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CHAPTER ONE

Pitkin Waay had driven his ancient Jeep north along the foothills and up onto the wide plateau of Rocky Flats enough times to have learned to concentrate on the rising, falling, looping journey itself rather than brood over the problems which awaited him at his destination. He preferred his routine of studying the staggering uplifts of yellow-gray rock and tracing the endless ravines that split through the massive irregularity of the mountains to engaging in unsettling reflections and musings on the business and problems of the plant.

In an undefined way, probably related to his despair over the population explosion which was cascading across the entire front range of the mountains, Pitkin felt sheltered by the rock outcropping which tracked the highway and rose like a great natural wall, shielding his eyes from the sprawling suburbs of Denver lying to the east. Looking west, toward the mountains, he could study the small, inconstant range of hills which bumped along the feet of the sharply rising mountains. They had become as familiar to him as they were to the ranchers who had resisted the lucrative offers of developers and continued, instead, to run cattle in the pastureland maze of rocks, gullies, and crosscutting dry creek bottoms.

Given his strong preference for a view of the open countryside, Pitkin could never really understand why the appearance of the plant, as he topped the edge of the high flats, always captured and held his attention. The indistinct, clustered buildings were, from a distance, simply an anomalous industrial silhouette almost lost amid the sweep of the grassland. Pitkin remembered how, on cold winter mornings, he could immediately note the location of the plant by the stark white plume from the heating building. The steam would sometimes rise into the blue sky like a giant exclamation mark whose period was the flattened outline of the facility itself.

Now, however, the warmth of recent spring days had brought a new intensity of color to the prairie, and the plant was accentuated, both by the sky and by the face of the wide plateau. The complex was surrounded by a soft carpet of natural grass, green and fresh in the cool morning. Above the earth, like a painted backdrop, the bright predawn sky outlined the water tower

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and vent stacks which rose from the clutter of buildings and began to assume individual forms and shapes as he drew ever closer.

For the next few minutes, the whole structured assembly seemed to drift slowly to his right as Pitkin followed the highway, and, for a time, it seemed that he would pass the plant completely. Then, at the last moment, the intersecting access road appeared, and he slowed for the turn. Wheeling his battered vehicle through a ninety-degree turn, Pitkin came into a direct line with the plant. The road also led him straight toward the early morning sun which was just now rising directly behind the plant and burning with a golden, red fire in the heart of the Rocky Flats nuclear weapons facility.

Pitkin quickly shaded his eyes with his hand and squinted down the long road toward the security gate. As he approached the high chain link fence and the guard station, which intercepted the roadway, Pitkin looked for refuge from the glare in the long irregular shadows, which etched dark lines across the grounds. He saw temporary relief ahead in the form of a long slender thread where a vent stack stood against the light. As he drove forward, the shadow darted down the very center of the road and neatly speared the Jeep, laying a dark mantle over his eyes.

"Good morning, Pitkin," nodded uniformed, badged and armed Henry Niwot. "It's pretty early for you to be running late isn't it?"

"I'd agree that it's a bit early, but what makes you think I'm late?" Then, before the guard could speak, Pitkin answered his own question. "They've been calling down here from the office asking if I've checked through?"

"Easily half a dozen times," nodded Niwot. "I'd say you've been expected for at least an hour."

Despite the fact that he was Chief of Security at the plant and obviously knew the Deputy Director, Niwot examined Pitkin's government identification badge with official deliberation and looked from the tiny picture to the live model carefully. It was evident the practices of security had become habit and routine in his life.

"I have a feeling that the whole day is going to be like this," said Pitkin. "I guess all schedules are out the window today, mine especially. But what brings you down to the gate, Henry?"

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Niwot shook his head woefully, "I'm trying to get things set up for the herd of reporters you invited out here. As a matter of fact, we've called in a couple of extra men and I'm giving them some pointers on how to deal with a bunch of smart mouth media types. Say, Pitkin, nobody passed the word to security on when this horde will descend on us. Somebody in administration really screwed up again." Catching himself, he quickly added, "I didn't mean you or your folks, Pitkin."

Pitkin waved the apologetic correction aside. "I know exactly what you mean, Henry, and you're right. Things got pretty disorganized awfully fast yesterday. But the word on the press conference is that it's scheduled to begin at ten o'clock, but I expect we'll have some of our press friends coming in quite a bit earlier. Our newest radiation episode is going to be front page news for a few days, and things are bound to be hectic for a while. Smiling broadly, he added, "I even had to postpone a fishing trip with my son today. From his point of view, this place is an unmitigated disaster."

The security chief was relieved by the assurance that he had not offended Pitkin, whom he and the guard force looked upon as a sympathetic and understanding friend in the highest echelon of the plant's administration. "Sounds to me like that boy has got more sense than any of us. I hope things settle down soon so the two of you can get after those trout before the tourists catch 'em all." Stepping back, he gave a short wave of his hand and Pitkin eased out the clutch of his venerable Jeep and rolled off toward the administration building.

The United States Department of Energy's plutonium processing facility at Rocky Flats was thoroughly federal. It was neatly tiered in structure; it wallowed in regulations and directives, and it thrived on rumors. Any discordant report was always magnified, and any news tremor, however slight, was almost certain to create bureaucratic shock waves which would be amplified by bureaucratic minds. Such a predictable event-response pattern served to prove the rule that, in the rooms and hallways of government, the echo swallows its origin, and, thus grotesquely bloated, presents itself as the truth. Since nearly all federalphiles are programmed to believe in such distorted truths, there are precious few honest skeptics in government. Where they do exist, they are the natural centers of contention, covertly

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admired by those in the ranks and openly despised by most in positions of authority.

Pitkin Waay was just such a skeptic, but one whose philosophical understanding of the system had insulated him from much that was trivial and humbug in the bureaucracy. His was a bemused tolerance for the overreactions of the lined up, organized, numbered, and by-the-book federal workers.

Pitkin had also learned to listen selectively; bureaucratic living encouraged it, and his particular office situation made it a condition of survival. He was practicing the art as he went through the routine of arriving at his office. However, there were others who were equally skilled in not being ignored, especially when the echoes they listened to were sufficiently compelling.

"Doctor Waay."

Pitkin kept walking.

"Doctor Waay, we've been looking for you everywhere."

He nodded but kept walking.

The call became sharper and more insistent. "Sir! Mister Chase is waiting for you in his office."

That slowed him a bit.

Seeing she had caught his attention, an emphatic Etta Westridge continued in her most severe and official tone. "He's asked where you were at least a half dozen times in the last hour. And, Dr. Waay, he's been yelling again."

As Pitkin sighed and turned from his own door toward the adjoining door of the plant director, the secretary, yellow pencil jammed into her tightly curled hair, continued her rapid-fire monologue. "Now there isn't any excuse for that, sir. We're all patient and respectful with him, but he shouldn't be loud with the staff. I believe it's your responsibility to speak to him."

Having been thus advised of his duties, Pitkin forbore any comment whatever. He opened the door of the Director's office and, with an ambivalent sigh, left the imperative Ms. Westridge for a meeting with Hugo Chase.

In contrast to Pitkin who was tall and loosely built, Hugo Chase was a block, a short, compact, square block. The disparity between the two men did not end there. Pitkin's rangy frame was characteristically draped with casual clothes, usually Levis and decorum shattering plaid shirts, while Hugo was a round man's fashion plate. Even the most imaginative iconoclasts among the

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plant's work force could not envision the Director without his suit coat and neatly drawn tie.

The differences between the two men went beyond the mere matter of appearance and persisted in their attitudes, their behavior, and in the reconciliations each had made with his surroundings. While Hugo Chase's world seemed to be the plant with its orderly and logical layout and its planned and routine functions, Pitkin Waay's world only included the plant.

Chase, the Director, prided himself on the precision of the lathes which, enclosed in their glass-metal glove boxes, worked the dull gray plutonium into the classified shapes and configurations suitable for use in nuclear weapons. Waay, who probably knew as much about plutonium as any other living being, recognized the need for the work and the precautions in performing it, but decried the process as dehumanizing and found irony in the fact that twentieth century science had managed to produce, in arresting quantity, material that, instead of enriching man, threatened his very existence.

Chase, the organizer, accepted without reservation the rationale for the work itself. To him, weapons, nuclear weapons, were a logical development of science. The fact that science had become both the benefactor and the organizing theme of society troubled him not at all. Pitkin Waay, who felt ill-at-ease in being organized by a system which had far more questions than answers, was philosophically skeptical of his own technology and of its allure which, in the aggregate, seemed to him to be encroaching with a machinelike sterility upon the more humane accommodations of people to society.

The Director was satisfied that the plant presented no threat to its foothills environment, nor to the people of Colorado. The Deputy secretly, and sometimes openly, wished the facility had been built somewhere else.

Chase, whose fortress mentality caused him to live in virtual isolation, fumed with contempt for detractors who had called the facility "a radiation time bomb" waiting to explode and spew its contamination into the air. Waay, who, more often than Chase, dealt with the public and the media, understood the concerns of the thoughtful critics and sometimes found himself listening to them with something more than governmental politeness.

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Given the differences and the contrasts, it was remarkable that the two men had been able to develop a working relationship that, while not warm, was comfortable and firm. Its success stemmed from the fact that the professional alliance was based upon fundamental needs.

Chase, for the stability of his efficient operations, needed the strongest possible scientific presence at the plant. Beyond efficiency, Chase needed to operate in the contentious arena of local and national politics where Rocky Flats was a focal point in the continuing debate over environmental safety and the emerging struggle over national defense issues. In all arguments, on both issues, the articulate competence of Pitkin Waay was indispensable.

For Pitkin, the challenge of radiation physics, with its demanding intricacies, was a refuge. His questioning intellect was frustrated by the contradictions of a changing society, and the more he questioned himself and tried to balance the costs and risks of nuclear technology and nuclear weaponry, the more profound became his uncertainty. Thus the plant was, in one sense at least, an escape, but paradoxically, it was also the source of his quandary.

Given, then, a disruption, a disquieting event, it was predictable that the reactions of Pitkin Waay and Hugo Chase would be different. It might also be expected that the official reaction, the immutable exposed front of the government, would find its direction in the interaction of the Director with his deputy.

"Dammit, Pitkin, this is the last thing we needed. The timing couldn't have been worse," Hugo began the moment Pitkin walked in the door. The Director stood immediately and began waving his arms, first one then the other. His voice rose to a near shout, "Authorization hearings for us are coming up next week. With this," pointing to the news story, "our fine friends in Congress will start talking about dismantlement just like they did last year." He closed his outburst with a grand sweep of his hands over the desktop as if he was calling it safe in a great wooden slide to finality.

Chase's unmistakable reference was to a copy of the Denver Post, which lay, with its front page turned up, displaying a traditional red headline. The sixty-point type jeered at them.

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PLUTONIUM PLANT PLANTS PLUTONIUM

Inset below the lead paragraph of the accompanying story was a three-column picture of a shovel amid a small pile of loose dirt. Some of the dirt had obviously been soaked, and a very perceptible black stains blotched the otherwise dry soil. The line under the picture was in thick boldface: **ROCKY FLATS DIGS**
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Reading aloud, Pitkin smiled. "You have to admire the alliteration in the headline, and the picture caption isn't bad either."

"Sure, Pitkin," scolded Hugo, "you just keep on admiring those media bastards, and we'll both be looking for work."

"Easy, Hugo," soothed Pitkin. "We both knew this was coming from the minute it happened yesterday. It doesn't solve our problem to damn the press. They've got a job to do the same as everyone else."

"They sure did a job all right," said Hugo as he sank heavily back into his oversized leather chair. "Have you read this?" he asked, noting that Pitkin was standing by the desk looking down at the newspaper.

"As a matter of fact, I haven't. I'd promised Breck that we'd go fishing the rest of the week. Then this came up, and I had to spend an hour this morning trying to reschedule the whole thing and making arrangements for him to spend some time with Cope."

Hugo was only vaguely familiar with Pitkin's family. "Cope, that's the boy's grandfather?"

"No," Pitkin corrected, "Cope is a friend of the family." Then he added softly, as much to himself as to Hugo, "The kind of friend they stopped making a long time ago. The type who somehow has an uncomfortable understanding of things we feel are so damned cleverly incomprehensible." Shaking off the thought, Pitkin looked at Hugo, "I remember now that you've met him. Last year he came to the plant with me, and I introduced you."

Hugo had an unpleasant and hazy recollection of a nasty old man who had called him and the plant some unseemly names. He quickly decided it was not a subject to be pursued. "Yes, of course. But all isn't lost. I expect that you can fish anytime. The reservoir is close and ..." "Reservoir?" The incredulous

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note in the fly fisherman's voice caught Hugo up short. Pitkin was on the verge of launching into an indignant explanation of exactly how unthinkable it would be to attempt using a fly rod on an over-fished city reservoir, but he realized that Hugo had been making an honest attempt to express some sympathy for his problem with Breck. With a shrug he looked back down at the Denver Post.

Abandoning his attempt at being the understanding director, Hugo returned to the matter at hand. "Read it. Read the damn thing," he said snatching up the paper and thrusting it into Pitkin's hands.

Pitkin accepted the offer and, to the accompaniment of a frown from the ever-neat Hugo, sat in a side chair and tilted back against the wall while propping a foot on the edge of the nearby polished coffee table.

DENVER: Barrels containing plutonium contaminated oil were unexpectedly unearthed today during a government soil testing demonstration at the Rocky Flats nuclear weapons production facility northwest of Denver. An unknown quantity of radioactive oil from a corroded barrel leaked onto the open ground before its contents were identified and before alarmed plant officials could evacuate the area.

First signs of radioactivity appeared when a shovel, wielded by plant Director Hugo Chase, broke through a rusty barrel lying just below the surface of the ground. Additional barrels were being uncovered by plant workers when a plutonium-sensing instrument began signaling radiation. All work was discontinued, the site was cleared of visitors, and the observers were taken to a monitoring station and checked for contamination.

Chase had announced the soil-testing program over a month ago. He promised that it would provide conclusive evidence that the land surrounding Rocky Flats is well within acceptable limits for radiation. Critics of the facility have long argued that plutonium has escaped from the plant and has, over the years, accumulated to a hazardous level.

Deputy Director Pitkin Waay gave strong assurances that no one at the demonstration had received a measurable dose of the deadly radiation. Waay told reporters the barrels would be constantly monitored. He also said immediate steps would be taken to prevent further leakage of the contaminated oil.

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Waay, an expert on plutonium processing, admitted he had been surprised by the presence of the barrels and advised reporters the problem had what he termed "a hazard potential."

Plant officials have scheduled a press briefing for tomorrow morning. Further details on this latest Rocky Flats radiation miscue will be sought at that time.

One unidentified authority said the plutonium release from the barrel deposit could be the largest and most significant radiation threat to the area since the plutonium fires at the plant over twenty years ago. At that time, plutonium releases continued for three days before they were brought under control.

Pitkin folded the paper and tossed it back onto Hugo's desk. Locking his fingers behind his head, Pitkin stretched back in his tilted chair. "It seems pretty straightforward to me," he said. "Actually, I get the impression they were pretty easy on us."

"Easy?" snapped Hugo. "How in the hell, do you read that as being anything but an invitation to every sign carrying, soft headed radical in the state to grab a sign and hit the highway out there?"

Pitkin chose his words carefully. He sensed that Hugo was building up to another tirade against the outside world. Having heard the Director's vigorous and loud editorial on protest marchers and antinuclear critics in all its variations, he wanted to avoid hearing it again this morning. "Hugo, every one of the press people out there yesterday knew what we were doing. We were dishing up pure and simple propaganda about the purity of our operation. It was a setup and they knew it. The fact they even attended was a surprise to me. Then our whole media event blew up in our faces. It would have been easy for them to turn us into more of a laughing stock than they did. I read that story as the Post holding fire and giving us a chance to clear ourselves."

Hugo found little in Pitkin's words that he could directly dispute. The soil sampling had in fact been an orchestrated event designed to dampen criticism of the plant. Hoping to give the plant a new lease on life in the face of continuing demands that it be closed, Hugo himself had been an eager participant in the planning and in the execution of the ill-fated public display. Never in the darkest corner of his worst nightmare had Hugo thought of encountering hidden barrels of contaminated machine oil. It had

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been a genuine surprise and a media disaster. It now remained for the plant manager to answer to the public.

"Pitkin, have you thought of any explanation for those damn barrels? How could we not have a record of them? If I didn't know better I'd say they were planted there."

"I hate to mention it, Hugo, but you selected the sampling points yourself."

"General locations, Pitkin. I only looked at our plant map and said, 'Here, here, and here.' Walking out there and sticking a shovel in the ground at that very spot was a random act, a one in million chance."

Hugo threw up his pudgy arms as if appealing to the heavens for an explanation of why statistical probabilities had turned against him personally. Failing that, Hugo would have settled for a miraculous purging from his mind of the nightmare memory of the previous day's unfortunate surprise.

"I'll have to hand it to you, Hugo," said Pitkin, unable to resist the opening, "When they handed you the shovel, you really put your foot into it."

Ignoring the jibe, Hugo asked, "Have you been able to get any kind of assessment of the situation we're dealing with out there?"

"Not really," answered Pitkin. "Obviously, our first concern was to get the area defined. Last night before I left, we managed to get plastic over what we believe to be the whole pit, but I haven't talked to anyone yet this morning."

"Then, we still don't know just how large the pit is, how many barrels there are or how hot it really is?"

"No, I can't say, but we ought to have some rough numbers for you by noon."

"Look, Pitkin, I know you and some of your people were up half the night with this thing and I know it's slow going, but we've got that ten o'clock press conference. We're going to need something more than promises of having information later. Those media pals of yours won't settle for anything less than specific radiation levels and a statement of the size of the contaminated area."

Recognizing the fact that Hugo would never shed the conviction his deputy was something of a media sympathizer and

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thus borderline subversive, Pitkin ignored the remark about his "pals" and confined himself to the problem at hand.

"Remember these are rough guesses, Hugo. We believe the whole area is between one hundred and one hundred and fifty square meters. That's the entire pit. There may be leakage we haven't found yet, but the one hot spot we know about is where you were digging. Last night it was showing 920 d/m/g. That's the hottest spot, but it's only a few square meters. Over a larger area it averages down to 250 to 300 d/m/g's"

"Jeez," breathed Hugo, "that's pretty hot. Are you sure you have it all covered?"

"Yes, it's covered. With that and the sprinklers, I'm pretty sure we've got the immediate problem under control."

"Sprinklers?" asked Hugo sharply.

"It's pretty dry around there and that means dust," explained Pitkin. "It's purely a precaution, but it seemed like a good idea to avoid any possibility of wind dispersion. I'd bet there's not even a nervous jump of a counter needle anywhere except at our hot spot, but it doesn't cost anything to be a little extra careful."

"I know all that," said Hugo holding his palm up and turning his head to one side as if trying to avoid hearing about sprinklers and water, "but running water out there could be as bad as wind. If we get erosion, it'll concentrate the stuff."

Pitkin was very much aware of Hugo's sensitivity to the subject of plutonium concentrations by way of erosion. A few years earlier, the State of Colorado and the nearby City of Broomfield had collected enough evidence to compel Hugo to publicly admit that detectable amounts of plutonium had been deposited in Great Western Reservoir, the city's water supply. The plutonium had been carried from the plant to the lake by a small stream, which ran through the federal property and carried runoff from the flats directly into the Broomfield reservoir. Despite assurances that the plutonium residues were well within acceptable safety limits and that even those trace amounts had settled in the muddy bottom of the lake where they would probably never be removed, the public had been outraged. There had been demands the reservoir be drained, and only the most iron clad guarantees by the highest officials in Washington D.C. that the situation would

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be monitored had deterred the massive expense and adverse spectacle of a reservoir draining and earth removal exercise.

The Broomfield experience had given rise to intensive picketing and a barrage of newspaper editorials calling for closure of the plant. A congressional investigating committee had naturally jumped at the publicity opportunity and had held hearings in Broomfield, in Denver, and at Rocky Flats itself. As usual, however, the committee's attention span held only as long as the media kept the story on the front page and in the television lead-ins.

Finally, the heaviest thunder of the public storm had abated and, as one wag observed, "The glow faded from the radiation story." More extreme voices continued to hurl charges and make claims about the hated nuclear work and real and imagined human effects of plant activity. But, wiser critics were content to wait for another day. They knew the radiation hazards inherent in plutonium coupled with the problems of handling and containing the potent metal would outlast the superficial interest of politicians. The plant was vulnerable, and there would be other opportunities.

Hugo Chase had held his job only through some adroit maneuvering and by calling upon some old and powerful friends in the nuclear weapons establishment. Pitkin knew, however, that Hugo could not survive another high visibility incident involving radiation danger.

Having no desire to inflame Hugo, he made only an offhand response to the Director's concern over the sprinkling. "I don't really believe that's a serious problem, Hugo. We're only keeping it damp. No one's going to ask about it, but if they do, you can tell them it's strictly precautionary."

Hugo accepted the idea and repeated it, as though settling it in his mind, "I agree. We don't see any need to mention it at all. As you say, it's simply a safety measure, sort of routine."

Hugo's eager acceptance of the idea of downplaying the sprinkling operation could have been expected. His first line approach to the public in general, and more particularly to the media and critics of the plant, was to give out as little information as possible. That was directly inconsistent with the view of Pitkin Waay, and the divergence of opinion had led them into an

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awkward and ill-fitting pattern of responding to public requests for information.

"In that case it would be best if you took on some of the questions about containment," suggested Pitkin. "I could stand the variation in what the Post has called our 'dodge, step, and duck' routine."

"I may just do that, but don't get any ideas about making yourself scarce around ten o'clock."

The Director insisted that Pitkin attend every press briefing. The argument given for the standing order was that Pitkin's expertise had to be on call to avoid the spread of misinformation about the technical aspects of the plant's operation. That element of meetings with the press, although not to Pitkin's liking, was manageable for him.

It was Hugo's penchant for playing on Pitkin's scientific background, which gave rise to the Deputy's resistance. At least that was the conscious reason Pitkin assigned for his grudging cooperation. Had he permitted himself to think about it, he would perhaps have agreed he simply didn't relish attempting to defend, through evasion, things that he felt cried, not for defense, but explanation. "I'll be there, but let's go easy with your 'Doctor Waay, the foremost expert in the characteristics of plutonium' line."

"Now what the hell is that supposed to mean?" flared Hugo, his face beginning to redden.

"Just don't plaster this unfortunate creature of ours with cosmetics, Hugo. Play it straight. That's all," shrugged Pitkin, not wishing to pursue the long-standing debate, which always was loud, but seldom enlightening.

"Okay, okay," waved the Director impatiently, "I just didn't like hearing about water being applied to the area. If you think it's necessary, that's good enough for me."

"Not necessary, only cautionary. It's crude. It's interim, but for a while, it'll work."

Abandoning the subject of sprinkling for one that was growing more immediate and demanding, the Director returned to the problem of explaining the embarrassing lack of information about the stash of barrels.

"Documentation is the key to this press conference, Pitkin. No matter how thin or indirect, we need to turn up a record, an

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entry, some explanation of how and why those barrels were buried out there."

"Then you've found nothing?"

Hugo lapsed into head shaking and mutterings. "No. No record. Nothing. We invite the eyes and ears of the whole state into the compound and then turn up something we can't even begin to explain. I've had Etta and her crew searching almost all night. She knows it's priority, and, if anything was to be found, she'd probably have turned it up by now."

"There are a lot of files out there, Hugo. It's going to take a long time to find anything. It's probably some ledger entry or note in the back of a logbook. I'd guess we're talking about weeks to find it."

"We've got to keep after it though," insisted Hugo. "I can't promise to produce something if it's not there, but I don't want to admit we can't find something either. I expect we'll catch hot red hell either way."

Slamming his fist against the desktop in frustration, the plant's chief officer cried out against the inevitability of onrushing events. "This plant is going to become a target again. Every cynic and every protester who can walk will soon be after us with the volume on ten and the tone on shrill. Mark my words, Pitkin, the cry will go up to dismantle this place. It'll be a replay, a damned bloody replay. By God, if I didn't believe that this place was a vital part of our national defense program, I'd be the first to campaign to shut it down." With a grim smile he went on, "You know, I'd like to shut this place down and toss the keys in their pious faces. Tell `em it's going to be hot for the next twenty four centuries and they can decide what to do with it."

"That's not the type of comment I would recommend for the press briefing," smiled Pitkin. Then he added, "I guess I'd agree with you that the big Casino for today is some record entry of the barrel pit. It is funny nobody confesses to knowing anything about it. I've been here for almost fifteen years and Harvey has been here twenty-five, and neither of us can think of anything which would account for the damn things. My hunch is that someone in the shipping department simply screwed up, probably during one of those periods we were running triple shifts. Things were pretty hectic, and they got behind in getting that stuff loaded and off to Idaho. Then some foreman got tired of working around

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it, and simply took a front-end loader and cleared the shipping dock. If that's the case, our bureaucratic system will have conveniently and officially forgotten what was a very minor and probably midnight event."

"Well, don't forget that you're part of the system, Pitkin."

"Unfortunately for my psyche, that's true, and today I need someone to tell me why I am. Maybe it's just my finely tuned sense of humor that keeps me hanging around this place."

"I fail to find anything humorous about any of this," growled Hugo jabbing his finger at the Post.

"To paraphrase Jerome Lee's fictional Clarence Darrow, 'When you lose your power to laugh, you lose your power to think straight,' Hugo. Thinking back, I almost feel guilty not having paid to see that gusher of ours begin to spurt up from our own little radioactive strategic petroleum reserve. Then came the great press corps withdrawal. That should have pleased you, the media in disarray and in retreat."

"Some fun," glowered Hugo who himself had been seen to join in the hasty and general removal.

"Speaking again of the gentlemen and gentlewomen of the press," said Pitkin, "given time to reflect on yesterday's events, they're sure to be here today with some hard questions about contamination. We did check their shoes and clothing and determined they hadn't picked up anything, but today we can count on questions about inhalation and lung burdens."

"Those questions will just have to be deflected somehow. I don't believe there's anything we could say which would satisfy them entirely. Our answers should be reassurances. The press should be made to understand that as soon as we have definitive answers and after we have prepared a study of the problem, they will be advised." "Hugo," said Pitkin quietly, "that's standard government crap, and I can tell you now, nobody will buy it. Studies are a plague on the honest taxpayers of this nation. Most of them are cut and paste jobs that cost a bundle and say only that more studies are needed. Promises to 'advise' the people are dilatory bunk.

"Giving the small table a shove with the pointed toe of his cowboy boot, Pitkin stood up and jammed his hands in his pockets. "We've been through this too many times, and there's nothing to be gained by going over it again. I've had it with

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making up strategies for dealing with the public. Dammit, Hugo, we're the public. When we hold back on the press, we're cheating ourselves and, each time we do that, we get in a little bit deeper and it gets harder to say anything at all. We're ridiculed and despised and mostly it's because we spend too much time figuring out how not to tell the entire truth. We've forgotten that the people have a right to know what their public servants are doing." Pitkin paused, angry at himself for doing exactly what he didn't want to do, restating arguments made over and over again with his superior. Determined to give the matter some finality, he stated flatly, "We play it straight, Hugo, or you play it alone."

Hugo Chase was close to exploding past any point of reconciliation. His face had become livid, and he had picked up the offending newspaper, which his pudgy hands were twisting into a tightly rolled club. As Pitkin stopped speaking, Hugo sprang from his chair and with a savage sweep of his arm he slammed the rolled paper onto the desk with a furious slap.

The suddenness of the act surprised Pitkin, but its effect on Hugo was far greater. At first startled and then chagrined, he opened his mouth as if to speak, then clamped his lips together in a tight line suppressing what may have been a curse or a threat that he knew he would later regret. His eyes met Pitkin's level stare for an instant. He then spun around and presented his back to his deputy.

"All right, Pitkin, have it your way, but all this straight talk that's so precious will have to come from you." Turning again to face Pitkin, he continued beyond the immediate issue of the possible radiation exposure, "Maybe I'm nailed too tightly to the book, maybe I'm afraid, or maybe I just don't know any other way, but I simply cannot go out there and somehow undertake some kind of revelation for the media. I ask only that you choose your words carefully and try to remember that despite all the trappings of the system you so thoroughly despise, we are engaged in work vital to this nation. If there was another way of maintaining the shred of sanity, or call it fear, which keeps the world from blowing itself apart, I'd be the first to accept it. But pure damnation for its own sake has never solved a problem and never will. Until I hear a constructive and sensible alternative to building nuclear weapons, one which will guarantee the survival of this nation, I'm willing to be a target, but I reserve the right to resist extreme and

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reckless criticism, and I will not apologize for this plant or the program it helps execute."

Listening to Hugo's words, Pitkin realized he was seeing a dimension of the man he had never before thought to exist. The blocky, little Director's final words, spoken with quiet dignity and simplicity, were more compelling than if they had been hammered into a tirade and hurled at him.

Before Pitkin could speak and almost as if her entrance were the well timed walk on of an accomplished actress, Etta Westridge, who Pitkin humorously believed to be the real manager of Rocky Flats, walked in and flatly announced, "Mr. Chase, some reporters have already arrived at the east gate. They're hours too early, but they say they're from a network and claim they need pictures and background material. Shall I tell the guard to hold them?"

Shaking his head and forcing himself to adapt to this new information, Hugo sputtered, "Network? Oh, no. Better have them brought directly in. Security will have to escort them, of course."

"Of course," she echoed. "Shall we take them to the conference room?"

"Why, yes. The conference room, Etta," agreed Hugo.

"I don't believe it will hold all of these and the others who will be coming later, sir. Would you prefer the lunch room?" She asked the question as though oblivious to the fact that she had just suggested, and the Director had agreed to, the conference room.

From his sidelong glance and silent plea for direction from his deputy, Chase received only a "Don't ask me," shrug. Yielding to his secretary's apparent preference, he agreed, "Put them in the lunchroom, Etta. That will do fine."

"Well, if you want the conference room, sir, we may be able to squeeze in a few more chairs..." She trailed off knowing what would come. "Anywhere, Etta, anywhere. Just put them where there is room, and then tell me where they are."

"Will there be slides, Mr. Chase? If there are, we'll have to make do with the conference room. You remember, sir, the briefing for the Senate Committee? We started in the lunchroom, but had to move to the conference room. The Chairman was quite upset that we couldn't get it dark enough to see your slides."

By this time, Pitkin was grinning openly and being very careful to say nothing. He knew from past experience that the

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briefing would be wherever Etta Westridge wanted it, but before she would announce her decision, Hugo Chase would be pleading with her to do whatever she wanted. Once armed with the Director's approval and wearing his authority like a blazing shield, she would produce results with a chilling efficiency.

"No slides, Etta. No formal presentation or statements. Just questions, lots of questions. Please take the newsmen wherever you think most appropriate." Waving surrendered, he added, "Make the proper arrangements, a regular press briefing just like we've had before."

"Just as you say, Mister Chase."

As she turned to leave, Hugo foolishly made a last futile attempt to inject one of his ideas into her arrangements. "If it's possible, perhaps we should have coffee set up for them."

With the kind of deference usually reserved for the aged and infirm, she intoned ominously, "I'll certainly try, sir, but you know how things are in the cafeteria."

No, he most certainly did not know how things were in the cafeteria. He was not going to ask. She knew that. Pitkin knew it, and they all realized that only by not speaking further could Hugo be forgiven his transgression of suggesting something which in all probability she, with her awesome efficiency, had already done.

"Well, ah.... certainly, Etta. If possible, fine. If not, that will be fine, too."

Having reduced Hugo to the status of mere boss, she turned and, with a "Thank you, sir," swept through the door and off stage.

What could be said about Etta had already been said enough times that Pitkin's hearty guffaw and Chase's "damn" were sufficient to say it all again. However, her performance had cleared away much of the tension, and finally, even Hugo relaxed a bit and managed a grudging smile.

"You know, Pitkin, some day that woman is going to go too far. When she does, I'm going to take those damned sequined glasses and that cat-bed wig of hers and drop them in the nearest shredder." The threat was entirely a rhetorical flourish and had, like other comments about Etta, been reduced to a cliché by its repetition over the years of her reign.

"That's what you get for yelling at the staff this morning," admonished Pitkin. "But, by willikers, I have to hand it to you,

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Hugo, you've got the right idea. Now, if you can figure out a way of doing all that, let me know. I'll back you a thousand percent. Yes, sir, I'll be right behind you. Count on it."

Pitkin's spoofing tone provoked a chuckle from Hugo who responded in kind. "I just know you will, Pitkin. You have such a way with Etta, perhaps I should simply transfer her to your staff and the two of you could work more closely together."

"That'll be the day you start looking for a new deputy to clean up your damn barrel caches," laughed Pitkin.

"Speaking of barrels," sighed Hugo, "would it be possible to check that hot spot with your radiation control group again before our press briefing?"

"I'll do what I can and get back to you," said Pitkin turning toward the door.

"One more thing, Pitkin."

The Deputy turned and, without speaking, waited.

"If you get a minute, check with Etta and her people to see if they might have found anything in the files, anything, a map, a note, a log book entry. I confess that I forgot to ask her while she was here, but even if I'd remembered, I wouldn't have had the stomach to try and pry anything out of her."

"I'll ask, but when she turns anything up, I suspect we'll hear about it, fortissimo." With a wave of his hand he agreed to meet Hugo a few minutes before the press conference in the "lunchroom, the conference room...wherever."

Hurrying through the hallway and the increasingly crowded reception area, Pitkin checked through the security door to the outer yard. He crossed the parking area to the garage, and seeing that the shop foreman was busy with some welding equipment, scrawled his name on the vehicle sign-out sheet. He stepped to the door of a pea green Ford pickup and thumped the hood. "Okay, Poudre?" he yelled.

The short, heavily moustached foreman looked up, nodded and called out, "Bring it back in one piece. It ain't no damn Jeep."

"A body'd think I broke one of his precious damn springs every day," Pitkin intoned with mocking innocence. As he pulled off the shop pavement, Pitkin slipped the clutch ever so slightly. It was just enough to squeak the tires. He was rewarded with the

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image of Poudre scowling into the rear view mirror, calling out his familiar irritation at the "pesky damn scientists."

The friendly argument had been going on for years. Poudre had labeled Pitkin a reckless driver, and Pitkin, in turn, constantly badgered the foreman about the inadequacy of his repair of the government vehicles assigned to the plant. The broken spring Poudre complained about had been a result of one of Pitkin's hurried night trips between the plant and the barrel pit during the frantic efforts to control the plutonium release from the contaminated oil. Revisiting the site in the broad light of day, knowing the worst of the spill had been contained, he was willing to take a bit more time and put Poudre's General Services pickup to less risk. Still, it would have been uncharacteristic for Pitkin to pass an opportunity of continuing his running by-play with the shop foreman.

It was a long mile to the southeast quadrant of the facility. Outside the high chain link fence there were no roads and only a carpet of prairie grass before him. Pitkin drove carefully avoiding the worst of the little gullies that crisscrossed his path. He took a keen interest in the condition of the grassland, noting how years of its not having been grazed had created a cattleman's dream. The thick buffalo grass had reasserted itself and was thriving in a nearly natural state.

Yet, Pitkin knew that grazing the land was out of the question because the plutonium, which contaminated the soil, would also be in the grass and would be ingested by cattle. Through the animals, the radioactive metal would enter the food chain. Neighboring ranchers had already expressed serious concern about the possible eventual contamination of their pasturelands, and their fears were not without some scientific basis. The spread of released plutonium had, in fact, reached and, in some cases, exceeded the plant's legal perimeter. Nearing the barbed wire fence that marched up and down the east boundary of the federal land, Pitkin slowed and corrected his course to put himself on a direct line with the little cluster of vehicles and men situated on a small rise. The group of workers was in an area overlooking a sharply descending slope which fell away in a southeasterly direction. He stopped the pickup near the other government vehicles randomly parked around a large black plastic

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cover, which had been framed and secured on its edges by closely spaced cinder blocks.

On the far side of the covered ground, a worker was holding the end of a red hose and waving its sprinkling nozzle slowly and deliberately back and forth. The finer part of the almost invisible spray drifted slowly toward the black shroud creating a dazzle of rainbows over the somber and mysterious burial ground.

Above the glinting spectra of color, Pitkin could see sunlight flooding over the City of Denver. The air was uncharacteristically clear, and, despite the fact that the central city was fifteen miles away, he could see the jutting skyscrapers in startling detail. They glistened, each competing with the other and claiming to be the most lustrous of all. Beyond the downtown area, he could see where the famed Cherry Creek wound its way along, oblivious to the development around it and mischievously confounding the symmetrical inclinations of planners. Still farther to the south and east, he could trace the direction of Interstate 25 by the line of ultramodern brick and glass mushrooms which had sprung up in the fertile soil of energy and technology. Surrounding it all was the unending carpet of houses and apartments stretching to the horizon and apparently beyond.

As he stared at the city, Pitkin realized that the rush hour would now be well underway. The crush of cars would be filling the inbound streets, each vehicle operated by an individual whose identity would be surrendered, for a time, to a mass impulse to hurry, to hurry impassively and implacably with the long term dreams of his life compressed by the immediate goal of simply getting to work.

It was a pattern in which he found no satisfaction. The close, intense matter of traffic was something of a mystery to Pitkin. The impulse in people to be together, to be near others, had to be strong indeed to make them endure the madness of the early morning freeways. He had often wondered why the combination of driver, car, and highway system was not more fragile and more frequently shattered by some random act of neglect or carelessness than it was. Yet, such things did happen, and when they did, lives were changed. Of that he was certain.

With a scowl at the city and the yellow mist beginning to obscure the feet of the magnificently pretentious buildings, Pitkin

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climbed out of the pickup and approached the barrel deposit. Casting one last look at the city skyline, he noted that the man with the spray had moved to another area, and the rainbows had disappeared and fallen as droplets upon the sullen black plastic cover.

Pitkin found Harvey Flagler squatting down near a device used to detect the presence of plutonium. Flagler peered intently at the very nervous needle in the instrument. He muttered a bit and proceeded to make some notations on graph paper clamped to a battered clipboard. After a few minutes, Flagler rose with a grunt and leaned forward, massaging one of his knees.

"Damn thing's going to give out on me if I keep this up. These all night parties and the rush, rush is a young man's game, Pitkin."

"Well, I'm afraid this job is going to make us all old before our time, Harv," said Pitkin, falling in alongside as Flagler began walking toward another instrument a few yards away.

Of all the people who worked closely with Pitkin, Harvey Flagler was easily the least talkative. He had little use for those who were uncomfortable with silence and considered nervous prattle to be the sure sign of a character defect.

It was only after the two had stopped and squatted to read two more radiation counters that Flagler finally spoke, "Water from the sprinkler got into one of these buggers a while ago. I thought we really had a zinger. Needle was stuck off the mark." The technician made a few more notes on his paper before grunting a noncommittal, "Uh huh."

You're beginning to sound like my doctor, Harv. Always and forever hemming and hawing about something but never telling me why."

"That right?" said Flagler, unsmiling. After another moment of silence, he looked directly at Pitkin and added, "Well, I sure hope he knows something more interesting about you than I know about this trash pile."

"If you don't know something by now about this 'disaster,' as Hugo calls it, you're sure wasting a lot of the government's time poking around out here."

Flagler's leathery face broke into a grin. "Say, this thing really has old Hugo spinning hasn't it?"

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"Remember the Senate Committee two years ago?" asked Pitkin. "It was out here about the Broomfield reservoir. I'd say this was at least on a par. That was an argument over radiation levels in the bottom of a lake a couple of miles away. The whole thing was pretty nebulous. The radiation intensity was open to question and the story sort of dribbled out over two or three months. This time we dug up our own radiation on our own property in front of the assembled metropolitan press corps. Toss into that the fact the Senate authorization committee is taking up our budget next week."

"Jeez," whistled Flagler. "No wonder he's, pardon the expression, 'hot.'" Then, squinting at Pitkin and scratching the stubble on his chin he mused, "Yeah, Hugo is like that. This damn plant is important to him. No one can imagine him at the grocery store or fishing or home with a beer watchin' TV. Anything that interferes, he hates. He'd be stirred up all right."

Pitkin nodded absently, "Hugo puts a lot of himself into this place. I guess I admire him in a way. He's one of those rare people who really believe in what they're doing."

"I guess so," agreed Flagler. Then unexpectedly, "It's you, that I can't figure, Pitkin. You work long hours, very long hours. You work like a man who's tryin' to finish a job that's killing him. Maybe you're standing too close to the job, but seeing it from too far away."

Pitkin felt a slight flush of embarrassment at the appraisal so openly and unexpectedly delivered. "That's quite a speech, Harv. Either you've taken up psychology, or you've been spending too much time with old Cope. He's forever telling me that I'm crazy for building bombs when there's so much fishing to do."

"Cope's right. At least about not doing enough fishing. He told me the other day he'd finally got you to agree to take a couple of days off and go up to Routt Lake. Are you still going or are these damn barrels getting in the way?"

"I'm hoping I can still manage it. If I don't, I'll have to contend with Breck, and Cope'll be back at me, calling me a 'pizzen peddler.'"

"I know. He calls Hugo peddler numbers one and you peddler number three. He says there isn't anyone whose 'pizzen happy' enough to be number two to Hugo."

"Speaking of 'pizzen,' Harv, what have we got here?"

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"We're pretty short on anything spectacular, I'm afraid, but here, look for yourself." Flagler thrust the clipboard into Pitkin's hands and returned to scratching the stubble on his neck.

Pitkin's eyes raced down the columns of numbers, pausing briefly at random points before moving on. Tilting the board toward Flagler he asked, "Do you need this right now, Harv?" Noting the negative shake of Flagler's head, he tucked the board under his arm and shrugged, "Pretty nasty, but I don't believe it's a public calamity, just yet. There's a general increase around the barrel pit and one hot spot where we had our gusher. You agree?"

"You're the expert," answered Flagler, "I just read meters, but for what it's worth, I don't think we've got a radiation problem in this area that we can't handle."

Pitkin glanced quickly at him, registering the emphasis on the words "in this area." "Are you trying to tell me something, Harv?"

"Pitkin, yesterday and today were the first times I've seen any soil contamination readings for this area for three maybe four months. You know we monitor the whole reservation and have a routine for checking the air samplers, but have you looked at the ground accumulation logs recently?"

Pitkin's brow furrowed for a moment before he answered. "I'm not sure I follow you. I review them periodically, every three months in fact. Of course, I look at them incidentally when something like this happens. They're not very useful except for background information. Now, tell me why you ask."

"Got an hour? It's something you better look at yourself."

"I'm sorry to say I haven't, Harv. I've got that damn press briefing coming up, and I promised Hugo that I'd take another run at the files to look for some reference to our little dump here. Can it wait?"

"It'll keep," said Flagler with a shrug, "besides it may not be worth the time anyway."

Moments later, as Pitkin wheeled the pickup away from the barrel deposit, he saw Harvey Flagler standing alone staring into a thick green bound book. Pitkin hesitated and even slowed for a moment. Then he looked at his watch and shook off the

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thought. With a frustrated kick at the accelerator, he aimed the pickup back toward the impassive concrete buildings of the plant.

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CHAPTER TWO

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"Gentlemen, oh, yes, and Ladies, I do not have a prepared statement, but I would like to begin by welcoming you to Rocky Flats. I know most of you, of course. However, we do have some new faces here today. Some of your colleagues from the networks have joined you, and I want to be the first to welcome them to this facility. For the first time visitors, I should point out that our goal is to make as much information available as possible. There are naturally some areas of inquiry that are closed, but I assure you, they are narrowly limited, and they are closed only because of the legitimate demands of national security."

Cynics as suppressed sarcasm might have characterized the slight shuffling among the assembled reporters. It was only barely noticeable. In a more compressed atmosphere, such as the smaller, nearby conference room, it would have been decidedly more obvious, but in the spacious lunchroom, it quickly dissipated and a stranger to Rocky Flats press conferences would have passed it off as a sort of settling-in. It must have been that Hugo Chase did not notice the little titter, because he continued without interruption.

"Before taking your questions, let me introduce the men here at the table with me. On my left is my deputy, Doctor Pitkin Waay. Doctor Waay is recognized throughout the scientific community as an expert in the physical properties of plutonium. I might add that Doctor Waay is a native of Colorado. In fact, he grew up on a ranch only a few miles from here."

Inwardly, Pitkin flinched. "The home town boy crap won't sell this crowd, Hugo," he thought, "nor the heavyweights from Washington," he told himself, noting that the local contingent of reporters had indeed been swollen by the addition of some obviously high priced talent from the networks.

As he spoke of Pitkin's expertise, Director Chase may not have felt the sharp glance thrown up at him by his deputy. He may not have heard the accompanying sharp cough, but in any event, he turned in the opposite direction and continued.

"Also here with us is Mister Lamont Wellington, our public relations officer. Mister Wellington arranged this news briefing knowing that the soil sampling program on the property surrounding the facility would be of interest to you."

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"Sure he did," thought Pitkin. "He also was a big shaker in starting this whole damn soil sampling business. If he keeps relating to the public the way he has in the past, Hugo's nightmare of dismantlement may become a living fact."

Hugo was warming to his task; convinced of the truth of the old cliché that reporters were more interested in their stomachs than in news. "Mister Wellington has advised me that, following a question and answer period here, we will have a recess for some delicious hot rolls and coffee. After that, we will adjourn the formal press briefing for a motor tour through the area to allow you to see for yourselves some of the activities associated with the program. Mister Wellington will accompany you and will advise you when and at what point you may take photographs. Unfortunately, we cannot permit cameras in any building other than this one, and even here, in the administrative area, we have photo restrictions."

"Again, I would note the presence of some newcomers out there and accordingly offer a few further words for their use as background."

From the ranks of newsmen came an anonymous, "I thought you said you didn't have a statement, Hugo."

The quick flush of the Director's face was evidence to all who knew him that he was simply talking, perhaps with the hope of softening up what he sensed was an unfriendly and tougher than usual group. It occurred to Pitkin, who knew quite a bit about how his superior's mind worked, that Hugo was angling to provoke enough uninformed questions from among the out-of-towners to dilute the intense interest of the more sophisticated locals.

Hugo ignored the shouted jibe and plunged ahead with a recitation of facts about Rocky Flats. He described how the plant had been constructed in the early fifties by the Atomic Energy Commission and how it was only one link in the chain of nuclear weapons facilities spread throughout the United States. At that point, he recited the standard formulation that Rocky Flats had been assigned the mission of fashioning "critical components" for nuclear devices. Moving on, he painted a picture of the elaborate safety program, the concern for worker health and for the public well being. Hugo next launched into the statistics on how the economic stability of the surrounding communities was, in part,

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founded upon the employment of some three thousand skilled people at the plant, and how the federal government was a dependable employer whose presence was a note of stability in an otherwise volatile job market.

Sensing that toleration and politeness were turning into hostility, Hugo rushed through a canned explanation of the soil-sampling project. According to him, it had been undertaken merely to reassure the community at large that the land surrounding Rocky Flats was virtually free of radioactive contamination. He made it clear that the government's position in the long smoldering controversy over the location and operation of the plant in the Denver area was "under review." He suggested that the views of local officials on the subject were, admittedly, well intended, but technically misguided.

Finally, like a beleaguered warrior taking up his shield, Hugo jammed on the thick glasses he had been nervously cleaning and announced, "I'll take your questions gentlemen,... and ladies."

Hugo, sensitive to his obvious stumbling and his persistent failure to recognize the distaff side of the press corps, called on a young woman who had been glaring at him from the front row.

"Mister Chase, I'm Shelia Montrose and I assure you I'm a gainfully employed reporter. In fact you may have even seen me at one time or another in the past five years I have been reporting the evening news for KCOL TV." Ignoring the suppressed group chuckle that followed her cut at Hugo, she continued, "We all know that yesterday a deposit of barrels containing contaminated oil was discovered during your soil sampling demonstration. My question is twofold. First, what is the reason for radioactive oil being buried here at a weapons facility? Second, what type and how much radiation are we really talking about?"

"Well, Ms. Montrose, that may be a threefold question, but we'll allow it." Hugo's forced, "heh, heh," fell as flat as only forced humor can fall. The only one in the room who joined, or attempted to join, in the Director's little joke was Lamont Wellington. His ingratiating snigger served only to drive plant public relations down another fraction.

"To answer your first question, Ms. Montrose, it was indeed oil that was contained in the barrels. As you perhaps know, one of our functions here requires us to use lathes to

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machine metal parts. In such an operation the lathes are cooled and lubricated with special oils. That oil, once used, cannot be reused and has to be disposed of in a safe and environmentally acceptable manner. Our practice is to ship the oil to radioactive storage areas located on government reservations in Idaho. The barrels we saw yesterday were undoubtedly placed in their present location for temporary storage pending shipment to a depository. I suspect they were overlooked and not shipped as planned. It was clearly an oversight, and I might add, a very minor one."

Pitkin couldn't help marveling at the Hugo's explanation. "He's amazing. Absolutely amazing," he thought. "Where in the world did he find that one. 'Temporary storage,' my tintype." Pitkin was all the more surprised by the Director's statement since no record of the deposit had been found, and in the moments before the press briefing had begun, Hugo had still been toying with the extravagant notion of trying to paste a classification label over the entire affair.

"As to your next question," Hugo continued, "it goes into a highly technical area. Therefore, I will defer to Doctor Waay." Thus, the old pattern, established at press conferences years ago, prevailed. All operational or policy type inquiries were usually fielded by Hugo Chase. Questions delving into scientific or technical areas fell to Pitkin.

As attention shifted to the tall physicist who rose and stepped to the podium, there was an increased level of interest among the reporters who had dealt with him before. Pitkin was known by them to be as direct and as forthcoming as the confines of bureaucracy would allow.

In his mind, Pitkin felt he was performing a ritual. He knew the questions the press would ask. Many of the reporters knew the answers he would give. It seemed that no matter how careful he was in making explanations and how painstaking he was in constructing answers, the reporters were never satisfied with his effort. It was just as true that he was seldom content with the stories which found their way into print.

When he had first come to the plant, he had enjoyed the give and take with the press. Like those not accustomed to dealing with the media, he had the feeling that his expertise was really being called upon and that his questioners were interested in the answers. The ensuing experience had been a bitter lesson for him.

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Each bout with the press had been followed by "interpretive" stories, which were far more editorial than fact. The personal views were reflected in the details, which were highlighted, the arrangement of information, and the subtle adjectives and qualifiers, which were, accepted journalistic technique.

Pitkin's initial reaction to the reporting has selected and out of context statements and their use to support the writer's own pre-dispositions were anger. However, his ire had become the focal point of follow-up stories with such phrases as "irate government official" and "angry denials." He had responded by answering all questions in precise scientific terminology avoiding explanations and analogies. That brought accusations he was being uncooperative and insensitive to the needs of the public. He exercised more restraint than he knew he had by not commenting on the media's rush to raise the banner of the public's "right to know" while, at the same time, using editorial selectivity and the interpretative style to persuade rather than report.

Finally, Pitkin had found a middle ground. He steadfastly refused to compromise on his science, and he insisted on accuracy. Reporters who were fast and loose with the facts were gently lectured at the next opportunity. On the other hand, he recognized the need for generalization in certain areas and also offered suggestions for follow-up where it seemed appropriate. He made their lives easier by supplying dependable, factual information. In exchange for reasonable questions and reasonably accurate stories, he tried to understand their problems and to make their professional lives somewhat easier. Thus, an accommodation, however tenuous, had been reached with the Colorado press corps.

"Yes, Shelia, I saw your clip on yesterday's evening news, so I anticipated your question. However, before getting to the matter of the amount of radioactivity associated with the barrel deposit, I must advise you of one rather serious error in the story your station broadcast. You stated that the radioactivity was discovered by accident, and further stated we were not prepared to detect radioactivity. While that same statement may have been made by other media, it is, nonetheless, not true. As you know, the soil samples, which are really quite small, were to be placed in glass lined containers, sealed, and sent to a laboratory for

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contamination analysis; therefore, it might have been expected that no detection equipment would have been necessary as the samples were taken. However, not by accident, but by my explicit orders two radiation monitors accompanied the group to the sampling site. The radiation was detected immediately when the oil first appeared. In my judgment that was not an 'accidental' discovery of radiation or evidence of unpreparedness. However, it is fair to say the oil was discovered accidentally, so the error was not as serious as it might have been."

Pitkin's matter-of-fact tone and attitude took most of the sting out of what he had intended as a mere righting of the record. Still, the red tint in Shelia Montrose's face told Pitkin that his correction had been received as a rebuke. Trying not to sound apologetic, he addressed her question.

"As for the contamination in the oil, I can assure you the levels we have been registering in the area around the barrels are well below acceptable levels by federal standards. The contaminant is plutonium and we are therefore dealing with alpha radiation, whose permissible level in soils is 20 or 25 d/m/g, depending on which standard you use. There are a couple of further specific notes you may want to have. At the exact point of the oil leak, we have registered 920 d/m/g, however that is the source and it's been contained. The soil contamination in the nearby areas are intermediate, 250 to 300 d/m/g's, but by intermediate I mean within ten to twenty meters from the source. The readings drop to near normal approximately forty meters from the leak we all saw yesterday. The specific instrument readings on disintegrations per second are now being typed. A handout will be available when you leave."

For confirmation of his promise, Pitkin cast an inquiring look at the well manicured Lamont Wellington who acknowledged the preparation of a handout with an affirmative bob of his head accompanied by the sweep of his delicate hands over his perfectly shaped razor cut hair. It was not simply a "yes, Pitkin" nod, but rather a "yes, my friends of the press corps, I am preparing such a release, and I will, of course, personally see that each of my dear colleagues receives his very own copy" nod. The reporters, however, knew Lamont, therefore, they ignored him.

"What the hell is a d/m/g?" called a reporter who squinted suspiciously at Pitkin from the front row.

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"It's an abbreviation for disintegrations per minute per gram. But rather than try to understand its scientific implications, I suggest you think of it in relative terms. Remember, I said 25 was the level considered safe by federal standards. The State of Colorado is somewhat more conservative and says that more than 20 is significant and may require the exercise of caution by people living on such land. Based upon that you can begin to understand just how radioactive a sample of material is when compared to another."

Then 920 would be a lot of radiation?" continued the same reporter.

"Yes. But we find that level only in a confined spot, something about the size of a large table. Fifty meters away the levels are in the neighborhood of 16 and 17."

"How far is the east fence from the barrels?" called Shelia Montrose.

"Forty meters from the east edge of the barrels. Anticipating your next question, we're within federal and state standards at the fence line."

"How many barrels, Pitkin?" The bulk of Deke Prowers, a well known and popular reporter for the Denver Post, combined with his booming voice to give him the edge over his fellow reporters, all of whom had been raising their hands and waving notebooks trying to get recognition for the next question.

"Deke, I can't say. As I just told Ms. Montrose, there was radiation associated with the oil seep. Our first effort has to be containment. As soon as we're satisfied that the area is secure, we can move on to the next step."

"Are you telling us you're still trying to get the radiation under control?" shot back Prowers quickly.

"No. The possibility of further radiation has been eliminated. What I said, Deke, is that it's a matter of first things first, and counting barrels is not a priority with us." Hanging on to recognition for a follow-up question, Prowers demanded, "No argument about your priorities. I'm asking how many barrels and how long they've been there. Now certainly you must have some record you can make available to us."

Hugo was back on his feet, "That is under review and..." Before he could go on, Pitkin began speaking just loudly and firmly enough to override his director. "No, Deke, we have not

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found any documentation bearing on the placement of the barrels." Making his interruption out to be a routine correction rather than a note of dissension, Pitkin added, "As Hugo was saying, we are looking. If and when we find something, it will be made available to the media immediately."

"If," shouted Prowers over the clamor for recognition. "Are you telling us the government may not have a record of those barrels being buried out there?"

In the abrupt silence that followed the question, Pitkin spoke quietly and directly. "It's a possibility. Please note, I said only that it's possible. An employee may have violated procedure; a memo may have been misfiled or lost. The list could go on, but I don't see anything to be gained from speculation. The only thing I know for sure is that we're as interested as you are, and when we know something we'll share it with the public."

In the slight murmur that followed the unusually candid admission, there was a period during which notes were taken and reporters who were prepared to be hostile and antagonistic adjusted their attitudes ever so slightly to compensate. The seriousness was slackened further when the next questioner obtained recognition.

It was Jess Lyons, in his crumpled and stained three piece suits that were as much a part of him as his narrow intense face, "Isn't their plutonium out there, right now. As you people are fond of saying, 'airborne?'"

"In the most limited and extremely technical sense, that is correct, Jess."

"Right, " cried Lyons triumphantly. "A fact the government has always tried to conceal from the public. Now Doctor Waay..."

"However," Pitkin cut him off, "that needs considerable qualification."

"But..." tried Lyons.

"No," insisted Pitkin. "You asked. Now I'll answer, and when it's that kind of question, I will answer completely. There's no headline in my statement that there is plutonium in the air around this plant and, indeed, the Entire State of Colorado. This is a subject many of you have heard me discuss before."

This brought a few groans from the assemblage and not a few hard looks at the combative Lyons. His paper, the Pondera

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Leader, was known in the area not only for its extreme views about Rocky Flats but for its emotional rather than factual approach to all news. Lyons and Pitkin had been through the subject of airborne plutonium on enough occasions to establish a routine, and to the dismay of those who had heard it before, it was being heard again.

"The key, Jess, is the amount. As I have told you before, the amount of plutonium in the ambient air is so slight as to be nearly immeasurable. This plant's routine yearly release to the atmosphere of alpha emitting radiation particles has been steadily declining since 1970. In that year this facility released, through normal operations, 354 microcuries of plutonium. The reduction is apparent when we note that by 1976 the level of release was only 4 microcuries. When you consider further that we operate with a permissible routine release limit of 500 microcuries per year, you can see that we are far, far below acceptable levels." "That's all crap, Doctor Waay," piped Lyons in shrill anger. "It's the radiation falling on people and eating away their lungs that counts."

Unyielding, Pitkin continued, "Translating the full 500 microcurie limit into the more commonly recognized rem unit we find it is equivalent to 10 millirems per year. Comparing that to the 100 millirems of radiation per year every person receives from nature, gives us a better understanding of the relatively insignificant amount emitted by Rocky Flats in the same period of one year."

Lyons' thin face pinched into a disappointed stare. This had happened to him before. He knew Pitkin Waay would bury him with details, and restraint was his best course. But Jess Lyons had long since drawn all the slack from his own approach to news gathering. For him there was no way but taut resolve to score a touch, to make a point, however fine it might be. "Yes, but 10 millirems, Doctor Waay, would be equal to a tenth of a year's natural dose. Instead of getting 100 we're getting 110, thanks to your crowd here. That seems significant to me." "Even if I were to agree with you that 110 millirems is a significant increase over 100, and I hasten to emphasize that I do not agree, you have misunderstood the 10 millirem factor. The 10 millirems is the amount of radiation one person would receive if he lived

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continuously at the nearest offsite location and received the maximum radiation possible from our routine releases.

We cannot under any circumstance make such an incredible assumption. First, the plant does not routinely release 10 millirems each year. In fact, the release last year was less than one fiftieth of 10 millirems. The second and very significant fact you have missed is the improbability of any single person receiving the full measure of radiation released from the plant each year."

Before Pitkin could continue, a smiling Ed Walsenburg from the Rocky Mountain News interrupted him. "All of that is interesting, Pitkin, and I'm sure you and Jess could go on forever over his poisoned air theory, but that really isn't why we're here today. Is there or is there not a hot spot out there?"

"I've already answered that, Ed. Yes, there is, indeed, an area, a very small one, heavily contaminated by radioactive oil, and, as I also said, the precise numbers, as we have them, will be made available."

"And the levels are within acceptable limits?"

"The levels of free radioactivity are well within our operational limitations."

Walsenburg's smiled broadened. "I take it that means the stuff contained in the ground and in the oil is not considered by you to be `free radioactivity?'"

"It is in media which is susceptible of almost total control." Seeing scowls begin to pull at the faces of the reporters, Pitkin explained. "The radioactive elements are, in effect, trapped in the oil and in the soil. As long as the oil does not migrate from the area, and there is no reason to expect anything like that to happen, it presents no containment problems. Essentially the same is true of the soil. As long as we keep it from being dispersed, there isn't any danger whatever."

"Could your little hot spot grow, despite your containment efforts?" asked the suspicious reporter.

"Not if our containment work is effective."

The next question was a natural follow-up, and, since Walsenburg was asking the questions common to them all, the group let him follow his lead. "Would you explain how this containment system of yours works?"

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Pitkin knew he was entering a difficult area and he chose his words carefully. "Our first action was to determine just how much of the area was in fact contaminated. I can assure you it is quite small, something on the order of a dozen square meters. We then did some further exploratory digging to determine just how large the burial site was. The natural settling of the ground helped us there and we were able to define the perimeter fairly easily. It's about ten meters long and four meters wide. Once we were comfortable with the size of the pit, we covered it and the contiguous area with plastic. Of course, we have alpha counters out their now and a team of radiation monitors."

"Give us a specific on what long term measures you have in mind for seeing to it this isn't a continuing problem," persisted Walsenburg.

"After we have removed the contaminated soil, we may elect to cover the area with something permanent, asphalt perhaps."

"I drove up Indiana and came in the west gate," said Walsenburg. "Did I see you sprinkling the area?"

"Yes, that's simply an added precaution. Until we can say with complete certainty that we don't have any more random spots to contend with, we're just keeping the ground out there damp to prevent drying and wind dispersion."

"Won't that wash the damn stuff down into the Broomfield reservoir?" called someone from the back of the long lunchroom.

Hugo Chase was on his feet and speaking even before the question had been finished. "There is not now, sir, any possibility of erosion, nor will there be such a possibility in the future."

Hugo's answer was too quick and his words too loud to escape notice. Veterans in the press contingent knew they had hit a sensitive nerve, and there was no mortal power, which could prevent them from pinching it a bit.

Frank Watkins whose thin mustache and plastered down hair, parted in the middle, reminded Pitkin of a roaring twenties character, identified himself as a representative of a wire service. "Mister Chase, you sound as though you're prepared to guarantee the people of Colorado and especially the citizens of Broomfield that it won't rain."

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"Mister Watkins," seethed Hugo, "I can only guarantee you we are giving this matter our undivided attention, and I am confident it will be entirely cleared up without any further radioactivity being released at or near the soil sampling site."

"Would rain erode the stuff down the gully and into the reservoir?" persisted Watkins. "It's a simple enough question, Mr. Chase, and I'd like something better for an answer than the 'we're working' hash we've all heard before."

"Doctor Waay had described the measures we've taken to prevent that from happening. I would suggest you pay a bit more attention to our answers and the information being given you and less to idle speculation on the improbable."

The hoots and jeers came from every quarter save the one occupied by the embattled plant officials. Watkins, unmoved by either the supporting catcalls or by Hugo's derisive barb, stood his ground waiting for the clamor to subside. "That's hardly an answer, Mister Chase, but if it's the one you're sticking with, I'll be glad to file it exactly as you gave it."

Before Hugo could reply, attention shifted to the impeccable figure that rose near the front of the room. Every soul present recognized him. An aura of self-importance, mistakenly thought by some to be self-assurance, enveloped him. Lesser members of the media edged away from the presence, and he stood alone in his magnificence. His intoned introduction of himself was entirely superfluous for identification, but indispensable to the image.

"Mister Chase, my name is Leighton Marlowe and I'm with CBS news. You may be unaware of the fact that the matter of this plant and its radiation adventures is a subject of keen national interest, but let me assure you that it is so. I should like to first ask you if this plant, at the time the plutonium contamination of the water reservoir of the nearby community of Broomfield was uncovered, did not give assurances that such a thing would not happen again."

Marlowe did not wait for an answer but continued, speaking as much to the assembled press as to Hugo. "Now, by what seems to be a more significant and threatening revelation, the people of this great state are again placed in peril. My question is this. Does not this new spill of plutonium violate your earlier assurances to Congress, and does it not dramatize the need for yet

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another review of the entire question of decommissioning this plant?"

Hugo Chase's anger was apparent, and he made no attempt to conceal it. As if he were tearing away an official seal, Hugo pulled his heavy rimmed glasses off and shoved them in his breast pocket. Then, placing his hands on the tabletop, he leaned toward Marlowe, waiting until the room fell tomb silent, then spoke.

"Mister Marlowe, I believe we all were enlightened by your editorial. We're flattered that you came all the way from Washington D.C. to deliver it personally. Everyone has long been aware of your network's sentiments on defense policy, and it cannot be a surprise that you chose to bring your crusade here. While this may indeed be an inviting forum for the expression of your views, I must advise you that the event you have chosen is one of little moment and may defy magnification, even by your great network's resources."

Extending one arm toward Hugo and the other toward Marlowe, as if holding them at bay, Pitkin spoke firmly enough to cut off comment by either. "Hugo, Mister Marlowe, I wonder if we aren't getting off the mark. I'm certain that our views on the mission of Rocky Flats are well known to the Congress and to the people of the media. I'm also sure both of you would agree that this press conference is hardly an appropriate place for a debate on the defense policies of the United States government. The subject is essentially political and better left to elected policy makers. At this facility, we execute the program assigned to us. The need for such a program is another topic for another place with different parties than are present today."

Before either combatant could respond, Pitkin continued, "The specific questions asked by Mister Marlowe, however, invite us to go into areas reserved for others and, within the context of our role as managers of this facility, we can make only two responses. First, there has been no compromise of the Department's statement to Congress on radiation control. Second, the issue of decommissioning has been before Congress on previous occasions. Whether or not the instant event of discovering a number of barrels of contaminated oil will provide sufficient cause for the question to be revisited is not one for us to answer. Finally, since both of your questions go to subjects upon

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which we may be required to make statements to the legislative branch, I'm sure you understand that it would be improper for us to make any further comments here today."

The polished Leighton Marlowe was wise enough to know that he would get nothing of news value from Pitkin, and he also realized that the Deputy was going to block further needling of the Director. Yet, the pressure of audience expectation and the knowledge that the eye of the camera was upon him extinguished logic and compelled him to speak.

"I understand the reluctance of the government to address these questions, Doctor Waay. However, since the safety and health of the public is at issue, I am confident that the Congress and the people will insist that you do. Would you would be willing to state whether or not there has, in fact, been an escape of radioactivity due to the barrel incident of yesterday?" "Offsite? None."

"The word 'offsite' is a very large qualification, Doctor."

"This is a very large facility, Mister Marlowe."

"Perhaps too large, Doctor Waay. But as you have said, that is a topic for another time. Could you assess for the public," Marlowe opened his hands and held them palms up as if rendering a great communications blessing on the people, "the potential for a major release of radioactivity during the removal of your barrels." Quickly as an afterthought he asked, "You are going to remove them?"

"Yes. They will be uncovered, placed in appropriate containers and shipped to the Department's depository in Idaho. The potential for release during the excavation operation will be slight. It hardly needs to be said that we will take every precaution to guard against any further oil spill."

Fishing now, Marlowe pressed on. "This is my first visit to Rocky Flats, Doctor Waay, and I must say it is an impressive facility, what I have been permitted to see at least. I assume the off-limits areas are where you keep your plutonium. I confess the whole thing is quite mysterious to me, but I'm sure we," Marlowe's gesture took in the reporters, the television cameras, and the glaring lights which had been on since he first rose to speak, "would be interested in hearing your assessment of the possibility of the occurrence of a major accident here."

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Again Pitkin spoke with care, "I assume you are referring to the type of hypothetical," emphasizing "hypothetical," "consideration that enters into the evaluation of credible accidents for such purposes as Environmental Impact Statements or other cost-benefit analyses."

Pitkin paused, looking directly at Marlowe, waiting for him to accept the premise or to state another. Marlowe sensed the hazard and tried to head it off.

"Then you have studied the possibility of a larger and very significant accident leading to major releases of plutonium?" Marlowe wanted only the story building admission that a major release potential had been made the subject of a study. Marlowe had never interviewed Pitkin Waay.

"Such a study has, indeed, been made. We have evaluated the maximum credible radionuclide release resulting from processing criticalities, from aircraft crashes, from accidental criticalities relating to transportation mishaps and from other such events. As one example of this type of analysis, we have calculated that the maximum, I emphasize maximum, credible fire releases are 6.2 microcuries of plutonium with the likelihood being 0.0001 per year. The backup information for that analysis is quite illuminating. I refer to the assumptions and calculations used to derive those estimates. I would be most happy to trace such a derivation for your audience, keeping in mind it is only one hypothetical among many."

"Maybe another time, Doctor Waay," replied Marlow. He had had enough for now, but with a newsman's persistence tried once more for a usable admission. "You seem to be saying the possibility does exist of a larger 'criticality' I believe is the word you used." "Your question assumes a present or immediately past criticality, Mister Marlowe. There has been none. You may be misinformed about the term 'criticality.' By our definition that is a self-sustaining nuclear fission reaction, or a chain reaction. I'm certain you understand we have not had that type of event. Our studies of it are truly hypothetical and discussions of such a phenomena bear little relationship to the actual day-by-day operation of this plant."

Pitkin paused. He was inwardly raging at himself. According to his own standards, he had been discouraging communication by throwing up a barrage of technical jargon. His

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anger was especially bitter because, in his mind, the clever Marlowe had won something of a victory in driving him behind his own barrier. "Besides" he thought, "it's a losing battle." He knew that Marlowe, with his cut and paste prerogative would present a picture of incompetent government managers refusing to divulge information to the public. Seeking to atone for his attitude and salvage something for himself, if not for the plant, he made an offer.

"Since you have expressed an interest in our operation, Mister Marlowe, and have gone out of your way to make this visit, would you be interested in a closer look at those mysterious off-limits areas you mentioned?"

Marlowe's face displayed genuine surprise, but without a fraction of hesitation, he seized the opportunity, "That is a very kind offer, Doctor. I accept."

The television lights switched off as Marlowe sat down, and in the relative gloom left for mere reporters, Ed Walsenburg asked, "Pitkin, is there any reason to believe that any of us who were here yesterday received a significant amount of radiation?"

Pitkin was grateful to Walsenburg for the change of pace, and he took pains to make his answer as non-technical and as responsive as he could. "A good question, Ed. There's a long and a short answer. I suspect you would prefer the one that makes the most sense."

"I'll settle for that," the reporter smiled. "If it's short."

"Agreed," said Pitkin. He realized the high point of the press conference was past and the remainder of it would be detail and confirmation of loose ends. He reviewed the events of the previous day and reminded Walsenburg and others that their clothing and equipment had been carefully checked for radiation after the aborted excursion to the soil-sampling site. He was careful to emphasize the fact that no radiation had been detected on their persons or on their equipment. He bantered with Walsenburg over the need for detailed body examinations, fielded a dozen questions from the others about the schedule for barrel uncovering and removal, and rejected Jess Lyons' demand that the downwind population be evacuated during the process. Promising to consider Shelia Montrose's request for television coverage of at least part of the barrel removal, he reminded the group of the promised tour of the facility and adjourned the press briefing.

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Turning from the podium, Pitkin gestured at the nearby lunchroom doorway. A quiet watcher had been standing there through the entire proceedings moving only to lean against one side of the doorframe and then the other. As the figure approached, Pitkin looked at the CBS correspondent and called, "I'll be with you in a minute, Mister Marlowe." Marlowe waved an acknowledgment permitting Pitkin to give his attention to his assistant.

There was an aura of remoteness about Jenny Gilpin, which disengaged her from much that went on in her presence, or so it seemed to those who did not know her. None who did would have said she was aloof, because there was always warmth in her quiet smile. While an imperceptive stranger might have thought her to be indifferent, she had only a sympathetic sensitivity, which made her shy upon meeting another for the first time. Her casual friends sometimes thought Jenny was nonchalant; had they more carefully noted her steady gaze and intense brown eyes, they would have thought otherwise.

There were senior members of the plant staff who did not understand why Pitkin had chosen Jenny as his assistant. They recognized her academic achievements, her high standing in her graduating class, and her advanced degrees in physics, but Jenny's quiet manner had suspended their complete acceptance. That she was female was no doubt a contributing factor to the coolness of male management. And some of their reservation could be attributed to the fact that her sometimes too incisive mind sliced into their own thinly secure environment and created disquiet and suspicion.

Pitkin Waay, who was either unmindful of the undercurrent or casually defiant of it, depended on Jenny. He had discovered that tasks assigned to her were always done to his satisfaction and often beyond. When she was asked for an opinion, she gave it, and she gave the reasons for it. Jenny had, on more than one occasion, given him the small edge of reassurance necessary to drive the edge of doubt away from difficult decisions. But underlying it all, Pitkin relied on Jenny because she was loyal. Being able to confide in his assistant enabled Pitkin to talk his way through many problems, which were sensitive, and some problems, which were only maddeningly tedious. Recently, both

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categories had expanded, and he, Pitkin, had come to depend on Jenny Gilpin more and more.

"Jenny, I suppose you heard. I committed myself to give Marlowe the grand tour. I'm going to have to ask you to go along with Wellington's group. There shouldn't be any problem. Just let Lamont make all the noise. He knows the routine by heart, but if he starts off the deep end, strangle him diplomatically."

"Are you sure you want me to wait?" she asked with mock seriousness. "It would make a better story if we did it now in front of Marlowe's television camera."

"I don't believe any of these reporters would even write it up. He's not their favorite PR man," laughed Pitkin. Then looking at Wellington talking loudly to a captive group of reporters lined up for coffee, Pitkin's face lost its smile. "Whatever you do, keep that outfit away from those damn barrels."

"If I know Lamont, it should be easy. I'll hint there may be some hot particles floating around. The last time I did that, he whipped out his handkerchief, covered that aquiline nose of his, and did a one-eighty."

"One more thing, Jenny. When the media people leave, drive out to our infamous barrel pit and talk to Harvey. He said he had something to show me, but I'm going to be tied up, at least through noon."

She nodded her understanding then, noting Marlowe was standing nearby waiting for Pitkin, and Jenny turned to leave. As she did, she saw Jess Lyons still sitting scribbling in a ragged notebook. Walking toward him she called out, "Jess, come with me. I'll get you a super nuclide filtering mask and some lead shorts and we'll tour the hot spots."

"She works for you?" laughed Marlowe as he joined Pitkin.

"Yes," smiled the physicist shaking his head watching his assistant rouse the old reporter and lead him off for coffee and doughnuts.

"Would you like to join them?" asked Pitkin, inclining his head at Lyons and the girl.

"For lead shorts or for coffee?"

"Only coffee, I'm afraid."

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"Then I'll pass. My stomach won't take anything stronger than milk any more, besides, I'm anxious to get started on this tour you promised."

"Fair enough," agreed Pitkin. "If you'll walk with me to the office, we can start there."

CHAPTER THREE

Following Pitkin's lead, Marlowe was soon out of the plant lunchroom and into the long corridor leading to the administrative offices. There was nothing remarkable in the secretaries, the clatter of typewriters, and the usual and normal trappings of a busy office, and Marlowe used the walk to take a closer look at his host.

Pitkin Waay was taller than Marlowe was and a good deal more muscular. His neat, clean, and decidedly casual clothing created the appearance of a man who might have just walked in from a nearby cattle ranch. But from the sandy colored hair

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sprinkled with gray to the dusty boots, there was more to Pitkin Waay than scientist in western garb.

Marlowe, the experienced student of peoples the world around, suspected that Pitkin was at intellectual odds with himself. It seemed strange that he would defend the program and the Director, but, at the same time, neatly avoided making statements, which would commit him to either. In the short minutes they had spent together, Marlowe had already seen the studied reserve masking a swift and penetrating intellect. He had watched Pitkin appear to listen to polite questions, all the while thinking ahead, and beyond what was immediately before him. "If he plays chess, he's a master," thought Marlowe. "His anticipation is incredible. I'd wager he's already got my entire tour planned, and no matter what I say or what I ask, he's got the answers with alternatives all planned and laid out."

He also guessed the physicist was a man who could, under the right circumstances, act decisively, but, at the same time, he would be selective of when to act and when to defer action. Marlowe had seen a display of Pitkin's instinctive decision making ability in the handling of the difficulty at the press conference.

The newsman had been surprised by the offer of a plant tour. He dismissed the notion of it being a play for publicity or a pandering to his own status as a nationally recognized figure. Pitkin Waay decidedly was not one to be impressed by titles and pretense. Marlowe suspected that the offer had been made as something of an apology for being avalanched under technical jargon, but, whatever the reason, he welcomed the opportunity to learn more about the plant.

The plutonium story was not one he would have ordinarily covered, but it broke while he had been preparing for a trip to San Francisco. Finding some extra time in his schedule, he squeezed a briefing out of one of his research assistants, and headed for Denver, planning to visit the plant as a sort of layover exercise. Now that he was here, he also found himself interested in learning more about the facility and, more immediately, about the man guiding him into the wide carpeted reception room of the plant's central offices.

In the middle of the reception area, the two men encountered Hugo Chase who perfunctorily shook the newsman's hand and mumbled a stiff and formal welcome. Marlowe made an

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obvious effort to bridge the gap his questions and Chase's answers had opened between them.

"Mister Chase, I'm glad to see you again. I wanted to assure you that my questions were not intended to embarrass anyone at this facility or to inject controversy where there was non. I pride myself on being a professional, and I was only seeking information. If my background information was incorrect, I will be in your debt if you will assist me in correcting it. The tour that Doctor Waay very thought fully suggested will undoubtedly be a long first step in perfecting my education about your plant, and I welcome it. To tell you the truth, I was quite surprised by the offer, and I confess that I'm looking forward to the next few hours. Doctor Waay has already advised me on the ground rules. No cameras, no recorders, and no notes in restricted areas. Having spent my war years assigned to the military, I understand, and, of course, fully accept the restrictions of security."

Hugo eyed Marlowe suspiciously, but nonetheless tentatively accepted the peace offering. I appreciate your comments, Mister Marlowe, and, for my part, would ask you to remember that for the past two days we've all been operating under a good deal of pressure here with very little time for rest. After you and Pitkin have completed your tour, perhaps you would stop by my office. I'd be interested I hearing your reactions once you see firsthand what it is we do here."

With the breach partially repaired, Pitkin ushered the newsman toward his office and pretended not to see the exaggerated look of surprised disbelief that Hugo pinned on his antagonist's backside. From his doorway, Pitkin called to Etta, "Would you have someone bring us two large glasses of milk from the cafeteria?"

"Certainly, Doctor Waay. Would you like a sandwich or doughnuts?"

"No, thank you, Etta. Milk, nothing more."

"I believe Deora brought in some molasses cookies, sir. I could just step down to her office and see if any are left."

"The milk will be fine."

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“If you say so, sir, but I ate some of the cafeteria’s Danish myself, and they were excellent.”

Pitkin was spared a further refusal by Marlowe. “If there are any of those molasses cookies left, I’d love one.”

“And you Doctor Waay?” asked the triumphant Etta.

“Since you are going anyway, Etta, yes, one for me.”

As Pitkin closed his door, the chuckling Marlowe surveyed the comfortable office. “I have that woman’s twin in Washington. There’s really no point in arguing you know. They operate on their own principle of disorientation. If you had asked for cookies, I’d wager there wouldn’t have been one for miles. I’m quite comfortable with my secretary. I decide in advance what I want, then I simply ask for a variation and negotiate back to what I wanted in the first place.”

“Etta has always wanted to visit Washington, ” “began Pitkin.

“Not in a million years, Doctor,” said Marlowe, throwing up his hands in mock protest. Following Pitkin’s lead and taking a leather chair near the cluttered low table in the center of the room, Marlowe heaved a great sigh. Dropping his arms on the wide padded armrests, he looked squarely at Pitkin. “Where do we begin my orientation on Rocky Flats?”

“I suspect that might depend upon how much time you have,” smiled Pitkin. “But it might be more productive for us to talk for a few minutes and decide what would be most informative and what you feel would really be most useful to you.”

Catching Pitkin’s intentional emphasis on “really,” Marlowe bantered, “Well, of course, I really want to see your darkest secrets, the ones you’ve cleverly concealed from the public all these years.”

“That’s a tall order, Mister Marlowe. Would you settle for a look at a rather stodgy and monotonous production facility, flavored with a healthy dose of bureaucracy?”

“Sounds rather dull when you put it that way,” replied Marlowe leaning back into the soft cushions. “Perhaps you could talk me through the least dramatic areas while we wait for our refreshments.”

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“Fair enough,” agreed Pitkin, rising and walking to a long side table. After shuffling through an assortment of papers, returned to his chair. “I’ll try to avoid repeatin any of Hugo’s orientation, but for openers, let’s look at an outline of the buildings and grounds.

With that, Pitkin laid a map on the table, arranging it so it was right side up for Marlowe. Returning to his chair and leaning forward over the upside down map and the maze of black squares and rectangles arrayed on the stark white paper. Pitkin pulled a bright silver ballpoint pen from his shirt pocket and, using it as a pointer, began tracing a thin line that coursed around the outer fringes of the drawing. “As you can see, Mister Marlow, ...”

“Leighton, please. The ‘Mister Marlowe’ puts quite a barrier where there needn’t be one, and with just the two of us here, it seems a trifle awkward. And, if you don’t object, I’ll drop the ‘Doctor Waay.’”

“Fine with me. As you may have noticed,” said Pitkin, spreading his hands and looking down at his boots and Levis, “I wouldn’t stand very high on anyone’s formality register.”

“I don’t believe you could begin to understand how much I envy you in your, shall I say, relaxed attire. It look entirely appropriate for the wide open spaces of your facility.”

“Yes,” agreed Pitkin returning to his diagram. “Our open spaces here would make a very respectal3e cattle ranch. We’re sitting in the middle of over ten sections of excellent grazing land. Six thousand five hundred fifty acres to be exact.”

“Interesting,” mused Marlowe as he studied the map. “I see here on the margin an arrow indicating Boulder to the north. The University of Colorado is there isn’t it? It was more an observation than a question and without waiting for confirmation, the journalist continued. “I’ve been invited to keynote a summer symposium there. I believe it’s entitled “The Media and Public Responsibility.” It’s obviously been arranged by journalists for journalists as a forum to massage their paranoia. I suppose it’s therapeutic for the disillusioned idealists who have rushed into a profession whose essence is public bloodletting and then discovered that the public insists on being told about itself while

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reserving the right to flay the messenger. But, then, reality, in one form or another, probably invades every profession and tortures its most sensitive members. I imagine you find it s even in science?"

Pitkin, whose eyes were fixed upon the map between them, made only a noncommittal reply. Marlowe's words, casually spoken, were needle sharp probes, and Pitkin realized he was being examined by an expert who would balance every word, every inflection, and would find as much substance in what he sensed and felt as in what he heard. But Pitkin, who had been invited by others to express his personal views on the plant, determined this was not going to be the unveiling of Pitkin Waay, not was it going to a philosophical dialogue on the disillusionments of professional responsibility. It was going to be a tour of Rocky Flats, nothing more.

"In any event, said Marlowe, perhaps recognizing Pitkin's silence as a note of caution that the conversation was too digressive, "from what I've seen of the mountains and this area, I think I'll accept the speaking invitation. So far in my gypsy existence, I've managed only to fly in and out of Denver a few times, and I have never really visited your state."

:You could do worse. There's a lot here to see," said Pitkin. "Boulder is an especially beautiful city, despite the fact that a lot of its population is pretty ragged, both physically and intellectually. If you accept your speaking invitation, you should take a few days and get up to the mountains. They're our only legitimate claim to uniqueness."

"How far is Boulder from here?" asked Marlowe tapping his finger in the center of the plant map.

"About ten miles, almost due north." Pitkin indicated an area off the upper edge of the sketch.

Continuing to peruse the plat in from of him, Marlowe was silent for a moment. Pitkin, for his part, was content to simply sit and wait for the next question. Pitkin's resolve was to supply mechanical facts and information. He would leave it to Marlowe to apply the interpretation.

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Looking up, Marlowe remarked, "I see that downtown Denver is really quite close. I had no idea of the proximity. What would you say it is?"

"Sixteen miles to downtown, as the crow flies."

"Or as the wind blows," countered the newsman. "I noticed on the drive up here how close some of the housing tracts are to your perimeter. I also was rather surprised at the growth on the downtown area. It seemed to me when I flew in that there were new skyscrapers everywhere."

Marlowe, looking back at the map, probably did not see the lines of Pitkin's face tighten, nor did he note how the silver pen was enveloped by a hard fist, but with the sensitivity of the skilled interviewer, Marlowe may have caught the subtle tension in Pitkin's clipped, "Yes, Denver's booming. There's precious little doubt that."

"Out here," Marlowe pointed to the lower right portion of the drawing, "is where your barrel cache is located, if I remember Mister Chase's briefing correctly. I guess it's what you would call the southeast quadrant of the facility, closest to Denver?"

"A bit neared to the east boundary fence." Pitkin indicated with his pen.

"I see. Now where are we? I assume somewhere in this area? Marlowe was pointing to the grouped blocks enclosed within the larger open space.

"Correct. The line here represents the chain link security fence that encloses the plant proper, some three hundred eighty-four acres. The L shaped building, here in the northwest part of the secured area, is the administration building.

"For background, Pitkin, "said Marlowe, easily taking up the use of the physicist's first name, "how long has the plant been here? I recall Mister Chase at the briefing saying something about the early fifties, and why in the world did the government choose this metropolitan location rather than some far away desert."

"The Rocky Flats selection was actually made in 1951, and some limited operations were begun in 1952. Growth since then has been a cyclic thing, dependent, of course, upon the inclinations of Congress. As to location, it's hard to believe, but in

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the early fifties this was a relatively remote site. The Boulder-Denver growth hadn't really taken off, and the plant wasn't in anyone's back yard. Remember, too, that the plant, at first, was fairly modest in size and the volume of work was much less than at the present. The location had the advantages of nearby universities, a large work pool of skilled machinists, and excellent transportation facilities. At the time, it must have looked to the Atomic Energy Commission like a good decision. Today, it may be otherwise, but when has hindsight ever been wrong?"

"I can't argue with any of what you say, but my research assistant tells me there has been a pattern of continuous plant growth. And, as recently as two years ago, you began construction on a major new plutonium recovery building. Wouldn't it have been prudent somewhere along the line to call a halt to renovation and new building and reconsider the prudence of continuing at this location?"

"Perhaps, shrugged Pitkin, "but I'll leave the second-guessing to editorial writers. For what it's worth, you should know there have been a number of studies examining the options of terminating all the work 'here and of discontinuing some aspects of it, especially the radioactive materials processing."

"Yes, I've heard of studies being done, but what's become of them?"

"A good guess would be that, like most expensive studies performed for the government, they have been filed and forgotten. Some got a few headlines for a few politicians, but for the most part they have gone the way of most paperwork."

"I know something about contractors and paper studies," nodded Marlowe. "You speak like a veteran Washingtonian, and your guess on where those studies are now is probably correct. But you must have supplied information for the contractors who did the studies and you must have read their conclusions. What's your view on relocating to another area?"

Pitkin very pointedly ignored the question. Marlowe smiled at the demonstration of discretion and changed course. "Pitkin, I remember Mister Chase introducing you as an expert on plutonium. Since the need to process that substance is the reason

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for the operation of this facility, I wonder if we could talk a bit about plutonium. For starters, how much do you actually handle here?"

"Sorry, those numbers are classified."

"I guess I expected that, but based upon your director's briefing, may I assume most, if not all, plutonium components for our nuclear weapons are fabricated here?"

Without answering directly, Pitkin gave an affirmative nod, "It's no secret what we do here. Yes, I'd say your assumption is fairly sound."

"Would you be willing to hazard a guess on just what it is about plutonium which seems to spook the public?"

Pitkin rocked back in his chair and studied the television journalist's famous face. Here in the quiet office, it seemed less of a mask that he remembered seeing on newscasts. Absent the artificiality of makeup, stage lights, and flattering camera angles, Pitkin saw the folds and creases of a tired face, aged by perhaps looking too often at the realities of power and drained by having had to dwell too long on the effects of its misuse. Brown eyes, however, which in other men, would have brooded, moved with restless curiosity and expectation.

"A very good question, began Pitkin. In fact and many more things in fiction said, by people who should know better, "Plutonium is many things. For example, it has been that plutonium is the most toxic substance known to man. That's fiction. In fact, it is more toxic than cobra venom, but less toxic than botulism toxin. Plutonium is said to be a killer if inhaled in micro amounts, yet to date, there are few documented fatalities attributable to inhalation of small amounts of plutonium.

"But you aren't saying there's no danger?"

"By no means. A minute amount in the lungs, 12 to 13 milligrams, for example, will cause death by massive fibrosis in less than a week. Plutonium entering the blood stream through a small skin lesion will migrate to the marrow of the bone and probably cause leukemia. Let there be no mistake, we're talking about an extremely dangerous substance, one that is chemically toxic and one that is highly radioactive. The point I was trying to

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make bears only upon the difficulty of discussing plutonium. It's virtually impossible to separate out the truth and render it intelligible to lay people. I realize it sounds defensive to it, but it's in the murky area of truth and half-truth where many of our critics find their most persuasive arguments."

Marlowe was leaning forward in his chair, clearly caught up in the flow of Pitkin's words. The newsman was taken by the fact there was no trace of advocacy in this man's words, none of the urgency he had learned to associate with empire building bureaucrats the world around. There was an openness and honesty in Pitkin Waay that was almost beguiling. Still, Marlowe was puzzled.

Having interviewed people in almost every part of the world across the spectrum of interest and intensity from diplomats to terrorists, Marlowe had become susceptible to a peculiar itch it was most persistent when he was listening to the ingredients of truth being delivered by someone who appeared to be uninterested in the implications of his own words and unwilling to confront the sum total of the parts of his truth.

Marlowe felt such detachment was suspect. It was usually forced and artificial and a mask for emotions. Such disguised feelings were, in Marlowe's experience, far more eloquent than words alone. Such concealments were beyond statements and assertions, and they were the stuff that distinguished a news story from fill and copy.

The old itch was gnawing and biting at Marlowe. He had, over a third martini, once tried to convince a fellow journalist there was such a thing as a human gizzard and he, Leighton Marlowe, had one. That organ, Marlowe had argued, began stirring and itching whenever a story was brewing but remaining elusively just out of reach.

As he listened to Pitkin, dispassionately describe the properties of plutonium and its effects on the human body, Marlowe's gizzard began biting at him. Despite the candid explanations, his news hound instincts kept telling him there was more to the relationship between Pitkin and the plant than met the eye. He wondered if it was the man himself. What could there be

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behind the tanned square face, the classic Marlboro man features that made the old itch pick at his innards until he shifted in his chair in an effort to rub it away? He needed to tack and come at his man from another angle.

Marlowe seized a pause in Pitkin's words to interrupt. "All this you are saying is public information? ... Strike that. The question should be, what would you say is the level of public understanding about the effects of plutonium?"

"I suppose you're going back to your earlier question which went to the matter of public apprehension over plutonium handling. The two are related. Understanding and concern, I mean. Because we are talking about such minute amounts and, in the same breath, about disastrous biological effects, there's bound to be confusion and, in many cases, fear"

"Do you fear it?"

"I respect it. But I'm hardly representative of the public.

"True enough, but I'd like to get some sense of your personal feelings about the plutonium processing being done here"

"My feeling are my own, and not relevant to the mission of Rocky Flats." The answer was firm, flat, and very final.

Marlowe was wise enough not to attempt to drive his quarry to ground, at least not this day. "Very well, but from the perspective of your expertise how much of the public concern about plutonium processing is justified?"

The shield thrown up in response to Marlowe's probing came down far enough for the exchange to continue. "To put our discussion into context, remember, I'm not addressing end uses, governmental purposes, or political motives. I'm confining myself to the operation of this facility."

"I understand," nodded Marlowe, still listening, but now idly and politely. He was getting the official line, something he could read in any public relations pamphlet.

"The answer, in that limited sense, is really quite simple. Given an adequate technical understanding, proper equipment, and intelligent workers, handling plutonium is no more or no less difficult than handling any other dangerous and toxic substance. It can be done safely and with very little risk."

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"It's difficult to argue with an expert, but let me ask a couple of general questions. Since plutonium is the stuff bombs are made of, why isn't there a hazard involved in making bomb parts?"

"In a sense you have the ingredients of an answer in your question. We make only parts, the plutonium parts. The bombs, you call them, are assembled elsewhere."

"That's done in Texas?"

"Your researcher again?"

"I'm afraid so. She probably filled me with more information than I'll ever understand or use. She was pressed with other work, but when she heard my request, she took on the assignment of collecting background information for this story with more enthusiasm than I've ever seen before. I might add, she is not an admirer of the nuclear industry"

"Does she recognize a distinction between the nuclear industry and the federal government's weapons program?"

"I'm not sure, answered Marlowe, but I have the feeling you do."

"Yes, but its really another topic for another time."

Before either could speak to continue the exchange, Etta Westridge swept into the room with a cafeteria tray triumphantly balanced on one hand. "Pardon me, sirs." It was a demand not a request. Instantly, she was between them dispensing the glasses of milk and an enormous pile of golden brown cookies, each dotted with the small outcroppings of chocolate chips.

"Now, Doctor Waay, I certainly hope you're not going to pretend this is lunch. I'm sure Mister Marlowe would like a regular meal. After all, he is our honored guest." Addressing Marlowe directly, Etta continued, "I took it upon myself to substitute for the molasses cookies which were a bit too sweet. I'm sure you'll prefer the chocolate chip."

Holding the plastic tray smartly under her arm, Etta marched back the way she had come, pausing at the door long enough to remind Pitkin, "The cafeteria closes at one thirty, sir, and that doesn't leave much time. "With an almost imperceptible bow of her upper body, she acknowledged the startled "Thank

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you's" and, with sequined glasses flashing, disappeared behind the closing door.

"Would the honored guest like a cookie?" asked Pitkin solemnly. "The honored guest insists on a cookie," responded Marlowe seizing one and holding it up in mock salute to his host. The two laughed and chatted their way through the pile of cookies and glasses of milk until Marlowe, with only a faint and polite protest, accepted Pitkin's offer to eat the last lonesome wafer on the plate. As he sat munching it, Marlowe firmly rejected Pitkin's offer to include a lunch stop in the up coming tour of the plant. "This is more than I usually have for lunch, besides, I can eat anytime. I may never see the insides of another nuclear weapons plant.

"Setting the empty glasses aside, Pitkin returned the map to the table. With his pen, he indicated again the lines of the inner security fence. "Within the perimeter there are more than a hundred buildings containing over two million square feet of floor space. Since there isn't any way we can visit more than a few places, we should decide which ones are the most inviting to you.

Pitkin first identified the maintenance and support buildings, none of which aroused any interest in his guest. Next to be identified were a group of buildings in the lower part of the map. "In what is roughly the southern half of the facility, we house the operations of fabricating uranium, beryllium, and," said Pitkin. Sweeping the tip of his pen in a circle over the upper part of the drawing, he continued, "Here in the northern half of the plant are the plutonium processing activities."

"If I have a choice, that's the work I'd most like to see," said Marlowe, "but I think you anticipated me. Correct?"

"Well, plutonium's card gets punched far more than any other, so it's not really a clever guess, only a function of experience. There are two principal buildings we can look at, processing and recovery." Pushing himself to his feet, the tall physicist looked down at Marlowe, "If you're ready, I suggest we get started."

Later, after passing through security where Marlowe was unceremoniously questioned by a guard who either didn't know or

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didn't care about celebrities, Pitkin led the way across a compound to a large windowless concrete building. They entered by way of a heavy rubber-edged door and were accompanied through by a noticeable rush of air that gushed in from the outside and continued to blow in until the door closed.

Their first stop, just inside the door, was a small room, bare except for a half dozen vinyl covered stools, a like number of gray steel lockers, and a table piled high with clear plastic bags. Pitkin handed one of the bags to Marlowe and instructed him, "This is where we suit up. In the bag you'll find a pair of coveralls, a skullcap, and plastic booties which will fit over your shoes. I would suggest you might be more comfortable without your suit coat." Indicating the lockers, he added, "You can use one of those if you like." As Marlowe fumbled with the unfamiliar apparel, Pitkin easily donned his matching attire and stood waiting for his guest to stretch the booties of his polished shoes. The physicist flashed an understanding smile at Marlowe's good-natured quips on his slightly disordered appearance.

The garb of the plutonium processing building invariably discomposd those unfamiliar with the procedures, and Pitkin found it interesting to note how quickly the protective clothing was accepted and even almost forgotten by those who wore it for the first time. He was relieved by the fact that Marlowe displayed none of the nervous giddiness he had seen in so many others who had passed through this room for the first time, the politicians and especially the departmental political appointees on their initial orientation tours. Bursting with the self-importance of being baptized in the Potomac, they were almost comical in their attempts to appear nonchalant, yet important, but confounded in both by the ridiculous apparel.

Handing Marlowe a respirator, Pitkin advised him, "You may carry this or hang it around your neck by the strap. You won't need it unless, as the airlines say, 'in the unlikely event we experience sudden decompression.' If that or any other radiation related event should occur, there will be alarms giving us plenty of time to clear the area."

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"You were serious when you spoke of decompression," observed Marlowe as they left the dressing room. I was. Did you notice the rush of air when we came in the outer door?"

"Yes. It wasn't strong, but it was very noticeable.

"You were experiencing one of our primary safety systems. It's conceptually a simple process. To understand how it works, imagine a building with a giant air pump sitting in its center. The pump is constantly drawing air out of the building. The result is a structure with interior pressure slightly less than outside pressure, and when you open a door, air always comes in. It never flows out. Now carry your visualization one step further. Think of another smaller building sitting within the larger building. The inner building is also essentially airtight. Its air pressure is again just a bit lower than the pressure of the outer building. When you enter this inner building, you'll experience the same noticeable gush of air from the outer building. That is simply the effect of the pressure differential."

"The idea is to allow nothing in the air to migrate outward."

"Exactly," said Pitkin, leading the way down a corridor to another airlock door. "In this building we have four successive negative pressure zones. We're now entering the second one. The air lock door was a near duplicate of the first, and as with the first, they were ushered through by a draft of air on their backs. "In effect, we are now inside the second building I mentioned," explained Pitkin.

"A building within a building," said Marlowe, nodding his understanding of the idea.

"Roughly correct," acknowledged Pitkin. "However, you'll remember I said four zones. We're in the second. Now, to appreciate the next one, I would suggest you think of our second building as a floor in a large department store. Major departments, furniture, house furnishings, clothing, and so forth are laid out in distinct sections with wide corridors between them. Our second building consists of those corridors."

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Leading Marlowe down a wide hallway, Pitkin turned into a somewhat narrower one and gestured first to his left, then to his right. "On both sides of us are walled off and totally enclosed operating areas. "In our analogy, they are the major departments of the store."

"I see," remarked Marlowe, "ladies hot wear on the left and Rocky Flats house furnishings on the right, cast in glowing plutonium."

Pitkin ignored the attempted humor and continued explanation. "There are a number of operating areas in this building, and although they are separated by the corridors, in the aggregate, they constitute our third negative pressure zone.

Attempting to atone for his failed humor, Marlowe spoke to show he was staying abreast of his instructor. "What you have then are a number of third buildings within the second."

"You could think of that way, yes. If you'll wait here for just a moment, I'll see it we can't go into this one. Without waiting for Marlowe's assent, Pitkin stepped to a nearby door, pulled it open and stepped inside. From where he stood, the journalist could again feel the air around him move toward the door as it closed behind the scientist's white coveralls. The door, molded in rubber, was different from the two previous air locks. This one 'had a large conventional clear glass window in the upper half, but any picture it might have shown was closed off by a window shade emblazoned with forbidding red letters spelling, "NO ADMITTANCE."

While Marlowe stood looking up and down the hall, noting that every door was shaded in the same way, the door behind which Pitkin had disappeared reopened and his tour guide was inviting him into "NO ADMITTANCE." Feeling a bit flattered by the invitation to bypass the forbidding sign, he did so without comment.

Sitting directly in front of him and immediately capturing his attention was a contraption unlike anything 'he 'had ever seen before. Its basic contour was that of a large box. Marlowe guessed it was probably eight feet in height and almost the same number of feet in length. Width was more difficult to assess because there

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were sundry outlets and connections that broke up the surface on the off side of the thing.

Arrayed around the box were windows, each about a foot on one side and two feet on the other and outlined with black molding. The first window was implanted with its long dimension aligned vertically; the second window was aligned with its long dimension horizontal to the floor. The remaining three window Marlowe could see were alternately placed in the same pattern with the lower edge of all the windows approximately five feet from the floor. Below each window, Marlowe saw what appeared to be black rubber sleeves hanging loose and empty. The sleeves were almost eerie because each ended in a black hand. At first glance it looked as that some of the fingers were missing, or at least chopped off.

High around the upper portion of the box was an assortment of dials, pipes, and tubing. A second look revealed a number of switches, levers and knobs, located at what, to his unskilled eye, were random places on the sides of the box

"If you have never seen one of these or something like it, said Pitkin, "you may not recognize this as a glove box. Before I forget to mention it, I should tell you that the interior of these boxes constitutes our fourth negative pressure area. Thus the air pressure inside the glove box is less than it is in this room. Any leakage of air that may be contaminated is, inward therefore, always

"A glove box," contrivance.

"Mechanically, echoed Marlow, still staring at the it's a number of things," explained Pitkin, walking the journalist over to one of the windows. "It's a production unit in a much larger system; it has its own nitrogen atmosphere, it is connected to other units with a conveyor line; and it has its own fire suppression system."

"Obviously these are the gloves the black sleeves." Marlowe pointed to one of the black sleeves.

"Yes, they're made of rubber impregnated with lead oxide."

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"Radiation protection?" asked Marlowe. "The whole thing is for that purpose. The windows are leaded, and the stainless steel sides of the box have lead shielding."

"Of course, I guess I was sort of taken by the sight of the gloves."

"Would you like to try one?"

"Marlowe's answer came fast upon the heels of the question, "yes, I would ... if it's not a lot of trouble or a violation of regulations."

Pitkin turned and walked a short distance to another glove box where a figure in white coveralls and skullcap was looking into a view port and adjusting some control devices. Pitkin spoke to the man for a moment. The other listened, nodded, made a final adjustment of his controls, then walked with Pitkin back to where Marlowe was still studying the contours of the glove box and eyeing its rubber arms.

"Mister Marlowe, this is John Morrison." While the two shook hands, Pitkin quickly looked through one of the windows of the nearby glove box and then back at the journalist and Morrison "John is the supervisor in the module. He and his group are in the process of doing some rather rough preliminary work on small plutonium ingots.

"Speaking to the worker, Pitkin asked, "John, I see that you have a button in there now. It seems to be isolated and clean. Would it be all right for Mister Marlowe to reach in while I hand it to him? "

"No problem, Pitkin," beamed Morrison. Glad for the break in his work-a-day routine, the plant worker volunteered to assist. me help you with those gloves, Mister Marlowe.

When he picked up the dangling rubber sleeve, Marlowe realized that what he had first seen as stubs on the black hand were simply fingers on the glove not fully pulled out when the last user withdrawn his arm and hand. Soon Marlowe was standing close against the box, looking through the window at his own rubber-clad arms. Pitkin, standing only a few feet away was likewise engaged.

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Marlowe watched while Pitkin's hands reached down and picked up a small disk. "Turn your palm up," directed Pitkin.

Marlowe did as he was told and Pitkin's black gloved hand carefully set the disk on the upturned palm. Marlowe's first sensation was the weight of the wafer, or button, as Pitkin had called it. It was surprisingly and deceptively heavy for its size that was about that of a silver dollar. Generally round and it was a dull silver color, very much like a worn nickel.

Curling his unfamiliar rubber fingers around the disk, Marlowe hefted it by raising and lowering his hand, getting a feel for the plutonium wafer. "It feels warm," he said, looking briefly at Pitkin.

"That's the radiation, but don't worry. You're fully protected by the gloves. The sample you are holding will be weighed and tested for quality. Either here or as some later stage, it can be processed like any other piece of metal. It can be machined on a lathe and shaped according to given specifications. Processing can also include cleaning the component, marking it, and sometimes welding and heating it, all according to design requirements."

Pitkin recovered the disk and replaced it in its mold. He and Marlowe withdrew from the glove box while Morrison watched, smiling all the while. "I catch you on the news whenever I can Mr. Marlowe. I sure never expected to meet you," said the worker, shaking Marlowe's hand again as Pitkin began moving toward the door.

The glove box experience had been brief, but to Marlowe, impressive. It was difficult for his mind to accept the reality of the substance he had held in his hand. He had read a number of the popular books by critics of nuclear weapons and from them had acquired an imprecise notion of how much plutonium would be required for a bomb, but he knew it was only a few kilograms. To have held such an awesome material in his hand was nothing short of incredible.

"The alchemists would be impressed." Marlowe's own voice reminded him how silent he had been for the past few moments.

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Pitkin had apparently visited that topic before. He spoke in an offhand way, as though dismissing the matter. "In the sense that plutonium is a man-made material, that's true, however, I believe the purpose of medieval chemistry was to find a way to transmute to gold."

"I dare say your plutonium is more valuable than gold."

"If you calculated the cost of production, handling, storage, and yes, using plutonium, your sum total would exceed by many factors the going price of gold. However, at the end of the line, you have a product whose uses are extremely limited." After a pause, Pitkin added, "And you have a radioactive presence which be around for a very long time."

Before Marlowe could ask the question Pitkin's remark suggested, the scientist halted at a white metal door and pushed it open. Inside a small room, they saw a stainless steel control panel atop a metal console. About waist high, the panel was divided into two sections. On the left were a couple of switches alongside four numerical readouts implanted in elongated slots. Protruding from the right side were three hand levers each with a thumb button on its top.

Sitting on an elevated stand behind the panel and situated to directly face a panel operator was what appeared to be a conventional twenty one-inch television set. Built into the wall to the left of the panel at eye level was a window approximately feet high and four feet long. Its institutional looking black metal frame was studded with bolts set some three inches apart. The glass it surrounded permitted the viewer to see, but rather imperfectly and dimly, into a very long room.

Inside the long chamber on the other side of the window, were a dozen precise rows of small metal casks. The containers looked to Marlowe very much like small beer kegs. Hanging in the middle of the room was a device designed to grasp, lift and move the small containers.

Even to Marlowe's untrained eyes, the panel was the remote control center for the mechanism he saw through the glass. "A plutonium storage room and remote handling system," he said, walking to the window.

"Right. This is where we keep unformed and partially formed plutonium components. It's also a general storage area for all radioactive materials to be kept when they are not being

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processed or handled for some reason. The device you see is called a three-axis retriever, and it's operated by way of a computer program, as you can see, it also has a manual capability. The vault itself is constructed of ten-inch thick concrete walls; it has an atmosphere of inert gas, and the window you see is double thickness of laminated glass with gelled water between the panes.

"Good God Almighty," breathed Marlowe. "Do you have plutonium in all those casks? There must be a couple of hundred of them."

"It's a safe bet a fair number are empty at any given time, than sound like I'm downplaying anything, I'll confirm seems to be your impression. There's a whole hell of a lot of plutonium in there. Don't ask me how much, because, although we have a precise inventory, the amount is classified

While Marlowe stood peering into the storage vault, Pitkin leaned against the wall, letting the newsman get his fill of the sight. So far, the tour had gone pretty much as he expected it. The only discordant note was the discomfort Pitkin felt at some of the questions. Not unexpectedly, the queries about the plant, the equipment, and the processes were simple, and he had been answering them almost without thinking. It was different with the unexpected, innocent sounding questions whose uncomfortable answers, had they been given, would have brought him personally into matters he had always publicly avoided.

Reflecting on the flow of their exchanges, Pitkin sensed he was being bracketed. If his suspicion proved to have substance and to be more than a shadow in his tired mind, he knew that Marlowe, in his own good time, would fire for effect. The realization angered him, and he toyed with the notion of cutting the tour short and sending the journalist on his way, or claiming press of business and dumping Marlowe in Hugo's lap. The more he thought about it, the more Pitkin was attracted by the prospect of getting out of Marlowe's line of fire, of closing himself in his office and stretching out on the cool leather cushion of his couch. He suddenly felt an almost desperate need for a refuge, for some time alone, for an opportunity to reject thinking, but most of all, Pitkin wanted to get away from questions about motivation and questions about his priorities.

"Pitkin," said Marlowe, still facing the window, "if even the most conservative estimates of our nuclear capabilities are

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correct, isn't this madness? Don't we see here," sweeping his hand across the face of the window, the greatest irony in mankind's experience? Brilliance ... genius ... breathtaking imagination and invention, all dedicated to one end ... the massive ... no, the total destruction of life itself?"

"It's certainly one statement which is currently quite fashionable.

"When all the rhetoric is boiled away, isn't it the only valid one?"

"Admitting madness, observing the vitality of mankind's tendency toward self destruction, and noting how technology has been an instrument of that tendency hardly seems to be a productive cut at the real issues."

"Which are?"

Pitkin again felt himself being drawn off his position as scientist and governmental official. With a discipline refined by constant application, he resisted the temptation to throw Marlowe's trite superficialities back into his famous face.

Like every critic before him who suddenly discovered the nuclear issue, Marlowe had begun by marveling over the awesome power and deadly radiation danger. That would lead him, as it had led preceding sages, to the succeeding step of fear bathing that would be ushered in by references to specific instrumentalities to be used in the destruction of the human race. Using throw weights, megatonnage, rad dosages, overpressures, heat blasts, and the newly fashionable nuclear winter, popularized for personal gain by a few careless scientists, the more avid and learned practitioners of the scare art could, by immersion, throw a child into convulsions and arrest the mental process of many adults.

Pitkin remembered one of ABC's great commercial fright movies as being a high point for fear bathers. In his own mind, he compared it to the hot tub fad. In both cases, a massive publicity campaign had made a lot of money for a few promoters. In neither case did the reality match the expectation. In the same way many people discovered they really didn't like sitting in somebody else's bath water, the public discovered the substance in the network's fear tub was, in fact, pretty stale stuff, having already been sloshed through by innumerable talk show hosts, editorial writers, and newscasters.

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In a critique following "The Day After," one observer had made his fellow commentators seem embarrassingly shallow by observing that while the scare game was easy to play, it ignored the only question worth asking, and one nobody wanted to try to answer. "After the hysteria, after the dilettantes have exhausted was with their campaign of fear," the former governmental official asked, "what exactly, what specifically, are we to do?"

Listening to the non-answers, the evasions, and the litany of irrelevancies, Pitkin had found himself troubled by the fact he heard no reasonable or honest answer. He was haunted by the prospect that there wasn't any,

"Mister Marlowe," said Pitkin aloud, ignoring the earlier ingratiating suggestion to adopt first name familiarity,¹¹ the issues which are discussed in the general context of nuclear weapons have been parsed in every newspaper and news magazine in the county. The lunacy of unringing the nuclear bell, of unlearning nuclear science and of trusting other competing nations to do the same is too staggering a folly for me to comprehend. Yet that notion is entertained and is abroad in the land, on the highest levels by people who simply propose to walk away and pretend that a half dozen or more developing nations already have nuclear capability which they will most certainly use in circumstances they deem to be appropriate. Now that is as much an editorial as you will ever get from me. I don't mean to be short with you, but I cannot imagine any purpose whatever that would be served by our discussing my views any further.

Marlowe eyed him for a moment. Pitkin watched what he believed to be a thin line of anger draw his interrogator's mouth into a tight line. The moment quickly passed as Marlowe turned and examined the control panel, and apparently dismissed the episode from his mind. He asked, "What's our next stops?"

"Earlier you mentioned our ongoing construction program, since we had planned to take a look at plutonium recapture operations, I thought we could combine the two interests by going to the newest building we have, the plutonium recovery building."

Marlowe appeared to listening, but his mind was on quite another track. What Pitkin had thought to be anger would have more properly been characterized as self-reproach. The newsman realized he had presumed a bit too much and had pressed his subject more than the fragile bridge between them would bear.

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He had profited from the exchange, however. He had discovered Pitkin Waay obviously had given the building, and yes, the use of nuclear weapons a great deal of thought. Marlowe also learned something about just how closely Pitkin held his own counsel. The journalist had no evidence to support his theory, but he strongly suspected there was a deeply cutting ambivalence in the scientist's attitude. "Did he believe in the weapons program," he wondered, "If not, why did he continue his work at the facility? Maybe Pitkin was a man waiting for an opportunity."

Before they walked out of the processing building, Pitkin halted at what almost appeared to be an elaborate bathroom scale. Pitkin 'himself stepped up onto the little platform and stood for only an instant, then stepped off and invited Marlowe to perform the same exercise. Pitkin completed the radiation check by taking a small device from a nearby shelf and passing it over his head, and up and down his body much the same way airport guards look for metal on passengers. The same sweep was made of Marlowe, with the same negative result. As they began their walk through the plutonium recovery building, Pitkin explained how they operated on the principle of extracting plutonium from its carrier material by using one of two methods. "For want of better terms, we simply call them either 'slow' or 'fast.' Generally, when we are working with material with low plutonium residues, we use the slow recovery process."

Stopping here and there, Pitkin explained how slow recovery usually began with incineration to reduce the bulk of the material and to convert the metal compounds into oxides. They watched the operator of a remote unit begin to work some incinerated waste through an acid leaching process. Then, Pitkin led his guest through a laboratory where further refining work was in process, explaining how the end product was a nitrate solution sufficiently concentrated that it could be combined with a like stream from the fast recovery process.

"Shades of my college chemistry lab," quipped Marlowe, "we didn't have any concept of what you're doing here"

"It's only that you don't recognize the process. The chemistry is fundamentally simple, and a good chem student would be able to figure most of what we're doing pretty quickly," said Pitkin.

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As they walked through the area in the complex where fast recovery was performed, Pitkin incorporated the remark about college chemistry into his explanations and emphasized the chemical processes. "Here we work with source material which is relatively pure. We can begin with oxide dissolution and leaching which yields a plutonium nitrate solution. We follow with evaporation and precipitation to get to a solid plutonium peroxide which in turn is converted to plutonium oxide by heating. Our oxide is converted to plutonium tetrafluoride by applying anhydrous fluoride spray. Finally, we get to plutonium metal by a reduction of the tetrafluoride."

"Enough. I'm glad I went into journalism," said Marlowe with a surrendering shake of his head. "I recognize the general outline of what you assure me is a fundamental process. But despite excellent attempt to translate it into simple language, I'm lost. All this seems terribly efficient. But if you are able to recover plutonium by these methods, why do we have waste? I suppose I'm thinking of contaminated oil which is what brought me here."

"We have two problems we haven't solved yet. First, some materials simply require so much processing, it's not practical to pursue the plutonium. Second, we often have only trace amounts and recovery is not possible by any method. For example, remember the radiation check we did before leaving the processing building? If one of us had picked up enough plutonium to register the meters, the article of contaminated apparel would have become waste, but plutonium in such a minuscule amount would be impossible to recover. The types of wastes created that way are packaged and shipped to a secure depository in Idaho."

"A bit scary if one thinks of contamination of his skin or hair. What would happen in that situation?"

"Often it can be simply picked off with sticky tape, something like removing pet hair. If we can't remove it that way, a shower may be required. Anticipating your question, the next step would be a session with a health physicist in the laboratory where the radiation would be located and removed."

An hour and many questions later, the two men emerged from the suiting up room without their protective clothing and headed for the administration building. Marlowe, in no apparent hurry, ambled along pointing and asking questions. Pitkin, in his deliberate, studied way, answered.

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CHAPTER FOUR

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The usually ordered and primly neat office of Hugo Chase had a slightly disheveled look about it. Hugo's polished desktop was bearing an unaccustomed load of files, but arranged in four neat stacks. Two white cardboard boxes, whose origin had been Xerox Corporation and whose purpose had been to contain paper for duplicating machines sat near the desk under the overhanging top. Sitting out of place on the cushions of a leather chair was a stack of imposing green paperbound Senate Committee hearing reports.

Behind the desk, the plant Director was caught up in his work, and he apparently did not hear the partially open door swing back, nor did he immediately realize he had been joined by his deputy and by newsman Leighton Marlowe. Hugo Chase's head was inclined over an array of typewritten pages. While one hand held a paper against the desk, the other, wielding a red felt tip pen hovered above, ready to dart down for a quick deletion or to settle on the paper for a scribbled notation

Pitkin, who recognized the activity for what it was, frowned. Marlowe, who had no suspicion that things were other than normal for the office of a busy manager, did not sense anything out of the ordinary.

"Hugo, if you're too busy ..." began Pitkin. "of course not," replied Hugo making an especially furious deletion. "Have a seat."

"If this is a bad time ..." Marlowe's unfinished offer to withdraw was cut short,

"Not at all, not at all," Hugo assured him, finally tossing the pen down onto the bleeding paper. Seeing Pitkin approach the book-laden chair, Hugo said, "Just set the damn things on the floor, I'll be needing them yet this evening.."

"Evening work?" asked Marlowe lightly. "Sounds rather serious."

"Bureaucratic rites of spring," Pitkin explained. "Every year we make our pilgrimage to Washington to appeal for alms."

"Forgive my cynical deputy, Mister Marlowe. In his own curious way, he's making reference to congressional hearings on our authorization and appropriations."

"You have my profound sympathy," said Marlowe easing himself into the chair whose companion was still being ungently relieved of its green books. "Remember, I've lived and worked in

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that city for almost forty years. Having sat through more money hearings than I care to think about, I know very well what you have to go through. The fiscal process of the federal government has always been ponderous and cumbersome, but the last few years have been chaos."

Accidentally, or perhaps intentionally, Marlowe had hit upon a subject near, but not dear, to the heart of Hugo Chase. Marlowe had also, by chance, or by design, taken precisely the correct approach to the topic. Hugo seized upon the newsman's words "Chaos is a good word, a damn good and proper word for what we've been seeing in the budget process." Catching himself, Hugo looked sharply at Marlowe. "If I'm going to be quoted, strike everything after 'hello'."

Leaning forward a bit as if to lend emphasis to his words, Marlowe looked first at Pitkin, then fully and steadily at Hugo "Pitkin, Mister Chase, I have not risen in the news business by reporting off-the-record comments or by making stories out of the kind of conversation we're having here. When I'm looking for copy and planning a news piece, I'll raise my flags and you'll know what I'm about. Besides," he added with a broad smile, "Congress is so screwed up and it's such common knowledge, I couldn't pay the network to carry a story about it."

Laughing and bobbing his head in concurrence, Hugo asked, "Did Pitkin offer you coffee?"

"He did, but I'm afraid coffee doesn't do pleasant things to my stomach. In any event, I've been here longer than I planned, probably missed my flight, and certainly demolished my schedule for the next couple of days. If I don't get moving in a few minutes, things will only get worse."

"Well, now that you have seen something of our facility what's your impression of it?" asked Hugo, remembrance of the morning's events edging back into his voice. Instructive is a first reaction. Pitkin here," inclining his head at the scientist whose face remained impassively neutral, was most thoughtful and, above all, patient. His explanations were in a language even I could understand. I'm not an expert just yet, but I know far more than I did when I arrived this morning."

"Sounds like a good tour. What did you see?"

"Many things, but our two general areas were the processing and recovery buildings."

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Hugo shot a quick glance at Pitkin while waiting for Marlowe to continue. The newsman made a mental note of the Director's reaction, as he continued his commentary on the plant." To be hard bottom honest, Mister Chase, and to capsulize my impression, I'd say I'll leave here petrified. While I have been reassured and given some comfort by seeing first hand the exacting care and precautions you use in doing exceedingly difficult work, I find myself left with the thought of the only potential the use of your product. admire, Another way of saying all this would be for me to admire, in my layman's way, the mechanical facts which attend the handling of plutonium. Your operation here is a part, a critical and finely honed one to be sure in a large and complex machine. Aside form the lesser fact that I am favorably impressed by your efficiency, I am utterly terrorized by the nightmare which nuclear weapons have nailed to my psyche. At this moment, I can tell you that my subject and my concern is not a relatively minor spill of contaminated oil, rather it is the manufacture and use of plutonium in a civilized world."

Hugo was almost matter-of-fact in his response. "You're certainly honest about your position. It's fairly stated and I believe I understand your feelings. It hardly needs to be said but we obviously don't agree on very many aspects of the weapons program. I'm sure we do agree, however, that the tour was a good idea. It's cleared the air and ... shall I say, eliminated some rather unfortunate misunderstandings."

As Hugo spoke, Pitkin had the feeling there was a hint of relief in his superior's words. He realized Hugo was taking what waggish bureaucrat had called a backyard approach. The gist of it was, "things are fine in my yard, let the neighborhood take care of itself."

The words carrying the message that Marlowe's attention had been deflected from the contaminated oil flap at Rocky Flats were, by the backyard standard, sweet music in the Director's ears. Such a positive development was not an insubstantial reason for Hugo's noticeable change in attitude and his compromising tone.

Hugo became the cordial host, asking if Marlowe needed to use a telephone, offering secretarial service to reschedule his flight of Denver, and making standard, polite offers of cooperation to provide further information at some undefined time in the future.

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Standing, Marlowe extended his hand to Hugo and, in turn, to Pitkin. "Since you will be coming to Washington for your hearings, perhaps you would permit me to buy you both a drink. As a matter of fact, let's make it dinner at the Press Club, my treat."

"Time permitting, we'll take you up on that," promised Hugo.

After seeing Marlowe all the way out the front door, Hugo was instantly all business. "Time, damn it, time," he grouched. "Pitkin we've got a hell of a lot to do and precious little time to get it done." As he sailed through the reception area on the way back to his office, he called out, "Coffee, Etta."

"But Mister Chase," she began.

"No damn 'buts,' just bring coffee."

There were occasions, admittedly few, when Etta Westridge understood that it was not politic to trifle with her boss. This was such a moment. With a grand, eloquent shrug and with eyebrows high on her forehead, she disappeared down the hallway in the direction of the little room that housed one of the administration building's coffeepots. Back in his office, Hugo flung a hand in the direction of the cluttering boxes and the unseated green volumes. He challenged his deputy, "With press conferences and guided tours of the whole damn place, how are we ever going to get testimony ready for those hearings next week?"

"Hugo," suggested Pitkin patiently, "we'll do exactly what we've done every year before. We'll write what we believe is a credible statement of our needs. We'll add a couple of throw away options, and prepare some justifications for each. Using last year's format, we can plug in the numbers and break them down on a spreadsheet. After we have the whole thing nicely typed, we toss it on the desk in headquarters and watch them rewrite every damn paragraph."

"I wish it were as cut and dried as you say. This year they've sent us new instructions for layout, changed code numbers, and asked for more detailed justification on all items over one hundred thousand dollars."

"Our leaders in Washington change instructions on budget testimony preparation as often as they change their socks, every three days."

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Hugo, not amused, merely grumped agreement.

"Seriously, Hugo, we've already put it together, sent it back there and corrected their revisions or revised their corrections ... whatever. There's only so much we can realistically do.

"Backup, Pitkin. We need to be ready for anything. It never fails, one of those anti-everything Senators always manages to come up with a new angle. They usually have just enough substance to sound plausible. They get their headline and we end up peeling .egg from our faces. The only thing we can do is get as damn prepared as humanly possible. That's especially true since the Committee has scheduled separate hearings just for us. It's an unusual procedure, and quite frankly, I'm worried. We may beheaded straight for a battle over decommissioning this entire facility."

"We don't need to worry about what the questions will be this year," Pitkin assured him. "This go-around it will be the barrels. And for whatever it's worth, I agree that it's decision time on the plant. Congress has been sitting on the edge of that issue for a long time -I suspect we're pretty damn close to a shut down or at a minimum, removal of the plutonium work."

Hugo shoved a stack of papers to one side and accepted a steaming cup of coffee from a tight-lipped Etta Westridge who entered and exited the office without a word. "You're right, Pitkin, but back to the matter at hand, we need to deal with the barrels. While you were out with Marlowe, I've scoured these waste depository registers," indicating the files on his desk, "and there isn't any explanation for the things being out there. It may be we'll never be able to account for them or reconstruct the events which put them in the ground" As an afterthought, he added, "Speaking of our barrels, reminds me of your crew out there. Has Harvey been able to set up a schedule that will keep a couple of men out there day and night? It's priority, so, if he's short of people, he can pull them off something else."

"I haven't talked to him since this morning, but I sent Jenny out there. He wanted to show me something, but since I was stuck with Marlowe, I asked her to see what it was. If there was a scheduling problem, I'm sure they worked it out."

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"Show you something?" echoed Hugo absently, his mind still on barrels and committee hearings.

"That's what the man said," shrugged Pitkin.

"I see. Well, Henry's something of a fusspot. I'm sure Jenny can tend to it, whatever it is." Hugo's dismissal of the subject was a manager's response to a detail which was on another track and more appropriate for subordinate handling. "The important thing now is follow-up on the barrel site, but I'll leave that to you. I've got to spend the rest of the day and tonight going through this testimony."

Leafing forward and back again through the pages of his desk calendar, Hugo continued reviewing his time-crushed agenda. "Tomorrow, Lamont will have his hands full with the press. He said he expected there'd be requests for access to the plant for feature stories. We know some of those people will want to get back out to the site for photographs, and there are always questions on details. We both know how Lamont gets a bit careless in what he says to the media..."

"Careless?" Interrupted Pitkin. "Hell, he's a babbling, gushing fountain of misinformation and contradiction."

"I know your feelings on that, Pitkin," said Hugo, shaking his head as if trying to ward off further disparagement of his media relations officer. "He's here, we both know how and why, and we're stuck with him."

"Yes, but if keeping him on our payroll is the price of keeping one senator happy, I say it's too high."

"Eldon Moffat isn't just any senator. He's a Colorado Senator, and he swings considerable weight on some important committees."

"He's also a superficial and pretentious ass."

"Remember to tell him that, Pitkin. We'll be in his office next week. Meanwhile, we've got to deal with Lamont. He was in this afternoon with his old story about how he couldn't keep up without a full time assistant. As before, I told him we'd consider it. I also told him that, without exception, all future press releases would require written concurrence by this office, either your signature or mine."

"And he agreed?"

"I didn't give him any choice."

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"By golly, Hugo," intoned Pitkin; "I will personally endorse a commendation for your personnel file. Do I have your permission to assign Jenny the job of sitting as sort of doorkeeper? We could route Lamont's draft press releases through her. She could read them for technical accuracy and either send them back for correction or forward them to us."

"I wonder if that might not just produce another of his damn pious protests. He'd certainly resent having to go through her."

"I'm not so sure," countered Pitkin. "Lamont fancies himself to be something of a ladies man, and he already uses every excuse he can think of to 'consult' with her on some of the stuff he writes. If we put it on a 'work with' basis, I'm willing to bet he won't say a word."

"What about Jenny?"

"She hates to see him skidding around on the facts as much as we do, and it really wouldn't take much of her time."

"Well, I suppose it's worth a try. You want to tell him?"

"Nope. I'll have Jenny do it. Using her tact is part of the plan."

Hugo shook his head, signifying he had reservations, but was willing to accept Pitkin's handling of the matter. "Next item," he said consulting scribbled notes on his calendar, "is the recovery building. We need some data on the cost benefits of operating it for the first two quarters of this fiscal year. We don't need it for the testimony, but your favorite legislator, Senator Moffat, has asked for some data. I suppose he's going to use it in a speech. I know he's a pain, but his request is an opportunity as well. If we give him solid information, we may be able to bring him around a bit."

"Those numbers are not going to be very flattering to our operation, Hugo. Total down time has been accumulating pretty fast. As soon as we repair or replace one thing, another goes out. The whole damn building has been a disaster ever since we began installing the damn junk equipment from Arbonne. Now there's a subject the Senate should get interested in."

"On Arbonne and the recovery building, we are in total agreement for a change. But there isn't any way we can initiate anything with the Committee. It's been a headquarters foul up from the beginning and we're only a couple of country boys who'd be well advised to keep our speculations to ourselves." After a

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pause, Hugo's eyes glinted, "Damn tempting though." Taking a sip of his coffee, he sputtered and slammed it onto the desk. "Worst stuff I've ever tasted. I should've known better than to ask for it." He glowered at the door and, with a grunt, returned to business. "Work up an outline, then, and we can talk about it some more before we leave. By the way, is your schedule clear for a Wednesday afternoon flight?"

"Since I'm reasonably certain your secretary," strong emphasis on "your", "has already made reservations, I'll make sure it's clear."

Ignoring the remark, Hugo asked, "Can you think of anything we need to discuss before I bail out of this place?"

"No, but I thought you were working tonight."

"I am, before Shamballa's piano recital and after Shamballa's recital."

"I'm glad you're admitting to life outside the plant, Hugo, because it reminds me that I'm leaving around noon tomorrow."

"Fishing?" Asked Hugo with a sincere curiosity that was surprising to Pitkin.

"With Breck and Cope. Want to join us?" The invitation was a polite reflex and not made with any thought it would be accepted.

It wasn't. However Hugo's answer was almost wishful. "I'll take a rain check and one of these days I'll cash it in. Recently I've been thinking about getting away from this place and taking a look at how the rest of the world lives. But thanks for the offer, Pitkin."

The pensive slump in Hugo Chase's shoulders made Pitkin wish he had pressed his invitation and even insisted that Hugo join him on the trip to the mountains. The pressure of recent events was weighing more heavily on the Director of Rocky Flats than Pitkin had realized, and Pitkin sensed that the seams of his plant world were being strained as never before.

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CHAPTER FIVE

The battered pickup bounced and careened up an ill-defined and seemingly nonexistent vehicle trail. If there was an immediate purpose in the truck's erratic behavior, it was simply to avoid encounters with the larger of the rocks strewn in its path. The greater strategic plan was more apparent, but no less a challenge than skirting the sharp edged rocks. It was to advance up the mountainside, intact.

Whatever effective discipline there was over the truck's progress was being applied by old Cope Gunnison. Like many of

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his generation, Cope seemed ill-at-ease in the driver's seat. He gripped the cracked, discolored steering wheel with both hands, leaned forward slightly, and stared grimly through the windshield as though he was afraid the truck would rampage out of control if he took his eyes off the ground ahead, even for an instant.

All the while, however, Cope was quite animated. It may have been the perilously random road, or it may have been a loose steering mechanism, or, still more likely, it may have been only Cope and his driving habits. But, whatever the cause, the old driver's elbows flailed wildly, wrestling the steering wheel as though it were a thing alive. While his arms pumped to and fro, Cope's head reacted only to the most severe maneuvers of the truck, and his misshapen, felt hat rode comfortably enough, pulled down firmly over his unevenly cut gray hair.

The old driver's face was a tanned brown mask, wrinkled by seventy years of ranch work. A moustache, which in years past would have been described as a handlebar, now drooped and sagged over his mouth. With his eyes riveted on the obstacles confronting his pickup, Cope seemed oblivious to his companions.

Sitting next to him and immediately at risk was a ten-year-old boy who sat flattened against the back seat cushion. Although the boy was endeavoring to look out the windows at the increasingly steep mountainside, his first concern was personal safety. Accordingly, Breck Waay kept a keen eye on the unpredictable elbows and gave them as much steerage room as possible. The long-billed, red baseball cap perched on the boy's head accentuated a thin face, which bore traces of a lingering suspicion.

Earlier in the journey and while the road was relatively passable, Breck had ventured an observation on a rather remarkable bump. Even as he had spoken, Cope's elbow swept over the top of his head dislodging the cap. Breck had restored the cap to its former position, but now he endured the vagaries of the ride without comment.

Pitkin Waay was riding shotgun, his right forearm resting on the ledge of the open window, his left arm on top of the seat behind his son's head. With his left hand gripping the empty rifle rack and with the door on his right side, Pitkin was quite securely braced against the jolting lurches of the truck.

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Indeed, as he swayed and rolled with the jouncing ride, he was obviously enjoying it. The random clouds of dust swirling into the cab and the breezes, which ferried them there, had been sweeping the tension from Pitkin's face and he smiled easily at the by-play between Breck and Cope. Pitkin's baseball cap, a tattered blue bearing the enigmatic label, "Coors Ain't Rice Juice", was casually perched far back on his head. His boldly checkered western cut shirt hung three metal snaps open around his neck, and the sleeves of the shirt were rolled well up onto brown forearms. In these and all other aspects of his outward appearance, Pitkin Waay was, under the circumstances, a very ordinary figure, but the expression on his face was evidence that he was a very contented one.

Pitkin was glad that old Cope, in his grumpy way, had refused to consider taking the trip to the mountains in Pitkin's jeep, and had instead insisted on driving his own battered pickup. Pitkin wasn't worried about what some might have considered to be a hazardous ride because Cope knew the mountains better than almost anyone, and, on this trail, the old rancher's knowledge was second to none. And despite the fact that Cope seemed to be at war with his pickup, he knew its capabilities and was sensitive to its limitations. Of course, Cope would not have considered anyone except himself competent to drive, and Pitkin, to his intense satisfaction, was left free to watch the spectacular scenery and let it crowd out the concerns he had hoped to leave on the windswept flats below.

Had Pitkin and his son been newcomers to the mountains, their attention would have been drawn from the scenery and become frozen on the precipitous slopes, which kept edging ever closer to both sides of the vehicle. Had such a diversion controlled the direction of their gaze, they would have missed a world of various and compelling intensity.

The array of wild flowers, contrasting the most brilliant colors with the most subtle and setting the most delicate shapes alongside the robust and bold, was a spectacle seemingly designed to expand the imagination of even the most languid spirit. One's eyes could only have been tempted away from such a scene by the infinite variety of form and outline presented by the surrounding yellow pine, ponderosa, and blue spruce, or by the panoramic pattern of green on the far distant mountainsides underlining the jagged

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profile of snow-whitened gray rocks which rose against the blue sky. In the midst of such offerings, there would have been no harbor for any thought that theirs was anything but a journey of exhilarating renewal.

However, even the keenest appreciation for the surrounding beauty would not have kept them from being glad that their destination was nearer than the rugged mountain peak ahead which seemed to dart from one side to the other as the pickup labored through the trees. Their ears could not have endured a longer journey. The muffler on the truck, savagely pelted by rocks from hundreds of similar trails, had long ago forgotten its purpose, and the bellowing engine, thus unsuppressed, made even the shortest speech difficult. However, Cope, who was accustomed to the noise of the pickup, defied the roar to announce they were nearing their destination.

"Jest ahead, folks," he called his voice gravelly from the accumulated dust in his throat.

"Less than a mile, just through those trees," Pitkin called back.

Cope confirmed the estimate with a nod, foregoing further competition with his thundering pickup. Thankfully, he did silence it somewhat. Since the incline had lessened considerably and, in fact, nearly leveled off, he was able to shift gears. The reduced noise of third gear was a distinct relief from the ear pounding administered by second.

Pitkin found the relief remarkable. "Sure is easier on the eardrums." Then with a solemn face, he called, "Say, Cope, did you know you've got a bad muffler?"

As he wheeled the pickup into the shade of a narrow trail, which tracked through a heavy stand of timber, the old rancher kept his eyes fastened on his driving, but replied by addressing his young passenger. "Tell your pap, his smart mouth ain't appreciated. Complainin' about a free ride is a sure sign he's got a bad case of cityitis."

Pitkin laughed and replied by way of the same messenger. "Breck, you tell Cope there, I was only being helpful and trying to save him the expenses of an encounter with the highway patrol."

Replying directly Cope scoffed, "I ain't had this thing on the highway fer years."

"Seven years, judging by your inspection sticker."

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"Ain't yuh heard? Yuh don't need 'spections no more in Colorado."

"Yes, but mufflers are still required, and most civilized folks are glad to use them."

The discussion was interrupted by Breck. The somewhat straighter trail through the trees and the reduced speed of the truck had relieved him of the necessity for constant vigilance against being thumped by Cope's swinging elbows, and he had slid to the forward edge of the seat where had been watching for evidence of their destination. "There it be," he cried, delighted to have been the first to see slivers of water through the closely standing lodgepole pine.

Another expectant moment and the pickup rolled out of the trees. There, in the middle of a meadow, was the lake, shimmering in the slanting rays of the sun like a polished silver coin. Their eyes swept along the perimeter of the water and trees, and they saw, to their satisfaction, they were in sole possession of the mountain oasis.

"From the look of the road, I didn't think we'd have much company," said Cope wheeling the truck to a halt.

When he twisted the ignition key, they were enveloped in a welcomed silence. For an instant, the stillness was heavy, having been introduced by a great and persistent sound. But it was also soothing, since the bellowing of the truck had gone on almost beyond the point of toleration.

Cope shoved his door open and climbed out of the cab. An exuberant Breck followed him, but Pitkin was content to sit for a brief moment studying the face of an old friend.

Rouff Lake was cupped in the gently sloping shoulder of the mountain which, as a boy, he had named "high scrappy." The top of the mountain, an easy and leisurely thirty-minute climb from the small lake, was the apex of a fat triangle whose base was the stand of timber surrounding the water and whose upper reaches were eroded and bare rock. The arrangement was ideally suited to catch the winter snow and hold it until the warm spring sun could transform it to water, most of which accumulated in the natural catch basin tucked away in the trees.

The site was remote and difficult to reach. Most fishermen, especially those unfamiliar with the area, were attracted to larger lakes and streams, situated closer to better roads and

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stocked by the State Fish and Game Commission. The people who did come to Routt Lake were usually long time residents who knew better than to talk too much about it and who were content to catch only what they called "pan size" fish.

If asked about the lake, Cope's standard answer was, "The fish you get out are too short for the trip in." Yet, Pitkin knew it was one of Cope's favorite places.

Cope had brought Pitkin to the lake for the first time when Pitkin was a small boy. On that trip the two of them had spent a week, fishing in the mornings and evenings and hiking the mountain from midmorning to late afternoon. Years later, Pitkin realized the grand adventure had been a diversion designed to help him forget the death of his father who, injured in a freak accident on the family ranch, had died suddenly in the midst of what had been thought to be a normal recovery.

As an adolescent, Pitkin had been to the lake a dozen times, always with Cope. As a student at the university, he had been to Routt Lake only once, but that had been with a fraternity brother and two girls. Fishing, on that occasion, had been a very thin pretext, but no one had raised an objection to the absence of fishing poles.

Despite his many vague promises and a few tentative plans, scotched by the demands of work, this was Pitkin's first visit to the lake in over a dozen years. And he felt very much at ease and comfortable.

"You gonna sit in there and gape around or help unload this gear?" growled Cope banging down the tailgate of the old truck.

Pitkin welcomed the interruption. His reflections had been drifting toward matters better left in the past. There was a camp to be pitched, and he was suddenly eager to be about it.

Cope had chosen a sheltered clearing along the tree line a long stone's throw from the edge of the water. In the center of the area some earlier camper had constructed a neat rock-rimmed fire pit which was half full of caked black ashes. The grass, already sparse and weak because of the almost perpetual shade of the enveloping trees, had been worn down where tents had been set and where earlier visitors had tramped away what little strength it had.

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It was the work of only a few minutes to transfer the bundles, bags, and camping paraphernalia from the truck to the clearing. While Breck and Pitkin carried, Cope shoved the gear from the front to the rear of the truck. Pitkin chided him for taking the easy job. "I see you gave us the walking and carrying work."

"By damn, that's somethin' comin' from a low down pizzen peddler."

Pitkin had hoped to leave the plant and all references to it behind, and he cringed at the use of the label old Cope had long ago pinned on him. However, he was determined that nothing should mar the beginning of the adventure, so he tried to brush off the label with a lighthearted threat.

"By golly, I'm going to take you back into the plant and give you the special tour."

"Hey," interrupted Breck, "can I go, too?"

"Shoot," scoffed Cope, "I ain't dumb enough to walk in there again. That damn 'tonium blowin' around, burnin' yuhr throat. It's bad enough ever time I get near Denver. Yuh can see the yellow stuff jest settin' there, even hidin' the buildin's. Inside? Hell fire, Pitkin, how do yuh stand it. And Breck, don't yuh let him take yuh near the place. The 'tonium'll take the hair right outa yuhr nose."

As they talked and worked, the camp took shape. The tent, a blazing red nylon arrangement which had been advertised as "alpine comfort for four," blossomed around its aluminum stems. Coolers and cooking stores were placed in convenient locations, and coats and sweaters laid in handy stacks near the tent. Pine cones and fallen branches were cleared from the immediate area around the fireplace, and the dead ashes were removed from the little circle of stones.

Breck took upon himself the task of unrolling and arranging the three sleeping bags, placing his own squarely in the middle of the tent, his father's on his left and Cope's on his right. He then unzipped them, and spread them open, exposing them to the freshening air.

Without being asked, the youngster sprinted off in search of firewood while Pitkin and Cope sorted through the large coolers for the food they would cook that evening. Cope sternly reminded Pitkin that the food stores would have to be kept in the truck at night. "Damn bears," he muttered by way of explanation.

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Pitkin had never seen a bear anywhere near the lake. Neither had any of his friends who fished there on occasion. But Cope was adamant. He had an abiding, dark concern over the presence of marauding bears and seemed convinced that securing the food in the truck was a necessary precaution. Pitkin thought the greater danger, if there was one, was from pack rats or even the ever present camp robber, a large blue bird known to swoop down and take food from under the very noses of unwary campers.

With greater care and agility than one would have expected to find in his big scarred hands, Cope sorted and untangled the fishing tackle. He made no pretense to being a fly fisherman and selected for himself a casting rod. He left Pitkin's bamboo rod in its tube and laid it to one side. He then carefully assembled a new sectional aluminum casting rod, whipped it vigorously over his head, squinted along the beads, then dismantled it and laid it casually among the remaining assortment of extra rods.

Pitkin was sorting through camp supplies and making preliminary arrangements for dinner, and Cope was squatting over a box of lures when Breck returned staggering under a load of dried tree limbs. After arranging them in a stack convenient to the fireplace, he wandered over and began watching Cope.

The old man looked up and growled, "Whatcha starin' at? Instead of standin' around, why don't yuh string up yuhr pole?"

The youngster was not at all cowed by Cope's tone. He had learned, as had Pitkin before him, to sense when Cope was blustering. Obediently, while both men covertly watched, Breck walked over to the rods and began sorting through them. Suddenly his hands darted into the pile and brought forth the sections of the new aluminum rod.

"Say, Cope," he breathed, "I never saw this one before. It's new isn't it?"

As he spoke, the quick hands were fitting the pieces together and aligning them. Whipping the rod over his head, he exclaimed, "This is just like the one we were looking at in the Sportsman." Trying to sound casual he asked, "Would you mind if I tried it out for a while?"

"Naw, I don't care," said Cope over his shoulder. "I've got the fish catcher here," indicating the rod he had selected for

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himself. "Far as I'm concerned, yuh can have the damn thing; it don't look like much to me."

The boy, now fully aware of what had transpired, rushed over and lightly touched the oldster's shoulder. "You went back to the store and bought it. Thanks, Cope. Would you...would you really... uh."

"What in thunderation are yuh hem-hawing about. No, I don't want to use it. All the new and shiny'll jest scare every fish in the lake. Maybe you ought to bury it in the mud fer a few day before yuh go flashin' it around."

"No, siree," cried the boy, now joining in the banter. "There probably won't be any fish left after I get this going."

"Well, yuh better string it up and stop talkin'," admonished Cope, still picking and sorting in his tackle box.

Challenges and exaggerated claims flying, Cope and the youngster were soon at the edge of the water snapping their lures through the late afternoon sky. Pitkin fussed around the campsite for a few minutes and waved a shouted, "Hey, Dad," when Breck thought he had a solid strike.

After a time, Pitkin opened the cooler and pulled a beer from the icy water, opened it and took a long thirsty drink. He opened another for Cope, a Seven-Up for Breck and went to join them, content to fish later in his own good time.

The casting, the calling out to report strikes, and the landing of a half dozen keepers continued through the idle hours of the late afternoon until the red which was left in the western sky by the fallen sun began to fade and dissolve into a darkening blue. When the fishing was concluded for the day, Cope and Pitkin returned to the campsite and kindled a fire in the rock pit. By the time the flames were strong enough to give off warmth, the evening air was cool enough to drive the fisherman closer to the fire.

"You know," said Pitkin, as he added fuel to the little fire and poked it toward greater energy, "the great thing about camping with a ten year old is that they have the enthusiasm to do a lot of the scut work, the intelligence to know they're being had, but the youth not to give a damn."

Cope looked in the direction of Breck whose slim figure was outlined against the lake where he was busily at work cleaning the last of the day's catch. "Yup," he grunted. "He's a

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good boy, Pitkin. It's a goddamn crime you keep him penned up in town. Why don't you send him out to my place fer a month or so. I got a couple of new ponies he could work with, and he's old enough to help out with chores."

"Cope, I appreciate the offer, but you don't have time to kid sit a ten year old."

"Bunk," shot back Cope. "I spend my time doin' jest what I damn please. He's good help and good company, and if it would make the boy happy, he'd be welcome."

Tossing another piece of wood on the fire, Pitkin spoke, perhaps a bit defensively, "Cope, we both know Breck thinks the world of you and the ranch, and, given a choice, he'd spend all his time there. We also know that I haven't given him the time and attention he needs. God knows I've tried to get close to him, Cope, but somehow, for some reason, I haven't. After Hayden...", both felt the quiet moment grow sullen and heavy. Pitkin, quickly composed, began again, "After his mother died, you raised the boy for the better part of a year. Ever since, you've been very special to him, but I'm concerned that he's becoming a burden to you. After all, you're not getting any younger and Breck is reaching a stage where he's sometimes difficult to manage."

"Burden is it?" huffed Cope. "I was yer dad's best friend, Pitkin. I helped put him in the ground. I've known you, boy to man fer almost forty years. In my book, like it or not, you and Breck is family, and family, real family, can't be a burden. Besides, you're all strung up with things at yuhr business, and Breck needs some time up here in the mountains. When you were his age, you practically lived here at the ranch. Yuh were even a fair hand at chores. Things shouldn't be different fer Breck."

There was a long moment during which neither man spoke. It was Cope who broke the impasse. "I don't want to step outa line, Pitkin, but someone's got to say it. You'll keep on ignorin' the boy until yuh bury his mother. It's that damned flat simple, and someone's got to rub yuhr nose in it, for Breck's sake."

"You see it in him, Cope?"

"Every day that he spends at the ranch. Part of it is yuhr infernal business. Jest too much plant and not enough home. Ain't no business worth the amount of time yuh give the Flats."

"Speaking of business, and, believe me, I hate to, I do have to go to Washington for a few days next week and..." As he

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spoke, Pitkin looked closely at Cope and immediately was caught by the sudden change in mood and the old man's amused attempt to maintain a serious look. The moustache drooped too much, the wrinkled skin around the eyes was studiously drawn too tight in support of what was supposed to be a frown. But the devilment in the eyes was revealed by the dancing firelight.

"Oh, Hell," exclaimed Pitkin. "I think I've been had. Breck told you about the trouble at the plant and the trip to Washington, so the two of you thought it might just be a good time for him to visit the ranch. I'll bet the whole thing was his idea."

"I'd have to say he was invited," admitted Cope.

"I certainly wouldn't want to upset your plans," chuckled Pitkin, "and a week would sure give me some breathing room..."

"Two'd be better."

"We'll see. I should be back next Friday. I'll come out and eat one of those stringy steaks you get off those half-breed steers. By then I'll have a better handle on some of the stuff that's been piling up at the plant, at least I hope so."

As his father finished speaking, Breck stepped into the light of the fire and triumphantly held up a string of dripping fish. "Boy, is that water cold, but look, I finished the whole mess." Looking from Pitkin to Cope, he realized he had been the subject of a conversation, and he knew without asking he would be spending some time at the ranch.

Experience told him the matter would be better left for later discussion. However, he would have burst, if he had not spoken. The fish came to his rescue by reminding him of one of Cope's frequently cited rules.

"Gee, Dad, what are you going to eat?" Adopting the language of the author, he continued, "Them as catches and them as cleans, eats. Them as sits on their," here the youngster discretely substituted 'behind' for the more eloquently original word used by Cope, "eats the leavin's."

In the same vein, Pitkin rejoined, "Them as sneaks around and plots against their elders may get their fanny kicked."

Cope diplomatically changed the immediate subject. "And them as jest sits and yaps at each other ain't gettin' any fish fried."

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Until the fish had been rolled in corn meal and flour and had begun to sizzle in the battered skillet, Pitkin didn't realize how hungry he really was. The main course was the delicate white meat of the trout encased in its crisp brown crust. It was supported by the staples of camping, beans and fried potatoes. And as with every Cope Gunnison outdoor meal, there were the greens. Cope always picked them himself from among the low, ground-clinging plants where the vegetation was thick and heavy. Looking vaguely like spinach, Cope's "greens" had a somewhat bitter taste, but they were a subtle and tasty compliment to the trout.

While Breck persisted in teasing Pitkin about eating borrowed fish, his father promised to repay the debt with some "grown up" trout to be caught the next day. They ate all the food, washed the utensils, buried the fish bones a bear respectful distance away, and settled themselves around the fire.

Cope was in a reflective mood, and Breck's persistent questions took the old rancher back to earlier days. "In them days you dasn't go too far in the these hills without yer pistol or a good saddle gun," Cope assured his eager listener. "There were still grizzly bears around and some of 'em were man eaters. Oh, things was different then all right."

"Aren't there still a few grizzlies around, Cope?" asked Breck, with at least a detectable note of apprehension in his voice.

"You betcha there are," exclaimed Cope. "Not as many as there used to be, but I've seen sign, Breck. Even this spring, I have. On this very mountain, up on the very top, on the rock knob yer dad calls 'high scrappy', I seen some bear sign. Course, the damn know-it-all ranger says it wasn't grizzly, but he didn't see it close up and fresh like I did."

"But there isn't any real danger from them now days." Breck was asking for and expecting reassurance.

"Naw! Not if yuh know how to handle 'em."

Pitkin's mouth drew down in a suppressed smile. He knew what was coming. It was a Cope standard, and he remembered hearing it on his first trip to Routt Lake.

"Let me tell yuh, Breck, jest how to handle a big snarling, bloodthirsty grizzly. I recollect one time when I was about yer age. It was late spring, same as now. I was up in the high country, not far from where we are right now. Pap and I

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was pushing some cows up to summer pasture. Somehow I got a ways behind to where I couldn't see the cows or my old man. I started kickin' that old hoss of mine to catch up, but all I did was cause him to slip off a rock and twist his foot. I climbed down and was lookin' at it, yuh know, kinda examinin' the hoof."

At his point, the storyteller leaned close to Breck and exclaimed, "Well, all of a sudden, that nag let out a squeal they could've heard in Denver. Ever hear anything like that, Breck?"

"I guess not," Breck admitted.

"If yuh had, yuh wouldn't be guessin' about it. It's somethin' yuh never forget. It jest flat curdles yuhr blood. Jest imagine, fer example, if we was sittin' here all quiet and restin', and somewhere out there in the trees we heard an ear splittin' scream. Wouldn't that curl yuhr hair?"

The youngster didn't want to admit to being afraid, but his quick glance at the surrounding darkness wasn't lost on the narrator. While Breck maintained a studied calm, Cope expanded his effect by falling silent and casually feeding the fire and casting a long look into the darkness.

Pitkin, for his part, remained quietly at ease, enjoying the friendly fire and marveling at the intensity with which Cope spun his yarn. It was a story with hundreds of variations whose only entertainment value lay in the way it was told. Cope was an expert.

"Must have been a bear," said the boy, by way of encouraging Cope to continue the story.

"Biggest damn bear I ever saw."

"What'd you do?"

"I wasn't left with much of a choice. My horse took off at a dead run, plumb fergettin' about his sprained foot. Like any self-respectin' mountain reared lad, I ran like hell. But that gol' dang bear came right after me. After a mile or so, I realized that, like the idjit I was, I had run into a crink in the rocks and was trapped like a rat."

Again, the pause was too long for Breck. "Whatever did you do?"

"There warn't anything left to do. I faced him square on and let 'im know he wasn't gettin' his teeth into a sinner. I started out with 'Bringin' In the Sheaves.' I kinda forgot them words, so I gave him a line of 'Nearer My God To Thee.' He was comin' on

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growlin' and snapping them big jaws, and I guessed I'd better change my tune. I shifted into 'Rock of Ages.'"

"You mean to say you sang? Sang hymns?" Breck asked, baffled by the calm way Cope described his singing.

"Jest as loud as I could and in my most beautiful voice."

"And that stopped him?"

"Stopped him? I should say so. Dead in his tracks. Fact is, he joined in. Course it wasn't human sound, but he stood there, clawin' the air, growlin' off key jest as pretty as yuh please. It sounded to me like he was singin' 'Go Tell It On The Mountain,' so we did the chorus a couple of times. Finally, he turned hisself around and marched off, still singing. Fer years after that, folks claimed they heard him bellowin' out hymns up and down these canyons."

Even before Cope finished, Breck realized he had been taken in. He fairly rocked with laughter, as much at his own gullibility as at the ridiculous story. He filled the next few minutes exchanging puns with Cope about the "bear facts" and how he had "bearly believed" the tale of the singing bear.

Pitkin listened as the old man recited idle stories about his early days on the ranch. The words called forth images of times when survival required almost full time effort, when community ties made a difficult life more tolerable, and relationships among people were direct and open. However, Pitkin wondered if Cope's was not a simplistic concept of earlier times, a nostalgic generalization.

He remembered a history professor at the university lecturing on the impulse of society to strive for something different than the present. There was a collective pressure, opined the teacher, to reject known dimensions of existence. Every development from the long bow to the transistor, and the insatiable appetite for their popular adoption, was a reflection of such pressure.

In a further, albeit cynical development of the theory, the argument was made that, because man did not profit from his experience, the societal tendency to progress, in effect, perpetually backfired, and successive generations only relived more destructive refinements of the past. That happened, contended the history professor, because the past was never really known at all. The association with anything past yesterday was vague,

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imaginative, and distorted by romantic recreations of what people wanted to believe about earlier days.

In such a formulation, there was little allowance for the behavior of individuals. For the most part, the legendary giants of history were reduced to the role of serving as spokesmen for the popular will. What was seen as prophetic in their acts and deeds was, in reality, only a sensitivity for onrushing inevitability.

Pitkin, however, had never been comfortable thinking of the Churchills, the Lincolns, and, yes, the villainous Hitlers of history as being solely reactive. Such a view left little for creativity and attributed almost nothing to the initiative of individuals when events were in equilibrium and susceptible to positive acts.

Despite a keen undergraduate interest in history, Pitkin had never committed himself to a systematic study of the philosophy of history where the individual stood as an originator of large dimensional events. Yet, he had read enough to have been intrigued with what he understood to be a point of departure and source of contention among the authorities. He had often promised himself that someday he would revisit the subject.

Sitting and listening to the voices of his son and Cope, Pitkin mentally laughed at his own woolgathering. "Still, I wonder if Cope hasn't got a better view of history than all the professors in the country?" he asked himself. "And all their students who carry away a lot of half-baked, lofty conclusions," he added with a wry smile.

"The old days were good enough," Cope was saying. "You could spit without hittin' two tourists, a park ranger, and a gassed up pothead. But they was tough times, too. All the wide-open range stuff was all gone when I was growin' up, but the tail end of it was hangin' on here in the mountains. We had a fliver fer goin' to town, but a lot of the work we did jest like it was done years before."

"You mean the roundups and branding?" asked Breck.

"That and all the other chores too. Seemed always to be too hot or too cold. Dust up yuhr nose and a boil on yuhr butt. Those were facts, Breck. It wasn't anything like they show on television. A roundup wasn't a purty hero all suited up in Sunday

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duds. It was a lot of sweat, an onery horse, and yesterday's underwear. A lot of the past jest ain't worth rememberin'."

After a moment, the old rancher added wistfully, "Still, totin' it all up, I'd take it over what we're saddled with nowadays."

The final assessment was delivered with a long look at Pitkin. Realizing that the talk was heading for contentious, if not dangerous ground, Pitkin spoke to close it off. "It looks to me like we're running low on firewood. Either we leave what's left for morning and go to bed, or someone will have to go stumbling out in the dark and get some more. Personally, I vote for the sack."

With no further discussion, the fire was doused and the campers retired to their tent. The drive up the mountain, the pitching of the camp, the fishing, and the meal combined to quench tent talk and the three, clothed in the warmth of their sleeping bags, were soon asleep.

Pitkin slept soundly until, in the predawn light, he awoke to the high pitched rasping of the trees, leaning on one another and swaying in a wind which was sliding down from the sides of "high scrappy." The ground of the protected clearing was becalmed, and only the squeaking tree trunks and the whishing overhead told him the wind was up.

Pitkin reached one arm out of his warm sleeping bag and, being careful not to disturb his companions, slid the tent zipper up enough for a peek out. Pulling himself further out of the bag, he planted one elbow near the tent flap and thrust his head into the faint light.

"Damn," he murmured under his breath. His head felt the prickling of cold rain. Through squinted eyes, he could see the indistinct outline of clouds against the dark gray horizon. He grunted a bit as he struggled his way out of the sleeping bag, donned trousers, and shoved his feet into his Wigley hiking shoes.

Carefully, Pitkin worked the tent zipper higher, and finally stooped his way through the flap into what was debatably a drizzle rather than a rain. He lost no time in visiting the little slit trench they had dug back in the trees away from the clearing. By the time he got back to the tent, he positively decided it was rain, and in sufficient volume to drench the thought of building a fire.

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As carefully as he had come out of the tent and his sleeping bag, he worked his way back in, closed the tent flap, and shut his eyes. At first, sleep eluded him and tantalized him from the mountain, high above the entangled branches and tree bodies swaying in the wind. But, then, it came. Not soundly, but to the surface of the mind wherein the sleeper believes he sets his course and thinks vaguely that he directs his illusions.

Summoned irresistibly by the familiar vision, Pitkin took a soft white hand and began the climb to the uppermost point on "high scrappy." Together they passed through the cool shadows of the trees and entered the field of rocks, forbidding and threatening, but always offering a handhold or footstep when the way became nearly impassable. The last ledge was a high, smooth and defiant challenge, but Pitkin managed to grasp a secure hold, and, reinforced by the knowledge that he could not fail, that the moment was everything, he pulled himself to the top.

He reached a long arm down, caught the upstretched hand, and with a firm, determined pull, Hayden was by his side, taking in great gulps of air. The wide red mouth was close, and the blonde hair tumbled wildly around her face as her sun browned arms reached for him. Together they had put themselves on top of "high scrappy."

Every outline of Hayden's face was, in the instant of his dream, as clear as reality, but as he tried to touch the face of the vision, and strove to reach through the veil of the past, the image fled. Pitkin felt as though the breath of life had left him in a chamber of dead memories where each competed with the others for a chance to taunt him with its unique unreality.

There were confused snatches of a life with Hayden. Graduate school followed by a succession of assignments at various Atomic Energy Commission laboratories where there was recognition of his gift for nuclear physics, commendations and quick elevation through the clique of atomic scientists. Then there was Breck's birth and a much sought after transfer to the plant near Boulder.

Finally, there was the wrenching torment, the days of anguish, and blinding sorrow following Hayden's death in a traffic accident on a Denver freeway. Pitkin had not been with her and had seen only the debris of the collision. He had only his imagination to tell him about the metal splitting crash and the

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searing fire which had destroyed the lovely Hayden, her softness, her understanding, her life, and the vital core of his own world."

Pitkin never dreamed past that point. It was as though his mind refused to indulge in further illusion. After the vision, and after the nightmare, there was only reality and consciousness.

Lying fully awake, Pitkin cursed himself for letting Cope and Breck talk him into coming up to the lake. Lately, he had hoped the tormenting night thoughts were fading away. The grueling work schedule he maintained had helped. Time had contributed, and in the past few months, so had a few evenings out with Jenny Gilpin who seemed to understand his detachment and seemed willing to accept it. But seeing the mountain had unleashed the haunting memories, and he felt the loneliness twisting inside.

Pitkin forced himself, as he had hundreds of times before, to turn his mind to the present. He reconstructed the drive up the mountain, the arrival at the lake, and the campfire talk of the previous night. It had been thoroughly enjoyable, and he had felt close to his son and happy about the camping expedition. Pitkin was determined to recapture that feeling. Breck needed a father, he told himself, more than the boy needed a mourning wet blanket filled with self-pity and memories, which would not die.

Come on, Dad! The fish'll grow old waiting for you to roll out."

Breck's call brought Pitkin's head out of the fold of his sleeping bag. "Has it stopped raining," Pitkin called through the tent wall.

"Rain? What rain?" cried Breck throwing the tent flap back and peering in at his father.

The morning sun was slicing through the trees on the far side of the clearing, and Pitkin could see the shadows had retreated almost to the edge of the lake. The grass between the camp site and water's edge sparkled and glistened as the sunlight, colliding with the beads of water, collected on the leaves. In contrast to the silvery grass, there was a distinct dark green trail through the wet grass where Cope and Breck had already tramped to the lake and back.

Breck went trotting off in response to Cope's demand for dry wood while the old man pattered with the smoking fire, trying to coax it to greater life. Pitkin pulled on his trousers and

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boots and stretched and yawned his way back into the stream of camp affairs.

"I was awake just a while ago. I guess I dozed off again."

"Dozed off, hell. Yuh been snorin' like a wallerin' pig fer the past hour."

Pitkin gave the squatting fireman a skeptical look, scratched under his chin and asked, "Any hot water for a shave?"

"There's water, a whole lake of it. All that's hot is in this pot and its fer coffee. Besides, this is a fishin' trip. Why would yuh wanna shave?"

"Because my chinny chin chin itches, that's why. I don't see you growing any hair on your face, except that cookie duster, which, I admit, is a classic."

"If yuh're really set on shavin', I'd recommend soap and good ole cold water. That's the way I do it every day, 'cept when I'm fishin'. It'd sure toughen up that pasty face of yuhrs."

After brushing his teeth in the ice cold water of the lake and splashing it over his face and hands, Pitkin decided to forego shaving. Returning to the fire, he found it burning with a higher and heartier flame, although it popped considerable objection to the wet fuel.

Even if Pitkin had set his mind to the task and expended a mighty mental effort, he would not have been able to think of anything that had an aroma comparable to camp fried bacon and coffee perking over an early morning fire. The bacon sputtered and sizzled alongside the eggs and potatoes, providing a cooking medium and lending everything in the skillet a mouthwatering flavor. From another pan, Chef Cope produced warm rolls, his own creations, baked the day before in his ranch kitchen especially for this trip.

It wasn't long before the food was gone. As the men lingered over their steaming coffee, Breck rushed off to the lake to exercise his new fishing rod.

"It's been a while since I threw a fly line," mused Pitkin. "I hope I haven't forgotten how."

"If yuh ever knew, yuh won't ferget."

Tossing the last few drops of coffee on the remains of the fire, Pitkin eyed the lake and decided fishing wouldn't wait any longer. He slipped a small aluminum dry fly case into his pocket and began assembling his bamboo pole.

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Cope watched the procedure skeptically. "I'll never know why yuh insist on fishin' with that stringy damn thing. Seems to me yuh spend all yuhr time snappin' and poppin' it around like a whip instead of jest tossin' it out there with a bobber or throwin' it out and windin' it in like yuh would a good lure."

"The application of skill, the delicacy of touch, is a picturesque and rhythmic blending of form and motion..."

"Bunk!" exclaimed Cope, picking up his own fishing gear and stalking off toward the lake.

Pitkin walked half way around the small lake before selecting a spot he remembered and one he guessed might be productive. It was a large granite outcropping which jutted into the lake like the prow of a ship.

The stone platform, some two feet above the water, was level and abundantly wide, allowing him space to spread out and make himself quite comfortably at home. Rising along the back portion of his station was an almost perfectly contoured stone backrest, which he looked forward to using when the fishing played out.

He selected a gray-bodied fly with black wings and a bright yellow head. He had no basis for the selection other than having seen some gray insects of the same size swooping and flitting over the surface of the water. Having applied an oil based dressing while sitting around the campfire listening to Cope's stories, he had only to secure the reel to the handle of the rod, thread the filament and line through the small and smaller agate beads, and tie the fly to the end of his long tapered lead. Thus prepared, he began pulling and whipping out a plentiful supply of line.

His first casts reminded him of how long it had been since he had worked a fly rod. However, as he began to concentrate on gently landing the fly with only the faintest ripple and working it along the surface, the satisfaction of mastering the line and lure returned.

Pitkin was not prepared for the first strike. There was a quick flash in the sun, the water around the fly roiled angrily, and the gray insect disappeared. Before he could set the hook, the trout contemptuously spat the unnatural thing from its mouth and swam away, presumably to look for something better suited to its digestion and taste.

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Pitkin muttered to himself and vowed to be ready next time. And it wasn't long before the next solid strike came. Setting the hook was a reflex. Keeping the vital tension on his line, he brought the fighting trout up to his rock, raised it out of the water, and neatly hooked his finger in a gill. It wasn't a trophy, but it was a keeper that he snapped onto a galvanized hook on his stringer.

By midmorning, Pitkin had added four more to his string and had thrown back an equal number, promising himself he would catch them next year. He had also missed a couple which were, of course, the granddaddies of the lake.

Proving himself to be a fisherman with foresight, he reached into the icy water alongside his rock and withdrew a can of beer. With beaded water glistening in the bright sun, it looked even more inviting than its commercial. The little tab popped sharply, and the first cool drink, always the best, introduced a break in the angling.

The break became a drowsy head nodding bask in the warm sun. That developed into a nap, a delicious half sleep with an occasional voice in the background and a breeze, just strong enough to ripple the surface of the lake. But it was not forever.

"Dad, are you awake?"

Pitkin blinked his eyes open to confront the inquiring blue eyes of his son who stood looking down at him. "Sure, I was just resting my eyes a bit."

"Cope and I beat you, Dad. I guess you'll have to do more fishing and less sleeping."

"You sure of that?"

"Yep, I already checked your string," said the boy.

"Well, I may not be as hungry as you two. And if we have as many as you say, we won't be able to eat them all anyway."

"Boy, Cope sure knows how to fish," said Breck admiringly.

"Don't tell him that," smiled Pitkin. "He's tough enough to get along with as it is."

With the abrupt seriousness of youth, Breck asked, "You and Cope tease each other all the time, but you love him a lot don't you?"

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Pitkin was surprised by the question, but his answer came easily. "Very much, Breck. He's been like a father to me since I was your age."

Cope is just teasing then when he calls you a `pizzen peddler?'"

"Does it bother you when he says that?"

"No...but I guess I don't understand what he means."

"Remember, Breck, how we've talked about my work. I've explained how we make parts for nuclear weapons. Those parts are made of a dangerous material called plutonium. Even though it is very dangerous, we're careful about handling it."

"I know, but when Cope calls you `pizzen peddler' doesn't he mean you're spreading plutonium all over making people sick?"

"That's what he means, but Cope is an older man and, as much as we both love him, he simply doesn't understand the first thing about the plant, about radioactive material, or about the effects of plutonium on people. He reads the papers about accidents at the plant..."

"Like the barrels you told me about?"

"Exactly. He also reads about smog and how it's affecting people's lungs and eyes. In his mind he's confused these things. In fact, I'm sure he believes we're responsible for Denver's smog problem. He sort of lumps all the problems of smog, plutonium contamination, and other toxic waste problems all together. Because I work at Rocky Flats and because it gets a lot of blame in the papers, Cope just thinks I'm causing a lot of the problem."

"Maybe you could explain to him..."

"I tried that once. I even took him to the plant and showed him around."

"Didn't it help?"

"Not really," laughed Pitkin. "You remember Mister Chase?"

"Sure. He's your boss and is the head of the plant."

"You know how Mister Chase is kinda formal and proper about everything? When I introduced him, Cope blurted out that he thought Mister Chase was `pizzen peddler number one in the whole territory.' Cope even claimed our 'tonium, had caused his chickens to lay rotten eggs. He was offering to send some in as proof when I managed to get him out of there. Some of what he

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said was just pure Cope. When he saw how proper Mister Chase was, he simply couldn't resist ragging him, but some of what he says, he believes. Some of it, too much, he gets out of his favorite paper, the Pondera Leader."

Breck enjoyed the mental image of Hugo's confrontation with Cope. "I'll bet Mister Chase got sterner than he did when I spilled root beer on Shamballa at the Christmas party."

"At least that stern," agreed Pitkin. "But, Breck, if Cope's calling me a 'pizzen peddler' bothers you, I'll mention it to him."

"Oh, no," said Breck quickly. "I think I understand about how Cope gets things mixed up. At the ranch he forgets things sometimes, but I never let on. I just act like nothing happened. If you said anything, it might hurt his feelings."

"I think it might, besides, the whole thing has become sort of a joke. So we'll just live with 'pizzen peddler,' okay?"

"Okay," the boy agreed solemnly as though he and his father had concluded a secret pact.

For his part, Pitkin was more than a little surprised at the way Breck had handled his concerns. The boy had shown tact by coming to Pitkin first, and he had shown a remarkable sensitivity for the old man's feelings. Thinking of Breck's confession that he had noticed Cope's forgetfulness but remained silent, told Pitkin his son was indeed growing up.

Later, as they washed luncheon dishes, Cope announced he was "jest goin' to loaf around camp."

Breck reminded Pitkin of a long-standing promise to lead a hike to the top of "high scrappy." Pitkin quickly suggested exploration of the area below the lake, but Breck was not to be diverted. "'High scrappy's' just sitting there waiting," he insisted. "and it'll be a long time before I have another chance. Please, Dad...?"

Looking up at the craggy mountain, Pitkin agreed. "'High scrappy' it is, and you're right Breck. It may be the last chance either of us has for a long time."

Breck's rock throwing, constant chattering, and stick rattling against tree trunks kept his father's mind close upon the reality of the walk through the forest. The same was true of the climb over the rocks. The boy's chatty observations required answers, his pointing demanded attention, and parental concern

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over unchecked exuberance kept thoughts of the past from intruding upon those of the present.

When they came to the foot of the last rock, the rounded challenging one, Pitkin paused and turned away as if to leave. But the vision suddenly and compellingly seized his mind, and he knew he wanted to pursue it to the top. Without a word, he faced back upon the rock and reached for the ledge, missed it, tried again and caught it. With a desperate scramble, Pitkin pulled himself up and over the edge. He lay there on his back in the sun, bewildered.

Pitkin's mind raced, and fragments of memory collided with one another, confusing him. He even began to wonder where he was. He threw his arm over his eyes to block out the blinding sunlight. It seemed he might touch the images, he even reached out.

Then came the cry, clean and strong, flooding him with reality. "Dad, give me a hand up."

Pitkin rolled to his stomach and put his hand over the edge to his son. He suddenly knew Breck was the living; the boy was the reality, and the vision was only a dream.

As they strolled back into camp, old Cope looked at them and asked, "What the devil you two grinnin' about?"

"Why, we just climbed 'high scrappy,'" bragged Breck.

"Together," added Pitkin.

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CHAPTER SIX

Monday morning depression, a plague upon those who are not content with their life's work, weighed heavily on Pitkin as he passed through the west gate of Rocky Flats. His mood was a product of more than a weekend left behind and more than discontent at overcast skies, which threatened rain.

It was his lot to face the dreary prospect of sorting through accumulated business, preparing written work for a trip to Washington D. C., and actually planning to go there for two days. Under the heading of waiting business were the infamous leaking barrels and continuing problems with the plutonium recovery

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building. In the category of trip preparation, there was the nitpicking of proof reading testimony to endure.

Driving along the short access road toward the administration building, Pitkin could see through the chain link security fence where the morning shift was arriving. Knots of workers bunched up at the security check points and filed one by one past the unsmiling guards whose discipline could not abide a faster identification procedure.

Watching their shuffling advance, Pitkin wondered if they were not, as the presence of the fence, the guards, and the implacable windowless buildings suggested, captives. In truth, had they not been sentenced by an imperfect system to serve until, old and tired, they were freed into the confining years of retirement. And was he any different? Did he, any more than they, have the luxury of choosing to turn around, to reverse his life in midcourse and take another and more open road?

Given such an option, would he take it? Would he be bold, even with his own life, or would he, like Prufrock, know that the "eternal footman" would "hold his coat and snicker?"

"Christ," he muttered, "it's only Monday and I've already worked my way up to T. S. Eliot. Friday, after a day with a senate committee, should really be something."

However, things began well enough. He managed to reach his office, get inside and close the door without encountering either Etta or Hugo. The neat stack of familiar yellow phone message notices was not as large as he expected, and even the "In" box looked manageable.

Most of the call slips represented attempts by newsmen to contact him. He shuffled through them, noticing that Deke Prowers had called twice. There was a third slip showing that Deke had also called Hugo. Paper-clipped to Hugo's notice was a scrawled note. "Pitkin, Please handle this. H."

It was characteristic of Prowers to call Pitkin and Hugo directly. His approach to newsgathering seemed to be the most casual and relaxed Pitkin had ever experienced. Yet, the man's instincts and perceptions were uncanny and, at times, unnerving. And, as did most of the experienced newsmen, he ignored Lamont Wellington. Pitkin set the three notes next to his phone and continued sorting the remainder.

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He paused to read one slip whose message portion was filled by Etta's neat rolling handwriting. "This man claimed to be a reporter but asked some of the most outrageous questions I ever heard. I told him to call Mr. Wellington, but he insisted that you call him Monday. E." The caller had, of course, been Jess Lyons who was editor, publisher, and reporter for Cope's journalistic bible, the Pondera Leader.

Turning from the call slips, Pitkin had just begun to sort through his mail when he was interrupted, not unpleasantly. Following a light tap on his door, Jenny Gilpin walked into his office.

"Before I talk to Cope or Breck, I'll give you a chance to tell me the straight story. How many fish did you catch? Any?"

"Any? What kind of confidence do you have in me? Is that my reward for raising you to your exalted position and giving you the benefit of my experience and wisdom? Any, you ask. The fact is, I caught so many we filled the cooler. How about coming over tonight and helping me eat some of the damn things?"

"Only if you let me fry them my way."

"Since Cope won't be around with his corn meal and flour, someone will have to do it. The job is yours." Catching her eyes directly, Pitkin paused a moment and said simply, "Good morning, Jenny."

She returned his look and, matching his tone, answered, "I like the sound of that. Good morning to you, Pitkin."

The entrance of Etta Westridge closed off the moment, fleeting, but sufficient. Despite her officious and trying behavior, Etta had at least two redeeming features. She had a woman's romantic soul, and she had an almost motherly affection for Jenny Gilpin. Etta instinctively realized her entrance had been an intrusion.

"Oh, Jenny, I was down the hall and didn't see you come in. I'm sorry, Doctor Waay, really I am..."

"Don't apologize, Etta. We were just discussing fish."

With the faintest of faint smiles at Jenny, Etta accepted the explanation. "Certainly, sir. I understand your trip and all. I just stepped in to tell you Mister Prowers is outside. He insists on seeing you. I can tell him..."

"No. I'll see him Etta, but in a few minutes."

"I understand...I mean, I'll ask him to wait."

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"I think we're under suspicion," laughed Jenny as Etta left and quietly but firmly secured the door as if guaranteeing their privacy.

"Yes, but this time it's benevolent," sighed Pitkin.

"Certainly more so than you," she said, trying unsuccessfully to be stern.

"You're referring to my note asking you to take over the job of guiding Lamont Wellington alongside the still waters of truth and responsibility." Then, suddenly, he was serious. "Jenny, we've got to corral him somehow. Every time he opens his mouth, he manages to put another dent in the program. This place simply cannot withstand more of his brand of public relations. Especially now. We're on the verge of a congressional disaster. It was my idea that you read all his releases, and I sold it to Hugo because I think he'll work with you while he wouldn't with anyone else."

"I don't have any special power over Lamont."

"I wasn't suggesting that. But we both know he trusts you and already asks you for help every chance he gets."

"I know," she said opening her eyes wide in mock horror, "every chance he gets. The man is a perfumed pest." Then relenting, she added. "I know the problem. I'll do what I can. As a matter of fact, I've already talked to him, and he gave me two items he wants to send out this afternoon."

"How do they read?"

"They need some work, but none of this is the reason I came in here. So far I've been invited to a fish dinner and been given a pep talk about the Lamont Wellington project. Both are suspect. I really wanted to fill you in on my visit with Harvey, but you went off on your fishing toot before I could get your attention."

"You have it now. What was Harvey's show and tell all about?"

"More barrel problems."

My favorite subject."

"Yes, and I don't believe you'll like it better now than before. Harvey began by showing me the accumulation registers for the east and south quadrants. About a week ago they literally started climbing off the charts. It seems one of the men in his radiation monitoring team noticed the uptick and they started rechecking all the stations. There has been a rise in the others, but

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the east and south areas between the plant and the barrel site have suddenly, very suddenly, gotten hot."

"What kind of readings are you talking about, Jenny?"

"One station, just south of the barrel pit, registered 620, another between the plant and the barrels read 580, and another 520."

"Hot is right. You are talking about d/m/g's?"

"Those numbers are from the continuously running air samplers on the perimeter. You know better than anyone, the standard readouts are disintegrations per minute per gram."

"But the highest, the very highest I remember seeing was something on the order of 30. You're saying we're registering a virtual ballooning of radiation. Damn, he should have told me right away."

"Don't blame Harvey, Pitkin. When he spoke to you the day of the press conference, he had just started looking at the numbers himself. He's been working almost around the clock, looking at the stack samplers, installing backups, and tapping the computers to see if there isn't a glitch somewhere."

"I didn't mean that the way it sounded, Jenny. You don't have to sell me on Harvey. It's just the jump from normal to this that I don't understand. If those numbers are confirmed, we're going to have to inform the state people, coordinate some more offsite monitoring, and do it all yesterday. Where's Harvey now?"

"I left him in the filter lab. He said he'd be here as soon as he could. In fact, I'm surprised he isn't here already. He knows you'll be looking for him."

"Have you talked to Hugo about this?"

"No. Harvey and I agreed that was your department."

"I have the feeling there's more to this than you've told me so far. If I'm right, if this is just the warm-up, I'm not sure I want to go into the game."

"There is more, but I'm a bit vague on the details...."

Jenny's hesitant beginning was interrupted by a hard, solid knock on the door. Pitkin called, "Yes?", and he and Jenny turned to greet Harvey Flagler.

"Ah, I see you're already here," smiled Flagler looking at Jenny.

"Oh, sure, I've got him on the ropes. You can finish him off."

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As he eased himself into a chair, Harvey glanced up at Pitkin, who was still standing behind his desk. "Did she tell you about those samplers giving us some high readings?"

"She said you were registering as high as 620. That can't be an average?"

"No, we haven't done enough sampling to get an average for the area, but, Pitkin, those numbers are for spots a long ways from the barrels. And they're damn high."

"It's over our all time high isn't it?"

"Depends," shrugged Flagler.

"On what?"

"It depends, Pitkin, on how good you think our monitoring was when we had the big fire a few years ago, or when the processing building filter fell out of place and wasn't noticed for a week. We've had other events which resulted in plutonium releases, so this isn't new and, it may not even be what we'd call a significant problem, however we define significant. If we have plutonium levels like that outside the fence, then it damn well is a big problem."

"You sound as though you're still short on data, Harv."

"I am. There's never enough."

"Tell me about the air samplers."

"Since Jenny told you about the 620, you've got the picture, but in general, they tell us the whole south and east areas from the plant buildings to the barrel area have been receiving some radiation worth talking about. The high readings are from the continuously running high volume samplers we installed at random points a few years ago. We routinely collect samples weekly, composite them biweekly and analyze them for plutonium. Johnny Simla was the first to pick up on the problem. He's been feeding the raw data into the computers long enough to recognize this kind of jump without waiting to plot isopleths. We would have routinely caught the problem anyway, but he caught it a week earlier than we would have in the composite."

"You ran a preliminary isopleth outline for the federal property area this morning, didn't you," asked Jenny.

"Got it right here," nodded Harvey, pulling a computer foldout from among a handful of papers. The graphic display he handed to Pitkin consisted of a series of looping lines similar to a land contour map. On Harvey's map, the lines were a series of

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long irregularly shaped ovals the smallest in the middle and successively larger ones around it, like distorted ripples on water.

Since every point on any given line would have the same value, such a map would show the pattern of radiation in a given area. Similar maps for soil contamination would show deposition and concentration patterns for radioactive materials. The lines, or isopleths, on Pitkin's map showed almost circular contours out away from the inner security fence. Customarily those lines stayed in close and were quite small, indicating the highest levels of plutonium were concentrated in an area immediately around the plant.

On the new map the lines looped from the center of the plant buildings out toward the south and eastern areas of the main facility with a distinct bulb growing around the barrel deposit. It looked for all the world as though a new rock had been dropped on the pond and had begun sending out strange elongated ripples, short ones to the north, longer ones to the south and east.

"Okay, let's forget about specific numbers for a minute and take as a given that we've got a radiation problem. Tell me the rest of it. I'd guess you think it came from the barrels."

"Some of it is coming from there, yes. Pitkin, our barrel pit is a lot bigger than we thought. When we first staked the place out, it looked to be a neat rectangular little hole. The fact is we missed the forest for a large tree. We were only on one corner of a large burial site. If I had to guess, I'd say there could be close to a thousand barrels out there."

"Damn," exclaimed Pitkin. "We had hoped for fewer than fifty, and now you're saying close to a thousand, but even at that, why would they start leaking all of a sudden and just now?"

"It hasn't been an overnight thing. There are places, mostly just under the surface and out of sight, where the ground is saturated with oil. The stuff's was leaking out of the barrels and migrating into the ground for years. The oil is a good holding medium, but the traffic in the area...?"

"Traffic?" asked Pitkin wrinkling his brow.

"You may forgotten, but after the last protest march sorta got rowdy and a few of the more ambitious members of the crowd broke down the north fence, Hugo ordered no trespassing signs put up about every thirty feet all the way around the outer boundary. A couple of weeks ago, the maintenance crew finally got around to

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putting up Hugo's signs. While they were at it, they decided to string some new barbed wire along the south line. I guess our neighbor's cows had knocked quite a stretch of it down. There was a crew out there every day for a week and they made quite a trail, right alongside the dump. On top of that, it's been dry and we've got a lot of dust in the air. "

Pitkin had sat down while Harvey laid out his story. It took time, because of the man's slow and deliberate speech. The facts also required some interpretation because of Harvey's penchant for understating matters. Thus his words that there was "radiation worth talking about" told Pitkin that his most experienced and skilled radiation monitor was worried.

"Have you covered the larger area?"

"Yeah, but with a number of little hot spots popping up, we're going to have to do something more and do it pretty soon. We can't cover the whole damn sixty five hundred acres with plastic, but if we get many more leaks, it'll come to that."

"If I heard you correctly, Harv, you said some of the radiation was coming from the barrels. Is there another source?"

"There is. A minute ago, you asked why the elevated readings in the air samplers had occurred so suddenly. I wondered the same thing. We simply had too much radiation in the air despite a larger deposit of barrels, dust, and lots of driving around out there. It didn't add up. It had to be the plant itself. I got lucky when I started tracking it down."

Pitkin noted the trace of pride in Harvey's voice as the radiation chief explained. "I knew we routinely check the samplers on the processing building, and that had been done only days earlier. The samplers on the recovery building had to be up to snuff because we'd just adjusted them, again two weeks ago. But then I remembered one of the electricians talking about the power overloads in the recovery building caused by the incinerators. After thinking about it for awhile, I wondered if the recovery building wasn't a good suspect after all. To make a long story shorter, I climbed all over that building."

"I hope it was worth the effort," said Pitkin, waiting for Harvey to continue.

"Depends on your point of view, I guess. To put it in a nutshell, the filter system in the recovery building is leaking like

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the proverbial sieve. At least the stacks are venting a hellashus amount of plutonium."

Pitkin was visibly concerned by the revelation. He leaned forward over his desk and looked from Harvey to Jenny and back again. He could have asked a hundred questions, but he wondered for a moment where he should start.

"Why wouldn't the automatic samplers have sounded an alarm, they're designed to, and there's plenty of backup?"

"A burned out electrical system would be my guess," shrugged Harvey.

"Burned...you mean heat buildup from the incinerators?"

"Sounds like a good possibility, Pitkin," said Jenny agreeing with Harvey. "If the circuits burned, the backup samplers and alarms would go out the same as the primaries. The wiring probably wasn't designed for separate conduits. The idea was to duplicate the samplers, not the wiring. But we must be talking about some pretty wild heat excursions."

"First things, first," cautioned Pitkin. "We have to work with knowns. Radiation through the stacks is a fact. How and why are still questions? When did you confirm your notion it was the recovery building?"

"Early this morning," said Harvey, "very early. I'd say four, maybe four thirty."

"And there isn't any doubt?"

"About radiation fogging out of those stacks? None whatever."

"Do they know about this in recovery?"

"I haven't talked to anyone except you and Jenny."

Pitkin picked up his telephone and quickly punched three numbers. It was only a few seconds until his call was answered.

"Good morning, Lily. Would you put Mister Meeker on the phone." There was a pause while the secretary spoke. "I understand he's in the lab," replied Pitkin, "but this won't keep. Please call him. I'll hold."

Dropping the mouthpiece below his chin, Pitkin spoke to Jenny. "Would you see if Hugo's in his office? If he is, ask him to join us in here." To Harvey, "Are those your notes on the stack emissions?" Noting Harvey's affirmative nod, Pitkin asked, "Mind if I have a look?"

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After scanning the notes for a few moments, he was speaking again to the telephone, "Hello, Perry. I know. Lily told me you were busy, but that's not important right now. I want you to shut down your operation."

It was obvious from Pitkin's scowl that Perry Meeker had questions. "Perry, I don't give a rat's ass about your schedules or about what you have in the pipeline. You shut that goddamned building down and do it now. And I want your vent stacks closed and sealed. When you've done that, come over to my office."

Without waiting for anything more than an acknowledgment of his orders, Pitkin ended the phone conversation. "Harvey, I think I can make out most of your scribbling," said Pitkin holding up the notes in his hand. "Our next step is to make damn sure meeker gets his operation closed down cold. I'm going to plan on that being accomplished before noon, and I'm making you my personal enforcer. If Meeker objects to you looking over his shoulder, tell him to call me."

Rising as a smile creased his broad face, Harvey spoke only briefly before leaving, "Don't worry about the shutdown and don't worry about Perry, we'll manage just fine."

Jenny met the newly appointed enforcer on his way out the door. "Leaving, Harvey?" She teased. "The party's just getting interesting."

"I'm being sent out to start my own," he laughed as he went on out the door."

"Any sign of Hugo?" asked Pitkin.

"He's not in his office, and Etta says he hasn't called in."

"He sure picked a good day to make himself scarce. But, knowing Hugo, he'll show up soon enough. Meanwhile, we're going to need a press release. We can't short circuit Lamont completely, so you'll have to work with him on it. Keep it short, non-dramatic, and routine. We've had shakedown problems before, and, for now, we're experiencing another one. Unless something else crops up in the next few hours, I expect that's the way we'll play it."

"I'd better get started," said Jenny, moving to the door. Pausing there, she looked back at Pitkin. "Is this going to put the dinner on hold?"

"In a word, no. Nothing short of a volcano erupting in the processing building will keep me in this place past five o'clock."

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Leaning back in his chair, Pitkin gave Jenny a long look before continuing. "You know, Jenny, crises at Rocky Flats are becoming routine and handling them has almost become automatic. In order, we have the event, the press release, the public outcry, reassurances, continued anguish from protesters, more reassurances, and finally boredom until the next crisis. I've concluded that late night, frantic busywork accomplishes nothing. To boil it all down, I'd rather have dinner with you than agonize over the problems of this creaking, steaming, leaking, old shop."

"Hmmm," she smiled, "Would I be forward if I said I think I see signs of a new Pitkin Waay? I'd settle for the old one, but I like the new one better." Not waiting for an answer or expecting one she called over her shoulder, "Fish at seven then."

Pitkin folded the isopleth map and placed it and Harvey's notes into an empty file folder. After dropping the folder into a desk drawer, he walked to the door, leaned through it and called, "Hello, Deke. Grab your coffee cup and come in."

Deke Prowers would not correctly have been described as fat. Most who met him, however, would place him on the order of "stout", or "husky", with some perhaps saying "pudgy." Pitkin, who had talked to Prowers in one-on-one plant related interviews more than a dozen times and had traded hiking stories with the newsman on a number of occasions, always had an initial impression of the man as being a former football player, perhaps a solid offensive guard with the Broncos. His suit coats, always too tight, looked uncomfortable on the muscular, square torso and supported Pitkin's belief Prowers would be more comfortable in athletic warm-up clothing or in a jersey with huge white numbers.

Pitkin and Prowers had met once in a lounge at the airport. The reporter and the physicist found, during the long wait for delayed flights, that they had a lot in common. Pitkin even made an unspecific agreement to take Prowers to Routt Lake fishing, and Prowers, for his part, had agreed to show Pitkin an almost undiscovered stretch of stream in the Laramie Mountains in Wyoming. Since then, the relationship had continued and grown stronger. Yet, Pitkin continued to keep plant affairs on a strictly professional basis.

Pitkin, instead of returning to the chair behind his desk, took the seat facing Prowers across the same low table he had used while briefing Leighton Prowers. Pitkin had the notion a desk was

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to be used for paper work, not as a refuge when talking to visitors. It was decidedly more informal and, therefore, much more to his liking.

"With people rushing in and out you seem to be busy," began Prowers.

"Monday's are always a little hectic for us," replied Pitkin, waiting for the newsman to work the interview in his own way.

"Didn't I see Harvey Flagler come out of here in high gear?"

"You saw Harvey all right, but in the years I've known him, I've never seen him in a hurry."

"He's the chief of your radiation monitoring operation, isn't he?" asked Prowers.

"Actually, his title is Chief, Radiological Monitoring and Control Group."

Prowers had taken a vinyl covered note pad and stubby yellow pencil from his coat pocket, but had laid them next to his styrofoam coffee cup, apparently not sufficiently interested in the information to take notes. He had also taken a package of filter cigarettes and book of paper matches from the opposite side coat pocket. It was not until he had stuck a cigarette in his mouth that he remembered and looked at the polished wooden plaque on Pitkin's desk. The declaration, in boldly carved letters, "SMOKING IS DEADLY-ESPECIALLY IN THIS OFFICE" halted him in the act of tearing off a paper match. With the deliberation of a sly miscreant abruptly and publicly exposed, Prowers slowly slid the package and matches back into his pocket. Placing the cigarette behind his ear like a short white pencil, Prowers smiled, "I won't even ask, but you'll have to give me credit. I remembered."

"As we live, we learn," observed Pitkin.

"In abstention there is salvation. Isn't that the creed of you non smokers?"

"I'm an antismoker, and my creed is poison yourself, but not others."

Prowers sipped his coffee before speaking. "I understand some of your people put in a long tough weekend."

Pitkin turned the format around, "Whom do you understand from?"

"Now you know I'm not going to talk about my sources."

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"And you know my people don't talk about their work. Since you're just stirring the water, I thought I might take a turn."

"Pitkin, I tried to call you last week. The secretary said you were out of the office. I tried again, and she said you wouldn't be back until today. Chase was in, but he wouldn't talk to me."

"I know about the calls. What's the question? You must be pretty proud of it, if you can't ask it over the phone."

"Let me try it this way," said Prowers, all at once deeply serious. "I know I won't get anywhere with you by bandying words and cute phrases. I'll tell you what I have and you can answer or react any way you want. I have a friend, unnamed naturally,..."

"Naturally," echoed Pitkin.

"Who is quite discrete, but who has suggested a question. This person won't go further, won't give me any background, and refuses to even suggest a follow-up. He says to ask you why you are substantially increasing plant security."

Pitkin's mind raced. He considered saying nothing or giving a "no comment," but he dismissed the idea. Any such response or non-response was tantamount to an admission. In all his dealings with Prowers, the likable newsman had played it absolutely straight. That fact made the question more puzzling. Prowers were not one to invent a strawman and put questions in its mouth.

Especially not this kind of question. Pitkin had expected something about the barrels or even about the plutonium emissions from the recovery building. It would not have been unreasonable for a skeptical and intelligent reporter to have taken a well aimed shot by combining past difficulties with the recovery building with the barrels and hit this week's bull's-eye. Security, however, had not been a problem.

As he considered possible reasons for the question, Pitkin recalled reading some news stories claiming that great volumes of enriched uranium were missing from the gaseous diffusion plant at Oak Ridge, Tennessee. He knew from having worked there for a couple of years after first signing on with the AEC and from having been there on business numerous times since that uranium was indeed lost. But the losses were not at all sinister, as the article had implied. Instead, the losses resulted from years of

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small leaks and from accumulations in the miles of pipes through which the process worked.

Loss of plutonium or alleged loss could trigger the same allegations of diversion and substandard procedures. In such a context, the question about security made sense because any hint about a loss of nuclear material especially weapons material, generated questions about plant security.

"Why have we increased security?" Pitkin repeated the question. "We haven't. And, Deke, I'm not reacting further, on or off the record."

"You think my friend was guessing, or did he know something?"

"If I knew who the friend was, I might have an answer for you?"

"I can't tell you, but I have the feeling you were as surprised by the question as I was." Getting no reaction, Prowers continued, "Speaking of surprises, is there anything new on the great Rocky Flats barrel mystery?"

"I think we're putting out a press release after lunch. You might find some copy there. See Lamont about it."

"No thanks, I'll call." Then in reflective tone, "Why the hell do you people keep him around?" Raising his hand quickly, Prowers answered his own question. "I know, I know. I did my stint in Washington D.C. Covering the Hill. Lamont was in Senator Moffat's office then, gumming up his works. You don't have to tell me how Lamont got dumped on you."

"I'm glad those words came from your mouth, Deke, not mine."

"I don't know how you folks work," said Prowers rising and putting away his pencil and notebook, "but I've got a deadline to meet so I'll be toddling off. Anything in your release worth writing about, or is the same old pap."

"If I tell you, will you sit on it until after lunch when it's official? I don't want to get blamed for playing favorites."

"Consider it embargoed."

"It's probably back page stuff, but we are shutting down the recovery building. That'll be announced along with some further information on the barrels."

"Shutting it down, again?"

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"Yes, shutting it down again. We haven't defined the problem completely, but we believe we've traced it to the incinerator bays, but the theory is off the record."

"Any plutonium emissions?" asked Prowers, immediately interested.

"I'll have to beg off on that one, Deke. It's the old story. We're gathering data, but we did shut down. That'll effectively foreclose even a remote chance of a further problem."

"Interesting," mused Prowers. But seeming to lose some of his interest, he concluded, "I guess shutting down the recovery building for adjustments is pretty much old hat?" He left the question hanging.

"It usually is, Deke." The slight emphasis on "usually" was noticeable.

Prowers gave Pitkin a puzzled look, but realizing the interview was over, he picked up his note pad, stood up and ambled out of the office, tossing a "See ya, Pitkin," over his shoulder.

It was well over an hour before Pitkin heard Hugo Chase's voice in the reception room. It sounded to Pitkin as though Hugo and Etta were exchanging views, loudly, on a typing assignment, either unfinished or not done to Hugo's satisfaction, Pitkin couldn't tell which. He waited until the matter was settled, to whose credit he didn't know. Didn't, that is, until he walked out of his door and saw Etta absolutely hammering the keys of her suffering magcard typewriter. He deferred comment and walked on into Hugo's office.

The Director was unpacking his briefcase. Watching him slam-dunk a thick sheaf of paper into his 'Out' basket, Pitkin had the impression the secretarial-director bout might have been a standoff.

"Two points, or were you fouled in the act of getting to the office?"

"What the hell are you talking about?" growled Hugo, tossing two green bound Senate Committee reports onto the desk.

"If you have to ask, I can't explain it," said Pitkin. Reaching behind his back and closing the door, he asked, "I suppose you spent the weekend working on our testimony?"

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"As a matter of fact, I did. Then I came in and found out that woman hasn't even finished the first draft of the backup material I gave her."

"I hate to be the one to tell you this, Hugo, but we've had some new developments. We'll almost certainly have to revise our statement."

"What are you saying," blinked Hugo, "what new developments?"

"We've got two problems, and I don't know which is worse. Let me start with the barrels. Harvey and his crew have figured out that the barrel dump is a lot larger than their first estimates indicated. As a matter of fact, it's quite a bit larger. Harvey thinks it may contain as many as a thousand barrels."

"Not quite. More like nine hundred and sixty."

"How in the world...?" exclaimed Pitkin.

"It's right there," said Hugo, tapping an aged and battered copy of a Senate Committee report. "The last place we would have ever looked for it. Over twenty-five years ago our predecessors were hit with a six-month period of priority work. The junk oil started piling up faster than they could ship it out and Idaho was having problems making room for it. The managers here simply took it upon themselves to create their own disposal, temporary of course. They advised the Joint Committee on Atomic Energy of what they had done and even supplied a map. It's all laid out, look for yourself."

"Then the testimony they gave the Joint Committee was the record we've been looking for. The people here gave the typed copy to the Committee and probably threw the extra copies away since the original would be printed in the report." Pitkin leafed through the report and easily located the map, which was printed as an appendix and folded in the back. "I'll be damned. A purloined letter."

"A what?"

"We should have had Ed Poe looking for our record."

"Dammit, Pitkin, stop talking in riddles. Who is Ed Poe and what's this talk about a letter. A couple of days in the mountains must have addled your brain."

"It's a tale for another time, Hugo. I was merely making a reference to the nineteenth century writer, Edgar Allan Poe."

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"Oh, well, why didn't you say so instead of throwing that 'Ed Poe' stuff around like he worked out in the shop or something. And since you have seen fit to explain yourself, be on notice, I've read the 'Purloined Letter.' Now what's the other 'development' you mentioned?"

"In an indirect way, it's related. Harvey's people were taking radiation readouts from the air samplers in the barrel area, and they picked up some pretty high readings. At first, Harvey thought it was the barrels and some extra activity in the area by a fencing crew. But he suspected the readings were too high to have been caused by the barrel pit and even the driving around out there. He kept looking and found our second problem. The stacks on the recovery building have been belching out some pretty nasty stuff."

"Spell it out, Pitkin. I'm ready to believe anything," sighed Hugo, resignation heavy in his voice.

"The area between the recovery building and the barrel pit, have received as much as 620 d/m/g during the past six to ten days. The worst case so far would be higher than our record highest level, and it's probably bumping up against state limits. We don't know how those isolated readings will average out and we don't know how far offsite the contamination extends. It's possible we have d/m/g's in the hundreds across the fence. If we do, we've gone off the chart and gone far past state and federal standards both."

"You can't be serious," breathed an astonished Hugo Chase.

"I'm sorry to say, I am. I called Meeker and ordered him to shut down."

"Good. We had to do that. I suppose he bitched about having his schedules fouled up?"

"Only briefly."

Hugo harumphed appreciatively, then scowled a question. "What the hell happened anyhow?"

"We don't know for sure, but a reasonably good guess is that the incinerators ran out of control and burned the electrical control system. The alarms and emissions monitors simply weren't working. I'd guess the heat may have damaged the filters themselves."

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"Then we've been putting out plutonium vapors for a week or more? With that plus the barrels it's no wonder the area's hot. And damn hot at that. I guess we also should get busy on a press release, but one without any specific radiation reading until we're able to get definite readings on the whole area."

"Jenny's already working the problem...with Lamont."

"Sounds to me like you're on top of the thing. Anything else? I'm not sure I'm up to much more."

"Nothing critical. I sent Harvey out to keep an eye on the shutdown. Later this afternoon, we can set up a troubleshooting team to find out exactly what happened, but in the meantime, I'm going to have a session with Meeker. You want to sit in? "

"Not unless you think you need me."

"No, just thought I'd ask. By the way, Hugo, have we received anything from Washington about increasing security?"

"Not anything I know about," replied the puzzled Hugo. "Why do you ask?"

"Oh, it's probably nothing. Deke Prowers was in earlier chasing down a tip he received from some mysterious friend. Prowers said his source suggested he ask us why we were increasing security at the plant. I told we him weren't. My guess is there's a rumor loose out there which says we've lost some plutonium."

"What'll the bastards think of next?" spat out Hugo. "You can bank on it. There'll be a story in the news this week claiming we've been shipping plutonium parts to Israel."

"The other variation is that terrorists have been stealing it," added Pitkin. "Back to the mundane business at hand, I think we should begin talking about notifying the state health people on our stack emissions."

"You said we were bumping up against their standards. Have we violated them?"

"I don't think so. But we won't know for sure until Harvey collects samples, does the separation and analysis, and gets computer readout. Until he's finished, we won't be able to say one way or the other. The fact we can't ignore, Hugo, is the state's own sampling system. It may not be as good as ours, but they'll be bound to pick up high readings. If we wait and if it looks like we were cutting a fine line on our agreement to cooperate with them, it'll throw a lot of negotiating, promising, and a fair working

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relationship right out the window. To make the situation worse, the story could break just while we're telling the senate committee what a minor problem we have with the barrels."

"I don't want to start down that road with the state until we know we have no choice." Hugo was adamant.

Pitkin knew the reaction was based in part upon a long-standing war with the Colorado Health Board, which had, in the last two years, been held in abeyance by a fragile truce. The tenuous peace had come as a result of pressure from the Colorado congressional delegation on the federal side and from the governor's office on the side of the health authorities. In truth, it was a cool standoff that endured only because of political pressure, which was as unpredictable in direction, strength, and duration as the wind, which swept fitfully across Rocky Flats.

Hugo's reluctance to face the issue of notification to the state was also predicated upon his vague understanding of the procedures involved and the publicity that would result. He remembered reading the Memorandum of Understanding that, he believed, would require a written notice of emission deviations greater than certain defined limits. Upon reading the requirement, he had condemned it as a "confession," and had told Pitkin, in private after the signing, he'd never write such a thing. The prospect of such a document describing contamination with potential adverse health effects being reprinted in the newspapers was, alone, sufficient to cause him to reject consideration of notification.

Pitkin, however, knew he had to persist. "Hugo, I understand how you feel about notification. But, if we sit on our hands and do nothing, we're inviting criticism from all sides. And we have no defense. There is no way to make a case for playing fast and loose with public health. If we're putting even one citizen at risk, we are not acting responsibly."

With a great sigh, Hugo opened the door a bit. "What do you suggest, short of formal notification?"

"Simple, give Delores Cortez a call. Tell her we've had a problem. Emphasize its not directly related to the barrels. Explain it's in the recovery building and our preliminary information indicates it's related to the incinerators. You can say that we're virtually certain we haven't exceeded any of our agreed upon

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parameters, but we're still collecting data. If we have to, we'll follow up with a notice."

"Even if I agreed to call, why the Cortez woman? She isn't the Chair on the Board."

"No, but she's the de facto radiation expert. And she's pretty down to earth about things. She'll listen with an open mind."

"How do you know so damn much about her?"

"She was a member of the state delegation that worked with us on putting the Memorandum of Understanding together."

"Well, why don't you call her then. I only met the woman once, at the signing of your damn MOU, and I'm sure you recall, we didn't hit it off very well."

"All right, I'll make the call, in your name."

"Fair enough," grunted Hugo, "just so I don't have to talk to her." Gesturing at the books and disordered stacks of papers on his desk, Hugo suggested a division of effort on their immediate problems. "I'm satisfied you've got the recovery building thing pretty well under control. Why don't you stay with it the rest of the day while I try to get our testimony into final form? Later this afternoon or tomorrow morning we can see where we stand on both."

As Pitkin turned to leave, Hugo added, "It'll probably be tomorrow before I'll have time to critique this testimony. I'm already running late and I've got some calls to make. Shamballa came down with something and missed her recital last Thursday and was sick over the weekend, and I promised Paonia I'd pick them up at the hospital this afternoon."

"The hospital? I hope it isn't serious?" Pitkin's concern was sincere. His contacts with Hugo's family had, for the most part, been limited to Christmas parties, an occasional barbecue in the summers, and infrequent encounters at the plant when Hugo's wife, Paonia, came by to pick him up or drop off some forgotten item. He liked the short round faced motherly woman whose life revolved around her husband and daughter. And Shamballa, Hugo's nine-year-old, was a serious faced, but mischievous, little girl who was one of Pitkin's favorite people.

"Oh, I don't think so. She may have just overdone her objection to playing the piano in front of all those parents, but the doctor wanted to run some tests anyway."

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"Hugo, if you need some time, I'll be glad to take over some of the testimony. I should anyhow since presenting it's a rock we both have to push up the mountain."

"No, thanks, Pitkin. I'm already wrapped up in the middle of it, and you'd have to start from scratch, besides, you've got your hands full."

Pitkin returned to his office, and in a few minutes was waiting for Delores Cortez to pick up her extension. He hadn't talked to her for over six months and then only briefly. His recollection of her as being reasonable and understanding was a bit undefined, and he hoped he hadn't oversold Hugo on her as the most sympathetic ear they could catch.

"Hello," the deeply rounded voice immediately brought her image to his mind. He saw a tall, full-bodied woman wearing her black, gray streaked hair upswept and tightly knotted high on her head. Her forehead would be shining as though waxed and polished and high cheekbones would make thoughtful brown eyes appear to be set well back where they had a greater freedom to measure and probe those people they found to be worthwhile and interesting.

"Hello, Delores, "He almost said, "Doctor Cortez," but decided to forego formality. "Pitkin Waay."

"Oh, sure. Hello, Pitkin."

He hoped the upswing in her voice was more friendly remembrance and less a sign of curiosity. "I guess it's been a while since we last talked," Pitkin began.

"It certainly has," she agreed. "If memory serves me correctly, it was a meeting in my office on our proposed modifications to the MOU."

"As always, Delores, your recall is perfect. And before you ask if I've called about your proposals, let me say that I haven't. Washington still has them under review, and I haven't been able to get any word on when we'll hear something."

"Believe it or not, Pitkin, I understand. We on the Board spend a lot of our time on the phone to Washington trying to get answers to the simplest questions. For our trouble we get citations to regulations which nobody understands, or we get dumped on with the most convoluted malarky you can imagine. So much for our little trench warfare with the bureaucrats, what's up?"

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"I'm afraid we have something of a problem out here with the new recovery building."

"You mean you're still debugging that chamber of horrors? You should consider putting those barrels I've been reading about inside that big acid pot and sealing the whole shebang for twenty fifth century archeologists to worry about."

"Might not be a bad idea." She seemed to be in a good mood; he hoped it would last. "Speaking of those barrels, it was a sweep of the area around them which led us to the knots in the recovery building. We were doing some extra monitoring in the barrel area, and Harvey Flagler's guys picked up some readings that seemed too high to have been caused by the barrels alone. As of right now, we've identified the recovery building as being the source of some emissions."

"Plutonium?"

"We're running the samples through analysis now, but there's no reason to expect anything else. Our raw data tells us the readings are below the levels in our MOU, but there's always the chance they may have gone slightly over. If they do, we'll file a notice with the Board, but I wanted to let you know what's up in case we don't reach MOU levels."

"Since I'm only a member, I take it this is all unofficial?"

"Yes and no. Hugo didn't call the Chairman because we felt that would be a little more than the situation called for, and it might obligate us to follow up with something written. Between that and doing nothing this seemed to be a good compromise."

"Might be for you, but don't you think it puts me in the middle? I won't sit on what you've told me; I'll have to call Jim Elbert. If I didn't I'd be in the soup with him and the rest of the Board. As Chairman, he'll at least put it on the record of the next meeting."

"Fine, Delores. I expected that would be your reaction, but before then, I'll call you back and tell you where we stand. If we're filing a formal notice, our present conversation will be superfluous. If we aren't, I'll call Elbert myself, and explain that I called you only because of your interest and research work in radiation, and because the MOU encourages interaction among federal and state officials who have expertise in radiation and health physics. I would say that pretty well describes the two of us."

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"The next agreement I negotiate, I want to hire you, Pitkin, instead of having to work under the watchful eye of the state's legal nitpickers," she laughed. "I'll accept your characterization. We're having a discussion of radiation health effects. And since we are, do you care to share with me any of your preliminary radiation readings?"

"Off the record, Delores, and in a hypothetical setting, you might give some thought to wind dispersion which has yielded 620 d/m/g's of plutonium in samplers three and four hundred yards from the source."

A low whistle came through Pitkin's earpiece followed by an exclamation, "Damn. No wonder you called. I'll be interested in seeing your isopleths, and if I know you, Pitkin, you've got a computerized one on your desk right now. If your 620 average out the way some of your emissions have in the past, you're on a rocket over your own federal standards. We could be talking about a serious hazard to public health."

Without answering directly, Pitkin assured her, "As soon as we've got some reliable displays, I'll give you a call. By the way, we'll be putting something out for the media this afternoon. Our release will track what I've told you, without specific numbers. It'll announce we're shutting the entire recovery operation down until we can find just where the problem is."

"You've had so many problems with the damn misbegotten thing, nobody'll think it's news," she chided him.

"The day the media ignores Rocky Flats will be a day worth remembering," replied Pitkin.

"The same would be true of the Health Board, you're ever on our minds," Cortez reminded him. "I appreciate the call, Pitkin. I expect we'll be talking again soon."

"Hugo and I are making our annual trek to Washington Wednesday afternoon, so I expect it will be the first thing next week before I can call, but I appreciate you hearing me out, Delores."

"Good luck in Washington, and give Hugo my regards," she said.

"Thank you. And Hugo wanted me to tell you hello, too."

Hanging up the telephone, Pitkin knew his call would rouse a number of people in Denver and their reactions would be as varied as the interests they represented. Critical to the

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discussions, the charges, the answers, and strength and vigor of them all would be the actual radiation levels registered by both the federal and state air samplers on private property across the federal boundary lines.

Although Pitkin, from years of self discipline, would go by the book and wait for verified data on the contamination, his experience told him the radiation which would be found off site was greater than any ever before detected. He knew it would be an important consideration in the debate over decommissioning the plant.

Pitkin was also certain the response to the plutonium releases, from the barrels and from the recovery building, would not be confined to Colorado. It would be central among the questions he and Hugo would face, from their own superiors in the Department and from political forces on Capitol Hill. In those places, too, the focus would be on radiation emissions and their potential effects on the people who lived in the communities surrounding the plant.

Events were converging, almost as if they had been orchestrated to force a determination on the future of Rocky Flats. Even though the lives of hundreds, perhaps thousands, of people could be affected by a decision to decommission the facility, Pitkin could not help wondering where the conflicting pressures were taking him and what role he might find himself playing.

"If Washington has answers to those questions and a hundred like them," Pitkin told himself, "the upcoming trip might be bearable after all."

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CHAPTER SEVEN

Pitkin leaned back in his window seat as the 727 gained speed, lifted off the long north-south runway, and angled strongly upward. Stapleton's concrete runway dropped out of sight in only a few seconds, giving way to shrinking rows of tract houses and shopping centers, and in few moments, the plane tipped its starboard wing in a farewell salute to Denver and climbed toward the East.

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The cultivated land below was irregularly checkered brown and green. The dry, light brown fields were lying fallow waiting for the cool days of fall when they would be sown with winter wheat. In an occasional field, Pitkin could see the dust cloud rolling up around a tractor and duck foot as a dry land farmer fought his perennial enemies, the moisture robbing weeds. If allowed to grow unchecked, their seeds would produce a succeeding generation to compete with next year's wheat crop thereby reducing yields, which, in the high plains of eastern Colorado, were nearly always marginal.

The contrasting blocks of green were, for the most part, the wheat that had been planted the previous September. The wheat plants would now be heading out by transforming their green leaves to tightly bound kernels. In the heat of the coming weeks, the stems and seedpods would be embrowned by the sun, and at the full-bodied time of ripeness, giant combines would march through the fields and transform the crop into pure golden grain. Farm trucks would carry the wheat across the stubble of the newly shaven fields and deposit the grain in the towering, concrete and galvanized steel elevators which were the landmarks of the small communities spaced across the plains.

Pitkin could also easily identify irrigated fields by the circular shapes of the center pivot watering systems and the bright green of their artificially watered crops. Those round plots contained the fragile crops, not natural to the high plains. They depended entirely upon the water drawn from the deep Ogallala aquifer, once thought to be infinite, but, now its level was dropping alarmingly as the powerful pumps drained away water faster than natural recharge could replace it.

Looking at the patches of dull green virgin prairie which had escaped plows and which lay yet unbroken, Pitkin marveled at the persistence of the tough native buffalo grass. Tightly hugging the ground, it defied the endless winds and provided forage for the cattle which had long ago been brought here to replace the buffalo. And it seemed to Pitkin that the eternal prairie grass had simply retreated to the rugged coulees and rock-strewn hills waiting, waiting until man exhausted himself and the underground water. Then, after the winds blew the dust from the unwatered fields exposing the hard pan below, perhaps the buffalo grass would reclaim the land.

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Pitkin knew lack of water would spell the end of irrigated cultivation of the plains, but with a scowl, he wondered if other more lasting and more destructive forces might intervene. Certainly, such forces existed, he told himself, turning away from the window in an attempt to close off such thoughts.

Across the empty seat and sitting next to the aisle, Hugo was staring vacantly at the papers piled on the face of his tray table. Sensing Pitkin's gaze, Hugo turned and looked at him. After a moment, Hugo's eyes turned to the window, but finding nothing to capture their attention, they returned to the paperwork.

Pitkin napped for a time, and when he awoke, he saw Hugo sitting looking at the paper work on his tray. "You still working on that?" he asked.

Leaning far back in his seat, and without looking up, Hugo asked, "Pitkin, do you ever have the feeling that events are piling up faster than we can comprehend, that we're sitting at the bottom of a hill staring up at an avalanche?"

"Sometimes, I do. I suppose with the problems we've been getting the last few days the feeling might be expected."

"Many times I've heard you speak of public health...I was wondering about that. Let me ask you, if we cooked every point of every argument down to a last drop of truth, would we see injury to people, actual injury from Rocky Flats plutonium?"

Pitkin looked at Hugo who still stared at his papers. He wondered, not so much about the answer he would give, but rather about why the question had been asked. It was not at all like Hugo to display the slightest doubt or question about the plant and its operation. In the years he had known Hugo Chase, he had never seen anything in him other than determination to operate the plant as efficiently as possible.

At least on the surface, Hugo's confidence had never faltered, and his faith in their mission and in the manner of its execution had been unyielding. The introspection Pitkin sensed in Hugo's question was vaguely disquieting because it paralleled the manner of his own approach to questions about the plant and their work.

Pitkin had a fleeting impression of dependence. For the first time, he asked himself how extensive had been his reliance upon Hugo to provide the thematic underpinning for Rocky Flats. Never had he entertained doubt about Hugo's belief in the need for

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the facility; Hugo had been unflinching in his damnation of critics; and he had been dedicated to the means of achieving their goals.

Hugo's inflexibility had made him an easy target for the committed enemies of the plant. The refusal to compromise his categorical denials of adverse health effects from exposure to low levels of plutonium had been the source of more than one heated argument with Pitkin. Such an uncompromising position itself, paradoxically, provided the best ammunition for those who wished to assail it. And Hugo, as a focal point of criticism, had drawn the heaviest fire. He had been castigated in the media and had even become something of a symbol of governmental intransigence. Still, Hugo had always been firm in the face of the onslaught.

Pitkin realized better now than ever before how Hugo had supplied the one solid position in turmoil of contradictions. He had depended upon Hugo who provided him with logic, logic Pitkin employed to confine his own apprehensions. Thus in a curious and ironic way, Pitkin had relied upon the existence of Hugo's fixed ideas, and had, in effect, used them as an anchor to restrain his own doubts.

If Hugo wavered, if he entertained doubts, Pitkin knew his own position at the plant was almost certainly untenable. Should Hugo suddenly begin to support and thereby re-enforce his own nagging uncertainties, whatever security Pitkin felt about his own professional world would be gone.

He had no idea what effect his answer would have, if any, but he did know it would be honest. Perhaps the answer was no longer important, because the question had already been asked.

"Injury to people? Yes, I believe we are injuring people."

Hugo's head swiveled around. "Pitkin, if you really believe that, how can you work there?" Hugo's eyes, magnified by his horn-rimmed glasses, stared at him.

"I've stayed on for a lot of reasons. It's a reasonably good job, and I do it pretty well. It also happens to be the kind of thing I'm educated to do, and I have invested a lot of years in the business."

"Superficialities, Pitkin," shot back Hugo with a hint of his old fire. "Given your feeling that we are in fact either injuring people or somehow imposing detrimental health effects on them, you would have to be immoral, insensitive, or hypocritical to work to keep the place operating, wouldn't you?"

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"Perhaps, but there are other considerations. I suppose there's a trace of self serving arrogance to be found in my reasoning, but I feel it has some validity. You and I both know how intense the pressures are to maintain a nuclear weapons program. Whether it's contractor influence, military mindset, or simply good common sense, the program is as strong, maybe even stronger, than it's ever been. Rocky Flats will be operated, at least it will until Congress coughs up the money to move it. While it's operating where it is, I honestly believe I can contribute to the operation. To put it another way, I trust myself to keep it as clean as possible, more than I would trust the man who would replace me."

"Fair enough," agreed Hugo. "I suppose there's some of that in all of us. While we might call it a reason, others would say it's a rationalization. Are you saying then, in terms of plutonium effects, you accept a given number of cancers as inevitable by-products of bomb production?"

Pitkin was saved from having to pursue the dialogue, at least for the moment, by the intervention of sandwiches. The plastic encased tray was thrust at them by a mechanically smiling flight attendant that stood waiting while Hugo deposited his papers onto the empty seat.

As is the custom on airlines, the coffee cart was scheduled for arrival long after the sandwiches, and most passengers would consume their food and stack food refuse on their trays before they would be offered something to drink. Nevertheless, the arrival of the food, and the business of unwrapping it had broken the thread of conversation, and Hugo did not attempt to take it up again.

Pitkin puzzled over Hugo's questions. In them he sensed genuine concern, but more than concern, there was a thaw in Hugo's confidence. It would, he told himself, require a powerful force in Hugo's life to effect a real change in his attitude toward the plant. But, he thought, as the coffee finally arrived, he was probably reading too much into a couple of questions.

Pitkin had only begun to sip his coffee when he felt the slight change in the speed of the aircraft telling him the first stage of the descent into Washington had begun. The distance between the capital and the rest of the nation had grown far too short for comfort. He, along with many other citizens, wished it were longer.

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The plane made the Leesburg turn and started its descent down the valley of the Potomac. From his roaring vantage point, Pitkin could see, through his visitor's eyes, the great blot of buildings and roads pasted across the countryside.

The growth of the Maryland and Virginia suburbs had, in the past twenty years, been stupefying. Automobile traffic along the George Washington Parkway and the Capital Beltway was so continually heavy it was virtually impossible to define a period of time that could be called rush hour. Across the river, Pitkin could see the endless miles of houses and apartments of Bethesda and Chevy Chase, and although his unschooled eye could not define it precisely, the dividing line between Maryland and the District of Columbia.

As the plane turned for its final approach, Pitkin could see the Watergate and the Kennedy Center, marking contradictory legends in the nation's recent history. For an instant, he could see down the very hallway of the federal government, Constitution Avenue. In the distance he could see the quintessential symbol of American government, the Washington Monument. The great obelisk rose from the mall like a white dagger thrust into the sky. Behind it, and farther away, Pitkin could see the classic outline of the capitol building.

Just as the plane seemed to be settling down upon the waters of the Potomac, the runway darted under its wheels and they landed at Washington National Airport. From the instantly crowded aisles of the airplane, Pitkin and Hugo made their way through the Jetway into the jammed walkways of the terminal. Distrustful of airline baggage handling, and planning a stay of only two days, both men had brought carry on luggage and were able to forego the awkward wait at the luggage carousels.

The heat of late afternoon combined with high humidity soon had the travelers sweating as they trudged toward the Metro station, which was a long and inconvenient distance from the terminal building. On an earlier trip, a couple of years ago, they had rented a car. Almost instantly lost somewhere in Arlington, and later in the District, they had parked the car and hailed a cab to take them to their hotel. Later, Pitkin had contrived to have a young staff member in the Department pick the car up and return it to the rental agency. The subway, something of a challenge, would deposit them within an easy walk of the great marble headquarters

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building, and while it wasn't as convenient as a taxi, Hugo was fascinated with the ride, thus the rails of Metro had become their avenue into Washington.

Farecards in hand, Pitkin and Hugo, along with a half dozen other grim faced passengers, passed through computerized turnstiles and took up positions alongside the tracks. To their great relief, the wait was only a matter of minutes. Metro's silver cars slid to a stop and invited them aboard with a swish of its sliding doors. Two quick notes from its chimes and the sudden pull of acceleration was a compelling invitation to use the handholds as they made their way to nearby seats.

Pitkin was always surprised at the speed of the cars. Very soon they were pulling into the Pentagon station where the sliding doors admitted a couple of junior army officers, three expensive briefcases carried by contractor types, and an attractive blonde who took an empty seat behind Pitkin. The car's next invitation was extended to a melancholy empty platform at the Arlington National Cemetery. The car had better luck at Rosslyn where it exchanged the blonde for a mixed group of some half dozen individuals, none of whom seemed associated with any other.

With its passengers sealed in behind clamped doors, the string of electric cars was prepared for serious business. Gathering speed on the slight decline, it clicked its way under the Potomac River. The great rush sent the tunnel lights sailing by, and had it not been for a noticeable change to an incline, only the train would have known it had subversed half the river and reached the District of Columbia.

In quick order, stops were made at Foggy Bottom and McPherson Square. Even though the Metro system was relatively new and had been constructed at astronomical cost, the walls of some stations were already stained with long ribbons of rust and dirt from leaking water. Many escalators were frozen into immobility by mechanical failures. Occasional tiles were missing from the red station platforms, and exit portals were often roped off and signed, "out of order."

At Metro Center where they changed trains, Pitkin looked at the curving walls and high arching ceilings and imagined them to be huge gray concrete waffles folded over his head. The small brown directional signs always seemed woefully inadequate, and it

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was only by luck that they found the line that would take them to station near the Forrestal Building.

After the short second ride, both men were glad to leave their car and head for the exit where they climbed, by the stairs, out of Washington's proud subway system. The late afternoon heat was a welcome relief, and even the intrepid subway rider, Hugo, was glad to emerge into afternoon sunlight.

"I suppose we might as well go straight to Baldwin's office," suggested Hugo. "That's where we always seem to wind up."

"We'll be lucky if he's in. Every time I call his office, he's 'on travel.'" Pitkin's contempt for the gross abuse of travel prerogatives, so pervasive in the federal bureaucracy, was quite evident. "Hell, if you aren't 'on travel' at least half the time, you're really small potatoes in this town."

"He'll be in this afternoon," countered Hugo. "I talked to him yesterday. As a matter of fact, he called me, said he was just confirming our schedule and wanted us to stop by as soon as we got in."

"Kind of unusual for Baldwin to call. Did he give you any clue as to why he's suddenly concerned about us?"

"I don't think we really have to wonder, do we, Pitkin?" asked Hugo grimly.

A security guard check, an elevator ride, and a hike down an extremely long corridor later they were greeted by a secretary. Obviously, they were expected.

"Mister Chase and Doctor Waay?" asked a young woman.

Hugo admitted as much. Their traveling bags were stowed in an inconspicuous corner while they were supplied with coffee by yet another young woman who appeared out of an adjoining office. Thus fortified they were told to "Go right in."

Hatch Baldwin was tilted back in a large brown leather chair, his gleaming bluchers propped on the edge of an opened desk drawer. He was, of course, on the telephone. A dark blue, pinstriped arm waved them to seats. The tanned, boyish face beamed a friendly smile. With a hand clasped over the mouthpiece, his mouth exaggerated the silent words, "The Secretary."

Hatch's first spoken words were deferential, "Yes, Mister Secretary, I understand." After a few moments, he continued,

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"Yes, sir. There may be some grumbling, but I'm certain Senator Sumter will be sympathetic. As a matter of fact, a call to his office this afternoon would be useful. I know he's out of town, but the record of your call would be a good maneuver." Another pause, "Yes, He's speaking in Miami this evening, I checked it with Congressional Relations... Good. I'll tell him you yourself tried to call."

Replacing the telephone, he greeted them warmly. "Hugo, Pitkin, glad to see you. How was the trip?" Without waiting for an answer, he plunged ahead. "Your timing couldn't have been better. Secretary Stewart and I were talking about your appearance before the senate committee when you walked in the door."

"I'm surprised he knew we were testifying," smiled Pitkin.

"Oh, he knows all right. The day we read the story about your little barrel cache, Senator Sumter's office called and asked that the Assistant Secretary appear at the authorization hearings on Rocky Flats. Two days ago, let's see, yes, Monday, the Senator himself called and quite strongly suggested the Secretary appear. The Secretary agreed to rearrange his schedule and make an appearance. Yesterday, the committee staff advised us the thrust of the hearings had been modified to include authorizations to decommission you guys right out of existence. We also heard, unofficially, that some of the senators want to delve into what was termed 'other matters.' Translated, they're going to sharpen some questions about the shutdown of your recovery building."

"And, let me guess," said Pitkin, "the Secretary's been called to attend to other urgent business."

"Indulge my curiosity, Hatch," interrupted Hugo. "What business?"

"He's been called to a meeting at the White House, if you must know."

"Must have taken some pretty fast arranging," observed Pitkin.

"You have a cynical and suspicious mind, Pitkin," replied Baldwin, pinching a speck of lint from his vest.

"And I'll bet my mother's cookie cutter that Julian is on travel."

"Assistant Secretary Wendover is in New Mexico, and despite your innuendo, Pitkin, he's tending to Department business."

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"That leaves you and a couple of other deputy assistant secretaries," said Pitkin evenly, "What are you doing tomorrow, Hatch?"

"I'll be at your side, my friend, while you and Hugo defend God, country, and Rocky Flats."

"I hope you aren't going to tell me this testimony will have to be rewritten before tomorrow," cried Hugo waving the sheaf of papers he had pulled out of his briefcase.

"Quite the contrary, Hugo," soothed Baldwin, "I suggest it's perfect just as it stands. Copies have already been sent to the hill. We can simply explain that we were asked to appear and discuss authorizations for Rocky Flats. We were not advised there would be new subjects and we did not prepare, or clear, testimony on collateral issues. The committee members understand our procedures and know we have to clear statements through the Office of Management and Budget before they go to Congress."

"Sounds pretty thin to me," muttered Hugo. "I don't like the thought of refusing to answer the questions of a senator."

"There's a difference between refusing to answer and simply explaining you are not prepared to answer," explained Baldwin. "The inside game is to answer what you can and promise to supply written material for the record when you're stumped. Believe me, Hugo, it's standard procedure for the executive branch to control their answers as completely as possible."

"It's also congressional practice to get answers to the questions they know are embarrassing," Pitkin reminded the Deputy Assistant.

"Fortunately, for us, that takes considerable time," replied Baldwin. "And, if we're lucky, we can usually moot the annoying questions and compromise the difficult ones before the ricochet hits us in the arse."

Hatch Baldwin's buoyant attitude and youthful appearance were a pleasant facade. Many competitors for promotions in the federal power structure had made the mistake of underestimating his knack of exploiting weaknesses and capitalizing on errors in judgment. Baldwin also knew the value of friendships, especially those with the right people.

The Deputy Assistant Secretary had, on more than one occasion demonstrated a willingness to sacrifice the reputations of others to preserve his own. While some would have termed such

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behavior as unsavory and decidedly undesirable, it was not uncommon among those who climbed their way through the thin and ever thinner branches of the higher levels of government where only a few of the hardy, clever, and devious can exist.

Pitkin was far from being satisfied with Baldwin's breezy explanations of the legislative and executive branch interplay. Having met some of the senators and having testified before them a number of times, he knew them to be opinionated and egotistical, but he also knew they were intelligent and determined. Certainly, they were not so easily sidetracked as Baldwin suggested.

The physicist was also puzzled by the obvious desertion of the Secretary and the Assistant Secretary. He had met Secretary Stewart two years earlier, shortly after his appointment and Senate confirmation. Stewart had visited Rocky Flats during an orientation tour of Department of Energy facilities, and Pitkin had spent the greater part of a day explaining and demonstrating the operation of the plant. The man had been friendly and forthright, and Pitkin had instinctively liked him. Ducking a committee hearing was inconsistent with what Pitkin believed was a strong personality perfectly capable of meeting the awkward questions of a senate committee.

"Hatch, you traveled some of that ground pretty quickly," said Pitkin. "For example, exactly what kind of questions should we expect about the recovery building?"

"If I knew, I'd tell you. I'm only passing on what I said was strictly unofficial information from a committee staffer. It could be nothing; it could be something considerably important. However, our guideline should be to avoid anything not directly relevant to the budget for the plant."

"Are they going to ask about the elevated plutonium emissions we reported?"

"Pitkin, I'm telling you all I know. But I don't know how they could get into that since we haven't talked to anyone on the Hill about your latest spill." There was a note of annoyance in Baldwin's voice, and Pitkin decided to probe a bit.

"Hatch, just to keep the record straight. We haven't experienced anything you could properly call a 'spill.' We blew some plutonium through our filters. I think it's important that the Department be mindful of the potential for misunderstanding

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which occurs as a result of using anything other than precise terminology. Were you under the impression we had experienced something more serious than air dispersion?"

"Did you?" Asked Baldwin impulsively.

"Hell, no!" blurted Hugo. "We explained the whole thing over the phone. Are you suggesting we're holding something back?"

"No, of course not," said Baldwin quickly, "I wasn't suggesting anything of the sort. I was only trying to think of anything that could be sitting out there waiting to blindside us. It could be related to one of the other facilities. Have either of you caught wind of any problems in New Mexico or Texas?"

Listening to Baldwin's defensive answer, Pitkin had the impression that Baldwin was fishing for information. "Maybe there's something he doesn't know, and it's got him worried," Pitkin thought. He knew that the absence of information was the most feared aspect of life in Washington, especially for those who were on their way to higher and more exalted positions.

For his part, Hugo Chase had been a plant director far too long to engage in the kind of talk Baldwin was encouraging. "I'm too busy keeping my own shop running without worrying about the rest of the system," he shrugged.

There seemed to be little of substance left for the group to discuss. Baldwin's plan to use Hugo's testimony as it was written eliminated the need to revise it. And Baldwin, in his mind, was going to confine their participation to commenting on budgetary matters as set forth in their written statement. Yet, the Deputy Assistant had one final matter for disposition.

Brushing the smallest, even imaginary, particle of dust from his bluchers with an elegant finger, he asked, "You, of course, remember you have an appointment with Senator Moffat at the unholy hour of eight o'clock?"

"Sure," said Hugo. "I told you about it on the telephone."

"I understand the invitation was for the two of you, but if you would like, I'd be glad to join you. I can't imagine what the Senator has in mind, but if it's departmental at all, I suppose I should go."

Pitkin suppressed a laugh. Baldwin had gone as far toward inviting himself as discretion would allow. It was the same bug-a-bear, a thirst for information, and a desire to be on the

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inside. Coupled with it was the gravitational pull of political power. In Washington, a senator, any senator, was a powerful force, and few Potomac stricken star worshipers could resist any opportunity to be where they could see, listen to, and, "land-a-goshen," even speak to a real senator. Baldwin had all the symptoms of having been smitten with a full dose of Washington Sycophancy, a contagion among mid and upper level bureaucrats. It was itching the man so fiercely that Pitkin almost felt sorry for him, but just almost.

"Oh, we wouldn't think of imposing on you, Hatch." Pitkin's tone was solicitous and barely serious enough to escape censure as cynicism.

"No trouble, I assure you," replied Baldwin.

Pitkin was firm in his determination to spare Baldwin further aggravation of his affliction. "No, Hatch, you'll get quite enough of the Senate later in the morning. Besides, I'm pretty sure it's only a little local Colorado problem. We'll work it out and see you in the committee room before ten o'clock."

Leaving no room for argument and remaining steadfast, Pitkin rose and began talking about how tiring the trip had been and how he and Hugo wanted to get checked into their hotel. Trailing promises to fill Baldwin in, and streaming assurances that he and Hugo could fend for themselves, Pitkin talked his way to the door, through it and into the reception area. Through it all, Hugo remained silent.

Once they had retrieved their suitcases and gained the open hallway, Hugo asked, "Okay, Pitkin, I went along, but what the hell was all that about?"

"Hugo, did you ever see a kid hankering for some sugary piece of candy, but not wanting to come right out and ask for it?"

"Sure, but..."

"Well, Baldwin wanted to tag along with us to Moffat's office so much he was about to pop, but he couldn't bring himself to come right out and ask."

"When you put it that way, I see," laughed Hugo, and the more he thought about it the more he enjoyed it. Soon the two of them were re-enforcing one another's laughter with snatches of Baldwin's offer.

"Departmental business, Hugo," sniffed Pitkin.

"Unholy hour of eight," mimicked Hugo.

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"I just suppose I'll have to go along," added Pitkin in his best Baldwin voice.

In a somewhat more serious manner, Pitkin offered a philosophical thought, "Washington really isn't so bad, Hugo. In fact, it's a pretty nice city. The natives are generally friendly and easygoing. You just have to be wary of all the outlanders who have their feet stuck in Potomac mud and who comprise the largest mass of the pushy and cushy ever assembled on this planet."

CHAPTER EIGHT

Eldon Moffat was senatorial from his magnificent shock of coiffurist tended hair to the soft black leather of his narrow perfectly arched French shoes. The deep blue, chalk striped suit coat was longishly cut, subtly hinting of a parallel with the stately legislators of the mid-nineteenth century, the Calhouns and Websters. Either golf course time or the sunlamp of the Senate gymnasium kept the face tanned and careful attention to diet kept the profile slim, almost classically gaunt.

The Senator was a study in confidence and wisdom, one of the finest and most finished products of manufacturing and packaging yet produced. His financial backers were content with

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his voting record, the party was satisfied with his staff written speeches, the public dutifully awed by the image, and Eldon Moffat gloried in being the center of it all.

If there was an abrasive note in Moffat's world, if there was an ugly pimple under his fine white collar, it was the distasteful, but necessary, business of fire suppression. The small fires threatened or actually set by disgruntled constituents did not trouble him. He had legions of staff whose sole mission it was to quench such sparks with a bucket of federal money here, another bucket there, or, more likely, a letter, a promise, a packet of information, sometimes, if the need was great enough, a visit by Moffat himself.

No, there was no difficulty whatever with the missed social security check in some small town, the disability pension matter in another, and the hundreds of other anemic cries from the small and weak. The illusion and the fact of power and influence that was embodied in Eldon Moffat kept him politically enthroned in a senate sinecure where the average and the mundane troubled him not at all.

Senator Moffat did, however, worry and did concern himself with destructive fires lapping around the ankles of the large and powerful. Those fires Moffat battled he. He had seen fellow club members perish when their inattention had allowed small fires to flourish. The ghastly spectacle of a crisply fried large denomination contributor was only less terrifying than a senator without a fire escape. Eldon Moffat had, in the past few days, felt some distinctly warm breezes blowing from the west, specifically his state of Colorado. No inferno for him. He intended to make certain there was no fire where he smelled smoke.

"Hugo, Pitkin, I can't tell you how delighted I am to see you. Please, please be seated. I know it's a bit early, especially by our time." Moffat's suggestion that he was mindful of the two-hour differential between Eastern and Mountain Standard Time was a distinctly false note when sounded in the French decor of his elegant office.

"We're always glad to meet with you, Senator," said Hugo, "and the earlier hour suits us very well."

"I'm sure it does. You both look well. Pitkin you've been up in the mountains. You can't get that kind of color anywhere else. The sun even bleached your hair a bit, or am I seeing a few

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more silver threads among the gold? God, how I envy you fellows, living and working back home near the mountains."

"Washington hasn't been so very bad for you, Senator," said Pitkin. "You look as fit as I've ever seen you."

"Do I now? Why, thank you, Pitkin. I try to keep myself in as good a condition as time permits. If I didn't, I'm afraid this place would put me in an early grave." He went on in a reflective way, "I guess I'm really an old war horse in a new kind of race. There's no more of the leisurely debate we used to enjoy, and a man out of shape could easily be trampled by some of these young bucks. But you two didn't come here to listen to that kind of talk. Here we sit and I haven't even offered you coffee."

"Thank you, Senator, but we just finished breakfast, and I think we're set for now," said Hugo.

"Just so," agreed Moffat, "I'm glad to hear you've eaten, but I must confess, I'm embarrassed for not having had you up here for breakfast. I had intended for us to have a bite together, but I had another commitment I couldn't avoid."

"We understand," interposed Hugo, "you can't spend your time eating with everybody who drops in from back home. You'd never get anything else done and pretty soon you'd have my shape."

"Nothing wrong with a few extra pounds, Hugo," said Moffat heartily. "I'm sure you enjoy your meals more than I enjoy the bird food they let me eat."

Shifting the conversation to matters at hand, Moffat observed, "I know you came to town for Alvin Sumter's authorization hearings. I'll be sitting in since I'm on the Committee. I'll try to keep the sharks from tearing off something vital." He chortled at his own crude little joke. "I asked you to come by just to see if you have any questions or thoughts about the hearings."

Pitkin and Hugo exchanged glances before Pitkin spoke, "No questions, Senator. Hugo's prepared statement pretty well lays out our program along the three option lines the committee staff requested, increased operational levels, status quo, and reduced program effort."

"Yes, I've read the statement and agree it's well done. Concise and to the point, refreshing in these days of long

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discourses on every conceivable trivial issue. I suppose you both realize there will be questions about those pesky barrels?"

"We both knew there would be from the minute we found them," said Pitkin.

"Good, I knew the two of you would be ahead of the game." He paused while his gaze swept around the office as though expecting to see his next question written on his original Manet or engraved on the gray stone given to him by the chatelain of the Chateau de Cialare. However, Moffat already had the question in mind, he paused only to give it a bit more effect.

"I trust you have also given some consideration to the possibility of finding some interest among members of the Committee in the problems with your new recovery building?"

"We anticipated some interest their, yes." Pitkin's reply was flat and uninviting of further development.

Bland answers notwithstanding; Moffat's firefighting instincts carried him forward. "It has been a difficult break-in period, has it not?"

"Difficult would be a fair statement," Pitkin's voice remained dry and neutral, but polite.

"Still, the building is a unique affair, and the engineering was necessarily innovative?"

"The concepts are well enough known to lend themselves to incorporation into such a building, but there have been unanticipated experiences," said Pitkin.

"I see, or at least I hope I do." Moffat's words rippled like slow water over large rocks, easily and softly. "Would you assign a reason to these...experiences?"

"Not definitively," countered Pitkin.

The barest trace of a smile tugged at Moffat's lips as he studied Pitkin. From past experiences with the two men, he knew Pitkin would be the one to understand the unspoken questions, and his expectation had been well founded. Moffat felt he had but a short step yet to go. He took it carefully.

"Should the question arise, although I have no reason to believe it will, as to the underlying cause for last week's filter malfunctions, your answer would be...?" He left it hanging for Pitkin to finish.

"The specific cause has not yet been identified by our technical people. To be perfectly honest, Senator, the jury is still

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out." As he spoke, Pitkin wrestled with a question of his own. He wondered how Moffat knew about the in-house theory that the emissions had occurred because of problems with the filters or the electrical controls for them. That fact had been carefully kept out of the news release, at his direction. Until he had a report in hand from Meeker and Flagler, he would refuse to assign a cause for what he had called, for Moffat's benefit, an "experience." The only explanation for the senator's inside information was a leak from someone inside Rocky Flats.

Moffat was now smiling broadly, "In my mind, that's a sound and commendable approach. I suppose it's the only way men of your scientific orientation would dare tackle such a complex matter. To assign blame at this point could be most embarrassing for you and for...the entire nuclear program. I guess you would agree with that?"

Hugo spoke as Pitkin would have expected, but without the enthusiasm or conviction he would have displayed a few short weeks ago. "Our mandate, Senator, is to execute a congressionally assigned program. Frequently, we encounter complex problems with many technical inter-associations. Therefore, we are locked into a systematic pattern of analysis, and premature speculations are seldom productive."

The statement sounded suspiciously political and Moffat nearly retreated from his beaming approbation of what he believed he had heard; however, he dismissed any concern he might have entertained. "Hugo, I'm glad you're running the show out there. You're appreciation of the program encourages me, and I know the Secretary depends heavily on you, as he does on Pitkin. I'll look forward to seeing the both of you in the hearing room. Together we might just put some staples in a few flap jaws."

Conspicuously consulting his watch, Moffat rose to escort them to the door. After vigorously pumping their hands as though he would not see them for years, he left them in his reception room with instructions to his aide to give them any assistance they might require.

The harried and disheveled assistant was visibly relieved when Pitkin and Hugo assured him they were not inclined to ply him with requests of any kind. As they shuffled toward the door, the aide offered small talk about their trip and the hearing. As they stepped into the hallway, he offered a final word, "Please give my

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regards to Mister Wellington. I understand he is enjoying his work at Rocky Flats."

"We'll tell him we talked with you," Pitkin promised as he and Hugo turned and headed down the long hallway.

They waited for a slow elevator, descended a floor, stepped out and looked at a locator board for their hearing room. As they negotiated the corridors studying the room numbers, Pitkin reflected on the remarks of Moffat's aide. "It wouldn't require much detective work to determine whose big mouth talked to Moffat's office about a defective filtration system."

"Lamont," nodded Hugo.

"I think we ought to fire his butt."

"For talking to a senator?"

"No. For talking to a senator without first talking to you or to me," explained Pitkin. "There's a difference, a damn big difference."

"We'd have a tough time making it stick," argued Hugo, stopping in front of the hearing room door.

"I suppose so," said Pitkin, dropping the subject as they stepped into the high vaulted hearing chamber.

They found only one casual clerk in the spacious room. She was at the far end on the elevated platform behind the curving wooden parapet. The leather headrests of a dozen chairs could be seen evenly spaced behind the upper edge of the elongated desk, and jutting up at various angles on flexible arms, a dozen microphone heads waited, one for each chair. The clerk was moving slowly along behind the chairs placing writing pads and yellow pencils on the unseen desktop, one for each chair and microphone.

The room was illuminated only by light from the tall windows. The wood panels lent the room a dignified aspect as they stared down at the rows of chairs and the witness table. The green topped table had been placed a discrete distance from the horizontal balustrade, which topped the senatorial deskwork.

Hugo set his briefcase on a front row chair, and, muttering something about the men's room, left Pitkin alone with the diffidence of the distributing clerk. Pitkin deposited his case on an adjoining chair and began walking casually toward the curved wooden bar and the Chairman's seat, designated as such by its central position behind the desk.

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The clerk ignored him until he spoke. "I guess we're a little early."

She caught his light smile and exchanged it for one of her own. "Oh, things'll pick up soon enough. Are you testifying?"

"Yes. I'm with the gentleman who just left."

"Then you're Mister Chase?"

"No. Mister Chase just stepped out."

Squinting down at a stack of papers Pitkin recognized as copies of Hugo's written statement, she scanned the opening sentences. "Then you're Doctor Waay, and," reading again, "you're from Rocky Flats, Colorado." She sounded as though she thought Rocky Flats was simply a town in Colorado, but the idea of the state seemed to interest her. "I went skiing out there one time."

"Where?" he asked.

"Winter Park. It was beautiful, but I'm afraid it was a lost cause; I'm not really athletic."

"It only takes time. If I can slide around on skis, anyone can. You really should try again."

"I might," she said absently as she began laying out copies of the statement, one for each chair. Halfway along the row, she paused and looked down at him. "Is it true what some of the staff are saying that the plant you and Mister Chase operate? That it has released radiation into the housing developments north of Denver?"

"There's been some problem with radiation getting out of the plant, but knowing staff, I'll bet it isn't as bad as they say."

"Some of them say it's pretty bad, but you're right, they usually exaggerate." Two men coming in the side door carrying light bars and electrical cord interrupted her. "It looks like you're going to be on television," she said, dropping the conversation and moving along with her stack of papers.

The girl had been right on two counts. The television crew was soon assembling light stands and stringing a network of wires around the room. Her assurance that things would quickly pick up also proved to be true. Staff members strolled in and out of the doors as though testing the atmosphere for their patron senators, and a few early arriving spectators began selecting seats from among the neat rows of chairs.

Pitkin took his seat in the front row and was soon joined by Hugo and Hatch Baldwin. The two had met in the hallway, and

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the well-scrubbed Baldwin was exuding charm and deliberate calm. He threw a familiar wave at a staff member before turning his attention to Pitkin.

"I was just asking Hugo about your visit with Senator Moffat. It was his impression that everything went quite well. Do you agree?"

"You mean after Hugo vomited on his carpet?"

Baldwin's jaw dropped, just for an instant. "That's sick humor, Pitkin."

"Did you expect me to say Hugo's impression was off the mark? It was a sick question, Hatch, but to give it the answer it deserves, we managed."

"You're a bit testy this morning, Pitkin. And I might add; your surly attitude isn't appreciated. I certainly don't want it reflected in our testimony this morning. I have quite enough to worry about without having to apologize for field employees who screw up the works and leave it to headquarters to hold the program together and, when called to Washington, forget just where they really are."

Baldwin's intent was the reduction of Pitkin Waay to what Baldwin perceived to be the "field employee's" proper place. He had chosen badly. The time was hardly appropriate and Baldwin simply didn't know his employee.

Pitkin quietly studied Baldwin for a long moment. The instant Baldwin's glance dropped, Pitkin stood, and began re-packing his briefcase. Baldwin watched long enough to comprehend what Pitkin was about.

"Just what the hell are you doing?"

Ignoring the Deputy Assistant, Pitkin spoke quietly to Hugo. "I'll wait for you outside."

Hugo was glaring at Baldwin and for a moment the Deputy Assistant thought he was going to lose both "field employees." As Pitkin walked away, Baldwin fumed, "Goddamn him. He's going to have to answer to the Secretary for this."

Hugo spoke with controlled fury, "I hope you're prepared to explain to the Secretary why he left. I also hope you know that the Secretary considers Pitkin Waay to be the most scientifically competent man in the Department of Energy. I'll stay and read the statement, and I'll testify on administration and budget, but your

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scientific expertise just walked out the back door, Mister Baldwin."

Before Hugo finished speaking, Baldwin's face was white with rage and frustration. The prospect of a confrontation between himself and Pitkin in the Secretary's presence ushered in the cold fear of experiencing a career disruption. Hatch Baldwin began to feel the slender branches of higher bureaucracy bend beneath his weight. He spun on his heel and stalked into the hallway.

Baldwin found Pitkin leaning idly against the wall a few long paces removed from the little group, which always clusters around the door of a hearing room. Pitkin met him with a quiet smile. "What took you so long, Hatch?"

"Why you arrogant bastard," seethed Baldwin.

"Another word like that and I'll move down to the first floor. Now tell me in gentlemanly terms why you're out here."

"I came out here to see if you've realized what you're doing."

"I did before I left. You see, Hatch, I've been considering resigning from the Department for some time. Why not now?"

There was a note of finality in Pitkin's words, and Baldwin knew the statement was not contrived and was utterly and completely true. His reeling thought could not formulate a coherent answer to the flat, "Why not now?"

"You mean you'd quit, just like that. Chuck everything and walk away?"

"The government isn't everything, Hatch, at least, not to me. I expect that's one large difference between your world and mine. And walk away? Certainly, but not before Secretary Stewart and I have a nice long chat about `field employees.'"

"Okay, I was off base. I admit it. Is that what you want, an apology?"

"I want two things. First, I want you to go back in there and apologize to Hugo Chase for being impertinent and insulting. Hugo was working for the program before you ever heard the word `energy.' He has performed the kind of work you only dream about. Rocky Flats operates today because of his skill and because of his dedication, and I will not have his record compromised or libeled by your silly presumptions. Second, I want it understood that you keep your mouth shut during the hearing."

"I'll have to introduce you...I..."

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"Not one damn word, Hatch. Not even a yes or no."

The Deputy Assistant struggled with himself. His instinct was to lash out and to threaten, but he knew there was nothing to do but accept Pitkin's terms. He had the awful feeling that Pitkin was perfectly willing to walk away and leave him the embarrassment of trying to explain things to his superiors. Yet, he could not agree to the humiliating terms without some attempt to salvage a fragment, however small, of his esteem. His notion of his own presence forced him to make the effort.

"I'll do it, but remember, Doctor Waay, there'll be another time, other circumstances. And if I'm asked a direct question in there, I'll have to answer."

"No you won't, I'll see to it. Don't threaten me, Hatch and don't try to compromise. We're not in your office, and I'm not another deputy assistant competing with you for an assignment or for a chance to claim some credit that'll get me a pat on the head. It's take it or leave it. And I might suggest you do one or the other pretty soon. I have the feeling the hearing's about to get started in there."

"All right, but I've got one condition. If you take this to the Secretary, even if I go along with you, there's no reason to buy off on your deal now. Do I have your word you won't report this to Stewart?"

Baldwin was totally unprepared for Pitkin's response. With a broad smile, Pitkin immediately agreed. "Hatch, I give you my word. Stewart won't hear a word about this from me." Thumping the blinking Baldwin on the back like an old friend, Pitkin turned the startled Deputy Assistant toward the door and steered him into the hearing room.

Facing Hugo, Baldwin stumbled miserably, but managed to get through a full apology with only some minor prompting from Pitkin. His most egregious errors were forgetting to call Hugo "Mister Chase" and forgetting the word "impertinent," otherwise Pitkin was satisfied.

When Baldwin stepped a few paces apart to smile a greeting at a female staffer, Hugo muttered his relief at the quick reversal. "Dammit, Pitkin, you had me sweating for a minute. I think he would've tried to tough it out if I hadn't told him Stewart thought you were a genius and would have his hide if you quit."

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"Yes, I agree. The thought of facing the Secretary was enough to dampen his silk socks."

"Well, the next time you decide to rag one of these headquarters types, let me know ahead of time."

Baldwin was occupied with ego repair. He was busily waving at staff friends and letting the little world in on the fact he was a personage of some importance. He was doing remarkably well until he saw a staffer slip through the doorway behind the chairman's seat and head directly toward them.

"Pitkin," hissed Baldwin, "it's Charlie Webber, the Chairman's counsel. I've got to talk to him or he'll think I'm crazy."

"Did it ever occur to you that you are?" asked Pitkin. But before Webber arrived, he mercifully took an important corner off Hatch's gag. "Go ahead and talk to him, but not a word to any senator."

The relief was written into Hatch's voice as he called out, "Charlie, good to see you, my friend."

If Webber was surprised at the heartier than usual greeting, he didn't show it. "Hello, Hatch." The committee staffer looked past Baldwin as he asked, "And you, sir, must be Mister Chase."

Hugo shook the outstretched hand and inclined his head at Pitkin. "Yes, and this is my deputy, Doctor Waay."

Webber extended his hand to Pitkin, and addressed them both; "I'm Charlie Webber. I work with Chairman Sumter."

Pitkin noticed the halftone implication created by the use of "with" rather than the correct word, "for." He also noted how easily Baldwin was reduced to a mere deputy assistant by the imperious senatorial employee. Pitkin felt a flood of anger at the positional foppery on display. His disgust swept away the nudge toward inferiority that the man's attitude had given and was designed to give to the confidence of others. He decided he would nudge back.

Baldwin was explaining the absence of the Secretary. "Didn't you get our message. I'm positive that the Secretary himself tried to call the Chairman. When the White House called, the Secretary, of course, had no choice but to go."

"I do remember something about a call, Hatch, but we are disappointed not to be hearing from Secretary Stewart. However,

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we can't let that keep us from giving a good hearing to Mister Chase and Doctor Waay." Continuing the associative "we," he gave Hugo a figurative pat on the head. "We haven't had an opportunity to read your prepared statement, but I'm certain we'll follow it carefully."

Pitkin couldn't contain himself any longer. "I'm dreadfully sorry to hear you haven't taken the time to read our testimony," said Pitkin, loudly enough to send his voice to the ears of those standing nearby and to other listeners sitting at least five rows away.

Webber's eyes flew open as he threw quick glances around the room. "It just happens I have an extra copy, Charlie," Pitkin's heavy emphasis on the name was a roar in the sensitive ears of the still gaping Webber, "and you may have it." Pitkin held a rolled copy of their statement far out in front of him. Webber snatched it from his hand as though it had been a white finger pointing and naming him to be a negligent and duty-shirking assistant.

"Since you work for," Pitkin came down hard on the word "for," "Chairman Sumter, you may give him our regards, and you may run our message up to him that we are here and at his disposal."

Webber turned and stalked away. His rigid back was an eloquent reflection of his frame of mind. Somehow the code had been rudely broken. Nobody spoke down to any powerful committee staffer except Senators and sometimes they exercised discretion in dealing with the most exalted of the staff.

"I don't believe what I just heard," breathed Baldwin, almost choking. "You managed to torpedo and deep six every shred of good will we ever had on this entire Committee. You're a fool, Pitkin."

"And he's a posturing, strutting fool," said Pitkin. "All your good relations will come bouncing back the minute it serves his interests."

As he spoke, Pitkin felt a light hand on his shoulder. He turned and looked into the smiling face of Alvin Sumter, Chairman of the Senate Committee on Energy.

"Pitkin, my boy. I'm delighted tah see you. And Hugo, you look as fit as a pin."

The courtly Senator Sumter had never been known to speak at any pace other than authentic southern slow. The

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deliberate selection and savoring of each word was soft and pleasant for those who were in his presence to listen. The pacing was disconcerting for those who wished to engage in dialogue because it was difficult to determine when the old gentleman was finished. Fitting words into any of the segments was awkward because it was Sumter's custom to simply continue until his thought was entirely finished. He seemed to not hear the incomplete sentences, the phrases that were thrust into the ranks of his slowly marching utterances.

Hugo forgot the Senator's speaking pattern and began, "It's our..."

The Chairman continued, "And Mistah Baldwin, isn't it? We are always honored tah have one of the Secretary's representatives appear before the Committee."

Baldwin stared at Pitkin, afraid to speak, but equally afraid not to. However, he needn't have been concerned. The Chairman was not finished.

"Sorry tah hear the Secretary was called tah other affairs, but we all understand. After all, the President is the President."

Having offered them that profound thought, he seemed to have finished. Pitkin began to accept his welcome, "We're always happy...."

The Chairman, however, still had a fragment to complete. "Now isn't that so, Pitkin?"

Relieved to be addressed directly and to be given a specific invitation to speak, Pitkin replied, "It certainly seems to me that the President is indeed the President, Mister Chairman."

"Why, of course he is. And the Secretary's bound tah answer a summons from his leadah." His old eyes twinkling, the Senator gave Pitkin a long look. "Doctah Waay, I think you put a welt on Mistah Webbah's backside. I have been persuaded for some time now that our Mistah Webbah has forgotten entirely that Senators are elected and Senators appoint staff. Actually he is an well-educated and quite capable young man. I'm hopeful he will profit from his little encounter and not become malicious or mischievous in his work."

Pitkin made no attempt to reply, and it was well he did not, because the Senator was not finished. He had yet another pleasantry to visit upon them before he was willing to take up Committee business.

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Dropping the pretended formality he had adopted to discuss Webber, he returned with keen interest to fishing. "Pitkin, I have not caught a fish, not a single one, since we had our hearings in Colorado and you took me tah that little trout stream. Have you been back there?"

"Not to that stream, Mister Chairman, but last weekend I went to a small hidden lake and did very well."

"Did you?" exclaimed Sumter. "Would you consider taking me there if I should just happen tah get out tah your country before the summer is over?"

"I'd be delighted, Senator. At your convenience."

"Agreed," he said grasping Pitkin's hand. "I'll make every effort to visit you, soon." To the others he said, "Having concluded an agreement for my personal pleasure, I do believe it is time for us to be about our business."

CHAPTER NINE

It was only a few minutes before the distinguished Senator Alvin Sumter of South Carolina was looking down at them from his seat behind the wooden rail and making preparations to call the Committee to order. A cold eyed Charlie Webber took a seat next to the Chairman, but at a word from the Senator, stood and took a seat along the wall with other staffers and aides.

Soon the door behind Sumter's chair admitted a large senator, whose thick neck hung in heavy fleshy folds, making it utterly impossible for observers to determine where his chin left off and his jowls began. In the best senatorial custom, he squeezed

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Sumter's arm, and leaned over to whisper in his Chairman's ear before taking the chair on Sumter's immediate right.

"The Committee will be in order. We seem tah be a few minutes behind schedule so the Chair will not make a lengthy statement. Today's hearing has been called tah considering authorizations for the Department of Energy's facility in Colorado. That's the plant we all call Rocky Flats. The Chair is fully aware that a hearing on such individual matters is not the customary way of proceeding. However, recent events and certain concerns about Rocky Flats have convinced the Chair of the need for these hearings. The Chair had invited the Secretary of Energy tah attend and give us his thoughts on whether the plant should be decommissioned, removed tah another location. Unfortunately for our hearings, Secretary Stewart was called tah the White House on pressing business and will be unable to join us. I have also been told that Assistant Secretary Wendover is still in New Mexico, but we have a fine representative from the Department's headquarters with us today, Mistah Hatch Baldwin. With him are two excellent people from Rocky Flats, the Director, Mister Hugo Chase, and the Deputy Director, Doctah Pitkin Waay. Gentlemen would you step forward and be sworn by the clerk."

By the time the three had moved up the witness table, been sworn, and arranged yet another member of the Committee had joined their papers on the table, Senator Sumter. The rimless but small lens glasses combined with a bow tie and thinning black hair, parted directly in the middle, to create a professorial look. He was a small man and unobtrusive in the high backed chair immediately to the left of the Chairman. Chairman Sumter, however, treated him as though he were the single most important person in the room. In some unseen political ways, he may have been.

"The Chair is pleased tah note the presence of the Honorable Senator from the State of Massachusetts. We're just getting underway here, Senator Fitchburg, and if you have a comment for the record, the Chair would be happy to receive it at this time."

Woburn Fitchburg, a senator of legendary proportions, had, in the most recent elections, been re-elected to his sixth consecutive term in the Senate. He was the ranking minority

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member on the Committee, fiercely independent, usually caustic to everyone, and always brief and straight to business.

"As you know, Mister Chairman, I am not convinced of the need for this kind of special hearing. Rocky Flats may or may not require funds for a major relocation, but I believe the question could be examined in the regular authorization package for the Department of Energy." Squinting into the TV lights, he added, "I would also deplore any attempts to turn this hearing into a side show for any special interest groups, whatever their persuasion. That's all I have for now, Mister Chairman."

Turning to his right, Sumter asked, "Anything for the record from the distinguished Senator from Kentucky?"

"Only a brief observation, Mister Chairman," drawled the heavy Senator from amongst his folds of skin, "I listened with great care to my colleague, the Senator from Massachusetts, and want him to know I share his reluctance to proceed with this type of hearing. I know he shares my concern over the attempts by some to weaken our defense efforts, but we cannot set the precedent of attempting to conduct hearings on every one of our defense establishments. Why, the task would be endless."

"While I oppose this type of hearing as a matter of principle, I might not oppose a special hearing for the uranium enrichment works at Paducah," snapped Fitchburg. The reference to Paducah, Kentucky and the needling implication that individualized hearings would not be welcomed by Senator Danville reflected the acerbic attitude associated with Fitchburg. Danville's only reaction was a broad smile at his sour senate mate.

"The Chair welcomes the comments of the Senators. For the record it should be said that this hearing was originally set to discuss authorizations for Rocky Flats. A number of questions had been raised about new structures and new facilities out there and the Chair, at the suggestion of some members of the Committee, agreed to hearings. It was only recently decided to include testimony on removal of the plant. As the Chair said a few minutes ago, we had hoped to have the Secretary's thoughts on the subject. Without him, the Chair will have to simply confine our inquiry to the information our witnesses can provide. Mister Baldwin, you may proceed."

"Mister Chairman," interposed Pitkin, "let me introduce the Department's representatives at the witness table."

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Sumter's head came up and he even opened his mouth to speak. Then, with what may have been a faint smile and a glance at Baldwin's beat red face, he deferred and turned his attention back to the papers on his desk.

"Mister Chairman, on my left is Mister Hatch Baldwin, Deputy Assistant Secretary to Assistant Secretary Wendover. On my right, is Mister Hugo Chase, Director of the Rocky Flats facility in Colorado. My name is Doctor Pitkin Waay. I serve as deputy to Mister Chase. We have a written statement, and I believe each of you has a copy on your desk. If it meets with the approval of the Chair, we would ask that Mister Chase be permitted to highlight portions of his testimony and that the entire statement be printed in the Committee's report."

"The Chair notes, Doctah Waay, that you are obviously familiar with our procedures. I hope your insights will expedite the work of the Committee. Without objection, the written statement of Mister Chase will appear in the report."

"Mister Chairman, members of the Committee, my name is Hugo Chase, and, as Doctor Waay has suggested, I will summarize the key points of my statement. At the request of your staff, we have included three funding options for each aspect of our program components."

While Hugo took the senators through the summary points of his statement, three additional senators entered the room and took their assigned seats. The fact that more than one senator appeared signified the hearing had generated more than casual interest. However, some of the senatorial appearances were traceable to the presence of the TV lights and the attendance of a number of reporters.

Taking a seat to the right of Senator Danville was a lady who could easily have been mistaken for a librarian. With steel rimmed glasses hanging around her neck from a silver chain, a starched white blouse pinching together into a high collar, and a stern face glowering at the world, one would, understandably, have expected her to "shhhh" the entire assemblage any moment. The appearance was misleading. Dalles Klamath was no librarian. She was not at all quiet where environmental issues were concerned. Her voice was anything but a whisper when women's rights were at issue, and any "shhhing" she did was strictly parliamentary. Not a few special interest representatives felt that

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Oregonians must have felt exceedingly ill-disposed toward Washington when they sent Senator Klamath into their midst.

Walking in with the Senator from Oregon was Eldon Moffat. Instead of immediately sitting down, he whispered for a moment with the Chairman, to Casey Danville who ignored him, and even made an abbreviated trip to the side of Woburn Fitchburg. Finally, he made his way to the fourth seat on Sumter's right, leaving an empty chair between himself and Senator Klamath.

Latest to arrive was a young, quite handsome senator who smiled all the way to his chair. He surveyed the crowd as if estimating its size and voting potential. Since Washingtonians do not vote for senators, Calumet DeKalb's reaction to this crowd was either practice or reflex. He did manage to settle down in a seat on Fitchburg's left and began leafing through the pages of Hugo's statement, but he did so absently while patting at his hair and continuously adjusting and readjusting his coat and necktie. Illinois had liked either the appearance or the performance of DeKalb in the House of Representatives well enough to send him to the Senate; how well they would like his more visible performance there was still an open question.

Hugo concluded his summarization and looked up at Sumter. "I'd be happy to answer questions, Mister Chairman."

"Mister Chairman, an inquiry?" called out Senator DeKalb.

"The Chair recognizes the Senator from Illinois who desires Tah State an inquiry."

"Mister Chairman, it was my understanding that the Secretary of Energy would be testifying this morning, and I do not see him at the witness table."

From among the aides and committee staffers sitting along the wall behind the Committee members, a young woman quickly stepped forward whispered in the ear of her handsome employer. At the same time Chairman Sumter patiently explained. "As the Chair advised the Committee, before the Senator from Illinois arrived, the Secretary had been called tah the White House. He will not appear before us today."

Waving the girl aside, DeKalb made an effort to recover from the effects of an ill-advised question. "The Senator apologizes for his late arrival. However, I would inquire further.

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Is it still the intent of the Chairman to explore matters relating to the bomb making plant in Colorado?"

"The Chair will proceed in an orderly manner. Since the original call for hearings was naturally budget related, it would seem the best use of our time would be to concentrate on the budget needs for the Rocky Flats plant. The Chair would include within the budget those matters pertaining to removal of the plant to a different and perhaps safer location."

"Mister Chairman," snapped Senator Klamath, "it was this Senator's understanding that we would inquire into recent events at the plant which have resulted in the exposure of many innocent people to dangerous radiation. Is the Chair now saying we are to be confined to budgetary matters?"

"Authorization is the business of this Committee and authorization was the subject set forth in the hearing notice sent to my office," said Fitchburg, waving a piece of paper. "Mister Chairman, with all respect to my colleague from Oregon, I would suggest she pursue her antinuclear campaign in a forum where she doesn't occupy the time of those who do not care to listen to speeches they have heard too many times."

The reply was ice cold. "If the distinguished Senator from Massachusetts could manage a decent concern for issues vital to this country, I am certain he would find my words and those of many of our colleagues less oppressive and more enlightening."

Chairman Sumter had heard it all before and was unmoved by either side. "According to our procedures, Senator Fitchburg, you may proceed."

"Mister Chairman," cried an insistent Klamath and a smiling DeKalb as a chorus of one.

The wily old Sumter continued speaking as though he had heard nothing at all. "To ask our fine witnesses any questions which the Chair feels are relevant to this hearing."

Again, but less insistent and more resigned, "Mister Chairman,"

Their years in the Senate and on Sumter's Committee should have instructed them to better effect. The Chairman was only in mid-sentence. "And as necessary, and from time to time, the Chair will rule on the propriety of questions. Senator Fitchburg..."

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"I thank the Chairman for still another demonstration of the wisdom which has made him a leader of extraordinary dimension."

Fitchburg and Hugo occupied the next five minutes doing what they both did best. They dug into construction costs, and they exchanged sums. They considered financing options and looked for hidden costs. The questions were terse and utterly devoid of rhetorical flourish. The answers were equally stark and bare.

Finally, the Chairman called time on Fitchburg, and turned to Casey Danville. "The Chair recognizes the Senator from Kentucky."

"Thank you, Mister Chairman." "Heavy" Danville, so called by a few inconsiderate detractors, settled himself a bit deeper into his folds of skin and consulted his handwritten notes before speaking.

"Mister Chase, I listened with great interest as you and the Senator from Massachusetts discussed some of the costs associated with operating your facility. I found it very enlightening and, "looking down the line at Fitchburg, "would not necessarily take exception to having any facility located in my state examined in the same manner. However, I would like to sharpen the inquiry and ask about one component of the Rocky Flats facility. Mister Chase, is my information correct on the cost of your new recovery building, forty million dollars?"

"That figure was the original estimate, Senator."

Danville professed surprise. "Are you suggesting to me, sir, that the actual cost exceeded the estimate? Lordy, lordy, we may have uncovered a new phenomenon in government contracting. What was the final cost, rounded off, Mister Chase?"

"To date, we have paid the contractor something on the order of seventy six million four hundred thousand dollars."

"Sounds to me like you had a slight overrun, Mister Chase."

"Some of the increased cost was due to change orders, Senator."

"During construction, you had the contractor build a few things a little higher or wider, or change a window or a wall here and there? Is that what you mean by change orders, Mister Chase?"

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"Certainly, you have correctly described the concept, however, in the case of the recovery building, we found it necessary to incorporate some major changes."

"Just for the purpose of clarification, Mister Chase, for those who are not familiar with your facility, could you outline in general terms what a recovery building is?"

"Since your question may lead into technical areas, I would defer to Doctor Waay who has an intimate understanding of these matters."

"It is not my intent to undertake a scientific exploration of the recovery process," said Danville quickly, "so I would ask Doctor Waay to remain on the high ground."

"Yes, indeed," agreed Sumter with less space between his words than usual. "Senator Danville has stated it well. We'll stay on the high ground through these technical matters."

"The recovery building at Rocky Flats has two purposes," began Pitkin, "The paramount objective is the recovery of plutonium from the various residues which are created by plutonium handling and processing in plant operations. The second objective is the recovery of americium which is a radioactive material with some industrial uses."

"Good capsule, Doctor Waay. Would it be crudely accurate to say the recovery building is your recycling center, a sort of scrap yard where you sort out the stuff that can be reused?"

"Your capsule would be more difficult for me to swallow than my own, but it's perhaps equally descriptive," replied Pitkin.

"Despite my rather imprecise description of your recovery building, I'm sure we all understand that very expensive and complex equipment is required, is it not, Doctor Waay?"

"It is, Senator."

"Now, Mister Chase made reference to major change orders submitted by the government during the construction process. Again, staying on the high ground, as you have so thoughtfully done thus far, what changes were required?"

"We determined the volume of anticipated material containing plutonium residues would be greater than originally planned; therefore, we increased the size of the storage area."

"Pursuing my crude analogy, Doctor Waay, you're saying you needed a larger scrap yard where the stuff is dumped and held until the sorting begins?"

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"I'll accept that, Senator, with one very important qualification. I would not, by indulging in this kind of illustrative exercise, want to leave the impression we handle plutonium residues casually, or that there is anything slap-dash about the recovery process itself. I only offer my reservation because I believe your generalizations may, if pursued too far, create misapprehensions that could not be repaired in the time we have here today."

"I accept your qualification, Doctor Waay. What other modifications were ordered, major changes, I mean."

"We added interim storage vault capacity."

"Storage for the refined plutonium and americium?"

"Correct."

"Why was that necessary?"

"Our operational experience was longer holding periods. For reasons unrelated to Rocky Flats or the recovery building we found ourselves with greater quantities on site for longer periods of time. The reasons I alluded to bear upon operations at other weapons facilities and would be better explained for you by Assistant Secretary Wendover who has overall responsibility for the weapons program."

"Is the greater than anticipated volume of material on hand a current problem, Doctor?"

"I would hesitate to discuss specifics in open session, Senator, but in general we do have a substantial amount of plutonium on hand at any given time. Again it's a result of the way the weapons program currently operates."

"You are referring to logistics and management factors and not basic programmatic changes?"

"Exactly, Senator."

"Would all the changes taken together require a doubling of the cost of the recovery facility?"

Pitkin turned to Hugo and said, "It sound's like he's back in your ballpark."

"I can only recite to you, Senator Danville, the computations from our contracting office. But to summarize, yes. Material, labor, all the allowable costs do almost double the original estimate," said Hugo.

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Looking at Sumter who was about to interrupt, Danville asked, "Would the Chair indulge me for a few additional moments?"

"Mister Chairman," called Moffat, silent until this moment, "I wonder if we shouldn't pursue our regular order. I'm sure other members of the Committee have questions, I'm sure I do, and if times are extended without compelling reason, we'll find ourselves hopelessly bogged down in exceptions."

"I find the questions interesting and the answers illuminating," shot back Fitchburg, "and I commend the Senator from Kentucky. If necessary, Mister Chairman, I would surrender time from my next round to allow this line of questioning to be pursued."

"Mister Chairman, I have no objection to a few more questions, if the Senator will be brief." Klamath's cooperative attitude carried the point. Sumter was not inclined to rule against three senior members of the committee.

"You may proceed, Senator Danville, but the Chair would appreciate brevity."

The fact that time limits were more often violated than respected had made Moffat's objection seem a trifle extraordinary. Some of the staff must have thought it was unusual since there was increased whispering among them. And the Senators from Massachusetts and Oregon had begun to listen a bit more carefully. Veteran Senate watchers among the press corps cocked their heads and looked at one another. "What was bothering Moffat?" they wondered.

"Thank you for your indulgence, Mister Chairman," said Danville, "I'll not be much longer. Mister Chase, setting aside the changes you ordered because of what Doctor Waay called 'operational experience,' why were so many other changes required in the recovery building?"

Hugo had not been prepared for this line of questioning and he sought clarification. "I'm not sure I comprehend the question, Senator. We ordered changes, as the need for them became apparent. I can assure you nothing unnecessary was added."

"I don't think you understand my question, Mister Chase. I am not suggesting there was any gold-plating of the type we find so often in government projects these days, thick carpets,

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decorator furnishings, executive suites, and so forth. Let me try my question this way. Isn't it true that you were making every effort to insure as safe a building as possible?"

"Yes, Senator. Many of our modifications were reactions to demands for a safer operation."

"In fact, a departmental order on radiation standards was issued in the very middle of construction was it not?"

Pitkin and Hugo both began to realize where Danville was going with his interrogation. At least his immediate goal was in view.

Pitkin took it upon himself to respond. "Standards for radiation emissions for Rocky Flats were changed, Senator, and the order was issued shortly after we had reached the midpoint in work on the recovery building. If I can anticipate your next question, we were, as a consequence of the new standards, required to redesign much of the equipment for the building."

"To your credit, Doctor Waay, did you not write a memorandum to Department headquarters on this matter? And in your memorandum didn't you point out that the new equipment should be obtained through competitive bidding?"

"I would guess you have a copy of my memorandum, Senator."

"Your guess would be correct, Doctor. Mister Chairman, I have copies of the memorandum for the members of the Committee. I would ask that it be included in the record of these proceedings."

"Without objection, Doctor Waay's memorandum...what's the date of the thing, Casey? Oh, I see it here. We'll designate it Attachment Number 1. Attachment 1 will be included in its entirety."

"What response did you receive from headquarters, Doctor Waay, if you can remember? I realize it was some years ago and there have been many intervening events."

"I remember very well, Senator. It was a directive that the equipment in question would be aggregated into a single sole source purchase and it would be handled by headquarters."

"For clarification, the effect was to relieve your office of the purchasing authority and to place the authority in Washington?"

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"Correct, and it was our understanding the purchase would be from a single source without bidding among competitors."

"In good round numbers, Doctor, what was your estimate of the reasonable cost of this equipment?"

"Between eight and nine million dollars."

"Do you recall how much the Department actually paid for it?"

"As I have testified, Senator, the matter was handled in Washington, but unofficially, I have heard the seller was paid something on the order of fifteen million dollars."

The newsmen were scribbling furiously. The backbench aides were whispering furiously. The Senators were listening intently, and Eldon Moffat was turning a pale white.

"Mister Chairman," cried Moffat, "we have indulged Mister Danville quite long enough. I must submit this line of inquiry is not relevant and would be better pursued in another Committee where it would be more germane. Department of Energy procurement is not within our jurisdiction."

Chairman Sumter's words were now spaced further apart than usual, or so it must have seemed to everyone who heard them. "Eldon, the Chair is mindful of the Committee's jurisdiction. However, these few little questions are hardly a serious transgression. Besides, the Chair hears no other objection."

"But Mister Chairman, I have reason to expect that Senator Danville may be mounting an attack upon me personally. As a matter of privilege, I demand this entire hearing be stayed until we can meet in executive session."

"Mister Chairman," said Danville, "if you would indulge me for a short time, I would conclude my questioning of our witnesses by asking four more questions. Further, I would give the Chairman my personal assurance that the questions and the answers will be brief, and the name of the Senator from Colorado will not be mentioned nor will there be any charge made against him directly or indirectly."

"Mister Chairman, I move this Committee stand adjourned. I will not permit this Committee to be used..."

A sharp snap of the gavel interrupted Moffat. Sumter glowered at him. "The motion is ruled out of order. Further, the Chair advises the Senator that the Chair has heard nothing that justify the implication that the Committee is being used for

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anything other than its intended purpose and the Chair will be the judge of how this Committee is being used. Senator Danville, please proceed."

"Mister Chase, what is the name of the company which supplied the equipment purchased by your headquarters?"

"Arbonne limited."

"Do you know any of the officers, employees, shareholders, or partners, if there are any, in Arbonne Limited."

"No, I do not."

"Did Arbonne supply the filtration system for your recovery building?"

"It did."

"I believe my next and last question would be more appropriately directed to Doctor Waay, however either of you may answer. Keeping in mind my request for a very brief answer, has the filtration equipment supplied by Arbonne performed as you expected it would?"

Pitkin leaned over the microphone, "No."

"As I promised, Mister Chairman, I have no further questions." Danville turned and began a whispered conference with his colleague from Oregon.

A stir swept the room. As a cool wind will rattle dead leaves against a windowpane, the curiosity of those attending the hearing rustled unanswered questions across the veil of the proceedings. It was a powerful and demanding force that Danville had unleashed.

The old Chairman took the pulse of the situation and decided to continue. He felt he had little choice in the matter. The attendance of more members of the media than he had expected, would have made adjournment look suspicious. There was also the matter of Moffat's motion for adjournment. Sumter had not endured in the Senate and mastered his Committee by acceding to the truculent demands of junior members, especially when those demands were made loudly and in public.

Sumter knew he would have to hold a tight rein on the remainder of the hearing. Controlling aggressive and ego driven senators was not an easy task under the best of circumstances. And to make matters worse, he was working in a clumsily and poorly defined situation. The scope of the hearing had been left for staff

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definition. The result was a vague statement of purpose, which invited the type of scalp hunt designed by Danville.

Senator DeKalb had slipped out of the room during the tedious exchange between Fitchburg and the Director of Rocky Flats. The consequence of his absence was a row of empty chairs to the left of Fitchburg. Thus it was the turn of Senator Klamath to inquire of the witnesses.

"The Senator from Oregon is recognized."

"Thank you, Mister Chairman." She had not "shhhhed" the spectators, but there was no need. She had their undivided attention, and she used it to good purpose. "Doctor Waay, I perceive you to be the scientific expert at the table; therefore, I will address my questions to you. Senator Danville asked you if the filtration system supplied by Arbonne Limited performed as expected, and you indicated it did not. Setting aside, for the moment the operation of the system, let me ask you this. Had it not been for the intercession of your headquarters, where would you have obtained the system?"

"Where is not the question, Senator. No one can could give you a fair answer. How is the question? It would have been purchased through the competitive bidding process. Who the successful bidder would have been, I cannot say."

"The system was not part of the building contract then?"

"Neither it nor the other Arbonne handling and recovery equipment."

"On balance, what is your assessment of the equipment, other than the filtration system, supplied by Arbonne?"

"On balance? I hesitate to make a generalization of that magnitude."

"If I state the premise that it did not perform as it should have, could you give me some specifics to support that statement?"

"Much of the Arbonne supplied equipment failed to comply with architectural specifications. A great deal of the conveyor machinery had to be substantially modified before it could be installed. Subsequently, we found faulty instrumentation and controls on a number of the glove boxes, and they required extensive refitting before they could be operated. The glass in a number of the glove boxes was not adequately leaded, and many seals were missing altogether. The remote handling mechanisms

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proved to be entirely unworkable. My listing is illustrative only and certainly not exhaustive of the specifics which could be used to support your statement, Senator."

"I certainly hope you didn't perform recovery operations under those conditions."

"No, as defects were discovered, they were corrected. Some problems required only repair; in other cases, we simply replaced parts which were defective."

"At no small expense to the taxpayer?"

"At very great expense, Senator."

"Did you maintain records which would reflect the condition of the Arbonne equipment?"

"Yes, we maintained log books in which such things are described in considerable detail."

"Would you make those records available to the Committee?"

"Gladly."

"Were these difficulties brought to the attention of your superiors in Washington?"

"Yes, numerous memoranda were written and submitted."

"Dalles, I have the file," interposed Danville, leaning toward his colleague from Oregon and offering her a thick file folder.

"Mister Chairman, may we have the departmental file made a part of the record?" asked Klamath, taking the file from Danville and holding it up for Sumter to see.

"Senator Danville, I do not at this time want to go into the question of your sources..." began Sumter.

"I understand..." Even long time friend and colleague Danville sometimes forgot.

Chairman Sumter was still talking. "But I do want to have your assurance that nothing in this file is classified."

"There is nothing..."

The Chairman would get there, given time. "Or of a personally incriminating nature, or which would prejudice later hearings or investigations."

"You have my assurances on all points, Mister Chairman," said Danville, speaking only when he was reasonably confident his Chairman had concluded.

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"The Chair will grant the request of the Senator from Oregon that the file be made a part of the record."

"Thank you..." But even Dalles Klamath sometimes stepped on her Chairman's lines.

"Subject to review by the Chair and by Committee counsel. You may proceed, Senator."

"Doctor Waay, returning to the filtration system, could you describe its function?" continued Klamath as certain as she could be that Sumter had finished.

"During our process work, as an example, gaseous radioactive waste is produced when natural air or nitrogen gas comes into direct contact with materials such as plutonium. Since these gases actually contain radioactive particles, it is necessary to pass these gases through a filter system before the vapor can be released into the atmosphere. There are other functions, but essentially we filter to take radiation out of the air."

"Just how effective is your system?"

"We have efficiency levels in our processing building of over ninety nine percent with particles seven one hundredths of a micron and larger. By any standard that's excellent filtration."

"You used your process work as an example. Is the filtration system in the recovery building the same as or similar to the processing labs?"

"They were designed to be even better."

"Have the design parameters been met?"

"It is not possible to say."

"Why not, Doctor Waay?"

"In order to get any meaningful data, it's necessary to have a certain amount of experience, operating time. In the case of the recovery building, we haven't had sufficient time on line to make a fair assessment."

"I understand from my people, that your recovery building has been shut down for repairs and adjustment more than it has operated in the past year. Is that true?"

"Your sources have been quite correct, Senator."

"As a matter of fact you ordered a complete shutdown only a few days ago?"

"I did."

"Please explain to this Committee the reason for the most recent shutdown."

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"Operations in the recovery building were shut down at my direction because air samplers located to the south and east of the plant displayed elevated radioactivity. As the Senator must know, we had an unrelated incident in the same area of the facility only a few days earlier when a deposit of barrels containing plutonium contaminated oil was discovered during a soil sampling demonstration. We were unable to immediately determine whether the source of radiation was the barrels or a second source or a combination. Later, our radiation control team traced plutonium emissions to the recovery building, and I immediately directed the building supervisor to discontinue all recovery work."

"Were any other precautions ordered?"

"I ordered our crews to seal the vent stacks, however, that would be a routine precaution."

"Is it your judgment, Doctor Waay, that the filter system failed?"

"Right now we have a technical group in the building, Senator. They are conducting a complete review to trace the reasons for the emissions we experienced. When their report has been finished, I'll be able to answer your question."

"Thank you, Doctor, I see my Chairman preparing to call time on me so I have no further questions at this point."

"I see the distinguished Senator from Illinois has again joined the Committee. The Chair recognizes Senator DeKalb."

Formerly a Representative who had made the giant leap to the Upper House, Calumet DeKalb was, perhaps, more vain than other senators, but he also had considerably more money than almost any of them. The massive family fortune was sustained by a large and profitable family business. Since older brothers occupied the key corporate positions, there had been no challenge suitable to him. Naturally, the youngest DeKalb had turned to politics.

DeKalb's family had not applauded his career choice, but they had accepted it. And after the first successes, his father had warmed to the idea. Determined that Calumet should have the best, the father saw to it that young DeKalb's staff included a few of the most capable and gifted advisers in the land. Under their watchful eyes, the young Senator had been kept from venturing into political minefields, and thereby from bringing adverse attention to the family, and, of course, the business.

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It had thus been something of a rebellion, which brought DeKalb into the arena with nuclear opponents and proponents. Perhaps he was already growing weary with Senate procedures and protocols which kept junior Senators from center stage, perhaps it was too much success too soon in his life, or it may have been a genuine interest in the subject, whatever the reason, he had announced to his staff that he intended to take an active part in the hearings on Rocky Flats.

There had been a flurry of briefings, there had been a great writing and rewriting of staff papers, and there had been meetings with various nuclear experts with varying opinions. Thus briefed, schooled, and counseled, he felt prepared to bring new insights to the jaded debate over nuclear weapons.

"Thank you, Mister Chairman. Mister Chase, as Director of the Rocky Flats plant, you would be in the best position to describe your mission. What is it?"

Hugo had been answering policy questions for years and was comfortable dealing with them. "Our mandate, Senator, as one facility in the larger nuclear weapons complex, is to produce parts, only parts, for nuclear devices."

"By devices, you mean bombs."

"While I do not propose to engage in semantic niceties, Senator, I believe the term 'device' is more inclusive and, therefore, more descriptive. It is true that most of the components we produce are used as missile warheads, but we produce a wider variety of parts for nuclear assemblages. For example, smaller tactical weapons would not be denominated 'bombs' nor would many of the research components we produce."

"I would suggest, Mister Chase, we are indeed verging on semantic distinctions, so let me take a different tack. Given the legitimate need of our country to defend itself, is there not a point where we need to ask whether the means of raising and maintaining our defenses imposes too great a burden on our people?"

"I'm sorry, Senator but questions on defense costs would more properly be dealt with by elected officials and those appointed to policy level positions."

"You misapprehend the scope of my question, sir. The fault is mine; it did encompass too much. More specifically, if the human cost of the Rocky Flats plant was amenable to

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computation, and we saw a given number of radiation induced cancer deaths in the Denver area, and the source of the radiation was Rocky Flats, would you support the removal of the plant to another, remote and more suitable location?"

DeKalb's fellow Senators began to listen. One or two leaned forward and gave him looks of approval for his finely honed question. There was also a hint of envy in their glances. They would most dearly have loved to have DeKalb's superb staff support to write their scripts.

"Given the facts as you have postulated them, Senator, yes, I would support removal of the processing and handling of radioactive materials."

"Calumet stuck in his golden thumb and pulled out a plum," whispered a reporter from the Post to a reporter for the Times.

"Yeh," came the reply from the Times, "let's see if he puts it up his nose or in his ear."

"I notice, Mister Chase, you said only the radiation work, why?"

"There would be no reason to abandon the plant altogether. It could serve as a superb research facility. Total abandonment would also be uneconomic. I might add, Senator, a number of studies have been done on the subject and they suggest the costs of total removal could run as high as a billion and half-dollars. Partial removal would be considerably less."

"Yes, I've seen those studies," continued DeKalb. "They have a common deficiency. They do not calculate the human tragedy of deaths from lung cancer and leukemia in the cities of Golden, Arvada, Denver, Lakewood, Broomfield, and Wheat Ridge. That listing, as you know, is not comprehensive, but it serves to make my point. Do you realize, Mister Chase, there are over a million and a half people within a fifty-mile radius of Rocky Flats?"

"I'm aware of those statistics, Senator."

"Then you know that the population density in the area immediately surrounding the plant has increased dramatically since the plant was built? Would you agree that the number of people at risk has probably doubled since the facility was built?"

"I would agree the population has increased since 1953, yes."

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"Has not the risk been substantially increased because of the construction of new plutonium handling facilities?"

"I would not agree with your characterization of the increase in risk as substantial. As our knowledge of plutonium handling increases, the safety margin is widened. The facilities at Rocky Flats today consist of second and third generation technology. We constantly work to upgrade the equipment; therefore, the plant sitting in Colorado today is more efficient and safer than the one sitting there even ten years ago."

"However that may be, the risk to Colorado citizens would be totally eliminated if the plant were decommissioned?"

"If the decommissioning were complete, the answer would be yes. I would remind you, however, there are probably no absolutes available to us. Any risk that does exist could be virtually eliminated, but not totally."

"I'm afraid I don't understand, Mister Chase, why would removal not eliminate the risk?"

"With your permission, Senator, I will defer to Doctor Waay for the answer. His expertise is quite extensive in these matters."

"Yes, I'd be glad to hear Doctor Waay's comment."

"In order to give you a complete answer, Senator," began Pitkin, "I must begin by referring you to an ongoing scientific debate. The gist of the matter is a difference of opinion over the effects of small amounts of radiation. Let me give a bit of background. There are various units by which we can describe radiation. One frequently used unit is the REM, which is an acronym for Roentgen Equivalent in Man. Using that standard, various agencies in and out of government have prescribed limits for people working where there may be exposure to radiation. For example, 3 rem per calendar quarter has been a frequently used standard for workers in nuclear installations. To give you a basis for comparison, we need to take a single rem and slice it up into a thousand parts. We will designate each part a millirem, one thousandth of a rem."

"You aren't going to desert the high ground are you, Doctah Waay," asked Chairman Sumter apprehensively.

"If, I have stepped into the shadow of the valley, Mister Chairman, I apologize, but I assure you we'll all emerge in the bright light of the high ground momentarily," Pitkin promised.

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"Please lead on, Doctah," smiled Sumter.

"Keeping in mind we are talking in terms of millirems, you should know that from a standard x-ray you would probably receive 100 of our small units, 100 millirems. Each year the materials in your body would impart perhaps 20 millirems, the radium dial on a watch could give you 20 millirems. An individual living in my area of the country, Denver, Colorado, receives some 200 millirems from his natural environment."

Despite the detour into technical matters, the listeners were obviously interested, and Pitkin continued with his explanation. "It is primarily in this area of millirems that the scientific debate I mentioned goes on. The unresolved question is what are the biological effects of these low levels of radiation. The question for large doses of radiation, on the scale of 25 rems and up is much easier. 500 rems would be fatal to perhaps half the people exposed to such a high level. Again, the unresolved problem is the effect, if any, of one-fourth or one-third of one rem."

"I believe we are approaching that high ground again, Mister Chairman. This brings us back to Senator DeKalb's question of decommissioning the Rocky Flats plant. We can sandblast and paint the walls of the buildings, scrub down the floors and exposed surfaces, remove great volumes of soil from many acres of land, and deep plow many more acres, but we can never remove all plutonium from the soil and materials around Rocky Flats. That means some radiation will remain. Low levels of radiation to be sure, but there will always be some. If people living in the area continued to receive only a millirem or two a year, there are those on one side of the scientific debate I describe who would say there is still a risk of harm. I may have given a longer answer than you wanted, Senator, but it may be a useful reference for understanding why Mister Chase said the risk could never be totally eliminated, even by removal of the plant."

"It is a matter of degree then, Doctor?"

"Degree of risk, yes."

"But removal would eliminate totally the risk of further accidents would it not? I refer to the fires which occurred a few years ago and to more recent events such as barrels leaking contaminated oil into the soil, and a recovery building spewing plutonium into the air."

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"The potential for such events would be eliminated by closure of the plant and removal of radioactive materials, yes."

"Only a couple more questions, Doctor Waay. In your answer to a previous question you said there would always be some radiation in the area, even if we removed the buildings, everything. If that's the case and if it's a result of contamination of the soil, won't the problem simply get worse as more radiation builds up in the area?"

"I believe continued build up of radiation would make decontamination more difficult, but in small increments. You would have to consider how clean you wanted the area to be and what use were to be made of the land. If the land were dedicated to use as pasture for cattle, cleanup would be less difficult. If residential use were to be permitted, cleanup would have to result in compliance with the State of Colorado radiation control regulations. One study estimated that as much as eleven thousand acres have already been contaminated in excess of State levels. Decontamination would require removal of approximately three inches of topsoil from such contaminated areas."

"And as the radiation spreads, the problem grows constantly worse?"

"Yes."

"I have been told, Doctor Waay, that some years ago, the government expanded the size of Rocky Flats by purchasing additional land to serve as a larger buffer zone around the plant proper."

"In 1975, additional land was acquired, but the primary reason was to prevent the encroachment of residential development."

"As radiation creeps ever outward and as the levels grow higher, would the Department of Energy consider purchasing portions of the cities of Arvada or Golden?"

"I'm afraid the question is pretty speculative, Senator, and would be better addressed to the Secretary."

"A final question. You used the word 'always' when you spoke of radiation remaining in the area. Is there not some decay of radiation, or to put it another way, does radiation not lose its energy over a period of time?"

"Every radioactive element decays. In fact, the decay process is what we call radiation. Some matter decays rapidly,

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some decays slowly, very slowly. The material with which we are primarily concerned at Rocky Flats is plutonium and it is exceptionally long-lived."

"I see my time has expired, thank you, gentlemen."

"The Chair thanks the Senator from Illinois for his excellent questions. Does the Senator from Colorado wish recognition?"

"Yes, indeed, Mister Chairman," answered Moffat as though he was casually undertaking a routine legislative chore. "For the record, Mister Chairman, I would like to reiterate my objection to the unprecedented practice of this Committee receiving confidential files for the record. Files that may be quite innocent but which may implicate only by indirection and innuendo. I myself have corresponded with Department officials on a number of matters. Since Rocky Flats is located in my state, I probably have written specifically about it, and perhaps have even urged that certain actions be taken which seemed to be in the best interest of the facility and the federal budget."

"Is the Senator saying he urged the sole source purchase we have heard about this morning?" snapped Fitchburg. "If he is, I would appreciate hearing him say as much so we can get on with this hearing."

"I believe it is improper for a member of the legislative branch to intercede in any manner in executive branch purchasing decisions, and.." began Klamath.

She was cut off in mid-sentence by Moffat, "Mister Chairman, I believe the time and the floor are mine."

"Senator Moffat is quite right, of course," said Sumter, "but he was recognized to address questions to the witnesses, and as yet I have heard none."

Moffat spoke with ice cold cynicism, "Mister Chairman, with all due respect, I have heard Senators make quite long statements as predicates for their questions and I have never heard a Chairman or and Senator object. Am I being denied the courtesy of the Senate? Am I to receive less of an opportunity to speak than any other members of the Committee? I find this abusive and singular treatment most unaccountable."

Moffat had been looking for a digression, and he obviously thought he had found it. Senatorial courtesy, the privileges of the club were more dear, more precious, more

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revered, and more respected than almost anything else in the Senate. By claiming he was being unfairly treated and denied club privileges, Moffat was raising an issue that could transcend and overshadow the unspoken charge that he had influenced Department of Energy purchasing procedures.

Whether or not his offense was a good defense would not be decided in the Committee this day, but he had set the stage for an assault on the procedures and practices of Chairman Sumter. That any such charge against the popular Chairman would quickly fall was not Moffat's concern. For the present, he wanted the fire around him to smoke more and burn less.

His tactic was, however, not new. Sumter, who had been embroiled in some of the Senate's most agonizing controversies, was equal to the challenge.

"Now, now, Senator Moffat," chided the old Chairman, "there isn't any need tah get your water up. You'll get you're full share of time the same as the other members of this Committee. In fact, if you feel the need, the Chair will grant you additional time tah pursue your inquiry and I'm certain your colleagues will suspend during your questioning."

Looking up and down the long desk, Sumter addressed the other Senators, "Now, in the interests of orderly procedure, the Chair will ask each of you tah pull your lines out of the water while Senator Moffat consumes so much time as he shall require. Senator, you may proceed."

Moffat put his offense on hold. "I thank the distinguished Chairman for his equanimity. I have but a few questions. Doctor Waay, have you assigned any reason to the most recent closure of the plutonium recovery building?"

"No, Senator. We have not. The matter is now under review."

"Quite so. Now, Doctor, going back to your testimony on the equipment purchased from...what was the name again?"

"Arbonne, Senator."

"Oh, yes. I believe you characterized the equipment as unsatisfactory."

"That is correct, at least, as to most of it."

"Tell the Committee, Doctor, would there be any way for the government to guarantee, before a contract is signed, that equipment it is purchasing meets certain standards?"

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"Not to guarantee it ahead of purchase, Senator, but I believe there are civil and even criminal procedures for dealing with suppliers who defraud the government."

Moffat felt a strong impulse to change course. "Is it not true that sole source, that is buying from one supplier without competitive bidding, is a common practice throughout the departments of the government, Doctor?"

"I can only speak for our operation, Senator," replied Pitkin.

"Very well, what is your practice?"

"We avoid it like the plague. According to our purchasing experts, it's contrary to the clearly expressed intent of the Congress, and it's subject to serious abuses."

Moffat, finding Pitkin to be an unsatisfactory sounding board, tried Hugo. "Mister Chase, in a newly constructed building as complex as the plutonium recovery building, it is not quite common to experience all sorts of difficulties in its start-up phase?"

"Breaking in new equipment and a new facility is always difficult, Senator," agreed Hugo. "But I must say, the Arbonne equipment gave more problems than it should have, far more."

Moffat saw nothing but problems down that road. He tried another. "Mister Chase, is it possible that you yourself might have decided to go to Arbonne for the recovery building equipment, if it seemed they were a likely supplier?"

"Possibly, Senator. But I would remind you the decision was taken out of my hands by others at headquarters. I might suggest your questions would be better addressed to them."

Moffat tried once more. "Within your experience, Mister Chase, have you not found that cost overruns are quite common in government contracting?"

"I have heard they are common, Senator, but I believe much of that is traceable to poor procedures and even poorer oversight by the Congress. In the time I've been at Rocky Flats, we've built three new buildings. All have been on time and within budget, except the recovery building. For some reason, headquarters saw fit to meddle in that one, and the result has been a long and troubled history of problems upon problems."

Moffat knew when to stop. "Mister Chairman, again I want to voice my objections to the usurpation of jurisdiction by

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this Committee over matters which should be heard elsewhere. I would move at this time that the files introduced by the Senator from Oregon be impounded until we can discuss them in closed session."

Sumter gave Moffat's tactic little time to blossom. "The Senator's motion is out of order. And the Senator's time has expired. The Chair now has a few questions of its own to propound tah the witnesses. Doctah Waay, you said the material you're most concerned with is plutonium?"

"Yes, Mister Chairman."

"And plutonium is the stuff we use to build our nuclear `devices?'"

"Yes, sir. There are also uranium devices, and there are also the much more energetic fusion weapons."

"Why, yes. I recall we used tah talk much of uranium, about mining it and putting it through Casey Danville's diffusion buildings at Paducah. I guess you scientists change the same as everyone else. So now the talk's about plutonium."

Sumter browsed among his notes, unhurried. Much of his talk was not interrogatory, and a wise witness recognized it as such and remained silent until a question actually appeared. And the whimsical remarks and courtly manner had to be recognized as guises sometimes concealing a remarkably keen and retentive mind.

"I wrote down the word `decay' Doctor Waay. I do believe you are the one who used the term a few minutes ago. Care tah make a high ground explanation of what the berry hill you meant?"

"I'd be willing to try, Mister Chairman, as long as I won't be caught up too rudely if I should stray."

"I'll be as gentle as a spring breeze over Charleston."

"I will not attempt any explanation of atomic structure since most of you are already familiar with the concept, however, it might be useful if I refreshed your memories a bit. Matter is composed of exceedingly small units called atoms. Each atom consists of a nucleus made up of neutrons and protons. Around the nucleus we find electrons. In a crude analogy, but one often used, we could think of the sun of our solar system as a nucleus and the planets as electrons. For reasons we do not understand, the nuclei of certain kinds of atoms spontaneously disintegrate, that is, they

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emit particles and rays which we call radiation. When this disintegration occurs, the atom changes. Permit me to give an example. In the complex atom, uranium 238, there are 92 protons and 146 neutrons in the nucleus. Suddenly, for no reason known to science, the nucleus may throw out a particle. The particle would consist of two protons and two neutrons. Therefore we are left with an atom having 90 protons and 144 neutrons. Because the number of protons has changed we have a different kind of atom. It is called thorium 234. I won't go through the process, but step by step it goes on until a stable atom is created which is not radioactive and which does not decay. In the case of our uranium 238, it will ultimately become lead. In a nutshell, Mister Chairman, that is radioactive decay."

"As long as it's decaying it's radioactive?"

"Exactly."

"Then plutonium, the material you have at Rocky Flats, is radioactive until it decays?"

"Yes. It's radioactive while it decays."

"How long does it take?"

"Well, Mister Chairman the half life of plutonium is 24,360 years."

"I'm afraid you'll have to explain 'half life,' Doctor."

"Half life, Mister Chairman, is the time required for one half of all the nuclei in a given sample of radioactive material to disintegrate. Again, I will offer an illustration. Remembering that the half life for each radioactive element is different, and also remembering that when our spontaneous disintegration of the nucleus occurs, the atom becomes a different element, we see this kind of thing happening. Beginning with some actinium 238, for example, in 6.13 hours exactly, one half of its atoms will have disintegrated and become thorium 228. Thus the half-life of the actinium is 6.13 hours. In a second 6.13-hour period one half of the remaining actinium will decay, and so on for each similar period of time. Incidentally, the thorium we saw created had a half life of 1.19 years."

"What does the thorium become?" Asked Sumter taken by the concept.

"It becomes radium 224 which has a half life of 3.64 days. It, in turn, becomes radon 220 with a half life of 52 seconds."

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"And in each element's half life one half of whatever there is just spontaneously disintegrates, decays and becomes something else? By golly," sang out Sumter forgetting formality, "Pitkin, I do believe you people have been hiding some damn fine ideas from me all these years. To make sure I understand this, you're saying the plutonium which manages to escape your filters and concrete buildings gets spread around the countryside and will be alive and snapping for...how long again?"

"The half life is 24,360 years."

"The radiation will be half gone then?"

"I'm afraid not, Mister Chairman. You will recall my comments on decay. As an atom of plutonium decays, spontaneously disintegrates, it is transformed into another element. Plutonium becomes uranium 235 which is also radioactive, and it has a half life of 713 million years."

"I'm an old man, Doctor Waay. I do believe I'll move on tah more immediate events. What do you propose tah do about the barrels of contaminated oil we have been reading about?"

"Our first concern was to make sure the radiation threat was eliminated. As we looked more closely at the situation, we found there had been underground leakage going on for some time. However, the danger there is slight. The plutonium is contained in the oil and the absorption of the oil into soil below the surface does not present an immediate hazard. It is only when the plutonium gets to the surface that it presents a significant problem. If it is exposed, it can become airborne and be carried by the wind."

"Have you managed to keep it grounded then?"

"We immediately covered the area with plastic..."

"Plastic? Since it is radioactive, wouldn't you need something more substantial? I thought you folks always used lead as a radiation shield?"

"We do whenever it's possible. This is only a temporary measure and under the circumstances quite effective. To understand why a sheet of plastic is acceptable as a temporary measure, you need to go back to my comments on the decay of atoms. That's our spontaneous disintegration again. I said the nuclei emit particles and rays. Essentially, three kinds of emissions can be made from an atom. The nuclei of some elements send out rays, really very much like light or radio waves. We call this

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gamma radiation. They can pass through considerably heavy material. The atoms of other radioactive materials throw out beta particles, which are fast moving electrons. A beta particle traveling at the speed of light can penetrate a few meters of air or about one half of a centimeter into water or tissue. The third particle which can be emitted consists of two neutrons and two protons tightly bound together. That is the alpha particle. Alpha particles are really very slow since they travel only about one twentieth the speed of light and haven't the power to penetrate a sheet of paper."

"I can see this one coming, Doctah. Plutonium emits alpha particles and thus your plastic cover does the job. I confess a reluctance to ask, Doctor, but if the radiation from plutonium can so easily be stopped, what is the danger?"

"I'll be brief, Mister Chairman. My earlier illustrations should be helpful here. We always return to the atoms and their spontaneous disintegration. The radiations I mentioned which are shot out of the atom can be alpha or beta particles or gamma rays. As any of those radiations come out of the atom, they dissipate their energy by interacting with the atoms of the substances in their path. They actually knock electrons out of the atoms they encounter. The atom thus hit is said to be ionized. Whatever balance existed between its outer negatively charged electrons and the positively charged protons in its nucleus has been upset. Although our alpha particles do not travel very far compared to beta and gamma radiation, they interfere with lots of atoms along the way. A rough analogy might help. If you think of a crowd of people and imagine a rifle being fired into it, the bullet, like a gamma ray, might hit one or maybe two or none. The alpha particle, on the other hand, would be akin to a truck driven into the crowd. It might not go very far but it would create havoc with lots of people in its path. Therefore, if plutonium is kept outside the body it is virtually harmless since the skin will stop the alpha trucks, but if the plutonium is inhaled and the particles lodge in the lungs, or if the plutonium gets into the blood the alpha trucks which come out of the plutonium atoms smash into and ionize the atoms of sensitive tissue and the result can be devastating."

"By that you mean lung cancer, Doctah?"

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"The best authorities on the subject say that the dangers from alpha emitters may include lung and bone cancer, leukemia, and genetic injury."

"This is the human cost of maintaining the plant in a heavily populated area? The cost Senator DeKalb was asking about?"

"If I recall correctly, Senator DeKalb's question was speculative. He was asking Mister Chase about removal of the plant if the human cost could be calculated. With present science, it cannot. Granting for the moment that very low levels of ionizing radiation do in fact cause cancer, we must ask the difficult questions. How many cancer deaths result from radiation, and how do we identify and distinguish them from the others? Today there is no scientific way of identifying a particular case of leukemia, for example, and stating it was caused by radiation or by anything else, for that matter. The problem, therefore, is one of knowing how many injuries the radiation from Rocky Flats does, in fact, cause. The problem the Congress must face, Mister Chairman, is reduced to this. Does the Congress want to spend hundreds of million dollars moving a facility because it may, and I emphasize may, be causing the injury and even death of an unknown, but small number of citizens. And by small number, I mean two or three; five or six would be too high given the amount of radiation and the estimates of the best experts."

"I suppose the same questions would have to be asked of every nuclear installation in the country. You have a most irritating way of turning this question back upon us, Doctor Waay. We in the Congress have been managing to avoid such hard questions lately. We, with no small encouragement from the White House, have discovered Commissions. We have chosen to disregard Section One of Article One of the Constitution which says, 'All legislative power herein granted shall be vested in a Congress...' Instead of conducting hearings open to the public and putting our bare hands on these nasty questions, we have adopted Commission government. To my mind, our Commission fever smacks of back room deals, closed hearings somewhere away from Capitol Hill, and power brokers putting a package together which, at the eleventh hour, they toss through the windows of the House and Senate with a take-it-all-or-leave-it label. While it makes reelection campaigning a lot more comfortable, it's

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lamentably poor government tah assign our constitutional authority tah a few commissioners. Would you recommend a commission be appointed tah study this entire matter in detail and recommend a solution to Congress?"

"I would not make any such recommendation, Mister Chairman." Pitkin knew Sumter was really making a speech and was relieved that he in fact agreed with what the old Senator was saying. It simplified the process of responding.

"Not even if I offered tah make you a commissioner?"

"I cannot believe I have offended the Chairman. Yet, such an offer would compel me to believe otherwise."

"He even sounds like a commissioner," said Fitchburg.

"Woburn, you have a fine ear for such language and a great affection for Commissions," teased Sumter. "I remember your excellent comments on the Social Security Commission which locked itself into Blair House and wrote a fine piece of legislation which we dutifully endorsed tah the tune of fine speeches by our colleagues. You had some wonderful words...let's see. Shameful abrogation of responsibility and authority."

"Damnable and cowardly abrogation," corrected Fitchburg to the great amusement of his Chairman.

"Gentlemen, the Chair will now entertain requests for recognition tah inquire further of these witnesses. Senator Fitchburg is recognized."

"My question is for Mister Chase," said Woburn. "You made reference to studies on the costs of decommissioning and relocating Rocky Flats. Would you make copies of those studies available to the Committee?"

"I'll send them as soon as I return to Colorado, Senator."

"Doctor Waay," continued Fitchburg, "you spoke of soil removal, the top three inches of over ten thousand acres. Do you have any estimate of the cost of such removal?"

"It's only an estimate, Senator, but the figure was on the order of 15 dollars a cubic foot. From that number it would be possible to arrive at a total, but I must confess I haven't done the arithmetic."

"Seems a bit excessive for simply scraping away topsoil, wouldn't you say?"

"I'm not well informed on such matters, but you must keep in mind the fact the soil is radioactive. It would have to be deeply

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buried on the site somewhere or even boxed and shipped to a waste disposal site, probably in Idaho."

"I hadn't thought of the disposal problem. Yes, the cost would be greater. However, is it not also true, Doctor, that the costs we're talking about would be incurred over a period of several fiscal years?"

"Complete decommissioning and removal could take as long as ten years, Senator."

"Mister Chairman."

"The Chair recognizes the Senator from Oregon."

"Thank you, Mister Chairman. Doctor Waay, Chairman Sumter asked you questions about the barrels you uncovered at Rocky Flats. Could you explain why they were placed there."

"Mister Chase would perhaps be more informed on that subject, Senator."

"I believe it would save much of the Committee's time, Senator," said Hugo, "if I could submit for the record an extract from the hearing record made many years ago by the Joint Committee on Atomic Energy. It explains in some detail how extremely heavy work assignments at Rocky Flats combined with inadequate disposal facilities at other locations, made temporary storage in Colorado a practical necessity."

"Without objection, the extract will be received," said Sumter.

"It does not, however, tell us why they were neglected in subsequent years, does it, Mister Chase?"

"We have found no record or reference to them other than the hearing record, I just mentioned."

"Removing Doctor Waay's plastic cover, the barrels and the surrounding contaminated earth will be an environmental nightmare, I suspect. The contaminated soil will be removed to a Department facility in Idaho, I believe?"

"That has been the practice in the past, Senator," said Hugo.

"The same with the barrels?"

"Yes."

"Can you tell this Committee how much radiation has already been released from the barrel area?"

"We do not have any definitive data."

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"May the Committee expect to receive such data as you ultimately collect?" pursued Klamath.

"As soon as we have information, yes," promised Hugo.

"Mister Chairman," called DeKalb.

"The Chair recognizes the Senator from Illinois."

"Thank you, Mister Chairman. Doctor Waay, I listened with great interest to your explanations on radiation and commend you for enlightening me on a most difficult matter. I also listened to your answer to a question from our Chairman in which you seemed to be saying the Congress should address the question of decommissioning your plant in the context of ignorance of the human cost. I confess I am puzzled. Would it be your testimony that we should continue the weapons work at Rocky Flats despite the fact it is visiting sickness upon the citizens who live nearby?"

"You perhaps misunderstood my answer, Senator DeKalb. I simply elaborated on your hypothetical question to Mister Chase. You asked if he would favor removal of the plant if the human cost could be calculated, if the cost included injury from radiation, and if the radiation could be attributed to Rocky Flats. Have I stated your question fairly?"

"Waay's going to put Calumet's plum up the Senator's gold plated bung," whispered the Times reporter to his colleague from the Post.

"I think you're right," answered the scribe from the Post, "Little Jack Horner should have stayed in the corner."

"Yes, Doctor, you have correctly restated my question."

"My treatment of the issue was intended to give the Committee a dimension which seems too readily and too easily ignored. Simply put, it is the factor of uncertainty. A decision to decommission the plant would, under the terms of your hypothetical question, be necessarily based upon supposition. Even casual reference to the literature, instructs us that there is great uncertainty over the effects of low doses of ionizing radiation. My only concern, Senator, bears upon the certainty that is implied in your question. To boil it down, are you fully persuaded that radiation from Rocky Flats has caused even one single cancer in the Denver area?"

"If I said, yes?"

"I would ask which one. I should say, Senator, I share your conviction there are radiation related injuries, but my belief is

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based upon statistical probabilities. My point is that Congress should proceed or not proceed, as it will. However, it should, in either event, be cognizant of the uncertainties involved and not follow a trail lay by superficial studies or paved with assurances of certainty. To legislate upon assurances of certainty seems to me to be a cosmetic treatment of a complex issue. My point goes to the matter of Commissions just mentioned by the Chairman. It's the easy way out, an evasion of the issue. If I were to be asked, I would say the Congress, for once, should squarely face a difficult issue."

"Mister Chairman."

"The Chair recognizes Senator Danville."

"Just a few clarifying questions, Mister Chase. Do you know which office in the Department issued the regulations which caused you to modify your equipment requirements for the recovery building?"

"To my knowledge, they were not regulations of the type which were published and promulgated in the routine manner. Instead, they came to us as a headquarters directive specifically applicable to Rocky Flats."

"And who signed this directive?"

"I don't know, Senator, but I would expect it to be the Secretary or someone acting with his authority."

"Perhaps Mister Baldwin could enlighten us."

Pitkin leaned close to Baldwin and whispered, "Sounds like a good question to me, Hatch. I think you'd better go ahead and answer."

Baldwin whispered back. "I don't know a damn thing about all this, Pitkin."

"Tell Senator Danville, not me."

Clearing his throat, Baldwin presented the Committee with the most innocent look he could muster. "I have no knowledge of such a directive, Senator."

"Do you sometimes act for the Secretary, sign his name for example?"

"Only when I'm specifically authorized on a case by case basis and such instances are quite rare."

"Is the practice more common for Assistant Secretary Wendover?"

"I'm sure it is, Senator."

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"Did you ever hear Mister Wendover mention the name Arbonne?"

"Not that I recall."

"Mister Chairman," said Danville, "I have no further questions of these witnesses. I do have an unsigned copy of the directive Mister Chase mentioned. I also have copies of travel documents of the Department showing certain trips taken at government expense by a Department official. These were trips, quite a number of them, to Jacksonville, Florida. I would ask the Chair to admit these as part of the record of these hearings."

"The Chair would remind the Senator ours is not an investigatory committee."

"I'm aware of..."

"However, the Chair will accept the documents under the same conditions the departmental file was accepted, subject to the review of the Chair and counsel."

"The Chair, as usual, has anticipated me," said Danville. "I would move that the entire record of our proceedings be forwarded to the Subcommittee on Investigations."

"Without objection it is so ordered. The Chair hears no further requests for recognition; therefore, we will adjourn but not before the Chair expresses its appreciation for the excellent testimony given by these witnesses. Mister Chase and Doctor Waay, I have conducted many hearings in my tenure as Chairman of this Committee, but seldom have I heard more forthcoming and enlightening testimony. You have the thanks of this Committee. This Committee on Energy stands adjourned subject to the call of the Chair."

Members of the media began making a few last hurried notes. The Times said to his colleague from the Post, "Calumet got off the hook, but I have the feeling the whole Congress got dumped on. Did you ever hear anyone like Waay before? He really told it straight, but I don't think he'll last much longer in government with that attitude."

"Neither do I," agreed the Post. "But I think the story is Moffat. He's got a big fire to put out. Ever hear of Arbonne?"

"Not until today, but I bet we'll hear more. You know, it just might be worth a little digging. I think I'll start doing some asking around. See ya, pal."

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While the spectators stood milling about and comparing thoughts on what they had witnessed, Pitkin and Hugo walked to the desk and shook hands with Sumter and Fitchburg. It was a brief encounter and the room began to quickly empty.

As Pitkin stood, collecting papers and sliding them into his briefcase, he heard Eldon Moffat's voice call to him from the end of the long desk. Moffat had apparently been talking to a television reporter, and, even as he spoke, the reporter was walking away coiling his microphone cord. The technician snapped his light bar off and left Moffat standing in the comparatively dim light of the committee room.

Pitkin snapped his case shut, set it on the table, and walked to the desk in front of Moffat. "Well, Pitkin, I suppose you think me some kind of infamous scoundrel?"

"One of my shortcomings, Senator, is my inability to judge other men."

"This entire matter was most unseemly and I'm sorry you and Hugo were caught in the middle. I suppose you know that Casey Danville has been a sworn enemy of mine for years? He has tried to smear me before and failed, and I assure you he will fail this time. I was simply unprepared for it today, but such is the nasty business of politics. I remember you said you kept a log of the Arbonne equipment failures and you promised to forward it to the Committee. Under the circumstances, it might be better if you sent it to me directly. I'll be meeting with Senator Sumter off and on the next few days and I can pass it along to him."

"Under the circumstances, Senator, I think it would be better if I sent the original to the Chairman with a copy to you."

"Are you implying I would tamper with the damn thing?" hissed Moffat.

"I'm not implying anything, Senator. I'm fulfilling my promise to Chairman Sumter and staying out of what you called 'nasty politics.'"

Moffat glared at Pitkin for a moment and, perhaps realizing an insult or a threat would profit him nothing and even be counterproductive later, restrained the impulse to try and bring the defiant scientist to heel. "Thank you, Doctor Waay, I'll look forward to having such a copy. Thank Mister Chase for his testimony, and have a pleasant trip back to Colorado."

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With two aides streaming behind, Moffat took his presence from the committee room. His exit was so abrupt, one might have imagined there was a fire somewhere nearby.

Returning to the witness table, Pitkin was surprised to see Hugo busily engaged in conversation with Leighton Marlowe. From the broad smiles and lively gestures, Pitkin concluded the talk was social and not professional. Of course, Hatch Baldwin was standing near, basking in the presence of a national news commentator.

"Pitkin," called Marlowe, stepping forward to shake his hand, "delighted to see you. After what I just witnessed, you may not take it kindly, but welcome to Washington."

"Thank you. I was beginning to wonder if we would see anyone non-government and non-political before we left this town."

"I've lived with the government and political types a long time but, believe me, I'm not one of them."

"Mister Marlowe was telling me he's been sitting through our little drama from the beginning," said Hugo intrigued and not a little flattered that such a personage would devote so much time to a proceeding in which he, Hugo Chase, had been a key player.

"The news sources of the city must have suddenly become awfully dry," said Pitkin. "I can think of hundreds of places more interesting and thousands where I'd rather spend a morning than in this dank and dismal chamber of echoes. It's too difficult to distinguish the real sounds from the false ones."

"I think you're beginning to understand this city, Pitkin. There are, indeed, few original sounds to be heard in these old buildings, and, as for the people here, most spend their time wishing they were somewhere else."

"And they're the ones you couldn't drive away with a stick," added Pitkin.

"Bingo," cried Marlowe delightedly. "I'm running late as usual, and my staff is probably calling around looking for me, so I have to be going. However, I wanted to stay around and say hello, and confirm our dinner engagement. Hugo told me where you're staying, I'll pick you up at seven sharp, if that's agreeable. And Mister Baldwin here is more than welcome."

For his part, Pitkin would have declined the invitation, but apparently Hugo had already accepted for him. Neither did he

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want to spend the evening being interviewed, but with Hugo and Baldwin present, he might avoid most of the questions. "Seven will be fine," said Pitkin, "and I'll bet Mister Baldwin will manage to join us. How about it, Hatch?"

"Absolutely," said Baldwin. "I'll be at the hotel with Pitkin and Hugo."

"Good," agreed Marlowe, "seven it is." With a wave he was gone.

"Pitkin," began Baldwin hesitating and clearly ill at ease, but nonetheless squarely meeting Pitkin's gaze, "I want to apologize to you. As I sat here this morning, I began to listen, and for the first time began to hear. The work you and Hugo do is the work of the program. I'm a Washington paper pusher and your word was correct, I was impertinent. Again, I'm sorry. And one more thing thanks for including me in Marlowe's invitation for this evening. Why you did, I'll never know."

Pitkin took the outstretched hand and said, "There's still a difference between us, Hatch, and there will be as long as you put your faith in the bureaucracy and Washington, but who knows, someday you may find a reason to change. I hope so."

Laughing at the puzzled look, he glanced around the room, "I think they want to turn out the lights; let's get out of here."

As Hugo and Hatch stepped out the door ahead of him, Pitkin looked back and saw the same melancholy girl walking behind the chairs picking up note pads. He paused, then said to her, "Call me next time you're in Colorado; I'll show you how to keep from getting your ski tips crossed."

She looked up surprised that anyone would think to speak to her. For an instant her face brightened. Then, her smile faded back into its wooden mask. Hers was a life that relied too heavily on the false impulses of a false society. Thus bound, she would always falter from the lack of confidence in her own abilities. Resigned to her surroundings, she bent over the long vacant table and resumed her work.

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CHAPTER TEN

True to his word, Marlowe wheeled his powder blue Mercedes under the marquee of the Washington Hilton promptly at seven o'clock. Pitkin opened the front door and herded Hugo into the front seat. He and Hatch Baldwin stepped into the back.

"I think I qualify for a headline, gentlemen. A Washington newsman on time. I have reservations for us at the Press Club, but if you have another preference don't be shy about saying so. I spend too much time there as it is."

"Those of us from the provinces aren't familiar enough with Washington to have a preference for anything except a McDonalds," laughed Hugo.

"Don't let these guys put you on Mister Marlowe," said Baldwin, "they may be a lot of things, but they aren't exactly rubes."

"How well I know. I was in their territory only a few days ago, and discovered city ways don't end at the west edge of Reston. But hearing no objection, the Press Club it is."

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It was only a few minutes' drive to Pennsylvania Avenue and a few blocks more to their destination. Marlowe turned into a parking garage where he was obviously well known. He bantered with the young man who promised to bring the car back in one piece if Marlowe wouldn't mind having it made the object of a high-speed test drive to Maryland and back. Handing him a five dollar bill, Marlowe said the drive would have to be made in the attendant's own car and promised to demand the money back if the radio was playing or the seat was even warm in the Mercedes when he returned from dinner.

The evening was warm and the sun was still visible through a bank of western haze as they strolled down the street. The air was heavy with humidity, and the bitter sting of smog from the afternoon traffic was strong enough to irritate their eyes.

Even with the discomfort of heat, humidity, and foul air, there was something compelling about the city. Pitkin tried to define it. He wondered if the mere unfamiliarity might not be a spice in an otherwise ordinary scene. There was also the aspect of novelty. A trip to the famed Washington Press Club was not on the tourist itinerary, and, most certainly, the trip was seldom taken in the presence of one who easily qualified as a Washington notable.

Pitkin ruled out the dinner engagement and the company as the attraction, but couldn't decide what was left. Was it an awareness, a knowledge he was in a great center of power? There was the famed Pennsylvania Avenue, he had caught a glimpse of the White House, and the Capitol gleamed through the buildings, bright even in the dull evening sun. But having stood close to those who clung to such symbols and used the visible trappings of government for their own ends, he was certain there was no attraction for him in either symbolism or personalities.

Marlowe had been walking alongside while Hugo and Hatch Baldwin followed some distance behind. The journalist had remained silent, and seemed content to permit Pitkin to reflect as he might on their walk along the humid street.

Soon they were inside the building, through the lobby and in an elevator. The had been joined in the ascent by a harried young man, who, in his sport coat and open collar, was perhaps trying too hard to look the part of a busy reporter. He nodded at Marlowe, but didn't speak until the elevator door slid open.

"Slow day for me, Leighton. How're things on the Hill?"

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"About the same, Fred, slow."

The young man disappeared into the bar and Marlowe explained. "Fred Hood, a young man with one of the wire services. I'm afraid he's having a difficult time adjusting to Washington. He still believes in right and wrong. He would have been better advised to stay with his small paper in California."

As he spoke, Marlowe led the way to a wide doorway where he was instantly met by the maitre d'. The party was obviously expected.

"Table for four, Mister Marlowe. This way please."

Almost every person in the room evidently knew Marlowe. Yet the greetings were subdued and infrequent. Some of those who saw him actually knew him, intimately and professionally, and had no need to do more than nod. Others, who wanted to appear to know him, also kept their acknowledgments casual and indifferent. Whether Marlowe was in truth just another journalist or whether there was a studied attempt to treat him like one was an open question.

Once they were seated, they were visited by a young woman, in a very short skirt, a low cut blouse, and long black knitted stockings, covering smashingly well formed legs.

"Good evening, Mister Marlowe. Something from the bar for you and your guests?"

"I'll have some kind of creme, Molly. You decide for me." Looking around the table, he invited them to order. "Gentlemen?"

Hugo ordered a scotch and was joined in his choice by Baldwin. Pitkin asked the girl, "Would I be inelegant if I asked for a bottle of Coors?"

Sensing he was a visitor, she replied, "That's the 'in' thing in Washington, sir. A Coors would be most elegant."

While Hatch and Hugo engaged in celebrity spotting, Marlowe picked up what he suspected was the thread of Pitkin's silent musing during the walk from the parking building.

"Washington's a most interesting city, Pitkin. There's diversity of material means, a full range of political thinking, flesh prickling monuments, and outrageous corruption. I wonder what people like Washington and Jefferson would think of us. We've changed so much I wonder if they'd even recognize their late twentieth century descendants."

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Marlow's journalistic sixth sense, his reading of Pitkin's thoughts, proved to be on the mark. "I wonder if we really have changed so much, or if we've changed at all," replied Pitkin. "Those men were agrarians; they lived, worked, and thought in terms of farming and open land. Large cities, by that I mean great accumulations of people, were, in their minds, European relics."

"Do I detect something of an aversion to our great American cities, Doctor Waay?"

"I'm afraid, I'm really not an expert on urban affairs, and I haven't given them enough thought to have much of a coherent opinion, one way or the other."

"Instinct or unconscious reaction is often more valid than the most carefully constructed theory," said Marlowe, encouraging Pitkin to speak his mind.

"In some things that's probably true. My instinctive reaction to a city such as Washington, or to any city, is a disturbing ambivalence. I'm attracted by its comforts, and if man has an inborn sense of community, I certainly share it. On the other hand, I believe massed people tend to lose their sense of responsibility for others. And, in a city, it's difficult to practice or to even understand self-reliance and individualism, as our fathers knew it. I suppose I have an idealized notion of such things, but I like the idea that, for some people, there may still be a choice between life compressed by multitudes of people and a solitary life, more difficult to be sure, but nonetheless an existence defined by an individual's sense of his own value instead of having his course set by collective impulse."

"Pitkin, you may be the last of a vanishing species."

"I agree with you. My ideas are out of date and hopelessly unrealistic given the facts of a technological society. I have an old friend, a rancher, truly one of the last of a dying generation. He has summed it up better than I could ever hope to. He told me that running water in houses and indoor toilets were the beginning of the end of his world. I suppose television and jet planes are doing the same to the life style I knew as a boy and a young man. Still, I believe there are decisions to be made. The vast majority of Americans have chosen, or been forced to choose, life in apartments, housing tracts, and condominiums. Theirs is a life of being dragged, by an addiction to mass media, from one fad to

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another and from the adulation of one sports star or rock musician to another."

"You make it all sound rather grim, all the more so, because I suspect there's a kernel of truth in your analysis."

"It's not my analysis. Others have been saying the same things and much more for years. Where there isn't room and opportunity to do one's own living, the only alternative is living vicariously. I prefer to select and experience the events of life personally. Thus far I have managed reasonably well and would not exchange my mosquito bites, hard ground, sunburns, and a dozen other tribulations for a thousand television outdoor sportsman shows with some damn movie star deep sea fishing off the coast of Florida. I could go on, but I think you get the idea. People in cities are surrendering their lives to anonymous directors, selectors, and editors. But I don't believe it's necessary. I cannot abandon the belief that still today we have the chance to choose an alternative."

"The road less traveled by?"

"Yes, Frost said it more beautifully and incisively than anyone else."

"Do you feel it is an individual's free decision, or is it circumstantial?"

"I suppose I'm getting a bit philosophical and beyond my depth, but I've always felt it was a combination. Circumstances do compel responsive behavior, and, at times, an individual's act is shaped by those circumstances such that free choice is nonexistent. However, it's just as true that there are moments, there are critical points when an individual is presented with the opportunity to select one course of action in preference to another and thereby set the direction for a series of subsequent events. Some such selections can be far-reaching and can control an almost infinite number of subsequent events."

"You are a student of history, Pitkin. I hear you contending against those who argue for inevitability."

"Yes, but I'm obviously quite unsophisticated, I know only enough to please myself and provoke others."

Hugo and Hatch interrupted and called upon Pitkin to settle their difference of opinion over the identity of an individual Hugo thought to be an anchorman but Hatch thought to be a Senator from Texas. As Pitkin followed their covertly pointed

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fingers and nods, Marlowe leaned back in his chair and reflected on his interrupted conversation with the physicist.

He remembered how the scientist's blue eyes had narrowed and taken on an almost brittle appearance as he spoke of compressed apartment living. The contrast with his almost reverential look during the brief references to his own camping was nothing short of remarkable. Pitkin Waay was a man torn and pulled by conflicting forces.

Marlowe had seen Pitkin Waay intellectually appreciating the fact of change. At the same time, he had seen a deep and driving emotion, which savored a fading illusion of solitary independence. Both forces were strong and in those instances where they collided, there was great turbulence. Marlowe thought of Pitkin's belief in the capacity of an individual, under certain circumstances, to make keystone decisions. If such a circumstance should arise in Pitkin Waay's life, Marlowe wondered which he would choose.

"You had better settle this, or we'll never have any peace," said Pitkin, bringing the newsman into the celebrity naming argument. "It's the tall man standing near the door taking to the maitre d'. Do you know him? Hugo insists he's the anchor on one of your competitor networks. Hatch, has changed his mind and says he is an editor for the Post."

Marlowe followed the directions and looked toward the entrance to the dining room. "I most certainly do know him. Would you like to meet him?"

As Hugo and Hatch allowed that it would be a great honor and agreed they would, indeed, like to meet the object of their disagreement, Marlowe made his identification. "He's the new manager of the dining hall."

As the laughter died away, the waiter brought menus, and with not a few chortles lingering in the air, they began considering their dinner options.

Looking again to their host for recommendations, they debated and discussed possibilities. Finally, Pitkin folded his menu and put it aside. "Hugo, Hatch, I have a proposal. Since Mister Marlowe has been a perfect host so far, I think we should put ourselves entirely in his hands. If he would be willing to undertake the task, I suggest we have him order for us."

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They agreed instantly. Marlowe was obviously pleased with the suggestion. He enjoyed such things and accepted their mandate with enthusiasm.

With the waiter looking over his shoulder at the menu, Marlowe began. "We'll begin with Escargots de Bourgogne and a plate of Salmon Pate. I remember the White Gazpacho soup. Last time I was here it was excellent; we'll have four cups of it, steaming hot. To make an allowance for our diverse tastes, we'll have what the menu calls the 'Great Plate for Four.' It includes Roast Lemon Chicken, Glazed Turkey with Rice, Red Snapper with Chives, Shrimp, and a mountain of Chesapeake Oysters. And, Devron, the bar's been holding a few bottles of wine I purchased in New York last year. Among them, I believe there are two bottles of 1934 White Bordeaux. I've been waiting for an excuse to give them a go. We'll look at the desert tray later, and each of these gentlemen can select his own. Oh, yes, one more thing, bring us one of those long, warm loaves of sourdough French bread."

The meal was delicious, and Marlowe was an excellent host. He never permitted the conversation to lag, and he kept it light and entertaining. He recounted some humorous newsgathering stories and recited a few anecdotes from his career as a young correspondent in Europe during World War II. Yet, it was not a one-man show. Marlowe involved them all in the conversation by asking questions and inviting comments on everything from the food to current political events.

Marlowe thoughtfully steered talk away from the hearing. He knew shoptalk was a sure spike to a light and enjoyable evening. When the matter did arise, he assured them old Senator Sumter was one of the most capable men in on Capitol Hill. Marlowe dismissed a reference to Moffat with an exaggerated lifting of his eyebrows and a comment about justice catching everyone sooner or later.

Responding to a direct question from Pitkin, Marlowe confirmed the fact that a feud had been brewing between Danville and Moffat for years. Moffat, something of a dandy about town, made no secret of his contempt for the bulldog-like Danville, and Danville had once publicly called Moffat a fop.

Summing it up, Marlowe guessed, based upon what he had heard that Moffat was in some extremely hot water. "Heavy Danville isn't one to show his hand until he's got most of the trump

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cards. Pitkin, you or Hugo might consider gearing up to campaign for the Senate. I suspect there will be a vacancy sooner than you might imagine, and you have a running start with today's television exposure."

To Baldwin, Marlowe suggested, "You might even become a candidate yourself for a high position in the Department. I'll wager the equipment for Rocky Flats came from Jacksonville, and it would also be a safe bet that someone will already be checking into Wendover's travel habits. Still, he might be entirely innocent, a pawn of some other shrewd people who mastermind Arbonne. Whatever develops, it'll be interesting, but almost routine for Washington."

It was Hatch who put Marlowe in a reflective mood with his question about international tensions. The table had been cleared and they were sipping coffee and an exotic brandy Marlowe had ordered when Hatch put forth his query about the Soviet Union.

"Mister Marlowe, you've traveled abroad a great deal and I've seen you on television reporting from Moscow. Do you believe the Russian leadership seriously entertains a belief they could win or even survive a nuclear war?"

"Hatch, you have asked the many billion lives question. I don't believe anyone has the answer and most of all the Russians. Just as in our own country, there are factions in the Soviet Union. They have their own hawks and doves the same as we find here in the United States and Western Europe. The tide of political sentiment there ebbs strongly anti-American and flows back to détente. Of course, the communists control public sentiment and have brought the business of managing popular feelings to the point where they can direct it as they please. The result is we find it difficult to fully understand the moves and counter moves we see reflected in their press and television. We simply do not know what is in the minds of the Russian leaders at any given time."

"You don't paint us a very encouraging picture," said Hatch.

"It's probably a product of my own anxiety and frustration over the absence of good solid information. To me, that is the most distressing aspect of our Soviet relations. We, too often, are walking through the dark not knowing whether we shall collide with a tree or step into bottomless pit. I suppose my journalistic

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instincts are frustrated by not being able to get my hands on a few tangible facts about the smoke filled rooms in the politburo."

"You're saying lack of good intelligence is our basic problem in dealing with the Russians," concluded Hatch.

"The problem has at least two dimensions," replied Marlowe, sipping his brandy. "Our files are nearly empty on the inner working of the higher levels of the Soviet government. That's one aspect of our information gap. The other is a void we have permitted to develop in our own system. Our colleges and universities have not provided us with enough serious students of the Eastern Block of nations. The Kremlinologists we have often exhibit a common failing."

"Which is?" asked Pitkin.

"The apparent inability to comprehend the most fundamental character of the system. The Soviet leaders are absolutists. They believe their philosophy is dynamic and that their system will flourish as ours deteriorates. To be sure, they demonstrate flexibility on the means, on the instruments of achieving their goals. But they never waver from their goals. Never. If it is in their interest to sign a treaty, they sign. If it serves a later interest to violate it, they do so without hesitation. Theirs is a classic and living example of devotion to what we consider the immoral rule of the means justifying the end."

"They sound more like American politicians than commissars," said Hugo.

"There's one difference. Few American politicians have long range goals. They characteristically look at the next election. They talk about preserving freedom and liberty, but recent history teaches us to be suspicious of such speeches, because there's probably a political motive behind them. I'm only suggesting that our politicians practice expediency for their own purposes, while the communist politicians practice expediency with a common, well defined purpose."

"It sounds like you put everyone, the Russians and the Americans, pretty much in the same category," said Baldwin.

"It's certainly true that we have a lot of similarities," replied Marlowe. "More than many people realize. We both have large governments, bloated bureaucracies, ambitious leaders, and lots of innocent people being shoved toward the abyss of destruction. The world's weapons are different, the faces change,

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but the equations remain the same. The French have an old saying, 'Plus ca change plus c'est la meme chose'. The more it changes, the more it's the same thing. And the same applies to people. As Pitkin was saying a while ago, people, their instincts and their appetites have changed little or not at all in the past two or three thousand years."

"You wouldn't know we're bogging along in ignorance to watch the television," said Hugo, still reflecting on Marlowe's remarks on the lack of credible information about the Russians. "I see the tube filled with experts on the Soviets."

"It would be simplistic to say we have too many 'experts' on the Russians, but there is a grain of truth in the idea. We have individuals who profess to have knowledge on the Soviet system, many individuals. I include politicians and, sadly, members of my own profession. They clamor to be heard and end up actually competing with one another for public attention. Each tries to out do the others in the sophistication of his analysis. The result is some of the most inane commentary imaginable. Much of it is pure claptrap, academic hair splitting. The public is confused and often sadly misled. On this point, I must say I know of no answer for us. We live under the First Amendment, and we have no way to determine who should be designated as authorities on the Soviet Union or any other country. I think the only solution is to recognize the problem and then undertake a process of education to teach people how to selectively listen and how to separate logic and facts from bilge."

"Interesting ideas, Leighton," said Hugo. "But to return to Hatch's question, what are the probabilities for nuclear war?"

"Actually, they are quite high. Tensions, misunderstandings, nervous leaders, perceptions of weakness, of too much strength, the list goes on, but any factor or any combination could be disastrous. However, it is not inevitable that there be an exchange of nuclear missiles. If the United States and the Soviet Union could find a substitute for nuclear war, the world might yet hold on for a while."

"What do you mean, a substitute?" asked Pitkin.

"A treaty for disarmament would be such a substitute, but such an agreement hardly seems to be a real possibility given the present appetite for posturing and maneuvering."

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Pitkin was not satisfied with the response. "I have the feeling you believe there are other alternatives to the use of nuclear weapons?"

"Yes," Marlowe confessed, "I do have other such possibilities in mind, but they range from the plausible to the slightly balmy."

"Let's hear a slightly plausible one," suggested Pitkin.

"Consider a confined, spectacular demonstration."

"Do you suggest we drop a bomb on a test site, a desert, or on the ocean somewhere," asked Hugo. "I can't see any value in that. We've had hundreds of such detonations at the Nevada Test Site, in the Pacific, and the Russians have seen plenty of the same at their test sites. What would be the value of another atomic blast?"

"I wasn't thinking of a detonation at the test site," said Marlowe. "I was thinking of obliterating a major city."

His listeners stared at him, unbelieving. They had been startled into silence by Marlowe's proposal.

"As a demonstration?" cried Baldwin.

"Yes. By calculation and by design. After you get past the utter black madness of the idea, ask the essential questions. Would such a sacrifice sufficiently shock the world to restore sanity? Would the destruction, the devastation jar the superpowers out of their ruts? If it would, you must then decide whether or not to make such a sacrifice."

"But destroying a city is unthinkable," protested Hugo.

"It wasn't in 1945. The result then was a sudden end to what most experts agree would otherwise have been a terrible and protracted war with enormous losses on both sides. The shock was effective then, why not now? Would you agree to such a thing if there were a reasonable chance it would save the entire world from Armageddon? Would any of you make such a choice?"

"Not me, not a city full of people," said Hugo, "A demonstration, perhaps, but..."

"You want a substitute without a price," laughed Marlowe. Looking around, he pursued the question. "Pitkin, would you make such a decision? You recognize the age-old question, of course. Would you throw one person out of the lifeboat to save the rest?"

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"I don't expect to be given the opportunity," replied Pitkin thoughtfully. "But in the final analysis, I might. If it came to such a point, I'd bargain for better terms, and I think fairness would require that the one who made the decision remain in the city he selected. If it was a lifeboat, the decision maker himself should jump overboard."

"I'd prefer hearing another of your substitutes, Mister Marlowe," said Baldwin.

"Very well. Let us consider an arena for controlled hostilities."

"I think you lost me with that one," said Hugo.

"Let me outline what should be rather obvious and fundamental conditions of coexistence. If either nation, the United States or the Soviet Union, were to aggress the other with nuclear weapons, the one aggressed would certainly retaliate, and we would have begun the incineration of the surface of the planet. Moving away from the homelands of our two nations, we have our neighbors and allies. The question becomes more difficult. Would we engage in nuclear war should Canada or West Germany be subjected to overt action by the Soviets? The answer would seem to be 'yes', but it is not the resounding 'yes' we would give in the case of an attack on the homeland. Still another step removed is those areas, which we in the United States have called areas of vital interest. The best example is the mid-east. Would a direct attack on Israel move us to engage in nuclear war with the Soviets or with any other aggressing nation? The answer is not 'yes', but 'maybe', and even that receives all kinds of qualifications and is tagged with 'ifs' of every gradation. Thus, if you move the battlefield far enough away and find one where the perceived interests of the combatants are vague and certainly not vital, you arrive at a position where war without nuclear destruction is possible."

"Then you're talking about a non-nuclear war as a substitute for nuclear war," concluded Pitkin.

"What I am suggesting is the possibility of an engagement in an area of the world which neither side considers valuable enough to defend with nuclear weapons. Such a place would be the arena for controlled hostilities."

"But if it's not important to either side, why would they fight at all? Asked Hatch.

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“Because they have been preparing for it for over forty years. Because they both have many untested conventional weapons. Because the leaders of one or both nations might need a friendly and controlled war for political reasons. Because we have in positions of power, a generation that has no first hand experiences with war. Because it would release one hell of a lot of tension in a world that's wound so tight it might explode otherwise.”

"Where could such a thing happen?" pressed Hatch.

"One of the more likely areas would be Africa. Neither nation has allies of the first rank there, none of its little nations has its own nuclear weapons, nor the entire continent is generally accessible to both. China would be another candidate, if its nuclear capability could be neutralized."

“And this is based upon an unwritten understanding that neither side would use nuclear weapons?” asked Hugo.

"Something like that," answered Marlowe. "I admit the idea is rather bizarre, but watching the constant sparring, the repeated near misses, and the institutionalization of the surrogate technique now used around the world by both parties, one must wonder if it's not a real possibility."

Looking from one guest to the other, Marlowe brightened and said, "I hope my gloomy talk has not depressed you. It shouldn't. It's entirely hypothetical and quite properly relegated to a giant heap of speculative talk which has accumulated around me these last few years as I have grown old and imagined myself to be wise. If you have finished, I would move we adjourn."

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