispering along the avenues—*tomorrow, tomorrow.*

Now tomorrow had come and now hopes were only ragged newspapers scuttling along dark alleyways and each new sunrise prompted a sort of jeer and no one held his breath in contemplation or enchantment or wonder.

Everywhere now a secret burned in the brain of the nation and this was the secret: *We are the last. With us the line stops.*

The secret had been in the people a long time and they did not talk about it, but still it was there. Sometimes they did not think about it, but still it was there—like the knowledge that the employees have when a firm is going bankrupt, like the knowledge that a man has when he is suffering a cancer that cannot be stopped and he goes through a pretend life for the benefit of the onlooker of his soul, if he has a soul and if he cares to play to it.

And with the secret came the special pride that the first have when they have become the last, and with the pride came the cynicism, that definitive apathy that had caused them to endow not just their country but the cosmos itself with a tragic triviality, so that once-splendid, once-sacred, once-loved things—all that they had called their dreams, their hopes, their honor—were now bad jokes that produced a single, unvarying response: *So what?*

And yet. And yet, there was time still for a last golden hour, and of those millions who thronged the old island of Manhattan, some thought, *This will not happen again.* And some wanted to see, just once, what it had been like to be awed or thrilled by the sight of mortal man raised to an extraordinary eminence. And some did not know why they came, except they sensed that a dark red circle was somehow being closed.

So they put on the old masquerade costumes of hope and innocence once more, beast and spirit alike, and they formed a mob set for a death spectacle, something to release the secret they carried in their hearts, and no one knew what

might happen—perhaps a catastrophe unhoped for in their common terrible dreams, something that would deliver them all from the monotony of having to pretend any longer.

When Willie saw them breaking through the police lines that had formed at the edge of the waiting area and when they came rushing ten-thousandfold toward the plane, the old, vicious pity took possession of him.

"They will hit plane!" Joto shouted.

Truman taxied off, pulling away from them, though they kept coming, their mouths opening and closing like fish as they shouted their emotionless cheers.

Over the radio in the cabin came the voice of the tower control supervisor advising them to depart the field and come down in New Jersey.

"No," said Willie. "Let us meet them now."

"They will be hurt," Joto said. "Look—they are crazy!"

Willie went forward into the pilot's cabin.

"Taxi forward a little more, Truman, then swing around. I'll speak to them."

"Don't be a fool," Felder said. "They'll mob you."

But Willie was already on the radio asking the tower for a speaker system.

"We can plug you in from the plane, Your Holiness. You won't have to get off."

"They want to see the pope," Willie said. "They need to see."

"We can't protect you, Your Holiness."

Another voice came over the radio. "Your Holiness, this is the archbishop of New York, Archbishop McCool?"

"Archbishop McCool, how are you? It's—it's good of you to come out to meet us."

"Gol-*lee,* Your Holiness, the President of the United States is here, President Shryker, the mayor of New York and many other officials and diplomats. We're gathered here at concourse B? We're set up ready to welcome you. Are you there, Your Holiness?"

"I'm here—out here with the people," said Willie.

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"If your pilot will taxi your plane over here, you see, we can have the welcome. The President has a speech."

"The people are all around us here, Brother McCool. I am going to speak to them. I don't know if we are near you or not."

"You are at the wrong concourse—the A concourse," said Archbishop McCool. "The President is *here,* at B."

The people were streaming across the runways to the place where Truman had stopped the plane.

"Look at the people. So many coming out to see the pope," Willie said with a sigh. "Perhaps you see them from where you are, Brother McCool."

"If your pilot would turn around. . . ," McCool said, but his voice now was lost in the roar of the mob.

"I have to see them—to let them see me," Willie said into the radio microphone. Then, leaving the pilot's cabin, he went to the door of the plane.

When the door opened and he stood before them, the people sent up a roar that seemed to move the aircraft and the frail figure standing in the sunlight.

Joto found a portable microphone, plugged it into the radio, then, hurrying through the plane, brought the mike close to Willie's mouth.

When the tower heard his voice and spied him standing there, the control supervisor switched the signal to the public address system so that suddenly above the persistent hubbub of the crowd, Willie's words were clear, though his voice was worn and tired, the voice of an old man.

"Perhaps we have simplified, falsely simplified. I do not know. Being only a man, I do not know."

The crowd roared, *No!*

"Nothing else seems to have worked so very well. And yet—what has happened before should not cast us down.

"We have got to try the brand new now—that is why we are here. To try what we started somewhere long ago and then forgot—for other things."

That was all he said—a meaningless group of phrases, thought most of those who listened, not a message at all. But

then that did not matter. That faded red-gold substance that was him—that was the message they wanted to grasp or heroize or smash.

They smashed into the plane now, and Willie shouted to them to be careful of themselves. Arms stretched out to grab him. He shouted again, but then they began to swim before him, and he staggered back into the plane.

Archbishop McCool's voice, urgent now, came crackling over the radio.

"The President is here. Concourse B. President Shryker?"

Benjamin led Willie to his seat.

"You must eat now, you *must,*" said Benjamin.

"In a while," said Willie, but he knew now he was very weak.

The crowd swirled about the plane. Up close they are different, Willie thought abstractedly. He could see an old woman holding up a statue of Saint Francis of Assisi.

A new shrill voice came over the radio.

"Your Holiness, this is President Shryker. Welcome to the United States. I'm sorry there's this mix-up in our meeting. However, we're sending a police escort out to your aircraft. There's a special white limousine for yourself and your companions. This car will take you down through Manhattan and then on to the Regent Complex where we hope to have a more formal welcoming ceremony. There will be Secret Service men in the cars before you and after you, of course. We understand your own service personnel are arriving very shortly. Is that correct?"

"What is he talking about?" said Willie.

Felder took the microphone.

"Mr. President, this is an aide to His Holiness. Yes, the security service and other members of the papal party will be arriving in a large aircraft in the next twenty minutes. We look forward to seeing you in the complex."

Joto, Felder and Benjamin talked animatedly among themselves. *Are they arguing?* Willie wondered. He felt faint again.

Felder, smiling a little, leaned over the seat before him,

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holding a bowl filled with broth.

Willie looked at the broth for a time, trying to decide whether to take it.

You are fainting, he told himself. *You have to be awake or it will all be lost.*

So he took the broth and very slowly sipped it. It was hot and it tasted like beef broth, and he sipped a little more and he did not taste that other substance that was in the broth that was not beef, but when he looked out at the crowd once more he saw them with great clarity as if they were actors in a movie spectacle.

Flashing red lights came up to the plane, and he felt himself walking unsteadily out of the plane on the arms of others. He did not hear the crowd shouting as a crowd but only individual voices and he tried to wave but it seemed a great effort to raise his arm.

He was in the big white car now and sirens were screaming and they were streaking across a field.

Someone handed a thermos to Mr. Grayson, who opened it and held it for Willie so that he could drink.

"Dear Mr. Grayson," said Willie. "We are only in the third and I am going all the way."

Thatcher Grayson's eyes lighted.

"You are pitching wonderful," he said. "As always. Drink this. It will keep you throwing hard."

Keep throwing hard, he thought. *Keep throwing the hard high ones, or no, low.* He sipped the broth again and felt the warmth come into him and also the detached feeling.

"Six innings more and keep throwing hard," he said. "Who's up in the fourth?"

"He does not sound good," said Joto.

"He is tired," said Thatcher Grayson. "So tired."

"Need only enough to finish," said Willie from far away.

"Finish what?" said Joto.

And Willie's eyes, which had started to close, opened and fastened on Felder's.

"Brother Herman," he said. "Who knows if you do not know?"

Benjamin, Joto and Thatcher Grayson looked at Felder, as if to ask a question.

"His fast has taken its effect," Felder said.

On each side of the car, the people lining the streets shouted the quick, unthought expressions, releasing feelings that were in them that they did not know were there. And some who came to mock and taunt the Mad Pope, seeing him, became speechless. Others found themselves shouting things out of their childhood that later they could not remember and would deny having said.

Many wept openly. They saw him for a second, two seconds, the car was moving so fast. He looked like a thin red-gold old man, withered and ill, and seeing him moved them to cry out those unexpected things, and Willie tried to see them but the car was going fast and the broth had caused him to see things differently.

He tried to figure out what had changed but it was too difficult and he thought perhaps he was only passing out from hunger.

He saw Benjamin in the jump seat very clearly and he knew Benjamin was praying the Silent Prayer, and there at Benjamin's side was Truman and the noise made Truman tremble and the noise was building as they went on into the city.

Willie let go of the thermos but Grayson caught it and handed it back to him.

"Do you remember Chicago, Mr. Grayson?" said Willie. "Chicago? I mean when we were there, when Clio doubled off the right center field wall the day they said in the newspapers he couldn't hit?"

"So well," said Grayson.

"In right center it is hard to hit the wall. Do you remember how glad he was?"

"I shall never forget," said Grayson. "And you, dear son—that day you threw pitches such as men have never seen before or since."

"Poor Clio. How can we see Clio again?"

Willie started to let go of the thermos again, and Thatcher

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Grayson took it from him and then took Willie's hands and folded them around the cup.

"What is this soup?" Grayson said.

"Just beef broth with some vitamins I put in it," Felder said without turning around.

"It seems to be helping very little, Herman," said Grayson.

"I have lost my pitch now," said Willie in a sleepy voice. "I have got to finish with ordinary pitches."

"You can do it," Grayson said. "Besides, you haven't lost the pitch. No one can hit anything you throw."

"Never learned the curve," said Willie. "Never learned anything—only what I started with. Now. . . ."

The crowds were thickening along the walks. The big car slowed down. The high city was suddenly before them.

Opening his eyes, Willie struggled up from his seat in the back of the car.

"Look at them!" Felder said with awe.

As far as they could see, there was nothing but people—millions of people, more people gathered together than ever before in the history of the city.

They were massed along the great avenue where the heroes had once ridden in triumph. They hung from the windows of the once-proud skyscrapers. They swarmed over fountain and monument. They packed themselves deep and thick from the edges of the avenues to the glass panes of the airline offices and brokerage firms and fashionable shops.

The car moved more slowly still, and the crowd stirred and moved like a giant slug, and there was an emotion in the air that was like a scent.

Suddenly Willie pushed the button that opened the glass dome of the vehicle and at the same time elevated that section of the seat in which he sat, flanked by Thatcher Grayson and Joto.

"Put it down!" Felder shouted from the front. "There are maniacs out there!"

Willie stood up and held out his arms and the roar of the crowd beat against him.

Both Thatcher Grayson and Felder tried to pull him down

gently, but Willie had become joined to the emotion of the people and with one part of himself he saw what they saw and felt what they felt and, strengthened a little, he waved his arms in an imploring way.

As the car slipped farther into the uproar, the shouts of the people came faster—strange cries that had not been heard in streets before, except once, in a forgotten time.

Lord Jesus, have mercy!

Save us, Lord!

Jesus, Lord, give—

"You need to see with your own eyes," he said to them, and he tried to look upon their individual faces, to reassure them one by one, but there were too many of them and the car kept moving and the noise echoing up and down the long, wide avenue was like a true storm that needed something to wear itself out upon, and he was that something.

He made the sign of Jesus over all of them on both sides and then made it again very slowly and still a third time, trying to send something to them that they could use even though he knew they would not use crosses any more, ever.

Willie! Willie! Willie!

The old chant began somewhere behind them, and when it caught up to their car, Willie stretched out his arms, leaning to this side and that. Reaching up, the people tried to touch him.

Leaning backward and twisting his body, Joto held fast to Willie's legs, fearing that he would be pulled from the car. The crowd wailed and moaned like a beast starving.

"Get down!" shouted Felder. "They will kill you!"

Willie looked down at Felder and Felder seemed far away and all that Willie knew did not seem important, and Felder raised his arms, motioning him to lower the seat, but Willie paid no attention, and of all the pictures taken that day, there was one picture taken at that moment that was more interesting than others. It showed Felder lifting his arms like the leader of an orchestra, and he seemed in that picture to be directing a mammoth demonstration that only God could fully comprehend.

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Up Fifth Avenue they went, igniting each block into a new burst of noise, up past the great broadcasting studios and the old cathedral of Saint Patrick, and the sound swelled after them and rose up on either side and rose up before them until there was nothing now but a hurricane of sound, and they were in the eye.

Willie! Willie! Willie!

There were black people and brown people and white people and people of yellow skin and old people and young people and rich people and well people and sick people and beast people and spirit people, and he blessed them and blessed them again even though they did not want to be blessed and did not want anything they could give name to—but only to see and if possible to touch, this madman, this saint, this freak, this joke, this devil, this fool, this something much greater or much worse than anything they would ever be, this something they could use as a target for the drifting rage that was their only vitality.

But whatever they wanted in their million unknown hearts, whatever they had come to get, what they received was a different gift, a surprise that they could scarcely have hoped for and that gave their chorus its peculiar intensity.

For as he rode on before them, the sad Oriental eyes roving this way and that as if trying to find a place to rest, the red-white hair turning in the sun, the thin, even bent frame swaying to the motion of the car, the arms little more than sticks waving under tattered cloth—they saw he too was doomed, a part of the hopeless cargo. He became, in their eyes, the confirming sign of what they had long looked for, the enfleshed captain of their guilty secret. A thrill went shivering through them: *That he should go before them and the bloodred circle close exactly as it had begun.*

I know, he seemed to say, with slow-moving arms and the old sad smile forming and reforming on his drawn face, *I know and I accept.*

Thatcher Grayson pulled at his arm and pointed ahead.

And Willie saw that dream-driven structure once more.

It was there, like a tree, like any plain thing, and the dream

fell away from it. Abstractedly, with the detached feeling that he could seemingly invoke at will now, he thought that this immense place would one day be a burial ground and that men would come here to remember all that they had wrecked and even pay tribute to the act of wrecking.

The sun slipped under a cloud so that the bulk of the structure was shadow and only its top rim showed life, and over the rim stretching away, sickly clouds roiled and scuttled in the sky as if this building made war against all that lay beyond it and could not stand on earth in any condition of peace with anything above or under or outside its own possessed presence.

The crowd, coiling and pressing forward, forced the limousine to stop.

A tall, tattered man whose face had been destroyed by a grenade tossed by an unknown enemy in a war that had been waged for the freedom of unknown persons, wriggled up through the crowd like a snake, begging unintelligibly for a miracle.

Willie put his hand on the plastic shield that the doctors had fashioned as a make-believe face for the man.

The man immediately touched the shell, and the people nearby crowded around him to see if a miracle had happened. When the man knew that no miracle had happened, he lurched forward and grabbed Willie's arm. The car began to move again, and a policeman pushed the plastic-faced man away.

"My brother," Willie cried, but the man was already receding behind a cluster of blue uniforms. The car glided forward into an elevator. A door came down suddenly, and they were swiftly borne up to the roof of the complex.

When they reached the roof ball park, the driver motioned to two guards standing beside an enormous door. One of the guards touched a button and the door went up and the green carpet of the field spread out before them.

The driver turned around and spoke to Benjamin.

"He can be picked off from anywhere out there."

Willie stared at the unreal field.

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"You have got to get down," Felder said. "The man says it is dangerous."

The surface of the field was too green. The crowd sounds, continuous and muffled, were like a growl. In the distance the name REGENT shone through the haze in faint blue lights.

"To those who love God," said Willie, "no harm—" He started to faint again.

Benjamin pushed the button, lowering the seat a little, and the car slipped forward into the field.

The crowd, seeing the car, came to its feet, roaring and shrieking and screaming the name of Willie.

There were flags and banners in the stands, and placards and crude signs. People shouted slogans and catchwords that referred to L-Day.

In Willie the sensation of detachment and disjunction deepened, and the people did not seem to be people but only pictures of people—perhaps, he thought, they had become pictures from watching pictures so much; and their shouting, perhaps it was a recording.

"The President," Felder or someone said, and the car came to a stop.

"Still the third," said Willie, looking up at the red, white and blue helicopters floating above the roof park. Then clutching Grayson's arm, he said, "I've got to talk to Clio!"

Grayson turned to Felder. "He is in no condition to—"

Felder, standing up and leaning over the jump seat, brought his face very close to Willie's. "Get hold of yourself. You are a sign. You cannot give up."

Willie saw Felder distinctly, but it was a man he did not know.

"It is the third. I am losing control," he said. "Nothing on the pitches."

Over the protest of Grayson and Benjamin, Felder half carried, half pushed Willie out of the car. Joto caught him.

"I am a sign," Willie said to Father Benjamin.

He was moving now, with their support, to a cluster of smiling men wearing flags and other insignia in the lapels of

their coats and holding papers in their hands. There was a little platform in the center of the field. There were microphones.

"The real," said Benjamin. "Let it enter you."

Willie tried to understand these words but got lost in the remarkable whiteness of Benjamin's beard. The men, the platform, the stadium itself went up and down quickly before his eyes as he stepped uncertainly across the Plasti-Grass.

The memory of the office came to him. He peered up at the stands where the artificial people waved their arms and shouted in faraway voices. The wind was suddenly cold.

"Where is the office?" he asked a man whose smile he remembered from somewhere.

"Brother Holiness!" George Doveland Goldenblade exclaimed. "It wasn't the videophone—it's *you*, your *color*—is it something *inside* you or what?"

"Where's Clio?"

"The President? Why, he's right over here, Father Brother. It's *Clyde* Shryker but—well, most people call him Mr. President. Brotherhood, you have turned the color of a yam, which is not right even for an Oriental nigra, or whatever you were before."

"You're Mr. Goldenblade," said Willie.

Goldenblade started. "You think I'd send a clone here—to this?"

"I am a sign, Mr. Goldenblade," said Willie.

Goldenblade inspected Willie's face, his own face blotching a little and working itself back and forth into a snarling grin. "I don't know as I get your meaning there, Holiness," he said.

Felder, Benjamin, Grayson, Truman and Joto were shaking hands with the stiff smiling men, who seemed to Willie to be made of wax. A figure in scarlet detached itself from the group and came to where Willie and Goldenblade were standing.

"I'm sorry things were so mixed up at the airport, your Holiness," Archbishop McCool said. "Gol-*lee*."

"Do you know where Clio is?"

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"Clio?"

"*Clyde,*" Goldenblade said sharply. "But call him Mr. President."

"Are you feeling all right, Your Holiness?" said McCool.

"I am a sign," said Willie.

Goldenblade, taking Willie's arm impatiently, said, "Come on, Father Brother, the President has a speech to give. It's gonna be hell to pay if this crowd don't get. . . ."

Into the circle of officials, who stood uneasily with the disreputable Servants, Goldenblade led Willie, dragging him along like a reluctant child.

"President Shryker, may I present the pope, the head of the Catholic church, a very close personal friend and a good old boy from Texas."

A pink-faced, pleasant-looking man, President Shryker smiled aggressively.

"Your Holiness knows the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court, I am told," said the President through many white teeth. "Chief Justice Harlowe Judge."

Chief Justice Judge, standing in the row of dignitaries, waved an invisible nightstick at Willie.

"How-yah, Holiness?"

"Do you know where they put Clio?" Willie said to the President.

The President's face fell immediately into a maze of question marks.

"For goodness sake, Holiness," whispered Goldenblade.

An aide nudged the President to a microphone. Eyeing Willie nervously, Shryker began to speak.

"Welcome to the United States, Your Holiness. May the flag of freedom, reason and justice fly forever over the land of the free and the home of the brave."

The President's voice carried to the vast throngs in Regent Stadium, and by radio and TV to the world. As he spoke, the President kept looking at Willie, whose dazed expression perplexed him, so that the words that came out now bore no similarity whatever to the speech that had been prepared for him.

"Life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness were goals established by our Founding Fathers," said the President, trying to collect his thoughts. It seemed to him that the pope might indeed be disarranged, as several of his advisors had warned him. It occurred to him also that the pope might be drugged or seriously ill. Smiling even more aggressively, he plunged forward with his speech.

"Here in our country, which of course is your country, we have a beautiful old folk song which says *This is My Country.* I think of that beloved song today when I look upon this great assembly of Americans who are proud that this country is theirs—which is to say *ours.* My country 'tis of thee, sweet land of liberty," the President said, still smiling and trying to figure out what he should do if Willie should run amok as some churchman in Rome had done only yesterday, he had been informed, "which of course is the fundamental faith of my land, your land, her land, our land, their land, which all adds up to—amok."

The officials of the city of New York and the aides of the President who were standing around the platform shifted their gaze from Willie to Clyde Shryker even as Shryker continued to search Willie's face for some sign of sanity.

"This great land of ours—yours—whoever's—is the land of Jefferson, Disney, Henry Ford."

"Is that man babbling or is that man babbling?" Goldenblade muttered into the ear of his brother-in-law, General Maxwell A. Harrison, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, who stood ramrod straight by his side.

"Of Thomas Edison, Saint Billy Graham, Samuel Goldwyn."

"By God, he *is* babbling, Maxie!" said Goldenblade, verging near a microphone.

Moving only his lower jaw, not even looking at his brother-in-law, Maxwell Harrison replied, "Te logo rumi tegurithi."

Goldenblade's face purpled.

"Jesus Horatio Christ!" he groaned, and lifted a hand to his brow.

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"And of course," President Shryker continued, pondering a possible route of escape in case of violence, "it is the land of that great American, Jesus Horatio Christ."

To Willie, President Shryker seemed a cardboard cutout figure that someone had brought into the park for a game or festival of some sort. Or maybe it was an ad.

He did not hear any of President Shryker's words, though he was aware of a sharp metallic ringing that came from the speakers at the top of the grandstand.

What game was it? he wondered. *Had Mr. Regent arranged to have this figure brought here as a joke*?

There were other figures behind the cutout man. Were they men or were they cutouts too?

One of the figures moved then, and Willie recognized Father Benjamin. Father Benjamin was coming toward him but in a slow-motion imitation of his usual method of walking.

You are going to pass out, he said to himself. *No,* he said, *you cannot do that; they don't want you to do that.*

Try to sort this out.

Now—now—this is the ball park.

I am not in a dream.

There is some sort of ceremony going on. We were in a plane. Then we came through the people.

This cardboard figure—and at that point the cardboard figure pronounced the name of Christ and Willie came to quickly.

This is a man, he thought. *He wants to pray.*

Father Benjamin was a few feet away, moving so slowly that he was many still pictures of himself, one upon another, as if someone had taken hundreds of pictures of him to show as a demonstration of an old man walking.

As the name of the Anointed One went into Willie's heart, his hands moved spontaneously to take the hands of this prayerful stranger who stood before him.

"Huh-uh, huh-uh, huh-uh," said the President, and backed off the platform.

General Maxwell Harrison, as if on cue, stepped between

the pope and the President.

Grabbing Willie's hands, he said in a solemn voice, "Te liri morganatha lu miri soo."

Like an ancient incantation, the *Only-Therefore* hymn of G. D. Goldenblade drifted through the microphones: *hum, humm, hummm. . . .*

In the glass booth high above the field, the veteran newscaster Zack Taylor provided a commentary on the proceedings.

And so, as you've just seen and heard, ladies and gentlemen, the President has concluded his address of—ah, welcome—a most warm, albeit informal address we must say—and now General Harrison, acting in behalf of our military forces around the world, has added his welcome—in a liturgical gesture of some sort which our advisors tell us is part of the revised Roman rite for the greeting of a pontiff in a sports arena. The language, we are told, is Syro-Chaldean or Aramaic—or possibly Croatian. Our research staff is busy at the moment trying to establish just what language it is exactly. But whatever the language, the gesture of the general's clutching the pope's hands was most moving.

So far the pope himself has said nothing. As you can see, His Holiness appears to be somewhat fatigued. We have been told that the pope has been fasting for the success of L-Day for many weeks now—how long we don't know.

Personally, if I may be so blunt, ladies and gentlemen, the pope looks like a very old colored gentleman today—a far cry from the youthful miracle pitcher whose games we had the pleasure of commenting on just a few short years ago.

It is indeed hard to believe that this is the same person.

Now . . . now you see one of the papal aides talking to him—an old priest with a flowing white beard, dressed as indeed all the visitors are dressed—in—what would appear to be—some sort of sackcloth. Our vestment research department has been trying to dig out the dope on the garb, and I want to assure our viewing audience here and around the world that when we find out what the pope is wearing, we'll pass it along pronto.

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We want to remind you that this entire telecast is being brought to you by Doveblade Communications, which has forgone all commercial messages during this special telecast. The president and chairman of Doveblade Communications, Mr. George Doveland Goldenblade, is on your screen, standing to the right of the ensemble. The gentleman who would appear to be holding his—that is, placing his hand over his—the man with his hand (cough). *Mr. Goldenblade is at the right there.*

It's chilly here in New York today, folks, with the weather holding at about twenty-eight degrees and with a strong easterly wind. However the emotion generated in Regent Park is such that hearts are warm indeed, if we may say.

Whether or not the pope will speak at this time, we don't know. It would be reasonable to expect him to make some sort of response to the warm and gracious words of President Shryker. But—

But now, the pope is turning—and walking away.

You see it, ladies and gentlemen, the pope with his aides seems to be heading for the limousine.

Yes—yes. The pope is definitely leaving this great stadium. The crowd—the crowd, as you can hear, is beginning to react.

We here—we here in the broadcasting booth are at a loss to explain the pope's sudden departure.

But as you see for yourselves, ladies and gentlemen, the pope and his entourage are getting into their car.

The crowd, very stormy now. . . .

Truman had taken the wheel of the limousine. Felder was in the seat beside him.

"That way," said Felder, pointing to an open elevator in the left field corner of the park.

The car shot forward.

Willie had fainted again. Slumped against Benjamin's shoulder, he dreamed the flight dream, but it was a difficult, turbulent dream this time, and he flew in a storm and fought to keep his wings moving.

"Give him soup," Benjamin said.

"I have none," said Thatcher Grayson.

"Give him something as soon as we get to plane," said Joto. "We do go to plane now, Herman?"

Felder was too busy directing the car to even hear Joto.

As the car sped across the field, people jumped out of the stands and ran toward it. A man in a blue uniform stepped out of the shadows of the left field corner and darted to the elevator. The car swerved sharply and then skidded to a stop.

Felder jumped out of the car and shouted something at the policeman. But the policeman had already pushed the elevator button and the door was coming down.

Felder grabbed the man's arm, then pointed wildly at the crowd pounding down the left field foul line.

When the man turned around, Felder struck him sharply on the side of the head, over his ear, and the man went down.

Felder frantically pushed the elevator button and motioned the car forward. When the car had moved onto the platform, Felder stepped in behind it and pushed the button. The door came down only seconds before the crowd piled into it, screaming.

They shot down the elevator shaft in five seconds.

When the elevator door opened, they faced an empty street. The crowds were massed on the other side of the complex.

"Move it!" Felder said, and Truman pushed the accelerator to the floor.

Willie, waking from time to time, saw steel, glass, colored lights—all in a blur. He supposed they were in the plane once more, but then decided drowsily that there would not be so many things out the window.

Felder kept up a stream of instructions to Truman. At the sight of a helicopter, they swerved down an alley and pulled up beside an empty hearse. The hearse belonged to the Smedley Butler Updike Funeral Home. The hearse's owner and driver, Smedley Butler Updike, a distant descendant of the old-time author Nathaniel Hawthorne, had parked it in this out-of-the-way spot so that he might enjoy a quiet beer in the Fair N Square Lounge on East 48th Street.

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Felder handed Truman a ring of keys. The seventh key worked.

It took all four of them to transfer Willie, now unconscious, to the hearse.

They discarded the hearse ten minutes later near the Holland Tunnel, exchanging it for a beat-up Chrysler. They exchanged the Chrysler for a German-made sedan after only a few miles. When they had crossed the Hudson River, Felder, using the name of Christopher Albright, rented a Plymouth station wagon. By the time the police in their helicopters had traced them to the theft of the Chrysler, they had arrived at the deserted Woodrow Wilson Airfield near Iroquois, New Jersey.

It was dark now. The wind blowing down from the north was piercing. Felder led them to a sorry-looking hangar.

"He will freeze, Herman," said Thatcher Grayson, holding Willie with his arms locked around his chest.

"We'll be on board in a minute," said Felder. "The plane has everything he'll need."

Truman, Joto and Felder rolled back the doors of the old hangar. There stood Felder's other jet, fueled and ready for takeoff.

"Just get it going," Felder said to Truman and Joto. "I'll give you directions when we're up."

When the plane climbed up over the green lights of Iroquois and swung westward, a captain-aviator of the Swiss guard gunned the engine of the escort jet at Kennedy and headed down the runway.

In the control tower, men shouted madly into microphones warning of the 146 aircraft in the skies above the field. But the pilot managed the takeoff.

He headed out over the Atlantic, and everyone in the world except the 126 passengers he carried and the six men in Felder's jet believed the pope had suddenly decided to return to Rome.

Over the Atlantic the escort jet turned south, and the flight crew opened envelopes directing them to a region northwest of the Gulf of Mexico.

Chapter two

Joto fed Willie intravenously. Benjamin and Thatcher Grayson prayed. Herman Felder, sipping a morphini, said, "We'll be in the desert in a few hours. Let them find him there."

"If he lives," said Joto.

"He'll live," said Felder.

"What is plan of all this?" Joto asked.

Benjamin and Grayson raised their eyes.

"Keep him safe until L-Day," said Felder.

"Does he—did he know of all this, Herman?" Grayson asked.

"He knows the general outline," Felder said casually. "He couldn't have lasted in New York. We would have had a hell of a time getting away from there even if he were well."

"You have planned very carefully, Brother Herman," said Benjamin. "You have reasoned things through thoroughly."

Felder started to say something but Benjamin continued. "You do not know what he knows, though. His dreams have taken him beyond knowledge and plans."

Felder pursed his lips. "This is all to protect him," he said.

"Of course, Herman," said Thatcher Grayson.

"What if he has chosen to be unprotected?" said Benjamin.

As the food began to work and the substance that Felder had put into the soup burned out, Willie found the flying easier once more and his eyes saw the blue distances again and he searched for a place to land.

His nondreaming, reasoning self, standing off to the side, began to speak to his flying, dreaming self.

Back to the old Bible dream.

Yes.

You can't live in a dream, you know. Why not wake up and see what's going on?

I know what is going on.

What?

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I am dying.

You should be awake for an event of such consequence.

I have an obligation to my dream.

Surely you know how it ends. The bird finds the green leaf and brings it back to the ship. It ends well.

For the bird?

Come now. Even you know you are not really a bird?

I fly.

Men fly. Many creatures fly—all the way to the stars.

You do not fly, poor Reason. You have never flown. That is why I have never been able to explain anything to you. And why I cannot understand anything you try to explain to me. We never shared the main experience.

But I am your true rational self. The most important, the indestructible—

Yet, you are dying.

So are you, Dreamer. When I go, you go with me.

Not in the dream. In the dream there is no dying, and we are all together—the Diver, Carolyn, Papa, Mama, all my brothers and sisters everywhere. We go on afterward. Forever.

You have lost me.

You were never with me. What have you ever told me, poor Reason, in all my life that did any good, that helped?

You never gave me a chance.

Would one more below-average brain have made the slightest difference?

How can you expect me to answer a question like that?

You are the reasoning part. Isn't the reasoning part supposed to give answers? Why is it, when I ask you a question, you just make up another question?

You are not familiar with the way I operate, I who am your truest self and the only one who can help you.

You are not my true self. If you were, I would be back in New York at the United Nations or someplace and I would be giving a speech and the people would clap their hands after I talked, and very fashionable people would meet in an elegant room later and there would be fine things to eat—and during that time, 1,200 children would starve.

You never state my position truly. You make things utterly simple, more simple than they can ever be, and do not even try to see how complicated they are in reality.

You break up; I unite.

What is the dream, truly?

You are a temptation to me, to what I am about.

You're afraid! If you were so sure of what the dream tells you, then why refuse to talk it over with me?

You'd find some reason to hold back.

I will keep silent if you will explain.

That is the problem, you see. If I could explain it fully, you and I should have no quarrel. To explain would be to show causes, have proofs, evidences—all those things you need for food.

Trust me just a little. Test my—my tolerance.

You are a temptation, I know. But I will trust you, or rather the dream, to try to explain a little. It is true I am afraid. Afraid of many things. And I may yet go with you.

That is the healthiest, sanest thing you have said in your lifetime!

I will try to speak to you even though I know that you will pretend not to understand what I say. With your habit of breaking and destroying, I know that you cannot accept what I dream. But I will try.

Good.

Go back to the time when we were closer, when we were in school together.

You're off to a bad start. We were never together in school. You turned away from me from the start.

Not in everything, poor Reason, not in certain things that were taught. Think now. Do the thing you are supposed to do. Think back to when we were in Einstein together and we were in the classrooms where they taught all those different lessons and we would go to the moral classes and to the Scripture classes together and hear the theories. Do you remember those days?

I remember.

What was the one thing that was taught that everybody

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agreed was the most important thing, so important that it was taken for granted and never argued about and never questioned, regardless of how we all acted? In the moral classes they said it made all things perfect and in the Scripture classes they said that it was the best of all that man could have and do and be—even in those most advanced courses they said it was everything. And there was the one very brilliant professor who came to the end of the course and found himself unable to say the word, though he had no hesitation in using the name of God. That word bothered him, and yet that professor had read John many times and knew that John said that God and the thing I am talking about are the same. I put the simple question to you, Reason: The most important thing of all—do you remember what they said it was, even the theorists?

Of course, but—

Wait. Let me finish. We agree on what the most important thing is. Now tell me, what does it lead to?

Now you are asking the questions instead of giving answers.

Choose your school, your theologian, choose your Gospel—what does it lead to?

Not to false innocence, not to lies.

It leads to what you cannot stand. It leads to the awful, the unspeakable oneness that terrifies you more than dying.

You're playing the mystic. You're mistaking the—

Ah, how you fight and how you name-call when your privacy and pride are at stake! You can't stand the coming together with just everybody. You're afraid of going under.

As if you weren't going under! And all for this mystic plan of a vague coming together! And at the hands of one of your own! One of your own dreamers!

You are a temptation, I know, but I will answer you, Reason. You are speaking of Herman, of course.

Your brother, your fellow dreamer.

He is my brother, yes, as is every man. But he is not my fellow dreamer. Once he walked with me, but he walks with you now.

I don't claim him.

Be true to yourself, Reason. Be faithful to your friends and servants. Herman once shared the dream—yes, I believe that. I think he tried to go beyond what he knew for sure. But he could not stand the loss either. Or else he could not believe that other people would share our faith and our trust, our insanity if you will. So he began to think in the old way again. He went back to your way.

Not my way—to some other way.

Let us compromise. He is up to some artistic business. He is up to the creating of a pageant or sign or some such thing. A kind of movie maybe but a real movie without film—a movie made to do your work, to instruct people, to give lessons that people will remember. Which led him to take the reasonable practical sensible step of planning a murder.

To provide a martyr for the dream?

A martyr for the lesson that he wishes to make out of the dream.

Be truthful, Dreamer. This whole business is as much your doing as his. You looked for it. You have been looking for it from the beginning.

That is not true. That is a temptation.

You cooperate with his plan. You haven't made one move to escape. In a way, you are planning your own murder.

I cannot interfere with Herman's freedom, or anyone else's.

What of your own freedom, man! You are free to escape and if you love life you *will* escape. Otherwise, how are you any different from him, except that where he is active and powerful, you are passive and powerless? It is like a sex act. You and death fornicating.

I fornicate with life. When I meet Robert Regent, I will have sex with life because I will be removing that one thing that between people kills life.

Poetry, romance, sentiment, bad versions of all three.

Even if I die, I do not die in the truest part of me. I do not die in the dream but only in the body and in you, poor Reason.

I am going to search for an escape.

Naturally. Only know what you are trying to escape. Is it the death of the body, or is it the death of that pride and that

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specialness that you fear?

Even in the Scripture it says one must love oneself.

But what self—the self that stands only as a part or the self that is part of the one being which always is and for which there is no name?

You refuse to make sense.

Yes.

You are irrational, crazy, just as they all say.

The Mad Pope.

It is time to wake up. But do not think I am going to sit in my corner and wait to die, saying nothing, only meekly waiting. I will plan an escape.

I am aware of that. But you must be aware that what you call an escape, I call a trap.

We are coming out of this conversation, up to the world where you and I are one. Remember, we *are* one. We stay or we go together.

I should have done better by you, poor Reason.

Some consolation now.

"You spoke strangely," said Father Benjamin, leaning over Willie. And Willie saw then not only Benjamin but all his brothers. The strange conversation echoed in his mind.

"We've been giving you food intravenously," said Thatcher Grayson. "You feel better, son?"

"I do, Mr. Grayson, dear friend, I do feel better. Where are we?"

Herman Felder came near the cot where Willie lay.

"We're over Ohio," said Felder. "We're headed southwest."

"We're going to Illinois?"

"It's a day or two early for that," said Felder. "We're going to a desert in Arizona. The others are waiting for us there."

"What others?" said Willie.

"The Vatican guards and the others making the trip. You remember the discussion we had about this?"

Willie tried to remember.

"If we were to go to Illinois now," said Felder, "the crowds

would gather. It would be impossible for you to meet Mr. Regent. In the conversations I had with Mr. Goldenblade, he assured me that Regent wanted to meet with you alone. He said that you insisted there be no publicity."

"It's something you and Goldenblade arranged?" said Willie.

"Following your own wishes," said Felder. "Remember the day you told me it would not be good for us to get there too soon because the crowd would come and wreck everything?"

Willie tried to recollect. He could remember taping last minute pleas for reconciliation which would be aired from Rome on the day of the twenty-third. He could remember dictating a telegram instruction to every bishop in the world to encourage priests within their dioceses to preach upon the subject of love and peacemaking on the last Sunday of Pentecost. He could remember many conversations and plans and late-night sessions with the brothers. But all these things came to him dimly because of what had happened in the place of the icons and because his mind, now in the last phase of the hunger, was getting cloudy and he knew things better when he slept than when he woke.

Joto seemed to be trying to assure him of something.

"Willie brother," he said, "you spoke night before last of prayer—of being necessary that we prepare our hearts for L-Day in some quiet place."

Yes, he could remember saying that. He looked at Felder again, and it was impossible to look at him now without the horror coming to his mind.

"Where is the place exactly?"

"It is a true desert area north of a small place called Nogo, Arizona. No one knows we'll be there—not Goldenblade or Regent, not anyone. It's a perfect place that I know well." Felder's voice dropped a little. "Once many years ago I made movies there, Western movies."

Willie got up shakily.

"You're not strong enough to walk," said Thatcher Grayson.

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"I'm okay," said Willie. "Herman, I want to send a telegram to someone."

"No problem," said Felder. "One of the guards can take it into Phoenix. It would be better to wait until we're ready to leave though."

"All right."

They set up trays of food then, but the sight of food sickened Willie.

"Some warm food, even a little, would help so much," said Thatcher Grayson.

Willie managed a laugh. "Whatever Joto got into my arms from his bottles over there—that will keep me going a long time."

Throughout this conversation Benjamin sat quietly, watching Felder's face. He seemed to ask many silent questions, but Felder did not look at him.

"I'm going forward," said Willie. "Just for a little while."

He was weak moving up the aisle, and when he reached the cabin, he had to grab the back of the seat and the overhead rack to keep from falling. And when he settled in his seat and let down the little tray in front of him and when he put the paper on the tray and tried to write words on the paper, his hands shook and the words were not readable.

He tore up the first paper and started another, then another, and then another.

Each time he changed the wording. He knew what he wanted to say, but what he wanted to say could not be put into words—even if you had a good brain, he told himself, it would be impossible.

At last he settled for something that was less untrue than the other things he wrote.

Dear Clio. I have always loved you as my dearest friend.
I hope you are ok. I am going to die. I wish i wasn't
but there is nothing i can do about it.
Give my love to Martha and the Child.
Clio only love makes any difrence.
Maybe that is a sermon. Its all I know.

Clio if you ever loved me as a friend you will not shoot
or kill anyone on L-Day. You will go and make peace
with others, whoever they are, they are people too.
It will be hard to do this Clio but you can do it
because you believe too everybody ought to be together
instead of apart. I love you Clio. I have loved
many people. I loved Carolyn back in Houston.
I should have married her and never played ball.
No, that is not right.
I had to be whatever I am and I felt myself becoming
what I am and let it be. I am afraid to die.
People i love are with me but there is no one
can help you die. The only thing that helps is to know
that in one part of me i am still alive.
That is the only part of any of us that holds together,
everything else goes. When everything else goes in me
that part will still live and the love that is there,
in that part, for you and for so many others,
it will go on too and for always. Willie.

When he had finished, he wept because of the memories of Clio and of their wrecked friendship and because, hard as he tried, the words would not come right and the words could not say what was in his heart and because as he finished the telegram, the plane broke out into the clear sky and there was the western sun that God had made, as sure and fine a fire as ever, and down below, the neat farms were laid out in little brown squares so tidy and careful that it was heart-breaking to look upon them—so bravely did people go on living most of the time, or try to, anyway, when they did not think about it so much. How lovely the world was in spite of everything. The evil in it was no match for the good—*except so few of you know it truly, thinking yourselves bad and being unable to stand it, and then you try to be less or more, and then it is wrecked, like me, like Clio, and then they kill like they killed you, Carolyn, and Carolyn it is time now for me.*

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Chapter three

The desert town of Nogo was named after an Indian who had tried to lead a revolt against the United States Army in 1858 and who had lost his life in the try and whose people after that had been moved to a reservation in New Mexico and had slowly died away so that afterward no one could remember what the name of the tribe had been, if it had had a name at all, and later on, on the flat ground where the battle had been fought with the great mountains in the distance, the U.S. Army had put up a monument to the bravery of Sergeant Cooper Longfellow, of Concord, Massachusetts, who had lost his life in the fighting, but the monument was gone now and the shacks that people had built setting up shops to sell genuine Indian jewelry and authentic Indian pottery, they were gone also, abandoned and sunken in the sand, and even the old movie town that Herman Felder had built twenty years ago and where many epic Western movies had been filmed, was gone, with just a few falling-down unpainted buildings still visible on the sandscape and there was nothing or no one within twenty miles except for Carbon Crocker who operated a gasoline station on the old road that no one traveled anymore now that the freeway was in, and the plane came on, landing smoothly on the runway that had been cleared off a week ago, and no one saw it coming down but Carbon Crocker and the men on the other plane that had landed an hour before.

This second plane glittered in the sun, and there were many men, 100 or more, standing around it. They were strange-looking men wearing fine dark suits and they were motionless as they watched the pope's plane land. Some of the men had removed their coat jackets and some stood under the wing of the aircraft that had brought them and because they were all wearing sunglasses, they all looked very much alike in their dark clothing and it was hard to think of them as the Swiss guard.

When Willie and his brothers got off their plane, a trio of

the men came forward, and Willie recognized one of the guards, named Paulo, and Willie nodded to Paulo, and Paulo smiled and nodded a little stiffly in reply.

"His Holiness is very tired," said one of the guards.

Paulo spoke to Willie. "We have sun tents that can be put up, Holiness."

"For yourselves if you like," said Willie. "I am all right. Do you have food enough for all?"

"All that has been attended to by Signor Felder," said the first guard, whose enormous sunglasses shaded the lower half of his face.

"We plan to eat on the planes, Brother Will," said Felder.

"Who will take my telegram?"

Felder took the letter Willie had written to Clio and handed it to Paulo.

"The fuel truck comes in a little while. Give this to the driver and tell him to take it to the telegraph office in Phoenix first thing in the morning."

"Just as you say, Signor Felder."

Willie blinked in the hot light. There was a thin, balding man standing near the tail of the plane, and when the man saw Willie, he came forward. It was Monsignor Taroni, looking pale, almost white, in the intense sun.

He knelt to kiss Willie's ring, but Willie brought him to his feet. He saw that he was shaking.

"What is wrong, Pietro?"

"I do not know, Holiness. I have prayed earnestly for courage, but fear clutches my heart."

"Do not fear, Pietro. Give your fear to the Lord."

Coming around the tail of the plane from the other side was a stocky young man whose suit fitted him badly. Willie felt his stomach turn at the sight of this man. The man stopped, hesitated, and turned to go back around the plane.

"Brother," Willie called.

The man reappeared.

"You are speaking to me, Holiness?" The voice was a voice Willie had heard before and the sound of it was like a hard-thrown punch.

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"I am Willie, called the pope."

Awkwardly the man came forward and in a half-crouch shook hands with Willie.

"Pat Joyce—Patrick Henry Joyce," the man said.

"I've not seen you before, Brother Patrick. You are of the guard?"

"One of the special ones hired by Mr. Felder."

"You are an American?"

"Originally, yes. I move around a lot," the man said. Then quickly, with a little smile, "It's very warm here."

Willie said, "Pray for the great day, Patrick."

The man, looking over Willie's head and then to his side, smiled and said, "Yes, Holiness."

"Tomorrow we shall have Mass for all who are here before we depart for Illinois."

"That will be very fine," said Monsignor Taroni, whose face grew whiter by the minute.

Then Willie went back to the plane, making himself walk as correctly as he could, even though he was sick and faint with fear.

The afternoon blazed on.

The officials and guards milled about their plane. When the sun went down over the western mountains, they boarded the plane to eat.

Willie and Thatcher Grayson sat under the wing of the papal jet.

"I would like to go to those mountains," said Willie.

"That would be a long journey, son."

"Too long for me, I know."

"Why did you not eat with us just now?"

"I do not care for food now, Mr. Grayson."

"You have had only what was in the bottle. That is not true food."

"I feel better though, dear friend. After I make peace, I will eat true food."

"If you make peace," said Grayson.

"He will meet me, I know now," said Willie.

"I do not mean him," Grayson said. "I mean those others.

The men on the plane. I do not like the things I heard this afternoon. There is something wrong with them."

"Do not worry, Mr. Grayson."

Grayson looked at Willie as if trying to make up his mind whether he was strong enough to hear really bad news.

"Herman," he said. "Herman is drinking again."

"It's all in God's hands," said Willie. "Trying to change things would be like trying to pick up one of those mountains."

At that moment Felder dropped down from the hatch of the pilot's cabin.

"Bloody international manhunt going on," he said with a laugh. "We sent a third plane on to Rome, you see. They've now found nobody aboard but two pilots from China who can't speak a word of English, Italian or French!"

Grayson stood up. "Herman, where did these men come from? Some of them appear—"

Felder clapped Grayson on the shoulder. "Thatch, you'd worry about a legion of angels."

"They're—they're drinking, some of them. Some of them are talking crazy," said Grayson whispering. "One of them has a starry swastika tattooed on his arm."

Felder laughed again; the scent of roses. "Don't be so squeamish, Thatcher. They're cops, not altar boys."

Willie gazed at the mountains, but the presence of Felder was just then larger than the mountains, and there was a demand growing strong in his heart and a summons that he knew he had to answer sooner or later if his dream was to hold up even for him. For if he had to forgive and be forgiven for something that had happened in the past, did he not have to forgive what had happened in Rome, and did he not have to deal with this man standing before him blocking out the enormous mountains and filling the night air with the odor of the mortuary and did he not—

"Every man in that crowd has been checked," said Felder, and Willie heard Death scratching something on a blackboard.

Then Felder went away, joining the men under the wings

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of the plane.

When the stars came out and the air cooled, the feeling of a men's stag or smoker or beer party came to the desert. There was music coming from a radio, and some of the men were playing cards.

Willie, Grayson, Joto, Benjamin and Truman strolled a little distance from their plane. The mountains were still visible, but now they were great prehistoric animals that had fallen asleep on the desert.

"We have just heard weather report for that part of Illinois where we go," said Joto. "Radio predictor says it will be very cold with snow falling."

"I know," said Willie.

"Truman read map. Indicates we fly to Springfield. Herman has automobiles ready to take us where we go."

"I am sure Herman has seen to everything," said Willie.

Father Benjamin said, "There is the question of the day after tomorrow. We must pray and discuss this."

They listened for a time, then spoke to the subject.

"It would seem to me," said Thatcher Grayson, "that we ought to travel to the great American cities preaching the good news that people don't have to be anything but people and also try to help the poor, sharing their lot in every way, and helping create a better sense of natural things."

Simple words, but Willie marveled that they had come from Thatcher Grayson.

"Friend of Truman has written him letter," said Joto. "This man is prisoner in jail in North Africa. He describes hopeless conditions of jail. Truman and I think substitute."

"The main thrust of our efforts should be to follow through on the day," said Father Benjamin. "After all, we cannot anticipate what grace God may send into the world as a result of this sign day. Many conditions will change. We will change also."

"The Lord comes," said Grayson. "The Changer."

Willie looked at the black, sleeping leopards that were the mountains.

"It is possible," said Father Benjamin in his slow manner,

"that we will be changed more than most men. For which one of us can deny that in all our testifying we have sinned and sinned often in judging men rather than the patterns and the traps and the webs that snare them. We must pray and listen extraordinarily well in the next thirty-six hours that our hearts be open to forgiveness and charity and forbearance."

Willie did not trust himself to speak. *The animal mountains will stay,* he thought, *but even they are not stronger or more lasting than the love we have for each other—and it will go on, it will go on.*

"What is it that you think?" Father Benjamin asked him.

"I guess—I'm tired," he faltered. "I can't think of anything but tomorrow."

They turned at the sound of an engine, a motor, far away at first and then louder, and then there were the lights coming slowly through the darkness.

"Fuel truck," said Joto.

The truck drew up to the plane and stopped, and Willie, leaving his friends, approached the driver, who had gotten out of the cab and was preparing to take the hose to the wing.

Seeing Willie in the faint light of the plane's forward cabin, the man dropped the hose and fell on his knees and said, "Tegawitha logo miri!" This was not said in the usual spiritist way, but in the manner of a man who was both angry and terrified.

Paulo, the guard to whom Felder had previously given Willie's letter, came up to them.

"Get up, man, you've got work to do," he said.

The driver was still jabbering in a prone position.

"Please," said Willie, placing his hand on the arm of the trucker. "He is only afraid of something."

Then he knelt by the side of Carbon Crocker. "Do not be afraid to talk like a regular person. That is the best way for men to talk," he said softly.

The man began keening in a high-pitched voice.

"Brother," said Willie, "won't you please stand up. I have something to tell you."

The man, whose real name was Christian Crocker, had

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been called Carbon Crocker since his boyhood, and he lived alone in the desert town of Nogo—alone except for the spirits who had come gliding down from the mountains, night after night for more than a month. He had seen the village of Nogo become a city as large as Phoenix, except that the inhabitants did not have fleshly form. At this very moment it seemed to him the air moved violently with the exhalations of a mighty vindictive multitude, and he knew, did Carbon Crocker, that the multitude had condemned him to death.

"What's going on?" Felder asked in the darkness.

"The fuel man is a spirit freak," said someone else. Even in the shadows, Willie saw that it was Patrick Henry Joyce.

"That's marvelous," said Felder. He grabbed the hose himself and clambered up on the wing, shouting for assistance.

Willie turned to Paulo. "You have the letter, Paulo."

Paulo gave the telegram to Willie, who sat down on the still warm sand beside Carbon Crocker.

"Brother," said Willie, "please look at me. I am your friend and your brother, especially now that we have made this connection. I ask you a favor. Do you see this letter? I want you to take it to the telegraph office in Phoenix and send it to the address which is written on it. Here." Willie handed the man all the money he had in his pocket. "Take this money, please. It will be enough."

"Mr. Felder has paid the man, Holiness," said Paulo.

Carbon Crocker stared at the bills. Willie repeated the instructions and asked Carbon Crocker if he truly understood. Carbon Crocker nodded.

"You are a good man," Willie said. "Good men have nothing to fear. God bless you."

Carbon Crocker rolled away from Willie, then sat up on his haunches for a few seconds. Presently he scrambled into the cab of the truck and did not leave the cab during the fueling of the plane, though Felder and the other men shouted at him, demanding that he help with the work.

Carbon Crocker knew that they were all evil spirits, jeering at him for investing all that he owned in a gasoline station on

the road between Nogo and Phoenix just as the new freeway came through, closing off the road and making his station useless and vain.

When the fueling was over, Carbon Crocker drove the truck off into the darkness. Willie watched him go, waving after him, a gesture that Carbon Crocker could not have seen. Then Willie went back to the plane, fainting away into his dream as soon as he fell into a seat.

Coming upon him a little later, Joto and Truman tried to inject a new bottle of the liquid into his thin arm, but Willie brushed them away. He was flying out toward the black leopards, seeking a signal or message to bring back to the travelers on the ship, though he knew now there were no travelers on the ship but one, and he was the one.

* * *

When he reached the gas station where he lived with the rats, Carbon Crocker drank from a bottle of True West Rye and read the letter Willie had given him, and he knew that it would be a very bad letter from the spirits in the mountain.

Carbon, he read, *you think you can get away with it but you can't. We have you completely surrounded. The only way out is you know what. We are going to build a highway over your stupid head. How do you like that? Hah-hah-hah. You Know Who.*

Carbon got out his old cowpoke Colt revolver and shot at the rats for awhile. He had spent many evenings shooting rats over the years, but then the spirits had come and given him new enemies to kill even though he knew he could not hope to kill them all and the bullets went through them anyway.

The rats squealed as he fired away. He read the note again, holding the flashlight close to the paper.

Carbon Stupid, he read, *we forgot to tell you. Stella is with Grit Wayne up on the interstate at the new DX and you know what he is pumping and also who don't you? What are you pumping you dumb bastard? You Know Who.*

Carbon Crocker got out his new army automatic rifle—a

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Goldenblade True Shooter—and went outside and fired forty shots at the spirits in less than one minute.

It was useless trying to kill them; the bullets whizzed through them.

He went back inside the station and fired at the rats again. He drank some more True West. Then he remembered the article he had seen in the last issue of *Second Wind*. It had been taken from an interview that the editor of *Second Wind* had had with Bishop Mae Frapple, imprisoned, according to the editor, "on trumped-up charges brought by homosexual monists in Washington."

Carbon Crocker found the place in the interview where the editor had asked Bishop Mae Frapple what happened to people who were not prepared to meet the coming of the Lord God.

There ain't no way for them to get shed of him, said Bishop Mae Frapple. *He bringeth hellfire, which is real fire. Fire burns. It burns anything. It burns even the ass of a spirit. Even the ass of a smart-ass preacher.*

The words came whispering to Carbon Crocker as if there were someone there, talking in the darkness of the gas station where the rats lay dying and squealing on the floor.

He got all his guns—the old and new revolver, his new Goldenblade True Shooter, his shotgun, his shells, and the two kegs of dynamite he had saved over from the days he thought there was uranium in the mountains. He loaded it all in the cab of his truck. Then he fueled the tank of the truck to the brim, using both pumps.

He got into the cab and started the engine. Driving slowly, he headed toward the dark mountains that were the home of the spirits.

The lights of the truck picked up the liquid gray shapes that drifted before him. They were backing away in fear, he knew, and he laughed.

"Who's got who on the goddamn run now?" he shouted. A thousand spirits flew into the air shrieking in terror.

He saw the planes then and swung the truck away. He would catch the spirits in their camp before they had a chance

to reach their planes.

He began firing his guns, the revolvers first then the rifles, the truck swerving as he drove with one hand.

He took out the letter the spirits had sent him, placed it on the windshield and propped it there with his shotgun. Then he pulled both triggers.

The blast made him lose control of the truck for a moment. It zigged and zagged like a vehicle out of a movie cartoon, but he managed to hold the road. The mountains were dead ahead.

He pushed the accelerator to the floor and leveled his automatic rifle through the rear window at the fuel tank. The truck hurtled on toward the largest and most sinister of the mountains—the main base, Carbon Crocker knew, of the spirit leaders.

There was a trail up the mountain, an old Indian trail that Carbon Crocker knew and that he had often traveled during the days when the spirits were still his friends. He found the trail now and pushed his truck steadily upward, its gears screaming as he made his way.

He screamed along with the truck, along with the spirits, as he climbed higher and higher, toward the great jagged stone that sat on the very peak of the mountain and that the spirits, Carbon Crocker knew, used as a mating place.

When the lights picked out that hated stone, he made for it in triumph and hate.

Seconds before impact, he squeezed the trigger of the rifle, setting off an explosion that came cascading down the mountainside.

It was like a small atom bomb exploding and continuing to explode down the mountainside, sending a river of fire pouring down, down upon the spirits Carbon Crocker had seen, carrying in its tide the carbon of Carbon himself.

Like a sudden sun, the fireburst flashed over the desert, waking the lizards and snakes who slept there and waking the creatures who slept on the planes.

The men tumbled out of the large aircraft in a panic. The air filled with shouts, cries, curses, confused and frightened

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prayers, some of them in tongues, for there were spiritist guards among the men.

Over the din, Herman Felder, hurrying from the escort plane, shouted, "Get hold of yourselves. It's just a storm!"

"An earthquake!" someone shouted.

"A piece of the sun!" another man yelled.

Felder, coming up the ramp of the plane, grabbed the man who made this observation and struck him in the face.

"A lightning flash and you go to pieces! Are you men or rabbits?"

"There are no clouds," someone shouted.

"All right," Felder replied. "Paulo, you and two others go over and look at the fire. It's safe. It's already beginning to burn out. You're not going to find anything there. But maybe it will keep these children quiet."

The three men set off toward the blaze.

Joto, Truman, Benjamin and Thatcher Grayson stood at the ramp of their plane.

"Possibly a meteor," said Father Benjamin.

The others were nervous.

"Let us pray and calm ourselves," said Benjamin.

Willie slept through the explosion, though in his flight dream he saw something, a flash of light, in the dark hills below. He swooped down to investigate but when he got low enough to see clearly, the fire had gone out and there was only smoking, charred wreckage that might have been some sort of machine that had gone haywire. He flew up out of the darkness toward the stars.

"What was it?" Felder said when the men returned.

"A car or truck," they told him.

"Everyone go to sleep," said Felder. "It was an accident that we can't do anything about."

The men, murmuring among themselves, slowly boarded their plane.

Felder boarded the aircraft after the others, proceeding to the private forward cabin where Patrick Henry Joyce and another man sat drinking morphinis.

"Go over it again from the beginning," Felder said to the

second man, a man with childlike blue eyes. "And you have had your last drink till this business is ended."

"I have told it to you fifty times," the baby-faced man said.

"Tell it again," said Felder, sitting on the edge of the seat. "Take it from the point where you meet the third man—the one coming by land." He looked in every way like the director of a film coaching an actor for a subtle role.

Chapter four

By seven the next morning the sun was already hot. The men gathered in a circle between the planes and Willie stood in the center at a small table and celebrated the Supper of the Lord. Eleven priests, including Father Benjamin, concelebrated the Eucharist with him.

His voice, as he read the Gospel, was the voice of a very old man. He had prepared a short homily in the first hour of dawn while he was still half in his dream and half in the world. He could not remember now what the homily had been about, and he felt weak and faint standing in the sun.

The inner voice spoke to him. *It is the eve of L-Day. Tell them to prepare.*

"It is the eve of L-Day," said Willie. "We must try to prepare our hearts for it."

He peered out into the light. The faces of the men were hard to see. Somehow they looked not like men but statues.

Tell them you forgive and ask to be forgiven.

"I forgive any of you who have wronged me," Willie said.

Or will wrong you.

He saw Herman Felder not twenty feet away, a strip of film in the blazing sun.

"I forgive those of you who will wrong me."

When he said those words, the statues became men; he felt his senses return to normal.

He saw the men and the blank desert and the mountains in the distance and he felt the nearness of the unequivocal stranger.

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Nausea. Loathing.

Then as he looked at the men, a reckless passion took possession of him.

Lifting his arms to the sky, he said in a loud voice, "I tell you the truth—I know that one of you will betray me tonight. Tonight—in Illinois—one of you will try to stop me!"

An immense silence settled over the circle of men. Then whispering, more whispering, movement.

A man behind Willie shouted, "We are your protectors!"

"You cannot think such a thing," said one of the celebrants of the Mass. It was Taroni, a portrait of dread.

Willie, stretching out his right hand, said in a still louder voice, "I am not dreaming—or perhaps I am dreaming instead of thinking. But what I know, I know. There is a man among you who has a grand design—a plan greater and grander than L-Day. That man is here among you and he is against me!"

The men moved, their dark silken suits rippling in the sun and forming a reptile around the place where Willie and his concelebrants stood.

The men stirred, waving their arms.

The air rang with unintelligible cries and protests.

Thatcher Grayson and Father Benjamin approached Willie.

"You are ill, son!" Grayson cried. "You can't mean these things!"

The old red-rimmed eyes of Benjamin burned into Willie's.

"You know it to be the truth?"

"Yes."

"Why did you not speak earlier?"

Willie, seized again by that unexpected passion, called out to the men once more.

"But I tell you this. No plan will succeed that begins with death and killing. What begins with death and killing will itself be killed. And those who wish to create new arrangements by killing men are enlisted in the class of death and are sitting at the feet of the headmaster!"

The men became statues again—except one, Herman Felder, who had turned about quickly and walked back to the

plane.

The men, murmuring among themselves, began to tell one another that the pope had become disarranged because of his long fast. But a few were stricken with fear; they had felt death move across the white sand and begin stalking about the aircraft.

Father Benjamin, embracing Willie, said, "Go on with the holy meal."

Willie, looking over Father Benjamin's shoulders, strained to see the men; he had not seen Felder leave the crowd.

"Please," said Benjamin.

Willie went on with the Mass.

At the Kiss of Peace, he went into the midst of the men. Coming up to Patrick Henry Joyce, he held out his arms.

"The peace of Christ be with you, Brother Patrick," he said.

Brother Patrick stood very still, letting Willie's arms enfold him. He said nothing. Willie embraced the other men of the group, looking for one man in particular. When he came to a very young man trembling with fear he said, "Where is Brother Herman Felder?"

"On board, Holiness," the young man whimpered. Then with a loud cry, "The end is coming!"

Willie said, "But not for you, young man. Calm yourself and have courage." Then he went to the plane, up the ramp, through the long funnel of the fuselage.

Felder, drink in hand, was in the forward cabin; he froze at the sight of Willie.

"The peace of Christ, Herman," said Willie, reaching for Felder's shoulders.

"Don't," Felder said, sucking in his breath.

"I wish to give peace and love," said Willie. "And forgiveness."

"There is no need for forgiveness."

"Even so."

Felder's eyes were enormous; the red veins were strange forlorn roads in a chaotic land.

"Don't," he said. "I don't want—"

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"You don't want love or peace, Brother Herman? Why, then, have you made this trip?"

Felder was still holding his drink; it was like a burning coal in his hand. He tried to put it somewhere and at the same time move farther back into the plane. But he was up against the door of the pilot's cabin now and there was no more room.

Willie advanced toward him.

Felder dropped his drink on the floor of the plane. Standing rigid, arms pressed against his sides, he allowed Willie to embrace him.

"And so may the peace of our Lord Jesus be with you always."

Felder whispered, "All right."

Willie stepped back and looked into the eyes and he stood in this way for half a minute, and Felder was like a man who had been pinned to the door.

Then Willie turned away and went back to the men outside and they communed in the Body and Blood of Jesus, and Herman Felder sat in the private cabin and drank four morphinis, until what had happened was something that had not happened.

An hour later the planes flew up from the desert toward the sun.

Ahead, the storm clouds were already forming over Iowa and Illinois and Indiana.

"You cannot mean an actual plot," said Benjamin.

"Certain things will happen that are not of my doing," said Willie, making ready for that fact that there was no real preparation for. His eyes saw things in a soft, luminous haze, and the events of the past began to mix confusedly in his brain, and even now he could not remember what had happened in the desert.

He drank a little sugared tea because he wanted to be clear-headed when he met the old teacher, though his mind was even now like the earth when clouds sail over it in fast succession. In the dark moments, when his brain worked, he saw shadowy, obscure men against shifting, mysterious

landscapes, architects or builders of some fantastic structure. In the quick openings of light and brightness he was flying high above the world, and all was well, even if the flight was nearly over. He was inside his dream and outside it, and there was only a little energy left for listening.

As he slept, Benjamin, Joto and Thatcher Grayson tried to argue away that persistent cry still echoing across the desert. At last they persuaded themselves that his fasting had induced a state of hallucination. Joto prepared another intravenous feeding and Grayson went forward to pray with Truman. Only Benjamin sought to understand the meaning of the hallucination, knowing that hallucination was not only vision but judgment and knowing too that there was a presence in the plane now that had not been with them before, a sullen, slouching presence that he tried to picture.

When he closed his eyes, he saw only the dim figure of some sly official, a teacher possibly, engaged in a tiresome explanation without beginning or end. "Begone," said Benjamin in his spirit, but the figure took no notice. "Name yourself," he said again, but the figure went on without a pause in a lifeless singsong voice that finally merged with the monotone of the plane.

In the other plane the genius of the drama reviewed the shooting script for the last act. He saw the movie clearly now, saw the great theater of the world thrilling to his all-explaining spectacle. There was a burst of applause, a spreading warmth, a sigh, then a sorrowing understanding. A new myth was burning the old away. He saw history swing out from its rutted rails, the rabbling demons fleeing before it. Time now was a chariot, and he was the driver. As he lurched on, he felt himself a titan—king, conqueror, conjurer of a million dreams, salvific herald of an immortal age.

But as the plane hurried on, a smaller definite picture intruded itself on the brimming vision. There was a whirring in the back room, the fitful sputter of a take-up reel. Lights. Flickering images. Suddenly he was in the past of thirty years ago. Palms. A long lawn going down to sea. Coming up to camera, a boy on horseback dressed as a cowboy and twirling

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a lariat. The camera closed in swiftly, awkwardly, on the boy's grinning face. The screen went white for a second, then the crude hand-lettered lines came up: HERMAN—WINNING THE WEST. DIRECTED BY GUNNER AT SAN RAPHAEL.

* * *

The planes flew on, like two silver bullets, while on the earth below men prepared for L-Day.

A few minutes before noon the United Nations issued its long-debated Declaration of Universal Peace, which called for a truce "between all warring elements in the world with said truce commencing at midnight November 23, wherever the pope of Rome shall be, and lasting for a period of twenty-four hours."

The statement, with ninety-six amendments, ran more than 500 pages and would not be published in final format for several weeks.

"What it provides," said the Secretary General of the United Nations, Jack E. Stonewell, "is that any nation stepping out of line on this thing is going to get the living hell pounded out of it whether it be a peace-loving superpower or some upstart country that isn't worth the powder to start with." Secretary Stonewell went on to explain that certain revisionist monist freaks had introduced amendments to the truce that were designed purely for selfish national gain, and he told his press conference that he was proud that he, as an American, had succeeded in getting Amendment 24 into the document, which called upon the responsible member nations to implement aggressive neutralization of all dissident elements acting against the spirit of the truce, through such means as thermonuclear punitive reprisals. After his press conference, Secretary Stonewell went on a family retreat at Camp Saint Billy Graham in Maryland.

But by the time the Secretary General gave his press conference, few citizens of any nation were paying any attention to the U.N. and its pronouncements. By now Willie's final TV tapes were being broadcast across the

globe—in China, Russia, Europe, Africa, the Americas.

By the hundreds of millions, people watched the telecasts or heard them on radio. Immediately many went to churches and synagogues for special L-Eve services.

L-Eve had become a Holy Day of obligation in many Catholic dioceses around the world, and even bishops and priests who did not approve of the pope or his plan tried to encourage people to join in the spirit of the day ahead. This was an act of loyalty to the pope, who, even if he was crazy, was still the leader of the church, as the archbishop of Paris reminded his clergy.

The day had begun with the usual round of suicides, but there seemed to be no more than on any previous day over the past two months, and perhaps a few less. Those who had stayed this long had decided "to be there when it happened," as *Second Wind* said in what it called its final, final edition.

The spiritist forces of the world were staging spectacular rallies everywhere. In Asia, Eastern Europe, Africa and in many parts of the Americas, people were already gathering in open country or at mountain retreats to be taken up to heaven with the triumphant returning Lord.

The largest of these rallies was already drawing thousands to the Grand Canyon where, according to Earl Cardinal Goldenblade, "at precisely 11 P.M. Rocky Mountain time the Spirit would plunge a flaming sword through the center of the earth, pick it up and eat it like an olive."

In London, Big Ben tolled ten times every quarter hour, reminding citizens, as the London *Times* noted, "of the grandeur of the Judeo-Christian tradition and of the spirit of moral renewal."

There were bells tolling in every city of the world. Preachers preached, sinners prayed, the fearful wept. Even the most beastly of men found themselves in church or temple to await—something. The feeling of world catastrophe was in the air. Anything could happen. Everywhere there were rumors of assassinations, conspiracies, plots, violence. Heads of state went into hiding. In the great cities the streets began to empty, until by midafternoon many had

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the look of cities under air siege.

In only one nation of the world did the L-Day truce seem in serious jeopardy. In that nation, in the words of the Defense Minister, "Instead of being a day of peace and reconciliation, November 24 could well be the day when the hatred of war reaches fever pitch."

That nation was Peru, where the Green Canary Army, under the command of General Clio Russell, had pressed to the very edge of Lima and was about to seize the government.

Willie's televised plea for L-Day was broadcast in Peru three times on Saturday November 23, and after each broadcast the aged archbishop of Lima came on the air and spoke directly to the leaders of the revolutionary army. Each time he asked the rebels to cease their war-making for at least the period of the truce.

"You have heard our pope," he said after the noon broadcast, "our pope, whom the people of Peru love and venerate as their spiritual father. I ask you in the name of God to stop the fighting. Please, gentlemen. After all, what difference will one day make?"

When he was off the air, the loyalist leaders congratulated the archbishop.

"They cannot refuse your plea, Eminence," they told him.

"The man who took the True Cross, Clio Russell—you have located him now?" the old man asked.

"We know where he is. There is a handsome bounty on his head. In this twenty-four-hour period, if they stay in place according to the truce, we shall settle his account and at the same time regroup our forces and drive them back."

"It is a very small chip but it has a dark stain upon it," said the archbishop.

"The man who captures or kills him receives 10 million sols," said the loyalist general.

"I have often wondered if it is not truly a drop of the Precious Blood."

"Many of my men would kill him for nothing. With the

incentive of 10 million sols we cannot fail."

"I used to hold it in time of temptation. I conquered my flesh with it," said the aged archbishop.

Clio and his staff watched the telecast of Willie's speech.

"They say he is mad," said Clio's aide-de-camp. "Last night in Rome before he flew to the States there was a fracas and a churchman was killed."

"He has the look of a loco," said another officer. "Note the eyes. He sees another territory, not a real one."

Clio was shocked at the appearance of Willie. Gaunt, white-haired, exhausted, he had become a man of eighty in three months.

A man named Talazar, who had once been a general in the regular army of Peru and who had defected to the rebels within the last month, stood quietly at the doorway, watching the telecast.

The officers scoffed and cursed, but Talazar stood there listening, smiling curiously. At last he said, "For all that, he presents us with a difficult situation."

They turned around, looking at him doubtfully. He moved into the room, sat down and filled an elegant carved pipe.

"The archbishop speaks the truth," Talazar said. "Peruvians are Catholics. They revere the pontiff. In terms of public support here in the country and throughout Latin America, it will be very bad to fight tomorrow."

The younger officers sharply disagreed. One of them said Talazar had been a staff officer too long and had forgotten what war was about and now lacked the boldness.

"Boldness is something for the very young," said the general, smiling indulgently, "for those who wish to make movies or write books and for romantics who wish to be heroes. Here, our cause is rather commonplace. We wish to take over the country." Talazar lighted his pipe. "General Russell, you see the political aspects of the situation."

Clio walked to the window of the farmhouse and looked out over the fields. He could see the churches of Lima in the distance.

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"We have won here," he said. "A day one way or the other would not matter."

"Exactly," said Talazar.

"I tell you they have reinforcements coming down from the North with many U.S. weapons," said the youngest of the officers.

"It still does not matter," said Talazar calmly. "Better to fight soldiers for a few days more than the people for a century."

"You are not going to make a peace gesture to them!" the young officer said furiously. "To compromise the cause of freedom!"

Clio looked at the young officer sadly. He had not heard the word cause in a long time.

"General Russell will not of course meet them," said Talazar. "We are speaking only of a short truce that will serve us politically."

"It serves them better," the young officer insisted. "They will get the same political advantage that we would get and they will get the reinforcements besides."

"Please," said one of the other officers turning to Clio. "Let us keep up the fight, General Russell."

Clio said that he wanted time to think the matter over. Then he dismissed them and went to the small room he kept in the back of the house.

The officers went out to the yard, continuing the argument on the front lawn.

General Talazar walked into a flower garden a short distance from the house and smoked his pipe. He strolled there and dreamed of a villa on Ibiza and of a woman with green eyes.

In the pocket of his jacket he had a pledge signed by the president of Peru that guaranteed him 10 million sols for the murder of Clio Russell.

Clio sat at the small table and tried to write his letter.

I suppose you heard him—and saw him, he wrote. *Maybe you have decided to*

He stopped there and could not go on. He looked at the

picture on the bedside stand: his wife and son and baby.

He had taken the picture himself on the last day in Rio. Martha's mouth was not happy in the picture because they had quarreled, and he had left her that way even though they had made love while the children napped and the quarrel was with them all through the lovemaking and the lovemaking did not remove the quarrel that had been with them almost a year.

He crumpled up the letter and started a new one, glancing now and then at the picture. Through the window he could see the soldiers sitting under the trees arguing and, in the garden, General Talazar strolling among the flowers.

I know you feel I have left you, but I haven't. I miss you. I can't even tell you how much. I can't express it. I am sad thinking about the last time when we said those things. And when you said I put all this ahead of you and the children I was mad, because maybe that is what I have done. I can't help it.

He stopped there and looked at the picture again.

And now watching W. on the TV I am even sadder thinking of what happened. Why didn't you say those things before—afraid of what I might think? Don't you know I love you and if you believed something that doesn't matter but is just personal and wouldn't affect us? Just like what I am doing is personal—can't you accept what I think? Maybe this is my religion?

He stopped again, seeing that he was only continuing the quarrel. After a while he tore up the second letter and drank from the brandy flask that he always carried now, and then he stood by the window for a long time looking down on his soldiers, who seemed very young.

Beyond the trees, between rows of bright flowers, the neat tan uniform of General Talazar moved back and forth, catching many small moving spots of light and making the general look like a leopard.

Anyone could fight, thought Clio, but not everyone could do the other things. And watching General Talazar, he was aware of the pitiful quantity of his own store, of how much he needed and would never have. To be like this silver-haired general, to be able to talk well, to lead and preside and rule in

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all those other ways. . . . Into his mind came the picture of a great African diplomat who had led a revolution for his people. In his youth the leader had been the greatest guerilla fighter of his day, but after the fighting he had been able to put aside his guns and don rich clothes and meet with men in splendid reception rooms. That man offered incontestable proof of—what was his name? Or was it only something he had seen on TV long ago?

He called for his orderly.

"Tell General Talazar that I have decided to respect the truce."

"The men will not listen to him, sir."

"General Talazar is the chief of staff of this army, sergeant. Do the men listen to their generals?"

"I will tell him what you have said."

"What kind of soldiers are they if they do not obey their leaders?"

"They are not soldiers, sir. They are revolutionaries."

"Go tell the general."

Clio watched the orderly go, following his progress out to the edge of the grove, where the general had stopped to refill his pipe.

The general listened, then turning to the house, raised his arm to Clio in an approving salute.

Clio waved back.

Then he sat down at the table again and tried to write to his wife to see if what had been broken could be fixed. But it was a letter he could not write because he knew there was no way of answering what she had said that afternoon after they had made love.

In a room below he heard the old voice of his past once more. The guffaws of the soldiers. A curse.

You probably never guessed how much I wanted once to see it all differently—how much I wanted to feel as he did. Then I found out nobody believed what he did but only pretended to. So I found another religion if that is what it is. But even if I was crazy and believed what he did, and you believed what I believed now, I would still love you. I can't stand to think you

are turned against me. Or that you are not happy. Oh Martha—

It was four o'clock in the afternoon, and Clio kept on trying to repair what had been broken and General Talazar strolled in the garden and dreamed of the blue-shuttered villa he would buy on the island and the yacht that he would anchor in the harbor below and he thought how splendid it would be to awake in the morning and turn from her green eyes to the green waters below and see the yacht and the palms along the shore and smell the mimosa drifting up from the terrace. And Clio kept trying to repair what was broken and Willie's voice came once more from the radio in a lower room of the farmhouse and the soldiers were getting drunk under the trees and the voices of the soldiers grew angry because victory was there before them, just beyond the hills, but General Russell listened to fools and bargained with tyrants.

Chapter five

The two jets hurried on and they passed over Kansas and they passed over Missouri and then they came upon that river that the Indians had named so strangely—the long, strange river whose name had been a spelling exercise for many school children, the river that the old-time writer Mark Twain had used as a metaphor of the world and that the old-time poet Thomas Stearns Eliot had called a dark brown god.

And when the planes came to the river, the air grew colder and the snow came driving down from the northwest and it was not easy to see the river clearly but they did finally see it from the planes and it was not a metaphor of anything and it was not a god and if it was something other than a river, then it was a fat, surfeited bull snake sleeping through the winter among the whitening fields where it had fed during the lush summer, and the fields were very flat and the snow spread out across the fields and then the pale half-dollar sun

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slipped swiftly from the sky and the night came on and they were in darkness.

Soon the lights began to twinkle on the ground below and Truman swerved the jet sharply and headed for a blur of lights struggling to be one light under the storm and Willie looked down at Springfield, Illinois, where Abe Lincoln had considered many serious matters and quarreled with his wife Mary and told stories men considered wise and funny.

"Lincoln lies there," said Thatcher Grayson pointing. "And over there—that's New Salem. They have reconstructed the village where he lived as a young man. It is an interesting place."

Thatcher Grayson knew Willie was not interested in New Salem but he had felt the alien brother moving about the plane and thought that the alien brother might depart if they talked and thought of natural events.

"What is it you call him?" asked Joto, who had also felt the presence of the stranger.

"Who?"

"Lincoln."

"The Great Emancipator," Grayson said. "Once I visited the tomb. It was a very hot day but it was cool there. My father took me by the hand to the place where the body rests and—you are all right, son?"

Willie, looking down at the lights, shivered.

"Tonight," he said, "I shall make peace with him."

Grayson moved nervously in his seat.

"Where are the fields, Mr. Grayson?"

"North of town," said Grayson, his voice becoming sorrowful. "Son, let us rest before we go there. It is snowing hard—look there. See? It will be very cold. You are not in condition."

"Good enough condition," said Willie, and now he looked more Chinese than any of the other nationalities and races that he was.

Grayson felt the estranged, scheming brother again but he could not be sure he was not being dragged back into his spiritist condition so he tried to put matters in the old terms

they both understood.

"Would I let you pitch if you had the flu or a sore arm and the weather was cold and the game sure to be long?"

"I have not flu, dear friend," said Willie, looking at Mr. Grayson with love. "And the game will not be long."

"When the score is tied and it is late September and the game is in the seventh or eighth and the pennant is at stake, the sun goes down early and everything worsens. Even the young pitchers are old, the relief is worn." Grayson did not know what he said and he spoke not to Willie but to the invisible stranger, all cold and bloodless, who moved about the darkening cabin.

The plane banked just then, struggling in the storm, its icy wings shuddering against the straight, hard wind. They buckled their seat belts.

"The fences are dark," Grayson went on in his doom-struck voice. "The ball coming in stands out for the hitter. The elements are with him now, not the pitcher, weary from the long season, too old for the fast ball and feeling the winter already coming into his body. Go to the strong relief but even the relief is weary and weakened. If the relief has lost its strength, what shall ye be strengthened with?"

The plane touched down, its engines roaring, the purple-blue lights of the airstrip rushing past them, the wind gusting the snow over obscure buildings in the distance.

Truman taxied to a small dimly lit terminal. Willie strained to see.

Over the speaker came the voice of Herman Felder.

"Other plane's landing behind us. They'll be getting off first. We have vehicles and supplies waiting for us. You can see the vehicles just beyond the fence out there."

Up the aisle, moving very slowly, came Benjamin. His eyes were fretful and very old when he spoke.

"You must not get off the plane," he said to Willie.

"Recommendation 40," said Willie mechanically as if from a memory drill.

"It cannot apply to this."

"Nothing else applies, Father Benjamin."

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Thatcher Grayson, sensing the danger and the fear and the presence of the hated brother and seeing how ill Willie was, broke into tears.

"Father Benjamin is right!" he cried. "It is wrong for you to be here. There is evil on this plane and evil ahead! And you are sick, dear son, so sick!"

Willie unbuckled himself in the seat and stood up.

"You must go on," he said to them. "What is to happen will happen, and I, for my part, must try to do what I ask others to do. But you must go on."

Joto and Truman joined them now.

"Why does Brother Thatcher weep?" said Joto.

Truman put his hands on Thatcher Grayson's shaking shoulders as if to ask the same question.

"The time is come for the plan to begin," said Willie, looking to the forward cabin.

Benjamin whispered, "Don't you see? It will all be lost in romance."

"What can I do to change that?" said Willie.

"Escape."

"Not possible, Father Benjamin."

"This plane could take us away in minutes."

Willie shook his head sadly. Benjamin attempted to argue further, but Willie didn't hear or if he heard would not listen. Finally he told Benjamin that it was too late and then he went to the forward cabin, leaving Benjamin still arguing, Grayson weeping, Joto and Truman trying to make sense out of what had been said in the desert and what now had been said on the plane.

Felder was not there; only his voice was there, filtering through the bulkhead from the pilot's cabin. Willie opened the pilot's hatch, and Felder's face, turning up suddenly and lit by the gleam of the instrument panel, seemed excited, exalted.

He had been talking in a low tone over the radio.

"It will be a few minutes," he said.

"Whenever you say, Brother Herman."

The cockpit reeked of roses. There was a crackling sound

on the radio, then a voice.

"There will be hunters out even now—drinking—shooting birds. They could be in the way. They—"

Felder turned off the radio.

"We'll proceed immediately to Regent Fields. According to the plans, you speak to Mr. Regent at midnight, the beginning of the day."

"Yes."

"Our informants say there are many hunters out even now, friends of Regent. Perhaps you would prefer to wait until morning."

"No."

"Then we'll set up just inside the fences of the property—about a mile from the guest house. There will be warm fires, tents, food. Regent has even built some modular shelters we understand."

"Herman," said Willie, coming closer to Felder, "I meant what I said earlier."

"I don't know what you mean," said Felder, busying himself with the instrument panel.

"I forgive you."

"There's nothing to be forgiven," Felder said in the same calm way. "You are ill—much worse off than you know. You are imagining all sorts of things."

Willie came closer still. The snow beat down on the cockpit.

"Please," said Felder.

The cockpit door swung to and Joto was there.

"Men are at door—time to go."

Felder got up from the pilot seat and quickly brushed past Willie.

"Let's go," he said to the others in the cabin.

Willie switched on the radio, but there was nothing but static.

"Have thermos of soup, Brother Willie," said Joto. "Please drink."

"Yes," said Willie, already feeling cold because of the snow and because death had breathed upon him and because he

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knew now nothing could save him.

The men in the plane seemed to have calmed a little, having once more convinced themselves that Willie's hunger had brought him to a delusional state.

Out on the airfield the wind blew freezing pellets into their downturned faces as they hurried toward the lights of automobiles.

Willie staggered in the wind; Truman caught him and half-carried him toward a car.

"Truman," he said, "it is easier to believe. Is that not so?"

Truman grunted.

Willie said, "Let me walk, please."

Truman released him.

Willie, feeling a little stronger, looked at the cars. They formed a black column reaching back into the storm.

The airport beacon swept across the cars. There were men scurrying about, shouting to one another. It seemed to Willie that it was something that had been rehearsed—a white demonstration that had nothing to do with him.

The beacon swept around once more, this time illuminating the figure of Herman Felder. He looked like a general shouting instructions to his troops.

"Herman!" Willie shouted feebly, but the beacon flashed away and Felder was swallowed in darkness.

"This car—" Joto cried from behind, and Truman guided Willie into a long black limousine that had the look of a funeral coach.

In the car Willie coughed—a fit of coughing seized him.

"Drink this," said Joto, holding a thermos of soup to his lips.

Willie sipped the soup; it tasted bitter. The car now began to move.

"Who is with me?" said Willie. "Who is in the car?"

"I am here," said Joto.

"Thatcher Grayson is here, son," said Grayson.

"Truman is driving," said Joto.

"I am with you also," said a figure hunched in the front seat.

"Who is that?" said Willie.

The figure turned his head, and the beacon light etched the face of Father Benjamin, old beyond old, old as the last photo of the famous poet after he had suffered the final stroke and did not expect to hear anything again but only the everlasting silence.

"Father Benjamin," Willie said, "you see that it is necessary? Some things cannot be helped. I did not ask to be born. Nor do I ask to die."

At the word *die,* the car jerked suddenly to the side, then skidded into the other lane. Cries of fear, prayer, protest came from the brothers.

"Please," said Willie. "Please Truman."

The car skidded away again, then slowly fell back into line with the others.

"Peace, my brothers," said Willie. "Let peace come now. There are important things to do and to be done."

"You are in delirium," said Joto in the darkness. "If you drink soup, you feel better in head."

"Pray, brothers," said Benjamin softly. "Pray."

They were silent going into the storm.

The procession entered the downtown of Springfield, all lighted and candled for the Christmas season. Over the main street, making an arch of green and white lights, the businessmen of the town had put up a sign: THE SPRINGFIELD CHAMBER OF COMMERCE SALUTES ITS LORD, THE BABY JESUS OF BETHLEHEM, PRICES TO SUIT ANY BUDGET.

Willie could see bright shops, their windows filled with toys. The snow kept falling in large wet flakes. The wind, broken by the city, had died down. The town seemed to be a set from an old-time play about coming home for Christmas.

He tried to pray, tried to listen, but all he heard was the pounding of his heart in the cage of his chest.

The tomb of Lincoln, topped by a blue Star of David and a red cross, loomed before them. The procession slowed, turned, then began to move more quickly.

He felt his heart accelerate with the motion of the car. His

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dream came over him again. When they broke into open country, he was up above the storm, flying without effort. He could see the storm below him, and below the storm, a dull monotonous terrain.

He was to find the green message for the others but there was no green growing thing anywhere and he knew that the old, the borrowed dream was worthless, a drug that his system had developed a tolerance for.

A persistent moaning filled the skies around him. A different kind of storm was coming. He did not know that it was only Truman weeping voicelessly as he drove on, trying to make words for events that no words existed for and asking God to come into being so that events could have meaning even though, he knew, it made no sense to ask God to exist.

The wind came across the plains like a scythe swung by a maniac.

Chapter six

In the Versailles Room of the Regent lodge, its giant mirrors reflecting the flames of a thousand candles, the One Hundred Most Important Men in America toasted each other with crystal goblets of champagne.

"By God," said George Doveland Goldenblade, pointing to the 3-D TV screen at the end of the magnificent room, "it restores your faith in the American dream."

The TV showed throngs of citizens pouring into Times Square to await the coming of L-Day. Chanting *Onward Christian Soldiers* they looked like figures preparing for battle. *Victory!* they shouted. And *Long live Old Glory!* It was as if a crusade were being launched.

The program switched from Times Square to other cities where L-Eve celebrations were underway. There were interviews with movie and television personalities, who called L-Day a wonderful gesture, a magnificent moment for mankind, something that would make the universe a better place in which to live. There were special programs of *This Is Your Death.* From time to time the cameras would pick up the L-Eve dance in the Roosevelt Grille with the music of the Guy Lombardo Orchestra.

The Versailles Room seemed remote from these events. It was a show unto itself, a scene of bibulous medieval fellowship. The men, dressed in formal hunting attire—bloodred jackets, black leather boots, blue and white striped breeches—had this day killed 160,000 ploves, and the fields surrounding the lodge were covered with feathers and bird flesh. A few guests were still hunting, though it was night now and the snow made the shooting difficult.

Goldenblade turned to Archbishop McCool. "Any word yet?"

"They are only a few minutes away, Mr. Goldenblade. Near a small town. Babylon Bend, I believe they call it."

"Excellent, excellent. We'll go to meet them."

"I beg your pardon, Mr. Goldenblade," said Archbishop McCool, smiling his handsome smile. "I believe Mr. Regent wishes to meet His Holiness alone."

"Of course—I knew that. So many distractions of late. By the way, where is Bob?"

"Gol-*lee,* Mr. Goldenblade, I don't know. I sure don't."

Nor did anyone else know where Robert Regent was.

Throughout this day of shooting there had been many rumors. He was in Springfield, soon to reach the lodge. He was in Chicago. He had been seen, someone said, in Peoria, Illinois shortly after noon. He *had* arrived and was now resting in one of the lodge's cabins. He was on the grounds, disguised as a plove guide, or as one of the hunters.

"He could be in this very room," said Goldenblade, turning to Frank Carlisle of Carlisle Personal Chemistry.

"For all I know, you are Bob Regent," said Carlisle, a man of fifty whose face twitched horribly.

"Don't be ridiculous! You know who I am."

"You could be made up. So many people in my organization are made up now, I don't know who the vice-presidents

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are. Even my wife seems made up half the time."

"What do you mean?" Goldenblade snapped.

"I'm telling you, people today are all in disguise, so you don't know who's operating. First it started as a joke, maybe. But now, a man doesn't know who he's operating with, or on."

"You mean on the videophone?"

"On video or live, in person, it's all the same," said Carlisle. "People turning into other persons. Somebody should stop it."

"You know what your trouble is, Frank? You got monist homosexuals in your organization. That will screw you up every time."

Carlisle's face was a moving jigsaw puzzle, with none of the pieces fitting together.

"Dove, if you *are* Dove, I would no more discuss intraplant personnel problems with you than I would discuss your sex life or that of your wife."

Goldenblade's mouth fell open. "What the hell is wrong with you? You talk like somebody who's lost his computer. What have you been doing, taking some of your own chemicals?"

"Look here, Goldenblade, if you are Goldenblade, I would no more discuss what I take with you than I would the sex life of whatever that is over there." Carlisle pointed to McCool.

"That's an archbishop."

"How do I know that? How do I know it isn't Regent? How do I know it isn't Goldenblade?"

"I'm Goldenblade."

"You're just begging the question," said Carlisle. "You and the archbishop could have switched any time in the last hour."

"Switched what?"

"Each other."

"Jesus Christ."

"You could have even switched him," said Carlisle.

Goldenblade put his thumb in his mouth. Revolving the thumb while he sucked upon it, he said slowly, "Why not do

this for a while, Frank? Maybe it'll clear what's left of your goddamn brains."

And he walked away.

The One Hundred Most Important Men laughed and drank champagne.

Black servants, dressed in colonial costume and white wigs, brought whole pheasants to them as they stood before the hearth or watched the L-Eve proceedings on the 3-D TV.

"Those two clowns of Regent's—where are they?" Goldenblade said.

"Mr. Cole and Mr. Ware?" said Archbishop McCool. "Gol-*lee,* Mr. Goldenblade, I believe they're still hunting."

"It's night for Chrissake. How can they see the birds?"

"I'll be goshdarned if I know, Mr. Goldenblade. But somebody said they were trying to set a record."

On the television, George Goldenblade saw the face of his brother, huge and veined like agate, the eyes bulging and mad.

Over the speaker came his high-pitched chant, "Zap! Zing! Splat! Splash! The Holy Spirit will break their ass!"

The camera cut to a raving mob gathered on a hillside below. The crowd returned the cardinal's chant in litany fashion.

"Look at that," said Goldenblade huskily. "That used to be a fine man."

Archbishop McCool tried to think of something to say that would make George Goldenblade feel better.

"Emotional distress sometimes does strange things to a person," he said at last.

Goldenblade stiffened. "What you mean, Archbishop Grace, is that Brother Eminence Earl has burnt a transistor—only you don't have the lousy genitals to say so." With this, Goldenblade went out to find Cole and Ware. His brother's voice boomed after him: "Zap! Zing! Splat! Splash! The Holy Spirit will. . . ."

The snow swirled down in great flakes; the slightly rolling fields were deep with it. From the steps of the lodge Golden-

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blade thought that the snow looked strange, gathered into odd little mounds and drifts, thousands of them. Then he remembered the birds.

Shotguns sounded off to the left. Goldenblade thought that the shots came from Easter Gorge, a shallow irregular valley near the side entrance road to the fields. In the afternoon he had seen a small mountain of birds stacked there. They had been butchered trying to escape the fields through a break in the fence at the end of the gorge.

He adjusted his snow boots and waded into the white mire. The birds lay everywhere. It was like walking on Jello.

Squish. Squish. Squish.

"Jesus," said Goldenblade. "And God. And Mary. And Christ."

More shots smacked into the air, amazingly close.

"Hey!" Goldenblade shouted. "For Christ's sake!"

Crouching low, frantically humming the *Only-Therefore* hymn, Goldenblade headed toward a slope that lay between Easter Gorge and the access road to the lodge.

"This is George D. Goldenblade!" he called into the wind. "Don't shoot or by Jesus Franklin Roosevelt Christ, I'll prosecute!"

Four shotgun blasts answered him, and Goldenblade pitched forward into the snow. Immediately two birds plumped onto the ground near his head. He heard drunken laughter.

"You crazy bastards!" he screamed. "You damned near hit me." He dared not lift his head.

"This is GOLDENBLADE!" he shouted.

The laughter broke, then resumed—louder, closer. He looked up. On the snow-covered slope, waving bottles and shotguns, their hunting clothes spattered with blood, stood Cole and Ware. Goldenblade jumped up.

"You goddamn idiots! You goddamn near killed me. Goddamn your mothers and fathers immortally. All your offspring. Your goddamn—"

"Why, it's Mr. Goldenblade," cried Cole, weaving down the slope.

"Famous communicator, famous industrial giant," said Ware.

Ware, whose face was blotched with blood and snow, crunched Goldenblade in a wet, feathery embrace.

"Idiots! Morons!" Goldenblade cried. "Don't you know what's happening here?"

"We're hunting, Mr. Goldenblade," crooned Mr. Ware, still holding the industrial giant in his arms. "Hunting the prey."

"Let me go, you drunk son of a bitch."

"You insult my mother, Mr. Goldenblade. Did I ever insult your mom?" said Ware, releasing Goldenblade slowly.

"*My* mother—" Goldenblade sputtered.

"Mothers, all mothers—necessities of invention," said Ware, and he fired his shotgun a few feet above Goldenblade's head.

"Goddamn you!" Goldenblade shouted, frightened and backing away. "Don't think I'm not going to report this to Bob Regent. Bob Regent is a close friend of mine. He doesn't like drunken slobs working for him."

Cole and Ware steadied themselves against one another.

"Wha'z Mr. Robert 'Bob' Regent got to do with it?" Cole asked.

"Bob Regent's wine we're drinking, in't it?" said Ware, waving a magnum of Regent champagne.

Goldenblade, half crouched in the freezing snow, saw that the men were drunk beyond the use of reason. He decided to try another approach.

"Gentlemen," he said, "it's been a grand day of hunting."

"Not over yet," said Ware.

"Not by a long shot," said Cole, and he and Ware doubled up with laughter. Cole fired his shotgun again.

"In a few minutes," Goldenblade said in a forced, friendly, pacifying way, "just seconds really, our Holy Father, the pope, will be here. You know, to meet Mr. Regent and start L-Day?"

Cole and Ware were still laughing.

"We are all looking forward to seeing His Holiness. And of

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course, Bob Regent is especially looking forward to seeing His Holiness. That's why I came out here, fellas. To find Bob Regent."

Cole wheeled and shot into a sudden flight of ploves. Four fell, two of them flapping wildly, spurting blood on the snow.

The men shrieked with laughter, then blasted away at the wounded birds. The birds exploded and disintegrated. Feathers, a small rain of blood, the falling flakes.

"Kill 17,000 birds today," Cole sang.

"Another 17,000 tonight," sang Ware.

"Kill all birds in here."

"Kill till it's all birds—everything," said Cole, waving his shotgun over the fields.

"Okay, fellas, sure. Ha-ha. We all enjoy sports, fellas. Good clean hunting sports. But where is Regent, Mr. Bob Regent?"

The men were still laughing.

"Fellas," said Goldenblade, "it's Mr. Bob Regent that the pope is coming to *see*."

Cole reloaded his gun. "Mr. Bob Regent, did you say Mr. Goldenblade? Mr. Robert 'Bob' Regent meeting pop?"

"*Pope*!" Goldenblade shouted. "The Catholic pope."

"Pope, pop—whazza dif'rence?" said Cole.

"Pop a pope, papa poppa," said Ware. "Pop pop pop pop," and he fired his automatic shotgun four times.

They doubled over with laughter once more.

Goldenblade, his teeth chattering, looked down at the lodge. Beyond it he could see the fields stretching down to the high fence around the entrance gate. And now he spied the first lights of the papal procession.

"He's here!" he cried. "Look men, for God's sake! He's here! The pope!"

"Pop pop pop," said Ware.

Cole fired straight up into the air.

In the lights of the moving cars, Goldenblade could make out the tents that had been erected in the area near the gate, the row of faint bonfires struggling in the snow, the modular cabins that had been erected in the afternoon.

Suddenly, overhead, came a whirring sound. Cole and Ware, roaring over their obscure elaboration of a joke, immediately fired toward it. They kept firing even after they saw the lights, the red and blue pulses of two, then four helicopters. The air was full of helicopters.

"You crazy bastards!" screamed Goldenblade, striking the gun from Cole's arms. "Those are choppers. That's Bob Regent! Bob Regent!"

Cole and Ware swayed together, staring up.

"Pop a pope," said Cole.

"Pop a poppa," said Ware.

"Come, Bob!" Goldenblade shouted. "Here, Bob!" He lifted his arms to the first of the helicopters.

In the craft Zack Taylor, ace commentator of International Broadcasting, said, "Those men there to the side of the lodge—who are they?"

"Who knows?" his director replied. "Anyhow, that's the procession ahead. But how do we light it?"

The network coordinator leaned forward and spoke to the pilot. "Radio the light crew to swing forward and try to get in from behind."

"It won't work," the pilot replied. "Snowing too hard. He won't be able to hold."

"When do we take air?" Taylor asked.

"At 11:58, just after the Chicago cutaway," the director said. "There'll be light in the area where those tents are. They have search lights in there someplace."

Even as he spoke, a half-dozen strong lights mounted on telephone poles switched on above the gate. The gate was opening now, and the first of the cars moved forward.

"Let's get that," Taylor said.

"There's still not enough light from here," said the pilot. "Besides this bird won't stand still. Too much wind."

Taylor turned to the director. "What are they showing now?"

"Williamsburg, Virginia. The President's smoking a peace pipe with an Indian chief from Florida."

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"And we've got the goddamn pope!" said Taylor, who was known as an air hog throughout the industry and who was out to win his thirtieth award for excellence in broadcast journalism.

Chapter seven

The car stopped and Willie saw the fields of ice.

There was much talk in the car but Willie could not hear it. He was looking at the fields and trying to open the door of the car.

Truman and Joto made a chair with their hands and arms and Willie sat in the chair and they carried him to the entrance gates of Regent Fields. The wind was stronger.

"Please, let me walk," said Willie.

So they put him down and he stood on unsteady feet and he saw the snow fields of his vision and he felt the ice wind that he had felt before and he saw the lodge and it looked like a castle or a church suspended in the air.

Grayson came forward to give him his arm and Willie passed through the gate and kept looking at the lodge and it seemed to be a place that someone had described to him long ago.

There were powerful lights flooding down on the ground around the entrance area and huge space heaters had been placed between the tents. The heaters had burned the snow away so that the ground was wet and brown and Willie thought that the ground was like sand strewn with seaweed.

They went into the first of the tents and Willie sat down on a folding chair and someone handed him a thermos of hot drink and someone patted his shoulders and there were many men in the tent and many more outside hurrying about and the men seemed far away to Willie and he kept looking at the lodge.

The strong lights made a liquid brown circle of grass and there was steam or mist rising from it and the snow falling into this circle continuously melted but beyond the circle the

darkness fell like a curtain and on the curtain they had strung the electrical castle and Willie, looking at these things, felt his body begin to resign.

He heard the voices of Benjamin and Joto and he heard the whimpering of Grayson and Truman and he tried to unite himself with their bodies and draw strength from the sounds that they made but when he looked at his hands, his fingers were small strange snakes, and he was sick.

Benjamin held his head in a corner of the tent and he retched there and then came back to sit on the folding chair once more.

But now the helicopters swooped down over the moist brown earth and to Willie they were huge wasps with blinking red and blue eyes, and he was sick again.

They said various things to him and he tried to listen and he tried to think of those things he had always known and he tried to pray, but it was like another person listening and thinking and praying.

Someone took a picture then and the flash seemed to last a long time and he considered that the flash was inside his brain. When it finally burned away to a pinpoint and went out, he said *Be calm* to his body and then told himself that he must cross the brown circle and enter the black curtain and he must pass through the curtain and there on the other side—

Green tree, a voice said distinctly.

"Where?" he said aloud.

Father Benjamin bent down.

"Where is what?"

"Where is the green tree?"

"You dream, young brother," said Benjamin.

"The world is white and darkness but there is a green tree beyond the dark curtain."

"In the dream only. It is winter here outside the dream you have."

"Look at the grass, Father Benjamin. See how brown it is."

"Only because of heaters that were brought here. Look.

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The grass is dead—killed by the cold and snow."

"There are many things that are dead here. We have come to a place of death."

"Do you want to die?" said Father Benjamin.

Willie looked at the old man's face. He considered this question a long time. And now he entered his dream fully and tried to borrow the life it had had for him.

He shook his head slowly. "No."

"Then we must leave."

"Not before I meet him. I have to meet him."

He drank from the thermos and he felt warmth and after a time he felt stronger. He stood up, still gazing at the lodge.

"You wish to die and do not know it," said Benjamin. "Have you learned so little from our teaching? Do you not remember that the enemy is always death?"

Benjamin spoke with anger in his voice and with pity and with sadness.

Willie saw things vividly now—the tents, the campfires where the men of the papal escort gathered to warm their hands, the faces of the men themselves, laughing, excited as children. A little farther on, he could see men spreading out their sleeping bags on the brown turf. The strong lights, the clamor of the men, the roaring of the helicopters, gave the scene a theatrical air, and Willie said softly, "I go onto a stage in a play I did not write."

Then he saw Herman Felder coming toward the tent, moving quickly, carrying his body like something that might go off.

He is in a dream too, Willie thought, *and perhaps it chose him as mine chose me,* and he felt the pull of the old murderous emotion.

"He is in a sort of trance," Benjamin said to the others, as if Willie were asleep and could not hear him speaking.

"So is Brother Herman," Willie said, as Felder came into the tent.

Felder spoke quietly, quickly, like the director of an acting troupe just before first night.

"Regent is here. He will meet you on the pathway to the

lodge. Just beyond the rim of lights."

"Yes," said Willie.

"He will be alone. At midnight. It's 11:51 now."

"Yes, Brother Herman."

"He cannot walk that far!" Grayson protested. "He is very ill."

"I can make it, Mr. Grayson," said Willie. "It is no more than the distance between home plate and the center field fence in Cleveland."

"Why it's two miles, boy!" said Grayson. He turned to Joto, Truman, Benjamin. "He can't make it."

"Regent's coming halfway, Thatcher," said Felder. "He's standing at the door of the lodge now, we are told. He will come right down the path. There is a little clump of trees about halfway. That's the place of the meeting."

Willie nodded.

Grayson said, "You have seen Regent?"

"His emissaries," said Felder.

"Who are his emissaries?"

"Various officials in the organization, Thatcher. They're not in the baseball world."

"Who are they?"

"Why are you questioning me like this?"

"Because I don't believe the man is here," said Grayson, bringing his bent body up to Felder.

"You're excited, Thatcher. We're all excited. Representatives of the papal guard, Monsignor Taroni and the others of our group conferred with Regent's aides not more than five minutes ago. They assured us Regent is here, waiting at the lodge. He just arrived."

"You don't know that," Grayson insisted. "You don't know anything about that—"

"I know Bob Regent better than you know him, Thatcher," said Felder. Then in a softer tone, "This is supposed to be an evening of reconciliation, Thatcher. Can't you trust anyone?"

Willie stood by the door flap of the tent. He was looking at the lodge.

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"We have to stop it," Grayson said.

Willie, turning around, said, "No, Mr. Grayson, we cannot stop anything. It cannot be changed now. I must do what must be done."

"The Society teaches freedom—even from our own choices," said Benjamin. "You act like a man in captivity. Has the L-Plan not enclosed you?"

"It is a chosen plan," said Willie, stepping into the glow of the gas lamp that hung suspended from the center pole of the tent. "Even now I could escape, I suppose. But what do I escape to? This is what I chose and am choosing. I cannot think beyond that."

"You do not wish to admit to a mistake?" said Benjamin.

"If it is a mistake, then it is a mistake I have wedded," said Willie. "I can no more give it up than Truman can talk."

Truman moved toward the door flap.

"You are my brother, Truman," said Willie, going over to him. "But my belief is my brother, too. That brother calls to me now."

"You can't go out there!" Grayson cried. Willie moved toward him.

"For a little while, my well-loved friend, I must leave you. And only for the purpose of never leaving you again."

"Why speak this way?" said Joto, his own body shaking now. "What is it that I do not know, that has been going on for many days and I have no knowledge of? Why this talk of death?" He had turned to Benjamin.

Benjamin extended his hands in a strange sign of pleading and blessing.

"What is it?" Joto demanded.

Willie embraced him. "It is only the difficulty of the plan, Joto. Another plan is in conflict with it."

He stepped over to Felder, and they stood looking at one another and their twin dreams spoke to one another.

"Peace, Brother Herman."

Felder said nothing for a moment. Then, in a whisper, "Peace."

They embraced and into the scent of roses Willie said, "I

want the chance to meet him." Felder's body became a block of stone.

"Promise me," said Willie.

Slowly Felder nodded his head. When he pulled away from Willie, his eyes had opened to the horror of what his actor knew.

Willie lingered, watching him swallow the horror. Felder took a little step backward—only that. Then he was as before, as on the day Willie had first met him—half film, half man, a makeover of a long-dead player.

Willie said to them all, "Do not come for me until after midnight."

He turned to Benjamin. "Old friend, my father." The sad, slanted eyes blinked with tears.

Benjamin folded thin wavering arms around Willie.

"There is only one father."

Willie could not speak.

He turned then to Thatcher Grayson.

"It is the last of the ninth, Mr. Grayson."

Grayson hugged Willie, holding him until Felder gently broke his grasp.

Now only Truman blocked his way.

"I have nothing to give you, my friend," said Willie. "I cannot give you belief. What can I give you?"

In the sign tongue Truman said *Stay.*

He gazed at Truman's unknown face, roughened and scarred like a moon. Then he reached into his tunic and took out the tattered shirt he had worn in Chicago, its red stain glowing in the lamplight like fresh paint.

"This flag is for you," he said.

Truman took it and held it, inspecting it gravely. Then he put it in his own tunic.

Willie gently embraced him as he stood there, one hand inside the breast of his jacket.

Then without looking back he went into the chill air and the damp falling flakes and the door flap of the tent closed against their immediate cries. But one voice came distinctly to his ears—Felder's final instruction to the troupe: "Stop! You

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are not gods. You cannot interfere with the dream of a man!"

Willie, breathing deeply, fixed his gaze on the lights of the lodge, all candled and gleaming like a Christmas tree.

He began the long walk, and each step became the rising-falling expiration of a dream, mortally wounded.

He passed the guards unnoticed. They ate their suppers or prepared to sleep. He did not hear their laughter. The special police guard had gathered behind the tents he had just left and were abstractedly preparing a Eucharist.

He went on like a ghostly athlete.

The helicopters, wheeling about the sky, kept watch for him near the tents. In the lead unit Zack Taylor scanned the tent village with his binoculars.

"Which one is his?"

"No one knows. It's possible he's still in the limo. There's been no procession or anything."

Taylor himself now saw the solitary figure trudging across the lighted stage but took the figure to be one of the guards or a gamekeeper.

"Radio down to the people at the gate," said Taylor. "We've got air in less than a minute."

Willie reached the edge of the lighted circle and stepped into the night, and no one saw him as he slipped into the darkness—no one but Patrick Joyce and his two assistants, stationed ahead in a grove of cedars.

On the shortwave a voice spoke something to the three men in code and they cocked their noiseless high-powered rifles and whispered confidently into their lapel mikes.

"All clear," said one.

Willie came toward them, a tall shadow perfectly silhouetted against the white stage he had left.

"Wait a minute," said the second man, stationed forward of the others. "There's somebody coming down from the lodge. Wait! *Two* men. Joyce!"

Joyce flattened himself on the ground and looked back up the path to the lodge. He saw the two figures moving like bears toward them.

"Okay, it's okay," he whispered to the other two. "It's

dark enough. Let them pass if they get there first."

"Shoot—"

"Shoot only *him*. We're okay. They can't possibly see—"

"Roger."

Joyce tried to see the two men but they were lost in shadow.

He pressed the director contact of his radio.

"I thought you said there would be no one here."

"There won't be," said Felder.

"We've got two people coming down from the lodge."

"For God's sake, keep clear of them. Head for the fence just as soon as—"

"We're all right. He's going to be here in a minute. We'll get out."

"Don't hit *them*."

"We know what we're doing."

"If necessary, let them pass."

Joyce laughed. "You're a great planner."

"Break contact."

"Roger." Joyce pushed another button and spoke to his assistants. "You read that?"

"Roger."

"Roger."

Clio woke from a troubled sleep and checked his watch. 11:55. The heat was stifling in the bedroom of the farmhouse. He lit a cigarette and went to the window—a cloudless night with the full moonlight on the lush sweet fields.

He could see Lima glowing in the distance. It reminded him of some vague happening in his childhood.

The house was quiet but for the snoring of his soldiers.

He went down the stairway and walked out into the garden where the azaleas bloomed.

The hot night and his loneliness combined to make the hunger in him intense. He had been dreaming of a woman with lush breasts and swollen wet lips. He walked into the sweet sticky fragrance of the garden.

The memory of L-Day came to him confusedly. He sighed.

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He began to think of other things.

He began to think of how, when he came home after the fight, he would go to her and how when she lay back, she would circle his body with her legs and how the slow pulling back of—

And then the 30.30 bullet tore through his heart and he was jerked backward into a bed of azaleas and his blood gushed over the moist earth, spraying his life among the blossoms.

The general, retiring into the shadows, went down toward a stream and threw the rifle into the water and came back up the road and found the machete that he had put there and the sack that he had put there and, whistling a little, he went into the garden and took Clio's head and put the head into the sack and then went back down the road, whistling softly in the moonlight and the white moon was the white belly of his mistress and the world breathed sensuously and he was hungry.

Willie passed under the shadow of the first of the cedars, marching toward the candles of the lodge, his dream drumming his fancies until he could imagine that a great feast had been prepared and he and Mr. Regent would make peace and many friends would gather about the fire.

And there was back there on the fields more than one fire, he thought, and yes there were many fires and he walked farther and the clouds were parting a little and the ground was firm and he had only a few steps to go.

But now the ground was not so firm, but now the ground was covered with soft things that were hard to walk upon, and now the fields were not ice fields but now the fields were swamp.

The moon breaking through the trees and the slow drip of rain.

How hard to fly in this strange country with the rain weighing down his wings and the wind so pressing hard and where was she—Carolyn, Carolyn, Carol—

Our Father—

No, better come down now.

Willie, Willie.

Mr. Regent is that you?

And Mr. Cole and Mr. Ware, rolling down a hillock, cavorting like children, came up firing and Willie's brown arms reaching for the green bough went funny crazy back and off and fire poured through his hands and feet and side and fire poured through his manhood and he was like a banner someone had hung in the air and still he hung there and there was running, three men running, and his blasted body did fall finally without a sound and the red ooze of life melted on the earth, the cold, the thirsting earth.

The snow fell fast and fine and white, so white.

And when running, they came and found him, he was all white and only white and forever white—arms white, legs white, face white, hair white.

And then they found his heart, torn from the body in that ceremony of fire and blood, and ah, white they found it too. And whiter still—like the white of white angels' wings, like the white dreams of God.

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