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## EXPEDITION

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# Expedition

Quincy Scanlon was well into his eighties, though he looked a trim, fit sixty. He sat calmly in the chair at the head of the huge oak boardroom table. His eyes were still bright with the intelligence that had been a major part of the creation of the major financial and industrial empire bearing his name. His intelligence and hard work had brought him to this room, at this time, with this group of people.

Quincy's eyes traveled over the individuals settling themselves into the chairs near his end of the table. A smile curved his lips at the interesting sight. There, by his left hand was his beloved granddaughter, his only surviving relative. He knew it was not familial pride alone that made him think she was beautiful. Jennifer was tall and well formed. A tiny frown did cross his mouth momentarily when he thought of the way many people thought of her.

To so many she was a cold, calculating executive. Jennifer seemed to encourage the attitude in the people she dealt with in the corporation, as well as those with whom she dealt with on behalf of the corporation. He had seldom seen her in anything other than a severe business suit since she had graduated from college over three years previously.

He had to smile again when he noticed her hair. It was obvious, to him at least, that her hair would still reach nearly halfway down her back if she would let it down from the matronly roll that surrounded the top of her head. That old spark he knew from her youth was probably still there.

Quincy looked down the table a little further, his eyes stopping on Albert Crane. Albert had been with the company for years. With a good diet and almost daily handball sessions, he kept a minor heart ailment in check and was still in almost as good shape as the day he joined the firm right out of college.

Sitting next to Albert, engaging him in polite conversation was a tall, statuesque woman. Her skin was like smooth black silk. From the written report he had read, her name was Gardenia Juliet Wilson, known to her friends as Dinny. She was an expert in half a dozen martial arts. She had served ten years in the Army, reaching the rank of Captain

before leaving the service. Quincy had been impressed with her formal education as well. Dinny had attended several of the best schools in the country, before and after her military service.

Next down the table was another woman. Recalling the file on her, Quincy marveled at the heritage of the woman. Her deep bronze skin reflected her ancestry, as did her tightly chiseled features. With the blood of Conquistadors running through both her mother's and her father's sides of the family, and Mescalero Apache also on her mother's side, and Incan on her father's, it made for an interesting mix. Not unattractive, he thought. Exotic.

He wondered for a moment at the adventures that must have taken place through history for her to be born. His thoughts went back to the file. He remembered that Sizu Perez was referred to as Connie by most, from her middle name of Constance. She spoke, in addition to English, fluent Spanish, good Portuguese, a bit of the various Incan dialects still used in Peru, and several American Indian languages, being fluent in Apache and Navaho. She was still in the US Army Reserves, a First Lieutenant in the Corps of Engineers. She, like Dinny, was skilled in several martial arts.

Quite a contrast sat across the table from Perez. It was another woman, this one nearly as tall as Jennifer, but almost disheveled in appearance. Her clothes were neat and clean. So was her hair, cut in a pageboy and very dark brown. The overall effect was still a bit unsettled. Perhaps, he thought, from the two cameras slung around her neck, the camera bag on the table, and the note pad and micro-cassette recorder she was readying in her lap. Candy Hansen was a renowned photojournalist just breaking out into the print medium as a reporter. From the file on her, there had been several offers of in-front-of-the-camera positions recently, both as newsreader and as TV journalist. The look had to be just that, a look, and not an indication of ineptitude.

The final person in the room was not at the table. He stood at one of the windows, looking out. Or rather, thought Quincy, the man stood near the edge of the window, out of view from anyone below. It would be impossible for anyone to see him from below, anyway, due to their height over all the surrounding buildings. Quincy watched the man studying the scene on the street below for a moment.

It dawned on Quincy, as he sat at the head of the table and studied the man at the window, that Jack Sandusky was dressed exactly the same way as he had been the very first time Quincy saw him. It was the same deep brown leather jacket, though showing a few signs of the years. The same leather hat hanging down the man's back suspended on a thong. He was sure the khaki shirt and pants weren't the same ones, but they were the same style. The same with the boots. Same maker and style, just new. The belt was definitely the same one. He recognized the bullet scar along the left side. He still didn't know how the man had acquired the scar on the belt. He had met Jack when he was barely a man, only sixteen, but the scar was there then, and that had been years ago. "It's funny," he thought, "There are men twice his age I think of as boys. But I thought of him as a man that very first time, even with him still in his teens."

Quincy cleared his throat and said, "Jack, if you are ready?"

Jennifer gave Quincy a quick look, at the slight deference to the man at the window. Allowing him to indicate when the meeting was to start. She watched the man as he walked to the far end of the table, opposite her grandfather. He stood there, not sitting, and said, "Well, Ol' Man, I read the report you sent. I'm here to listen to the details."

Jennifer bristled at the man's use of the words, *Ol' Man*. She held her tongue, partly because they were said with obvious respect, partly because she still wanted it not known that she was Quincy Scanlon's granddaughter. Only Albert Crane knew, and she wanted to keep it that way, at least for now.

"Well, Jack," said Quincy, "the basic premise is simple. An expedition into the central western area of Brazil. A general scientific expedition to gather data, in many fields of study, including future economic opportunities. "I want you to lead the expedition."

"I will grant you the premise is simple," replied Jack. "But you and I both know there is a lot more to it than that."

"True, of course," said Quincy.

"Have the Brazilians agreed to this expedition?"

This time Jennifer did speak up, at the implication that her grandfather would do this illegally. "Of course the Brazilians have agreed to it! They will be providing an interpreter, a guide and a security detail."

Jack gave the woman a quick, but rather searching glance, saying, "I see. It's always easier to have the host government's cooperation."

Jennifer asked, "You would do something like this in defiance of a government? Wouldn't that make you a mercenary, at risk of being tried as such and executed?"

"It would. Some requests are worth such risks when they come from the right person and are for the right reasons." After a short, rather pregnant pause he added. "This obviously is not one of those situations, since the government involved is cooperating."

Quincy quickly continued, before Jennifer could respond. "Yes, Jack. The government is cooperating. Scanlon Corporation will be footing the bill. The Brazilians will get a full and complete copy of all of our findings, including the information on potential economic development. In return for funding the expedition, and subject to joint American-Brazilian government approval, I will be allowed to participate in the development, if and when it occurs. There is a potential to make a great deal of money, several years from now, despite the initial investment the expedition will be."

"I see," replied Jack.

Again Jennifer bristled. She started to say something, but again held back. She knew her grandfather liked this man. She had heard him talk about Jack Sandusky several times. She would just have to trust in her grandfather's judgment.

Jack took a set of papers from his jacket pocket. "According to these you have some modified amphibious trucks?"

Quincy looked over at Albert and said, "Albert, you've been supervising that. Tell Mr. Sandusky about the craft."

Albert opened the brief case on the table before him and took out several sets of papers and said, "These are based, loosely, on the 1956 XM-158 Drake amphibious transport, which was based on the post World War Two Super DUKW. Which, of course, was based on the original DUKW used during that war."

"I'm familiar with the machines. Before you go into the details, how did you come up with the idea of using them?" said Jack.

"Oh," said Albert, "they were my idea. My father had a lot of experience in Ducks during the Second World War. In the original Ducks. He stayed in the service after the war and became familiar with

the Superducks then. He had close ties in the service and knew about the experimental Drakes. He bought one of the first DUKWs released as surplus when they were phased out. We used it around our place on a lake up in Minnesota. I grew up around it. Knowing what I do about the versatility of amphibious trucks, I thought these more or less new and improved models would be ideal for our use. There was another very small expedition that used a handful of amphibians, but not on this scale, either in size or number.”

“I see,” said Jack.

Albert continued, “When we acquired these vehicles, under lease, they were basic shells with a control station & power train. We had enclosures built to meet specific needs of the expedition.”

Jack interrupted with a question, “Flush, walk around...?”

Albert said, “We needed enclosed space, for labs and such, but wanted to maintain maximum utility. These things are very large. There are walkways along each side with moderate sized fore and aft decks. We kept the driving station high and forward for good visibility.” Albert slid a paper down the table toward Jack, who stepped forward and picked it up.

He studied it for a moment, then said, “Looks like a good design. How much weight did the enclosures add?”

There was a note of pride in Albert Crane’s voice when he said, “Not as much as you might think. One of our companies manufactures Kevlar and Graphite products. The in-hull and above-hull additions were made with a Kevlar/graphite alloy.”

“Windows?” asked Jack.

“Lexan,” replied Albert.

Connie Perez spoke up. “I don’t suppose you lined the interior of the hull with alloy?”

“No,” said Albert, his brows furrowing slightly. “Why?”

Dinny answered. “Kevlar and graphite alloys do a good job of slowing or stopping projectiles. So does Lexan.”

Now Candy Hansen said, “This is a peaceful scientific expedition. Not a military mission.”

Dinny looked up at Jack expectantly. Connie did the same.

Jack glanced at Candy then looked intently at Quincy. “Is there going to be a problem with this?”

“No. The Brazilian security detail wasn’t a problem. But it took some doing to get permission to take in personal weapons and an American commander for the Brazilian security detachment.”

Jack caught the frown on Candy Hansen’s face. He turned to Connie Perez and said, “I assume you are to be the security detail commander, Lady Sizu.”

Connie’s eyes widened in sudden surprise. Hers were not the only eyes that widened at his words.

Dinny gave him a quick look of questioning.

“Lieutenant Perez, sir. Or just Connie, since I’m not on active duty. I’d be interested to hear how you know about that other.” She glanced around the table and added, “Some other time, of course.”

“Of course,” replied Jack. He looked at her intently. “No implied disrespect, Lieutenant. But can you handle the job? Or, rather, the situation?”

“Yes, Sir.”

Suddenly Jack let loose a stream of Portuguese.

Connie stood, shoving her chair back with some violence. She stood, almost haughtily and responded, also in Portuguese.

Halfway through, Jack began smiling. When Connie finished, Jack said, “Well done, Lieutenant.” He walked back to the end of the table as the woman sat back down. “You’ll do, Lieutenant. You’ll do.”

As Jack started to continue, Candy spoke up again, this time rather heatedly. “What was all that about? I don’t know Portuguese, but you seem to be questioning her abilities. A woman is just as capable at the job of military officer as a man.”

“I find it somewhat incongruous that you are trying to defend a woman in a job you would like to see eliminated.”

“One has nothing to do with the other. Chauvinism is chauvinism, no matter what the setting.”

“Quite true, Ms Hansen.” He turned to face Quincy again. “Now about the...”

“You didn’t answer my question, **Mister** Sandusky.”

He looked back at the woman and, ice in his tone, said, “Nor will I. Your job, if you go on this expedition, is to record the events that take place, prepare reports for public dissemination in the media, and keep a factual record for historical reasons. Anything other than that, and a

response to an emergency event, is outside your jurisdiction. You will have no more input into the operation than any other non-executive member of the expedition. You will be expected to provide information, advice, and assistance to the staff, and carry out any instructions they may give to you.”

Candy’s face turned scarlet and she seemed ready to burst out with a response. Before she could speak Connie told her, “He was testing me on how I would handle a macho Brazilian grunt that disputed my authority to command, because I am a woman. All good commanders must know how their officers will react in tricky situations.”

Candy Hansen seemed to cool down at Connie’s calm explanation. She looked at Jack and said, rather petulantly, “Why didn’t you just say so?”

“Because this was not the time nor the place,” he replied to Candy, bringing another splash of color to her face. He turned to Connie and said, “Another unauthorized explanation like that will bring a reprimand, Lieutenant.”

Connie merely smiled and said, “Not unless, and until, I am under your command, Sir. This is still a preliminary meeting. I have agreed to join the expedition. But so far, you have not. Therefore I am not yet under your command.”

Jack grinned at her. “Touché, Sizu, Touché.”

Jack looked back at Albert Crane. “How many of these... What do you call them? Ducks, like the old DUKWs? ...are there?”

Albert grinned. We do call them Ducks. And there are six. The company had a seventh, which had been damaged during their initial testing, but it wasn’t economically feasible to bring it up to spec.”

“Another machine would have been nice. Who made the decision to not prepare it?”

“I did, Mr. Sandusky,” responded Jennifer.

Jack looked up the table to the cool looking blonde sitting beside Quincy. “And just who are you?” asked Jack, knowing exactly who she was.

“I am Jennifer Kincaid. The corporate financial administrator for this project.”

“Are you aware of the importance of backup equipment on a journey like this?”



“Quite aware, Mr. Sandusky.”

“I hope you won’t have too tight a hold on the purse strings back here, Miss Kincaid, when the crews are out in the field.” Jack watched her closely as she replied to his provocative statements.

There was a glimmer of a smile on her face when Jennifer said, “Don’t worry Mr. Sandusky. The purse strings won’t be jerked closed because of distance. I will be right there, keeping them closed, if I think it is the proper course of action. I’m the corporate rep on this little jaunt.”

“I thought Albert, here, was the Ol’ Man’s Johnny-On-The-Spot,” said Jack.

“No, Mr. Sandusky. Albert will be occupied with his duties as co-leader of the expedition. His priorities will be the smooth, safe operation of the scientific aspects of the expedition. I will be looking out for the interests of the corporation.”

“Look,” said Jack, with some force, “I don’t need some accountant with a green eyeshade pinching every penny I want to spend in country, like it was coming out of their pocket. There are a lot of miscellaneous expenses in a project like this, a few of which probably won’t be going on a corporate ledger.

“I don’t particularly like the idea of a co-leader. It is almost always a mistake. I have an able assistant in Dinny. I do think, if I decide to lead this thing, that I can work with Albert. But I see no need for another body taking up space, just to count money.”

Jennifer stood, her eyes flashing. “I won’t just be counting money, Mr. Sandusky. I will be doing a study on the potential economic impact on the area in terms of potential future development.”

Quincy watched with interest at the exchange between Jack and his granddaughter.

“I have doubts about whether the locals will have any interest in stocks and bonds.”

“Quite true, Mr. Sandusky. But I have a degree in economics and practical business experience. I know the value of a fertile cow, or a small patch of yams, as well as that of a blue chip stock or ounce of gold. I’m entirely capable of assessing the economic situation of an agrarian society, and the impact thereon of light industrialization and

commercial development as well as other forms of economic development.”

Again Jack looked at Quincy.

“I’m sure Miss Kincaid will be an asset, Jack,” Quincy said.

“Are you ordering me to take her along, Quince? Assuming I decide to take the job.” Jack was watching Quincy closely.

Quincy looked from Jack, over at Jennifer, then back. He sighed, then said, “Of course not, Jack. You know I don’t operate like that.”

A tiny gasp escaped Jennifer. She had been sure her grandfather would defend and back her up much more forcefully. She took another look at Jack, who was now smiling.

“Good. That’s what I thought, Quince.” He looked over at Jennifer again and said, “In that case, I’ll take on the job. With two conditions.”

Jennifer slowly sat back down.

Quincy asked, “What are they?”

“The remuneration you mentioned in this,” Jack held up the papers he had been sent, “isn’t going to be enough. Not with the problems that seem to be cropping up already. My fee is fine. But I want one tenth of one percent of any profits to the corporation resulting from the use of the information gathered by the expedition set aside. Half to be split equally by all members of the expedition, the other half to be split equally among anyone suffering serious injury or illness, or their survivors in case of a death. With a substantial initial bond put up by the corporation until a profitable return, and in lieu of any profits if development does not take place.”

“What’s the other condition?” asked Quincy.

“I’ll want to bring in several more people of my own choosing, in addition to Dinny.”

“Such as?” asked Albert.

“A pilot I trust. A man to do some scouting. I tend to not trust local guides completely. A hunter that knows that type of wilderness, and can supplement rations with wild foods. A mechanic. And a couple of ex-military I know, that free lance now, if the Lieutenant doesn’t know of a couple she would rather work with.”

Quincy said, “The Brazilians are providing ten troopers. Plus we have Miss Perez. And I know you can provide assistance if necessary.”

Jack grinned wolfishly. “True Quince. But there are some wild areas still left in this old world. One of them is the Upper Amazon. I’d prefer at least two more people I can count on without question. The ones I know would be able to contribute more than just a gun hand to an expedition of this type.”

“What? More mercenaries?” muttered Candy Hansen. Jack ignored her, as did Quincy as he looked over at Jennifer, then at Albert Crane.

“What do you think, Albert?” asked Quincy

“It’s fine with me, Mr. Scanlon. I would not mind some additional security. Nothing against the Brazilians, but some of the remote areas are quite dangerous.”

“How about the money, Jennifer,” Quincy asked her.

“The bond is a good idea for the insurance aspects, with potential profits to cover it. That is no problem. I almost did that anyway. Injuries are a part of something like this. For the other things, I can make some adjustments, if it’s really necessary.”

Jack said, “No adjustments. These are on top of the present plans. I don’t want shortcuts or scrimping because money was pulled from one hand and switched to the other. Everyone I bring on board will earn their money.”

Jennifer, resigned to the fact that her grandfather had backed Jack, instead of her, flared slightly at his words, and started to retort, but instead controlled herself and looked at Quincy, asking, “You’re the boss. If you okay it, I’ll adjust the budget and transfer additional funds into the account.”

“Do it.” Quincy turned to Jack. “Well?”

“Looks like you have leased yourself an expedition leader.” He pulled another set of papers from yet another pocket of his leather jacket and looked through them. He looked over at Albert. “I’ll want to go over those plans for the Ducks with you and Jerome, the mechanic I’m bringing in, as soon as I can get him here.”

Albert nodded.

“As soon as expedition members can be brought in, I want them sent down to the Ol’ Man’s estate for training. Everyone will be doing a little PT so I will know his or her individual physical capabilities.

“And no cell phones. I don’t want the interruptions during training. And since where we are going, there isn’t any service most of the time, I don’t want anyone thinking of them as a lifeline or back up.”

“Lieutenant,” said Jack, handing her two sheets of paper, “here is what I want in terms of weaponry. In addition, the names of two men you can trust. Again, if you don’t have anyone else you prefer.”

Perez looked at the list of weapons and whistled. She then looked at the two names. She looked up at Jack and said, “You know Inny Ynriqua?”

Jack nodded.

“He’s okay. However, this other man isn’t available. I know someone that will work out.”

“See to it, Lieutenant. In addition, get a simple PT course set up at the estate. Albert can take you and Dinny out, show you around. Today.”

The three named stood and headed for the door.

Jack pulled out another paper, this one just a slip. He handed it to Candy Hansen. “This outfit has an experimental micro-video camera. You might find it useful. Check it out. If you think it would be suitable for your needs, get a pair of them, as many of the cartridges as you can fit into your gear, and tell the owner he’ll be getting a field test report, for free, if we get the cameras.”

Candy looked up surprised. “I’ve been trying to get my hands on one of these for a month. Ever since I heard about them on the grapevine.” She hurriedly stood and headed for the door.

Jack turned back to Quincy and Jennifer. “Now, Miss Kincaid, be sure to bring at least a few small investment grade diamonds, one half to one caret, for insurance. Bring quite a few gold coins, and some silver as well. There may be a few instances where currency won’t be acceptable. They are also good insurance.

“Do not bring any drugs. And no seeds, no matter how many seed companies offer them to you free. Which they will when they hear about the expedition.”

She did not think about the seed comment until later, startled as she was at the realization that he intended to let her go with the expedition. “I’m going on the trip?” she asked, looking at him in shock. “I thought... From what you said before...”

“I don’t particularly like the idea. However, I do respect the Ol’ Man’s judgment. He obviously thinks you will do a good job. Now if you will excuse us, Quince and I have a couple of things to discuss in private.”

The imperious tone of his voice brought the red of anger back to her cheeks, but again she held herself in check. She had argued too long and hard with her grandfather to convince him to let her go in the first place, to jeopardize it now.

Quincy and Jack watched her leave the room, her head held high. When the door closed behind her, Jack turned to face Quincy and said, “Quince, are you nuts? This is not going to be a cakewalk. Research such as this is hot, dirty, usually boring work, with the occasional highly dangerous interruption. She’s your granddaughter, so has to have a passel of the right stuff in her, but still...”

“I know Jack. It took her months to talk me into agreeing to let her go. It was always conditional on you, though I did not tell her that. If you did not go, she did not go. And if you said she couldn’t, that too, was final. However, this project is as much hers as it is mine. I expressed an opinion one day, and she took it from there. She brought me a detailed prospectus a month after I had said what I did. After I read it, I brought Albert into it and the two of them have done almost all of the planning.

“You seemed very disinclined to have her come along until right there at the end. What changed your mind?”

Jack smiled. “That crack about the fertile cow. She apparently really does know what is important, economically.” Jack gave Quincy a searching look and asked, “What is the real story behind this expedition? I’m not buying the party line.”

“Almost a year ago, I had some really strong chest pains.”

Jack hurriedly interrupted his friend. “Are you all right? You didn’t say anything the last time I saw you.”

“I’m fine. It was just indigestion. Too many jalapeño burritos, you know. However, I did not know that at first. It made me think about a few things.” Quincy paused, stood and went to a small cabinet along the wall. He carried two snifters of brandy back to the conference table and handed one to Jack, keeping the other as he sat down.

“Because of that episode, I’ve had a few more tests done. I do have a couple of potential problems.” At Jack’s look of alarm Quincy hastily added, “Nothing serious at the moment. But I am eighty-three...”

“I’ve only been sick two or three times in my whole life, Jack. I never really considered myself immortal, but never really thought very much about dying, either. However, I did that evening. Now, I have accomplished a few good things in my life, helping raise Jennifer being one. And I like to think I have provided jobs for quite a few people, at the same time doing as little damage to the planet as I could, with the knowledge available to me at the time.”

“It’s one of the things I’ve admired about you, Quince. Always as much, or more, concern about those things, than profits and your own image.”

“You flatter me, Jack. I feel like I should do at least a little more before I die. A place like western Brazil is going to be developed sooner or later. I thought, perhaps if I could get my foot in the door, I might have at least a little influence on the way that things go. I suppose that could be considered manipulation for profit. We do actually stand to make substantial profits twenty or thirty years down the road.”

“Your granddaughter must know that. That the profits won’t be coming for a long time.”

“Of course she does. Like I said, when I mentioned the fact that I wished I could do a little more for the places that have yet to be despoiled, she is the one that came up with the basic plan.”

“Smart girl, your granddaughter. A government with complete information is much more able to make effective plans about resource use, population planning and so on.”

“Exactly. Jennifer is not quite the cold fish she lets most people think she is. She cares about things much the same as you and I. However, I have to tell you... She is as stubborn as they come. If she thinks she is right, she’ll tell you about it until you convince her otherwise. Or vice versa.”

Jack smiled. “Don’t forget, I’ve heard you speak of her many times during my visits to the estate.” His smile faded. “I don’t think she likes me very much, Quince. You know I may have to come down hard on her. A leader cannot allow disruptions at critical times. Sometimes

orders have to be followed immediately. Questions have to wait until later. You saw how I pushed her today.”

“I know, Jack. I am not placing any restrictions on how you treat her. I expect you to deal with her as you would any other backer’s rep. She takes her responsibilities to the corporation very seriously. Moreover, I will not put any restrictions on her either. I trust her like I do you.”

Jack smiled at his friend. “You never do things the easy way, just because it’s easy, do you?”

“Very seldom, Jack. Very seldom.”

Jack drained the snifter and stood. “I’ve got a lot of things to do the next few days, Quince. I assume I’ll be seeing you from time to time during the training?”

“Definitely.”

Jack started for the door. Quincy spoke again. “But Jack, before you go... What was the deal with Perez? You would not throw the title Lady around lightly, unless you were razzing someone. That was no joke. You really meant it. I have an extensive file on everyone that we have planned to involve in this thing. I had no idea you even knew her. I saw nothing in her file...”

“Doesn’t your file mention her unusual heritage, Quince?”

“Yes. Of course. Spanish blood by way of Mexico. American Indian and Peruvian Indian. Incan specifically. Her language skills were one of the reasons she was picked.”

“Quince, she is descended from three different lines of Spanish and Mexican Hidalgos. She can trace her Apache lines back to both war chiefs and tribal chiefs. In addition, her Incan bloodline goes back directly to the divinity. She is as much royalty as any princess in Europe. The only reason I did not call her Princess is the fact she would have probably been insulted. Lady was a bit of a chance. I just wanted her to know I knew of her and respected her heritage and her abilities.”

“So you don’t actually know her?”

“Nope. Just by reputation. I know several people who do know her. All have said they would follow her lead or trust her to cover their backs. From those people that is high praise indeed.”

“I see. I rather wish I were going along with you. This is shaping up to be a rather interesting venture.”

“You’re the boss, Quince. If you say you go, you go.”

Quincy smiled. “Thanks, Jack. I am a long way from the grave, knock on wood, but I am not up to several months in the conditions the expedition will be experiencing. And I wouldn’t put you or Jennifer in a position to have to keep an eye on me.” With an introspective look on his face Quincy added, “But ten years ago...Hell! Five years ago...I would have been leading this thing with you as Segundo.”

Jack laughed. “I believe it Ol’ Man. I would have been happy to follow you.” Jack reached out and opened the door, stepping through and closing it behind him.

For the next several days Jack was busy, away from Quincy Scanlon’s estate. He had stopped in just long enough after leaving Quincy’s office to pick up a set of the expedition planning papers from Albert Crane before leaving.

When he returned to the estate after eight days, there were two men in the car with him. They started up the walk to the front door of the rather imposing old mansion when Dinny came around the corner of the house. Jack stopped when he saw her. “Guys, there’s Dinny. She will introduce you around. Get settled in. I’ll talk to you later.”

He went up to the door as the two men joined Dinny and went around to the back of the house. When he knocked, the uniformed butler opened the door. Jack said, “Hello, Sikes. Where’s the Ol’ Man?”

“Hello, Master Jack. I am afraid Mr. Scanlon is in New York, on business. Miss Kincaid is in the Expedition office in the rear of the estate. It’s the smallest of the trailers.”

“Okay, Sikes. Thanks.”

As they walked to the rear of the house Sikes said, “Sir, if you don’t mind a word?”

Jack, surprised, stopped and turned to Sikes. “Sikes? Is everything all right? Is something wrong with Quince?”

Sikes smiled at the concern in Jack’s voice. “No. He is just fine. I just wanted to tell you that Jennifer is staying in the office unit, not here in the house. The others have space in the bunk houses. As far as I know, none of the others are aware of the fact that Jennifer is Mr. Scanlon’s granddaughter. She has not specifically made a point to



conceal the fact, but I am quite sure she prefers it not be common knowledge.

“She knows, of course, that I know you and rather casually asked me one day if I thought you would be likely to spread the word around, just to spite her.”

“And what did you tell her?” asked Jack.

“That I didn’t believe you operated that way.” Sikes smiled. “I did not get the idea that she was very reassured.”

Jack smiled wryly. “I got the idea early on she didn’t much care for me, even before we met at the meeting.”

“Mr. Scanlon has talked about you before. And quite a bit more since the project came up. She has heard in great detail some of your exploits when you were with Mr. Scanlon.”

“Ah. I see. She is probably very protective of her grandfather. And I would be considered a very bad influence.”

Sikes nodded.

“Well. You are right. I do not operate that way. However, let us not tell her quite yet. I want to see how she operates under pressure.” He looked at Sikes intently, knowing he was more a member of the family than a servant.

“As you wish, Jack. However, do not be too surprised at her reactions. She is very much like her mother and her grandfather as well. Very strong willed. Very capable.”

“I’m glad to hear it, Sikes. This expedition will test her in many ways. Thanks for letting me know of her concern. I can be a bit flip at times. I might have said the wrong thing at the wrong time.”

“Precisely,” replied Sikes, rather dryly.

“You’re a canny devil, Sikes. I don’t suppose you would consent to go along on the expedition and keep me out of trouble?”

“It would be an interesting diversion. But I have my duties here.”

Jack shook his head and stepped outdoors, heading toward the half dozen manufactured housing units set up near the center of the huge grassy area that comprised half of the rear portion of the estate. He thought to himself, “Hell. Sikes was not kidding. He must have been hell on wheels at one time. It probably would be a diversion for him. He and the Ol’ Man are well matched.”

As he walked across the grass to the training camp facilities, he noticed Perez was having several people run slowly through a simple obstacle course. Nearby, a man with belly overhanging his belt sat on an upended crate watching the others.

Jack stopped, watched a moment as several of the people, men and women both, running the course taunted the man to join them. Jack was a bit puzzled as to why Perez, or Dinny, who was also nearby, weren't all over the man for slacking off.

Jack called to the man, "Hey you! Goldbrick! Get off your duff and get out there with the rest. If you plan on going on this little jaunt I want you in shape to keep up."

The man didn't even look around, merely flicking Jack the bird. Jack then called, "Lieutenant! Dinny! Here on the double!"

Dinny and Perez both came running. Both were dressed in khaki shorts and short sleeved khaki shirts. When they came up to him, both were breathing easily after the fifty-yard sprint to reach him. The people on the obstacle course had all stopped to watch.

When Dinny and Perez came up to him, Jack asked, "Who is the goldbrick?"

"That's O'Hanlon. He's the mechanical engineer for the expedition," said Dinny.

"Why isn't he working out with the rest? And just why the hell aren't one or the other of you making sure he is?"

"Sir," said Perez, "when he first refused, he said he didn't need the workout. I was about to press the matter, when Miss Kincaid and Mr. Crane suggested that Mr. O'Hanlon was a valuable member of the expedition and could be exempt from the PT. There have been a couple more allowed to skip PT. Dinny suggested I wait until you returned, before I took further steps."

Jack looked at Dinny. "Why?"

"I think he's a ringer. Oh, he is a mechanical engineer all right. But I sensed right off that he is in a lot better shape than his appearance would suggest."

"I've kept an eye on him the last few days. She is right. He has more muscle there than fat," added Perez.

Jack looked over at the man, still sitting on the crate. He looked back at the two women. "Any reason you can think of why Kincaid or Crane would put him up to this?"

"Actually, I get the feeling Crane wasn't too happy about it. It seems to be Miss Kincaid's idea. I assume it is a test of your authority. That's the only thing I can come up with." Dinny looked over at the man again. "Boss. If he has any training at all I would have to think twice about tackling him. He moves pretty good, from what little I've seen."

Jack looked at the short, dusky skinned woman. "Lieutenant?"

"Concur, Sir. I could take him, but I'd have to hurt him."

"Nuts!" Jack looked over at the smallest of the trailers, then at O'Hanlon. He turned back to the two women. "Herd everyone out here as casually as you can, considering your talents. I suppose this is as good a time as any to introduce myself and lay out the chain of command." He turned toward the trailer again as the two women started off.

Jack went up the three steps to the small platform at the door of the trailer Jennifer was using as office and sleeping quarters. He opened the door and stuck his head inside. Jennifer was sitting at a desk entering something into a laptop computer. She looked up and Jack barked harshly, "Come along Miss Kincaid. You are about to see what you have wrought. I hope the medico is a good one."

Jack closed the door with a bang and didn't look back when he heard it open behind him. He heard Jennifer's heels click on the wooden platform and then the stairs as she followed him. When the sounds suddenly stopped he knew she was following him out across the grass. He smiled grimly. Two people would be getting a lesson. One of whom probably did not deserve it.

He noted that there seemed to be no one else coming toward the group that had gathered near the PT course. Jack stopped and faced the group as Jennifer came up. He saw O'Hanlon standing in the front ranks of the group. Perez and Dinny were standing on the outer fringes to one side and Crane was near the other side.

"Mr. Crane, if you would join Miss Kincaid," said Jack. As Crane stepped over to where Jennifer had stopped, Jack added, "Lieutenant, Miss Wilson. If you please."

They too stepped forward and joined Albert Crane and Jennifer Kincaid, turning to face the group. Both knew what was coming. Both

could see the anticipation on faces of several of the men that knew Jack. They all also knew what was coming.

Jack faced the group and, without raising his voice, began speaking, in tones that reached everyone there. "My name is Jack Sandusky. I have taken on the job of leading this expedition. Mr. Crane here," Jack said, indicating Albert, "is co-leader, in charge of the scientific aspects of the operation. I am sure most of you have already met him.

"Most of you have probably also met Miss Wilson, who will be implementing the instructions of Mr. Crane and myself. In addition, in case of the incapacitation of both Mr. Crane and myself, she will assume command. Miss Kincaid is paymaster, quartermaster, and next in the line of command.

"Finally we have Lieutenant Perez. She will be in direct command of the Brazilian security element that will join us when we arrive in country. She is next in line of command after Miss Kincaid. She is also to be considered safety officer. Any instructions she gives you, you will obey, without question, immediately. Any complaints about her actions will be brought after the situation is over. There is no leniency in this. My orders are the same. I will debate anything you want to debate, after the activity in question is over. I will not tolerate any discussion or delay during an emergency. Now, finally, it seems there has been arranged a demonstration of my authority."

Jack sailed his hat to Dinny, slipped out of his leather jacket, handing it to Dinny as well. Jack then unsnapped the hold-down straps of the shoulder holster carrying his handgun. This he handed to Lieutenant Perez. When he turned, holding his hand out to take the gloves Dinny had pulled from the epaulet of his jacket, he gave Jennifer Kincaid a long look.

She seemed a bit shaken at the realization of what was about to take place, but held her composure.

Jack turn to face the group again, pulling on the suede gloves. He looked at O'Hanlon and said, "It seems that you have been chosen champion of the civilized members of the party. I hope it was also by your choice."

O'Hanlon stepped forward, stripping off his shirt. "It was."

There was some hurried whispering in the crowd when O'Hanlon's removal of his shirt revealed several classic Marine Corps tattoos on arms and chest.

Jack stood easily, arms hanging at his sides, facing O'Hanlon as he stepped forward. Jack calmly asked O'Hanlon, "You want a pair of gloves?"

O'Hanlon raised his hands, as they doubled into ham sized fists and said, "No."

Just as he stepped into Jack's range, Jack suddenly threw a forward kick into O'Hanlon's groin and followed it with a round house right to the base of O'Hanlon's neck as he bent forward in pain. O'Hanlon went down without a sound and Jack pulled off his gloves, saying, "Have the doctor attend to Mr. O'Hanlon, Lieutenant."

Jack took his shoulder holster from her and slipped it back over his shoulders, snapping it into place. Dinny handed him his jacket and hat, then began dispersing the group. Jack looked at Albert Crane and said, "I'm glad you weren't in favor of this, Albert. I'll want to go over the Duck plans in detail with you later today."

Crane nodded and walked off.

Jack finally looked at Jennifer again. Her face was white. Jack said, "I believe we have a few things to discuss, Miss Kincaid." He walked toward the office.

With a start, Jennifer turned her eyes away from O'Hanlon, who was now coming around, as the doctor waved a vial of ammonia under his nose. She followed Jack to the office, without a word, going through the door as he held it open for her. She sat down heavily in the chair behind the desk, looked at Jack and said, "You knew I asked O'Hanlon to challenge your authority?"

Jack sat in the one other chair in the small room, tilted his hat back, and said, "I did. It was a convenient opportunity to establish my authority, though I don't particularly like using an innocent man in that way."

Jennifer looked Jack directly in the eyes and said, "I believe I would prefer that you had hit me, instead of seeing him hurt that way."

"Good. That's a sign of a good leader. The placing of one's people's welfare above one's own. Remember the lesson. And, as a point of information, I pulled both the kick and the punch. They hurt, but

did no serious damage. He'll be right as rain in a few minutes, if I'm any judge. If there is any additional problem, because of this, he and I will handle it in private."

Jack noticed the color coming back into Jennifer's face. It was, in fact, a rather interesting face. He had seen her before only at a distance. Except, of course, the many pictures Quincy had shown him over the years.

Distracted for a moment, Jack barely caught Jennifer's comment when she spoke, "Considering the fact that you knew it was a setup, why did you go ahead with it? Why didn't you confront me?"

Jack did hear the touch of anger in her voice. "I told you. It was an opportunity to establish my authority. Oft times specialists have a hard time dealing with external authority, no matter how important it is. I have serious doubts as to whether any of them know how dangerous this expedition is actually going to be."

"We are taking every precaution. There will be soldiers with us."

"I'm not talking so much about things of that nature, though contact with drug operations is no small possibility. Even revolutionaries. The terrain itself can be dangerous. Add to that the flora and fauna, and the inattention that people absorbed in their own specialty are prone to, and incidents are bound to crop up. If the people in charge are always questioned about the reasoning behind every instruction or order, the time will come when the delay will be the cause of a serious injury, perhaps death. I intend to prevent that if it is humanly possible."

Jennifer asked him, "Why did you put me in the chain of command? I had assumed I would be on the edges. I have no real experience in the wilderness."

"I know. But you are a company rep, just like Albert. Had you not been in the chain of command you would have been thought either incompetent, which would cause problems for all of us, or it would be assumed by most that you were along simply as my lover."

Jennifer was so startled, she choked when she tried to speak. Finally, after coughing several times to clear her throat, she was able to speak. "Don't flatter yourself, Mr. Sandusky. It would be clear to all that you were not my lover."

“Which would have been the clincher for anyone that was a little doubtful.”

Jennifer sputtered again, and curiosity getting the best of her, asked, “Well how does being in the chain of command keep that from happening?”

“You will be busy with many other duties, as will we all. You will be seen doing them. Were you only concerned with your own projects and the finances of the expedition, you would often be out of sight and mind, often at the same times I might happen to be. The result should be obvious.”

Grudgingly Jennifer admitted, “I suppose the situation might be construed in that manner. At least by someone with a filthy mind.”

“Grow up, Miss Kincaid. Scientists are just regular people with specific skills. They have emotions, hopes, dreams, and fears just like everyone else. They will see and believe what they want. When there are few other diversions, other peoples’ lives become the main topic of conversation and speculation.”

Before Jennifer could come back with the angry retort that was welling in her throat, there came a knock on the trailer door. She took a second to compose herself mentally, then said, “Come in.”

The door opened and O’Hanlon entered. He didn’t look at Jennifer. His eyes went to Jack, who continued to sit in the straight back chair in front of Jennifer’s desk. Jack turned his head toward the door and O’Hanlon said, “Dinny said you would want to see me.”

“Yes, Mr. O’Hanlon. Please wait outside. I need just another moment with Miss Kincaid, and I’ll be right out to conclude our business.”

O’Hanlon turned without a word and exited, closing the door behind him.

Jack stood, set his hat back onto his head, and asked Jennifer, again catching her by surprise, “Is there another laptop available? Mine is being upgraded at the moment.” He motioned with his chin to the laptop sitting on her desk.

“There’s another in the house.”

“Good. Have it brought out, and a small desk.” He pointed toward the corner furthest from the door. “Have them set them up there. I’ll be back this afternoon.”

Leaving her no chance to voice an objection, Jack stepped outside. O'Hanlon was waiting on the platform for him.

Jennifer hurried to the door to follow Jack out in order to argue with him, but stopped short when she heard him speak to O'Hanlon.

"You all right, O'Hanlon?"

"I'm fine."

"I'm sorry about the sucker punch. You got caught in the middle of a situation that was not of your making." Jack took a deep breath and continued. "You are a Marine, and understand the need for an officer to maintain his authority. Let's step around behind the office, out of sight. You have two free shots at me coming, but they need to be in private. Just try not to break anything important. I can't afford to be incapacitated."

Jack started down the steps of the trailer. Jennifer started to open the door to protest any more fighting, but this time O'Hanlon's voice stopped her. "Dammit, Sandusky! You just cost me another twenty bucks, and a good fight. Dinny was waiting for me when I came around enough to get up. She said you would give me a shot to get even. I told her you weren't that stupid and that I intended to take your head off.

"She bet me a double sawbuck that you wouldn't fight, just give me the chance to lay you out. I didn't believe it." O'Hanlon stood there for several moments, looking down the steps at Jack. "Why? I could do a lot of damage." He added wryly, "At least when I'm ready. I won't make that mistake again."

"I don't ask my people to do anything I wouldn't do myself, given I have the qualifications. Let's get this over with. You have a piece of pride to recover and I have other duties to attend to."

"Sorry, Chief," said O'Hanlon, a smile on his face as he came down the steps. "I went into a situation without proper scouting and got what I deserved. It was my fault. I was trained better than that." O'Hanlon held out his hand and said, "No hard feelings and no grudges."

Jack reached out and they shook, firmly. Jennifer was watching out the window now and saw the muscles of both men clench as the handshake became firmer and firmer, neither man's eyes leaving the other's. After a long moment each released the other's hand.

"You can count on my help, if it's needed down south, Chief."



“Good. I expected no less from a Marine.”

Jennifer noted that O’Hanlon was smiling and whistling as he walked jauntily off toward the PT course. When she looked back toward Jack he was already well on the way toward the house. As she walked back to her desk, a confusing array of thoughts were swirling in her mind. Jack Sandusky was confusing her. He was not acting at all the way she had pictured.

She sat down behind her desk, absently picked up the microphone to the PA system and said, “Lieutenant Perez to the office, please.”

Jennifer was sitting, chin resting on tented fingers, trying to decide how she felt about Jack Sandusky when Connie Perez ran lightly up the steps and knocked on the door, and then entered.

Out of old habit, she stood at attention, though she did manage to not salute. “Yes, Ma’am?”

Jennifer looked up. “Go to the house and ask for another desk and chair on my behalf. Ask Sikes to show you the laptop in the upstairs study. He can disconnect it for you. Bring it out and put it on the desk. I’ll hook it up to the network when I get back.”

Jennifer stood. Perez stepped to the door and opened it, saying, “Yes, Ma’am.” As Jennifer started to step past, Perez said, “Begging your pardon, Ma’am?”

Jennifer stopped and looked at Lieutenant Perez. Despite her best efforts the last several days, Jennifer had not been able to get Perez to drop her military bearing around her. She had finally decided to just go along. “Yes, Lieutenant?”

“May I offer a bit of advice in regards to Mr. Sandusky?”

“It seems I need some, Lieutenant.”

“Yes, Ma’am,” replied Perez.

Jennifer smiled inwardly. She was beginning to like Connie Perez. She was very straightforward.

Perez continued, “People like Mr. Sandusky are best dealt with directly. They prefer it that way. But they also enjoy *The Game*, and when anyone tries subterfuge or tricks they can and will play by the same rules, taking delight in each victory. Mr. Sandusky is probably the best I’ve ever met at dealing with people on their own level. It would take someone with absolutely no redeeming qualities to get the best of him.”

The two had exited the trailer and were walking toward the house as Perez talked. Jennifer stopped and looked at Perez. “I think you are probably right. But I was not aware that you were acquainted with Mr. Sandusky.”

“I met him for the first time at the meeting the other day, and for the second time this morning.” There was a pause, then Perez added, “But he is something of a legend in certain circles. I have known of him for quite a while.”

There was another pause and Perez said, rather wistfully, “Much as he seems to have known of me. I still don’t know how he found out...” Suddenly realizing she was getting into personal things, Perez quickly changed the subject. “I’ll get that desk and computer now, Ma’am.”

Jennifer watched the woman double time the rest of the way to the house as she followed along at a walk. “I must read Lieutenant Perez’s file more closely. And Sandusky’s,” she thought to herself. She went around the outside of the house on the walk and climbed into her Jaguar and drove off the estate.

She was back shortly after lunch. She struggled with the three large bank bags slung over her shoulders as she walked back to the office trailer. Jennifer dropped them with relief onto the floor, behind her desk, and sat down.

Jennifer noted the second desk had been moved into the room, and the laptop. To her surprise, it was connected to the network line that had been run to the trailer. The screen was on and she pressed the keys to call up the main menu.

It appeared as it should, just as Jack Sandusky entered the trailer. Jennifer looked over at him as he sailed his hat at the wall, where it caught on a coat hook and swayed for a moment before coming to a complete rest.

Jack was hanging his leather jacket over the back of his desk chair when Jennifer asked, “Did you hook this up and access the network server?”

“No. I just got back. Who did you have bring it from the house?”

“Lieutenant Perez.”

“I’m sure she set it up then. She has quite a bit of experience with computer systems.”

“I see,” replied Jennifer. She went over to her desk and sat down. “I didn’t think about that. There is a lot of sensitive information on the system. I was going to lock it out when I set up the second laptop. Mine is already password protected.”

Jack noticed the PA system. He nodded toward it and asked, “That an open PA pager?”

Jennifer nodded, working at her terminal, checking several files to see if they had been entered.

“Hand me the mike.”

Jennifer reached over and gave it to Jack absently. She looked up, however, when Jack keyed the mike and spoke.

“Lieutenant Perez to the office. On the double.”

“Mr. Sandusky,” said Jennifer, “let’s not make a big thing of this. None of the files were opened. I’m sure...”

“Listen, Miss Kincaid,” interrupted Jack, causing color to rise in Jennifer’s face yet again. “Discipline is important. You can trust your life and any amount of money, or any type of information to Sizu Perez. But, and it is a very large but, if you told her you were going to set up the computer yourself, she should not have done it on her own.

“Now it is obviously your mistake for not making yourself clear to her, but if she had any doubts at all she should have asked. It is your responsibility to enforce discipline of those in your charge. Good officers like Perez expect it and will think less of anyone that will not enforce their own commands.”

“But it is not that important...”

“All orders and instructions are important in the field. But discipline must be developed before going into the field.”

Jack stopped talking when the knock came, followed by Perez coming through the door, into the office.

Jennifer noticed that this time the woman was breathing a bit more rapidly. She must have run quite a ways.

“Yes, Sir, Ma’am?”

She was standing at attention. Jennifer looked at Jack expecting him to handle it. She was surprised when all he said was, “Lieutenant, you are here for disciplinary action.”

Jack looked over at Jennifer and said, “Miss Kincaid.”

Lieutenant Perez turned slightly to face Jennifer and quietly said, “Ma’am.”

Jennifer, reluctantly, looked at the Lieutenant, and after a tiny pause, asked, “Did you hook up the laptop and access the server?”

“Yes, Ma’am.”

“Why? I said I would do it when I returned.”

“Yes, Ma’am. It is a good system. It interested me.” There was a tiny pause, then Perez continued, “I thought I might save you a little time and inconvenience.”

“I see.” Jennifer caught Jack looking at her with a neutral expression on his face.

Taking a deep breath, Jennifer said, “There is information on this system that is not for general view. Mr. Sandusky assures me you would not have accessed it. I have checked the files and there is no evidence of access in the last three hours. But you should not have entered the system without permission.”

“Yes, Ma’am.”

Jennifer closed her eyes for a moment in controlled anguish, opened them. She had seen Connie and Dinny have people take laps around the estate as punishment for minor infractions of the camp rules.

She said, “Take two laps around the perimeter of the estate. Then come back here. I need someone trained on the system to assist me from time to time. You obviously have the skills necessary. It will be part of your duties from now on.”

“Yes, Ma’am,” replied Perez, still standing there.

It dawned on Jennifer that she was waiting to be dismissed. “Carry out your punishment.”

“Yes, Ma’am,” replied Perez yet again. She turned, her face still expressionless, and left the trailer.

Jennifer looked over at Jack, who was working at the keyboard of the laptop. “Satisfied?” she asked, the anger she felt at having to punish someone she was beginning to think of as her friend, obvious in her voice.

“Yes. As a matter-of-fact I am. You handled that surprisingly well.”

Despite herself, Jennifer was pleased at Jack’s words. She did manage to say, “I hated doing that.”

Jack looked up long enough to say, "You should. The whole thing was your fault."

Jennifer was opening her mouth to retort when the phone rang. She picked it up and became engrossed in the conversation.

Jack thought to himself, "Saved by the bell." He continued to work at the computer as she talked, inputting information into the personnel files from a notebook he took from his shirt pocket.

He had finished that while Jennifer was on the phone and began to scan the existing files. He read several, then pulled up his own. Jack smiled. He could tell that some of the comment lines had been entered by Jennifer herself. They were somewhat unflattering toward him.

Jack tried to pull up Jennifer's, but the computer responded that there was no file under that name. He broke out of the system and searched the master files. He checked on several of them, bypassing the passwords that protected three of the most sensitive corporation related files.

He pulled up the menu system again as Jennifer hung up the telephone. To forestall the continuation of the previous situation, Jack said, "I've entered the data that I have, on the people I'm bringing into the expedition, into the personnel files."

"The rest of the information you need for insurance and so on you can get from them during the personal interviews."

Jack stood up and went to the window to look out. Still looking out the window, he asked Jennifer, "What is the perimeter of the estate? About a mile?"

"Just under a mile." Jennifer looked at Jack's back speculatively and asked, "Are you worried about Lieutenant Perez?"

Jack chuckled. "Of course not. She could do two miles in full field gear and barely break a sweat. I've got a feeling she is enjoying the break in routine."

Jack looked around Jennifer. "Who went with you to the bank?"

Jennifer looked down at the bank bags, then back at Jack. "No one. Why?"

Jack looked out the window once more, then stepped to the door, opened it and let out a shrill whistle.

The man he had seen walking toward the trailers from the house saw him and waved. Jack motioned him over and waited in the door as

he approached. Jack looked up at the sky when he felt the first drops of light rain begin to fall.

The short, thin, wiry man stepped into the office. “Hi, Jack. I got your message. The big guy in the house sent me back here.”

“Hello, Jerome. This is Miss Kincaid. Miss Kincaid, this is Jerome Donnelly. He’ll be our chief mechanic. Knows almost everything there is to know about engines. He knows his way around big trucks and construction equipment as well.”

Jennifer nodded toward the man, who had taken off his short brimmed baseball cap. “Howdy, Ma’am.”

Jack looked at Jerome and asked, “You packing?”

“Not at the moment.”

Jack looked back at Jennifer and asked her, “How tall would you say Jerome is, and about what would he weigh?”

Jennifer replied, the confusion evident on her face, “I don’t know. Five five, five six. A hundred and ten pounds?”

“Close enough,” said Jack. “Jerome, see those bags there behind Miss Kincaid’s desk?”

Jerome leaned forward, saw the bags, and nodded.

“Consider any one of the three yours. Take it and go home.”

“Sure thing,” said Jerome. He went over, picked up the top bag and started for the door.

Jennifer leaped to her feet, eyes flashing. “What the hell do you think you’re doing, Sandusky? There is fifty thousand dollars worth of Brazilian currency in that bag!”

“Precisely. Here is a rather small statured man, though not in spirit, I assure you, unarmed, walking out with corporation funds. How do you propose to stop him?”

“I...”

Jerome was at the door, knob in hand.

Frantic now, Jennifer stepped forward, “Stop him, Sandusky! Please!”

Jack put his hand on Jerome’s arm. “Okay, Jerome. You can put it back now.”

“Sure, Boss. I don’t have much use for Brazilian currency right now anyway. You gonna tell me what this is all about?”

“No. Go find Dinny or one of the guys. One-shot is floating around some place. One of them can get you settled in.”

Jack had not taken his eyes off Jennifer as Jerome replaced the bag and went out the door.

“What’s in the other two bags?” he asked her.

“Gold and silver coins in one and greenbacks in the other.” Jennifer was trembling very slightly when she sat back down. “Just what in the hell are you trying to prove, Sandusky? I’m getting a little tired of these games.”

“So am I, Miss Kincaid. But it seems you need a dramatic demonstration to get any type of message. Which surprises me. You are smart enough to know better most of the time. It was absolutely insane for you to be carrying that kind of money around in bank bags, alone, in the open!

“It jeopardized the entire expedition, not to mention your life, and those that would have been forced to intervene had an attempt been made to take the money here on the estate.”

Jack’s voice had a chill in it now. “You do something that stupid again, and you will be staying here with your grandfather. I believe you have time to change and join Lieutenant Perez on her last lap around the estate.”

Jack put on his jacket and hat, walked over to the door, stopped and added, “I’m going up to the house to get some supper. When I return I expect that money to be secured. I also expect to see your personnel file listed with the others. Just as complete and candid as the rest.”

Jack stepped through the door quickly, closing it behind him. Jennifer began muttering to herself angrily, using several alternate names for Jack Sandusky besides his given name. But she carried the bags into the room she was using as bedroom, transferred the money to pillow sacks and stashed the coins under the mattress of her bunk bed. She took the bank bags back to the office, stuffed them with some of the remains of computer printouts that had been run through the shredder, and left them lying partially concealed behind her desk.

She returned to the bedroom, slipped into a pair of jeans, a knit polo shirt and athletic shoes. She grabbed a light nylon windbreaker and went out the office door.

Watching from an upstairs bedroom window Jack smiled when he saw her break into a run as soon as she hit the platform steps, headed toward the perimeter of the estate.

“The cold rain and the exercise should calm her down a bit,” he thought as he took a bite out of the sandwich he’d asked the cook to make for him as he went upstairs.

He saw Perez come into sight out of the trees, notice Jennifer, come up to her and then slow her strides to match those of Jennifer. Jack continued to watch until the two disappeared out of sight as they passed the garage.

Jack went back down stairs, found Sikes and told him, “Take something hot to drink out to the office trailer in about twenty minutes, please. And perhaps a couple of sandwiches. I think Miss Kincaid would appreciate it. Try not to be noticed by the expedition members.”

Sikes snorted in response to the last part of Jack’s request, but he nodded and Jack went to Quincy Scanlon’s study and began to make several phone calls. After the second, he keyed the intercom. “Sikes?”

“Yes, Jack?”

“Take only one sandwich out to Miss Kincaid.”

“Jennifer has a very healthy appetite.”

“I’m not too surprised. Anyone with that much bottled up energy has to get it from somewhere. But, please, just one. I do have a reason.”

“Of course. Mr. Scanlon said you might be requesting some rather odd jobs done.”

“Wise man, our friend Quince, what, Sikes.”

“Your British accent is atrocious, Mr. Sandusky. ‘*What*’ indeed!”

Jack chuckled and thought to himself, “I always thought I did a pretty good Eton accent.”

Jack opened the curtains so he could see the office trailer and went back to his phone calls.

He had finished up and Jennifer and Perez had not yet returned to the office. Jack took out cleaning materials and began to clean the custom handgun he drew from the shoulder holster.

He saw the two women reach the steps of the office and enter just as he finished. Jack smiled, slid the handgun back into the holster and reached down to get the compact backup gun he carried in an ankle holster. Taking his time, he cleaned it as well.



Finally, he secured it, stood and started back out to the camp. He strolled slowly out to the office, noting that most of the other members of the expedition were gathered under the awnings of the other camp units watching the now heavy rain. One-shot and Jerome, he noticed, were off by themselves under one of the huge oak trees near the perimeter.

“Discussing the relative merits of Ford versus Chevy as usual, I bet,” thought Jack.

Jack took a deep breath and released it before entering the office.

Lieutenant Perez immediately stood when he entered.

As he hung up his hat he told her, “Ease up a couple of notches on the military courtesy, Sizu.”

She hid her smile as she sat back down behind the desk and laptop. “As you wish, Sir.” There was the tiniest pause before the ‘sir’.

“I’ll be finished here in just a few more minutes,” she said, her fingers again flying over the keyboard.

Jack let the subtle dig pass.

Jennifer glanced up several times as Jack picked up the plan book from her desk and sat down in the straight backed chair, but didn’t say anything, as she too, continued to work.

Jack was pleased to note that there was a cup of steaming coffee on both desks and a few bread crumbs on each of the saucers. Jennifer had shared with Lieutenant Perez the one sandwich Sikes had brought out.

Jack began to go through the plan book again, his notebook on one knee, making an occasional note.

Several minutes passed silently, then Perez stood up and said, “If there is nothing else, Miss Kincaid, I have a few things to take care of before lights out.”

“No. And Lieutenant. You do excellent work. Thank you.”

Perez smiled. “Yes, Ma’am.”

Jack quickly set the heavy plan book aside and stood. He was at the door, hand on knob when Lieutenant Perez came around the desk. “Lieutenant,” he asked, “have any of the college gophers arrived?”

“Yes, Sir. Several.”

“Pick one that has some brains and have them set up my gear.”

“Yes, Sir. Where is it?” responded the Lieutenant. She immediately said, “Ah... Never mind. I’ll find it.”

Jack opened the door for Perez and she went out into the rain as the last vestiges of light began to fade.

As Jack walked over to his desk, pulled off his jacket and sat down Jennifer said, "You have a real way with words, Mr. Sandusky. Gophers? All the college students going on this expedition have the potential of becoming top people in their respective fields some day."

Jack began running through the personnel files again, watching the screen as he answered. "What are these students going to be doing on the expedition, Miss Kincaid?"

"Helping the scientists and technicians, getting some field experience, learning."

"Basically using a spade, setting up camp, doing the minor things the scientists and technicians need done, that would take time away from their more important work?"

"Well... Of course. That is part of their work."

"Gophers."

Jennifer muttered something under her breath. Jack found Jennifer's file this time. He read it, his assessment of her capabilities going up by quite a bit.

He couldn't hide the grin when he read the comment lines.

"Somewhat argumentative. Little wilderness experience. Also little leadership experience. Fit and good coordination, but suffers from lack of confidence in physical abilities."

The suggestions and recommendations remarks were just as brutally honest.

"Suggest intensive PT to build confidence. The leadership qualities should be carefully monitored by someone with more experience, and guidance offered when required."

Jack cut a quick glance toward her. "Putting those lines in must have cost her," he thought. They were the same types of comments and suggestions that were included in all the files.

Jack checked the other files for any changes, found none and turned off the computer. He swiveled his chair around to face Jennifer. "You about finished there?"

"Yes." She worked back through the menus, exited the system and turned off her laptop.

She looked over at him, meeting his eyes.

He asked her, “Are you about ready to put the cards on the table, Miss Kincaid?”

“Lieutenant Perez basically suggested to me it would be the best way to deal with you.”

“She is even smarter than she is talented, Miss Kincaid.

“Now, I know you don’t particularly like me, which is fine. But petty personal friction between us is going to be very detrimental to the expedition. As part of the leadership of this expedition you are an Officer and a Lady, to paraphrase military terminology, which you will find I do quite often. As such, the people for whom you are responsible must always come first, before your own comfort, your own needs, and certainly your own wants.

“When they see you and I having problems it creates problems for them, therefore even more problems for us. Discipline is difficult enough to maintain, without the added burden, especially in a group of people such as this is going to be.

“I will give you the guidance I can, such as this, which I hope you will take as such, and not personal criticism. I will always do it in private, unless someone’s health and safety are at stake.”

Jack unconsciously stood and began to pace, his voice and tone taking on the manners of a professor or lecturer.

“Almost all disciplinary actions should be done in private, occasionally with a witness if the specific situation warrants. Don’t dress down anyone in a public display, again, unless a specific situation requires it. Public humiliation is almost always counterproductive.

“In essentially the same vein, be very discrete when soliciting advice from those that have more experience than yourself. Don’t obviously be asking for advice in public, and if the one that has the knowledge is very far under you in responsibility, even in private, maintain an attitude of competency.

“Dinny will help you all she can, as will Lieutenant Perez. But don’t allow either to get into the habit of doing things for you, when they know you aren’t sure about the situation. Both are competent, take charge types, with many more skills and abilities than you might expect. Always get the information you need and carry out your own duties. There are many responsibilities that can and should be delegated, but try to learn as much as you can from the situations.

“That’s a start on the leadership training. As to the PT, let Dinny help you there. Sizu will run you ragged. She doesn’t know her own stamina. She pushes her people hard, but knows their limits. Since you outrank her, she will have a tendency to expect you to be able to outdo her in physical capabilities, or at least know your own limitations. But you have enough pride to push yourself too hard to try to keep up with her. And there is no need for those kinds of pressures. All you need is confidence. That will come, with Dinny’s help.

“There is no disgrace in ignorance of specialized situations and skills, unless the education is available and simply not taken advantage of. When you have a little free time, and you want, talk to One-shot. He could live and prosper in any known environment, except, perhaps, the center of Antarctica, or the middle of the Sahara. But then only if he wound up there with absolutely no equipment at all.

“He is a little shy, and you may have to coax him a bit. But don’t insult him by being condescending.

“If I think of anything that I think might help you, as the days progress until we leave, I will pass it on. I won’t have much time to pass along my vast store of wisdom once we get in-country.

“Now it is your turn, Miss Kincaid. Feel free to express any opinions while we are here, in private.”

Jack walked over and sat down behind the desk once more, this time leaning back and propping his feet on the corner. He watched, as Jennifer closed a small notebook, marveling at the fact that she had actually been taking notes.

“Thank you for your insights and advice, Mr. Sandusky. I appreciate it. I have a few more deficiencies in my education than I realized. I intend to correct them as quickly as I can, without shirking my other duties.”

Jack caught the subtle change in her expression, and the major change in her eyes. “Here it comes, Jackie-boy,” he thought. Nor was he wrong.

“You may be... No. Are right... about my insufficiencies. But I resent the manner in which you addressed them. You are a barbarian. And while someone with specialized skills in dealing with a less technical world is required for this expedition I do not believe that we will be entering a prehistoric or feudal time warp. This is the New

Millennium, Mr. Sandusky, and will continue to be so, even when we reach Brazil.

“You may be a legend in your own mind, and to a few misguided souls, similar in spirit to yourself, but to me you are just a petty man, that likes to order weaker people around, enjoying every minute of it. You have made some type of impression on my grandfather, but if I had my way, you would not be involved in this project in any shape, form or fashion.

“And despite your surprisingly eloquent dissertations on being an ‘Officer’, I find you sadly lacking in several of those very traits you so demand in others. I noted that you went to the house for your supper. That you haven’t been on the PT course. You even had someone else carry your things to the house. You failed to show up for a week, while the rest of those involved have been arriving and preparing for the trip.

“It seems obvious to me that you intend to use your friendship with my grandfather to enrich yourself with a minimum of effort on your part. And I’m sure, that when it suits your purposes, you will use the fact that I am the granddaughter of the man financing this expedition to in some way further your own ends.”

Jennifer’s anger had built as she spoke. She was standing beside Jack’s desk, leaning forward slightly, her hands braced on the surface of the desk, directly staring down at Jack’s face as he continued to sit passively, still leaning back in his chair.

He looked up into her face, asked, “Through?”

Her face became even redder. She straightened up and slapped his feet off the corner of the desk. “No. Get your feet off the desk! Now please leave. It’s late. I’m tired and angry. I want to get some sleep.” Her chin lifted slightly as Jack stood and began to slip into his coat and hat. Jennifer said, a bit of haughtiness in her voice, “Some of us do get up early in order to get as much useful work done as possible.”

Jack went to the door and stepped through. “Good evening, Miss Kincaid. Pleasant dreams.”

Jennifer had followed him to the door. She closed it behind him hard enough to rattle the windows, for some reason more angry at his lack of reaction to her words than anything else.

She strode to the bedroom, slipped out of her jeans and shirt, took a look at the bathroom door and decided to shower the next morning. She was too tired to do it tonight.

Before she had a chance to think about it, she had the covers of the bed flipped back, had sat down and laid back heavily, managing to crack the back of her head on one of the bags of rolled gold and silver coins hard enough to bring tears to her eyes.

“Damn! Damn! Damn!” she said, trying to rub the pain away. “This is your fault, Sandusky.” She fell asleep before she could get up and move the precious metals from beneath the mattress.

When she reached out to shut off the alarm the next morning she thought, “Good thing it was already set.”

Jennifer groaned as she swung her legs over the edge of the bed. Grudgingly she admitted that Jack was right about one thing. She had pushed herself to keep up with Perez on the disciplinary lap.

She made her way slowly to the shower and turned it on. When she reached up to wash her hair her fingers bumped the lump at the base of her skull, bringing yet another groan of pain. Jennifer tenderly felt the lump. It felt huge. “Should have put ice on it last night.”

Finally, dressed in clean jeans and another polo shirt, she slipped her socked feet into her athletic shoes and tied them. She raised up a little too quickly and grabbed her head when it felt like it was going to split wide open.

She grabbed the wind breaker off the coat hook and opened the door of the office, grimacing at the sight of the rain, still coming down steadily. Jennifer held the collar of the windbreaker over her head and ran slowly toward the trailer used as kitchen and dining hall. She had looked at the clock before she came out. It was still a quarter of six. Normally she was the first one in the kitchen and started a huge urn of coffee and waited for the bakery shop to deliver their now standard order of donuts and Danish.

But this morning she saw a dozen people standing under the awning, hands in jacket pockets, shoulders hunched against the damp and cold. As she rushed to get under the awning with the others Jennifer caught a glimpse of something out of the corner of her left eye. She dropped the coat back down around her eyes and tried to spot whatever it was that had caught her eye.

It took her several moments, and when she finally did spot it again, she realized she had to have looked right at it several times before recognizing it for what it was. A tent. She turned around, saw Connie Perez, and moved over to her. “Where did the tent come from? It wasn’t there yesterday.”

Even as she asked the question she thought, “Sandusky’s the wilderness expert. It must be his.” She voiced the thought even as she had it. “Oh. One of Mr. Sandusky’s men’s, I suppose.”

Perez looked at her like she was a bit deranged. “No. That’s Mr. Sandusky’s. Didn’t you hear him tell me to have his gear set up?” Perez spoke quietly, Jennifer noticed, though she doubted any of the others would have heard anyway, the way they seemed to be concentrating on the drive that angled around the house from the front, ending just before the first trailer.

She couldn’t quite keep the surprise, nor the grudging respect out of her voice, when she asked, “He slept out there last night?” Jennifer looked around. Though oblivious to it herself during the night because she had been so tired, it was obvious a major storm had passed through, the current rain the remains of a strong system.

Perez hid her grin by turning her head and replied, “Of course. From what I hear, he has a major aversion to unsecured manufactured housing.”

Jennifer was now bouncing on her toes slightly, to try to keep warm. She motioned with her chin, not wanting to take her hands out of her pockets to make any gestures. “What’s going on? Why is everyone standing out here in the cold? They can’t be that anxious for donuts. I haven’t even started the coffee yet. And it’ll be another fifteen minutes or so before the delivery truck gets here.”

“Not this morning,” said Perez. “Coffee and donuts are both being picked up.”

“By whom?” asked Jennifer.

“Well, my money is on the Chief getting back first,” replied Perez. She checked her watch, then stood on tiptoes, watching first the drive and then the tall wall that ran along the forested area bordering the estate.

Jennifer couldn't figure out why Perez kept glancing at the wall and intended to ask her. But first she asked, "So what's the big deal? Anyone can drive in and get donuts and coffee."

This time Perez didn't try to hide her smile from Jennifer. She looked over at her and said, "That's what the boss told Crenshaw, when he said someone should drive in and get the donuts."

Intrigued now, Jennifer asked, "When was all this?"

"About twenty-five minutes ago."

"But why was anyone up and about then?"

"Me and O'Hanlon and a couple of others got up to watch the Chief run PT at zero four thirty. Crenshaw had heard us talking about it last night I guess. He couldn't quite understand why we would get up that early if we didn't have too, just to watch someone run an obstacle course. And we couldn't explain it satisfactorily. He's usually pretty lazy. I was surprised to see him this morning when we went over to watch the Chief. He lost quite a bit on that fight yesterday. I guess maybe he wanted to see part of why he lost his money."

"I've got to admit I can't quite understand why anyone would want to watch someone run PT, myself." After a pause Jennifer realized she still didn't know why they were standing out here, waiting. "I still don't understand why we are out here."

"Crenshaw and the Chief are racing to the bakery and back to get the donuts and coffee. First one back with the goods wins. Loser pays for both loads."

Getting exasperated Jennifer said, "Maybe I am especially dense this morning. But just what is so important about two men driving in to get donuts?"

Perez turned to look sadly at what she knew to be an intelligent woman. "The Chief isn't driving. Only Crenshaw. Mr. Sandusky is on foot. That was the whole point."

"What?" exclaimed Jennifer, loud enough to bring several glances her way. She lowered her voice and urgently told Perez, "It's at least fifteen miles to that bakery!"

"The Chief figures it to be only about three, cross country."

"Cross country! But the river..."

"Yeah. That's the only thing that has me worried. With the rain last night it must be running pretty high. If he doesn't show pretty soon I'm



going to see what happened. Even if he does throw me off the expedition because of it.”

Suddenly they all heard a squeal of brakes from the front of the house. All eyes turned that way. Almost all eyes. Dinny, Perez, One-shot and Jerome watched the wall at the edge of the estate.

One-shot called out, “There he is!”

Jennifer strained her eyes toward the corner of the house, adding her “Where? Where?” to several others.

Perez touched Jennifer’s arm. When Jennifer looked around, Perez pointed toward the wall.

Jennifer couldn’t help herself. Her hand went to her mouth. Jack Sandusky was standing on the wall, a huge pack on his back. He stepped forward off the wall and Jennifer gasped, as did several others. The drop was over ten feet.

Jack went to his knees, but scrambled up and began running toward them. Jennifer heard tires scrambling on gravel and looked toward the house. A pickup truck was tearing toward the trailers.

All eyes went back to Jack. He was altering course slightly. Instead of coming directly to the trailers he was heading for the PT course, which would add almost a hundred meters of extra distance.

Jennifer couldn’t tell who said it, but someone out of her vision yelled, “Damn it to hell! He’s gonna run the PT course first!”

The cold and rain forgotten, Jennifer moved with the rest, to get a closer look. She did notice that the pickup was pulling down the drive toward the kitchen trailer. She found herself feeling intensely disappointed that Jack had lost. She watched him approach the first obstacle of the PT course. It consisted of an open A-frame of horizontal bars. Jack didn’t use the bars. He simply vaulted the frame.

The next item was a shallow water pit with a rope suspended over it, hanging in the middle of the pool. Jack made a huge leap, grabbing the rope, and managed to swing well past the edge of the pit, releasing the rope at just the right moment to get an extra seven or eight feet.

Next up was a one and a half meter diameter tile, five meters long. Without a pack it required leaning well forward to go through. With the huge pack Jack was forced to lean far forward, but instead on putting his hands on the bottom and spider walking the length of the tile as Jennifer expected him to do, he braced his hands against the side of the tile,

letting them slide, and literally ran the full length, faster than some people she had seen go through it without any encumbrance.

The truck had come to a stop and Crenshaw was carrying boxes of donuts and coffee to the kitchen trailer.

The next to last obstacle was a dozen poles, laid horizontally on short posts about half a meter off the ground. Usually taken by high stepping one at a time, Jack used a high hurdle stride to cross two at a time. But unlike a hurdler, he had no distance to pick up a stride between each hurdle. He alternated legs, taking the poles two at a time with each step.

The final item was a ten centimeter diameter pole, also set horizontally off the ground by about half a meter. But it was placed in line with the line of travel. With a huge leap Jack landed on the pole at a dead run and didn't slow down. He continued his stride at the end, the step off the pole merely part of his run.

His arms pumping close to his body, Jack lengthened his stride even more and headed to the kitchen trailer. It was only then that Jennifer noticed that Crenshaw was still in the process of carrying cartons of coffee into the trailer.

She scrambled to get into the trailer, followed closely by Perez, before Jack could get there. Both leapt back as Crenshaw barreled through the door again, almost threw the cups of coffee onto the table and went out for more.

Suddenly Jack loomed in the doorway. As he cleared the door frame he swung the pack off his back and onto another table. With a quick flick of his arm and wrist he had the pack zipper opened and quickly but carefully scooted the boxes of donuts out onto the table and then set the coffee, three large dispensing thermoses, beside the donuts. He flopped down in a chair, leaned back and propped his feet up on the corner of the table, careful to rest his ankle on the corner so his muddy boots wouldn't soil the surface of the table.

Crenshaw entered the trailer with another load of coffee cups, one falling to the floor, splashing coffee everywhere. Crenshaw was followed by everyone that could crowd in at once.

Jack smiled over at Crenshaw and said, "That'll be forty-two thirty nine, Crenshaw. I got a couple of cream horns for myself."

Crenshaw let out a low growl and started toward Jack. Jennifer saw his eyes narrow and could tell he was about to swing his legs down, but O'Hanlon grabbed the back of Crenshaw's jacket and said. "He won fair and square, Crenshaw. Pay up. Don't be a sore loser."

Crenshaw had stopped his forward motion. He shrugged his shoulders forcefully, pulling his jacket free of O'Hanlon's grasp. But he reached into his hip pocket and pulled out his wallet. He threw two twenty dollar bills onto the table near Jack and said, "Here's forty. You can pay for your own cream horns."

Crenshaw started to turn away, obviously headed outside. Everyone had crowded in by now, and from the back of the crowd, someone loudly said, "Who's going to tell him?"

It was obvious that Crenshaw knew he was the 'him' referred to in the question. He stopped at the door, turned around and said, "Tell me what?"

One of the other men, almost as large as O'Hanlon stepped forward. Obviously not afraid of any reaction that Crenshaw might have, because he was grinning when he said, "Sandusky forgot his money. He had to come back and get it. He essentially gave you a six minute head start."

Crenshaw let out another growl and left the trailer, slamming the door forcefully behind him.

Jennifer was still standing nearby, looking at Jack when the losers of the side bets began paying off the winners. Jennifer noticed there was little grumbling by the losers. Each seemed to consider it almost a ticket fee to a favored sporting event.

She saw Perez and Dinny both collecting wagers and wasn't surprised. Jennifer noticed that several of the other women had made wagers, which did surprise her.

She took a cup from the stack by one of the thermos bottles and filled it with coffee. Jennifer took a sip. It might not be steaming, but it was still hot. Glancing around to see if anyone was watching, she picked up a box of the donuts, weighing it in her hand. She set it down and took a Danish and her cup of coffee and moved to sit down. She chose a chair slightly behind Jack.

By now, almost everyone was up and about. Jennifer heard Jack ask Dinny, “Has the Leech made it over yet? He’s going to miss his chocolate donut if he doesn’t get here soon.”

It struck Jennifer as a bit odd, though she couldn’t put her finger on why. She put it off to the bristle she felt when Jack used the term ‘the Leech’ instead of Doctor Ramos’ name.

Dinny said she hadn’t seen him. It suddenly dawned on Jennifer that the Doctor didn’t like chocolate donuts. He liked jelly filled. “Besides,” thought Jennifer, “how would Jack know anyway? This is his first morning here.”

Barely catching the tiny wave of Dinny’s hand, she quickly looked over to where Lieutenant Perez was standing. Perez quickly disengaged from the conversation she was involved in, and moved over to Dinny and Jack.

Lieutenant Perez said, “Mr. Sandusky, if you have time before breakfast, there are a couple of things I need to discuss with you.”

Jack nodded. “I’ll be out in a minute.”

Dinny stepped back, and picked up a cup of coffee as Perez left the trailer. Jennifer noticed that Dinny was not drinking her coffee.

She wasn’t quite sure why she did it, but Jennifer quickly set her coffee and Danish aside and left the trailer. Hurrying over to the men’s dorm trailer she knocked on the door and called, “Doctor Ramos?”

“Yes, Miss Kincaid?”

“I need to see you right away in my office.”

When the doctor opened the door, still buttoning his shirt, Jennifer hurriedly led the way to the office trailer. She looked over at him, relieved that he had picked up his medical bag. “Good. You brought your bag.”

“Habit, Miss Kincaid. What is going on? Has someone been injured?”

“I don’t know.” They had reached the office trailer and Jennifer bounded up the steps. She opened the door and stood aside, letting the doctor enter before her. Jennifer quickly stepped in after him, closing the door behind her.

Jack was carefully taking off his shirt, obviously in pain. He noticed the bag and asked Dinny, “Did you send for the doctor?”

Dinny shook her head and helped Jack slide the shirt down his arms. “No. I was waiting to see what the problem was first. I thought we might be able to take care of it.”

Jennifer winced when she saw the huge bruise beginning to form under Jack’s left shoulder blade. To one side was a bloody scrape. The blood on the shirt hadn’t been easy to see, since the shirt was soaked with rain anyway.

Jack twisted his head around slightly as Doctor Ramos set his bag on Jennifer’s desk and opened it. “I take it you’re the Leech for this shindig.”

Doctor Ramos looked over at Jennifer. “He means doctor. It’s an old term. From Europe. From the Dark Ages period.”

“Oh, yes. I see. From the use of leeches.” The doctor began to check Jack’s shoulder. “It could be construed as a bit of an insult.” Jack grimaced, but didn’t make a sound when Doctor Ramos prodded the bruised area firmly.

Jennifer grinned in spite of herself.

“Not when I use the term. I read your file. Leeches...” Jack grimaced again when another firm probe of the wound occurred.

“...Organisms from the genus *Hirudo* did serve useful purposes. And still do, as a matter-of-fact, in limited instances. The fact that the term eventually came to be considered an insult does not negate the fact that those who know and understand the expertise it takes to use a... the things properly, would consider and use the term as a compliment.”

Doctor Ramos took out and opened a medicated prep pad, swabbed the cut, none too gently as he said, “Any of the rest of you buying this line?”

All Jack heard, his back to the three women, were three noncommittal ‘ahs.’

As he finished taping a gauze pad over the wound, Doctor Ramos said, “Change that twice a day. That scrape will ooze some for a couple of days, then should heal quickly. If you have any problems let me know.” He snapped his bag closed and Jack turned, slightly.

“No pills, salves or gunk of any kind?”

“I can put some ointment on it if you want. But I cleaned it. The ointment wouldn’t do much right now. The weeping will naturally keep the thing clean, as long as it’s kept protected from outside

contamination, plus it carries the natural infection fighting organisms of the body.”

“Well, well. A true physician. I’m pleased to meet you, Doctor Ramos.” Jack held out his hand and Doctor Ramos shook it.

“I take it you wouldn’t have been overly pleased if I had given you a shot or a couple of pills and told you to see me in the morning.”

“No, Physician, I would not. As it is, I found out I am going to have to replace one team member this morning anyway.”

“The trials and tribulations of the dedicated leader. How did you trash your back?”

“Fell off a trestle.”

Doctor Ramos looked at Jack and asked, “Did you say trellis, or trestle. As in railroad bridge type trestle?”

“The latter.”

Jennifer exclaimed, “You went across the old railroad trestle? That thing has been falling down for fifty years!”

Jack grimaced again as he slipped his khaki shirt back on and started to button it. “It still is. Take my word for it. By the way, what prompted you to come to the office at this particular time?” He asked Doctor Ramos.

“I didn’t come. Miss Kincaid brought me.”

Jack gave Jennifer a strange look, then told the doctor, “I see. Thank you. I can only assume that a Physician of your caliber strictly honors the Physician-Patient confidentiality doctrine.”

“Of course.”

“Good. There’s a load of fresh pastry over in the mess hut. It was disappearing fast when I left.”

Taking his words as the dismissal they were, Doctor Ramos picked up his bag and stepped to the door. “Mr. Sandusky, I think I prefer Leech to Physician.”

“I’ll remember.”

Doctor Ramos went out into the rain. Before Dinny closed the door they all heard the doctor say out loud, “Seems like I’ve got a good story to pry out of someone.”

Jack looked at Dinny and Lieutenant Perez. “You two go get some chow. I need to talk to Miss Kincaid.”

The two left without another word.

Jack looked at Jennifer for a moment, then said, “You have very, very good instincts, Miss Kincaid. I am quite impressed.”

“I’m flattered, Mr. Sandusky, but I have no idea what you’re talking about.”

“Why did you go get Doctor Ramos and bring him to the office?”

“I don’t know. Something you said in the kitchen trailer didn’t sound just right. And I didn’t think Perez would be bothering you with anything right then, unless it was important. And if it was important, the two of you would have taken care of it immediately.

Jennifer thought for a moment, then said, “Just several unrelated little things.”

“That is what most instincts are, Miss Kincaid. The automatic, unconscious interpretation of the little things.”

Jack went behind his desk and sat down, careful to find a position in the chair that wouldn’t hurt his back. After turning on the laptop and waiting for it to boot, he called up the file of prospective expedition members.

“Now, Miss Kincaid, we need to select a new geologist. Crenshaw won’t be going with us.”

Jennifer’s ire was rising again at Jack’s immediate assumption that she would go along with his decision to change geologists. “And just why do we need a new geologist, Mr. Sandusky? I grant you that Mr. Crenshaw seems to be a poor loser. But he is a geologist of national renown.”

“I read his file. And all you have said is perfectly true. I do not like to lose myself. But his reaction to the loss is only a sign of other, more serious potential problems.

“The man is a womanizer. Which is no big deal in itself. But couple that with his temper; his propensity to lose control; the fact that several of the women in the expedition will be fairly young and inexperienced, especially some of the college women; the fact that we are going to be in a remote location, away from the visible trappings of authority; and the fact that, as geologist, he will be running the core drilling crew. Which will often be off by itself, away from the rest of the expedition. That is just asking for an attempted rape.”

“Aren’t you reading a great deal into one bad reaction to a silly bet?”

“No. I got the reaction I expected when I provoked the situation. I had already decided Crenshaw would be a problem. I hadn’t quite planned how to test him, to find out for sure if I was right in my assessment, so when he mouthed off I offered a challenge he couldn’t refuse. I wasn’t wrong. Get with the program, Miss Kincaid. That is only the last of a series of signs. Didn’t you hear what I just said?”

“Yes, Mr. Sandusky. I am not deaf. But there is nothing in his file that would indicate a problem relating to interpersonal relationships. Nor have I seen any signs of a problem since he has been here.

“I have had a few indecent proposals directed toward me in my day. A few of which came from men I would not have thought it, at least at first, but Mr. Crenshaw has not made a single inappropriate move or remark toward me. And I have worked closely with him since he arrived, because geology is one of the most important aspects of this expedition. It is why we wanted one of the best. And I’m not sure I particularly like the idea of tests such as yours.”

“I see someone has sadly neglected your worldly education. People with a deep-seated problem, such as Crenshaw, have the innate ability to sense who would be an acceptable target and who might cause them a great deal of trouble.

“He would never approach someone such as yourself. It would be obvious to him that, not only would he not get anywhere, but you would be offended, which he would want to avoid at all costs.

“Now someone with little power to hurt him directly might get propositioned. If they said ‘No,’ politely and firmly, as all good parents should teach their daughters to do, probably nothing would come of it. But should she slap him, make fun of him, or otherwise trigger his anger, the woman could easily receive a blow, have a job or career ruined or something similar.

“But that is here, in, quote, civilization. The same situation without the trappings of law enforcement all around, could easily, and quickly, turn violent and dangerous.”

Jennifer made a concerted effort to control her temper, and react reasonably. “I can’t fault your reasoning, Mr. Sandusky. I’m inclined to agree with your assessment. If the situation were as you described it in terms of Mr. Crenshaw. I do not believe it is.”



"I know it is, Miss Kincaid. Crenshaw has already hit on several of the women here. To the best of my knowledge, he has been turned down each time."

Jennifer was startled. She doubted that Jack would tell her an outright lie. But she had not seen any evidence of Crenshaw's womanizing. She had to admit that she didn't particularly like him, but it was no reason to condemn a man.

"I am afraid I find it difficult to believe," she said. "Plus," she continued, "a charge like this could ruin an outstanding career."

"Miss Kincaid, I am not charging him or even accusing him. I simply want to prevent a potential problem before it develops. I have serious doubts that the man has the... Ah... that he would do anything of a truly drastic nature as long as he is around controlled, civilized society."

"But he has been on remote digs, other research projects," protested Jennifer.

"I know. But this is going to be a much more remote location in terms of civilization."

"I'm sorry, but I just can't condone the replacing of a member of this expedition for the nebulous reasons you have given."

Jack surprised himself. He didn't blow up. Instead he said, "Would you talk to, ah... I forget the psychologist's name... Adam..."

"Adam Sinclair. But I can't tell him your thoughts about Crenshaw..."

Jack interrupted Jennifer, "Let me finish, please. I know you can't use Crenshaw's name, or even describe the situation in enough detail that Sinclair would know who you were talking about.

"You are smart enough to put it to him in some hypothetical setting. But before you do, if you do, talk to some of the other women. Again, you are smart enough to get the feel of the situation without bringing Crenshaw's name into it directly."

"All right. That sounds reasonable." Jennifer stood up. "Now is there anything else we need to cover before breakfast. I'm starving."

Jack stood as well. "No."

The two went to the door. Jennifer opened it and started to go out, but stopped and closed the door. Turning to look at Jack, she asked,

“Yesterday, why didn’t you tell me you were camping out near the trees, and that you did your PT early in the mornings?”

“You are an adult, Miss Kincaid. You must form your own judgments about people. If you base them on what people tell you about themselves you are likely to wind up with highly erroneous pictures of the person.”

Jennifer opened the door again and stepped out. Jack followed her out of the trailer, but turned toward his tent as Jennifer headed toward the kitchen trailer.

She looked back at him, asking, “Aren’t you coming to get some breakfast?”

“Not right now. I have a couple other things to take care of first.”

Hating the fact that she felt disappointed, Jennifer walked the rest of the way to the kitchen trailer. She shook her head several times, as she thought of the troubling things Jack had told her about Crenshaw.

Most of the members of the expedition had already had their breakfast and left the trailer. There were a few lingering over a last cup of coffee, she noted. One of those was Adam Sinclair.

Jennifer hurriedly picked up a plate, loaded it with scrambled eggs, bacon and toast and went over to the table at which Sinclair sat.

“Adam, could I talk to you for a few minutes?” she asked, taking a seat across the table from him.

“Sure, Jennifer. Have you heard about Sandusky’s run this morning?” he asked her eagerly. “I’m afraid I slept in this morning. I missed the whole thing.”

“Yes. I saw it. He is turning out to be a rather remarkable man.”

The psychologist in him immediately came to the surface at Jennifer’s words. “Interesting,” he thought to himself. He asked her, “Is this business or pleasure?”

Jennifer had taken a bite of her eggs and took the time to chew and swallow before answering. “Business.”

Adam Sinclair wished he had his notebook with him. He had had several pleasant conversations with Jennifer Kincaid since he had arrived at the estate. He had found her to be a charming, intelligent woman. Her discussions with him about various aspects of the expedition, including his own part, had been just that, conversations.

With the single word she had already spoken he could tell this one was going to be very different.

“Adam, I’ve been thinking recently about what some of the effects of the departure from the surroundings of civilization might be. Especially on different types of personalities.”

She took another bite of egg and watched Adam’s face as she chewed, waiting for him to respond.

“This is official business, isn’t it?” he asked. “Something specific, not just general information.”

“What? Well... I suppose so. Why did you ask me that?”

Adam replied, “All of our previous conversations have been on a one-to-one basis. This one is shaping up as more of an expert-to-leader situation.”

“Look, Adam, I’m not trying to pull rank or...”

“Hey, don’t apologize. I wasn’t complaining. Just stating an observed fact. I’m afraid it’s one of the hazards of my profession. On a purely technical level, I have been wondering when the change would take place.”

“What are you talking about?” Jennifer asked.

“I mean, I’ve been observing you, like I do everyone. It is part of my job,” he hurriedly added. “I knew it was only a matter of time before you made the subtle change from interested participant, but outside the process, to active participation in the process of leadership of the expedition.”

Slightly annoyed at the direction the psychologist’s thoughts were taking, they seemed to be uncomfortably close to some of the things Jack Sandusky had told her the day before, she hurriedly interjected, “I’ve been involved in this from the beginning.”

“Yes, of course. As a planner, giving guidance and advice. But not actually in a leadership role. More behind the scenes type of activities. Please, Jennifer. I’m not criticizing, merely commenting.”

Jennifer made herself take another bite, chew and swallow, in order to give herself time to cool off. “It’s not a problem, Adam. It’s just that I wasn’t planning to talk about myself. I got a little side tracked.” After another quick bite she continued. “As I said, I would like to know your opinion of how different types of personalities are apt to act, once we get to the wilderness areas of the Upper Amazon.”

“Of course. Well, there are no absolutes, as I’m sure you know. Most personalities will change very little or react in any substantially different way to common stimuli.

“There are those few that aren’t quite comfortable in our modern civilization, but do get along all right, who seem to change and become stronger and more self assured when in less, quote, civilized surroundings. I think one of the new men, the one they call One-shot, is that type.

“Other personalities are similar, but the individual merely rises to the occasion, as the new situations bring out the best in them, not because there was a lack to start with, but because of a lack of proper stimuli to trigger certain reactions.

“The same type of thing happens during combat, a disaster, many other situations that are simply a change for the person. New feelings, experiences, emotions that have never been felt before.

“Then there are the few, again a tiny handful, that simply cannot deal with things strange or unexpected. They tend to fold early on, at the first real change that forces them to deal with new, unfamiliar situations.

“Unfortunately, there is the occasional person that will lose all sense of morality when the legal system breaks down, in a disaster, or when away from the constant reminders that a justice system of some type exists. A deep wilderness, such as we will be in, could trigger that reaction.”

“But,” asked Jennifer, “what are the signs to look for? For the various different reactions?”

“I’m sorry, Jennifer. There is nothing that will act as a sure signboard.”

“Not even for what would be the most dangerous? The personality that might tend to become savage?” asked Jennifer, what little food there was left on her plate now forgotten.

“Nothing very sure. Things like a tendency to bend the rules of good behavior badly. Say someone that cheats at cards whenever they can get by with it. Or has to be constantly chided by friends or co-workers about losing their temper over little things. Also, someone that tends to strike out blindly when hurt, or humiliated.

“Those are all possible signs. But people with them have and do act just the same way in situations such as we will be going as they do in civilization.

“I’m afraid I can’t be any more precise than that.”

“Okay. Thanks, Adam. You have been a big help.”

Adam Sinclair picked up his empty coffee cup and left the table.

Jennifer’s breakfast began to weigh heavily on what was now a cold feeling in the pit of her stomach. Adam’s words had echoed Jack’s sentiments almost exactly.

She picked up her plate and cup, carrying it over to the dirty dish receiving bin. Jennifer looked up at Maggie’s cheerful, “Hi, Miss Kincaid. Did you see the Chief beat Crenshaw this morning?”

Jennifer had to smile at Maggie Russell’s enthusiasm. As Maggie picked up one of the large plastic dishpans and carried it into the kitchen to begin washing the dirty dishes, Jennifer picked up the other and followed.

Setting it down near the sink with the one Maggie had carried in, Jennifer asked Maggie, “Did you win a bet with someone, on the race?”

“Me? No. I didn’t even know it was going on at the time. I’m just glad someone got the best of Mr. Crenshaw. I don’t like him very much. He keeps asking me to go out on a date with him. He knows I’m married to Mario. If Mario found out... Well... Mr. Crenshaw had better just keep his hands to himself. If I have to I’ll tell the Chief. I know he could take care of it without Mario finding out.”

Suddenly Maggie looked over at Jennifer. “You won’t tell Mario about this will you? If he found out, he might try to say something to Mr. Crenshaw. Mario is a good husband, but he isn’t very big. And Mr. Crenshaw is mean.”

“Don’t worry, Maggie. I won’t mention it to Mario. It was a nice breakfast. You and Mario keep up the good work.”

Maggie smiled and went back to her dishwashing, whistling softly, as Jennifer left the kitchen, went through the dining room and exited the trailer.

Jennifer paused under the awning, watching the rain, hating the tight feeling in her stomach. She suddenly realized, “It’s not that Jack was right and I was wrong. It’s the fact that I didn’t see it myself.”

She saw Anne Bodine leave the women's dorm trailer. Jennifer waved and called, "Anne! Do you have a minute?"

Anne ran through the rain to the awning. "Sure, Jennifer. Anything to delay taking inventory. We received the SCUBA gear yesterday. I have to inventory it and check it. I don't mind checking equipment, that has to be done for safety. But I hate counting things and making little marks on paper."

"What's up? Did you come up with more real work for an underrated, underpaid, highly skilled Oceanographer, slash, Marine biologist, slash, SCUBA diver?"

"Sorry. No. I was just wondering how things have been going around the camp. I've been a little busy lately, and haven't had a chance to talk to many of the other women."

"You haven't missed much, believe me. Though things might pick up a bit now. Already have, since the Boss came in yesterday."

Anne looked at Jennifer. "I don't suppose you know if he needs or wants SCUBA lessons? I'm a certified instructor. And I'd work cheap. Who am I kidding? Someone like the Boss could probably teach me a thing or two about diving. Even if he did cost me five bucks."

"You bet against Mr. Sandusky?" Jennifer asked. Anne Bodine was the first person she had actually talked to that she knew had bet against him.

"Yeah. Stupid, huh? Usually I'm not so gullible. I ought to know better than to try to trade on insider information."

"You lost me, Anne."

"Oh, I heard Crenshaw telling one of the college girls he was trying to impress that he had driven cars on the stock car circuit a few years ago. Stupid me. When I heard about the race I figured, hell, a stock car driver ought to be able to beat even someone like Sandusky."

"I should have known better. Anyone that will cheat at penny-ante poker will say just about anything to try to get laid. I did have the good sense to turn him down when he propositioned me the first day I arrived."

Anne looked at Jennifer and added, "I'd like to stay and talk, but I'm getting cold and if I don't get the inventory done now, I'll just have to do it later."

"I know. I've got a few things I need to do as well."

Anne ran off through the falling rain to the one of the semi-trailers used as store rooms, which would also be used to transport the equipment to the ship when they left for Brazil.

Jennifer turned and walked slowly to the office trailer, wishing she had foregone breakfast. She was dreading the next few minutes.

Walking with her head down, she failed to see the young man waiting at the door of the office until she reached for the door knob.

When she did realize he was there it startled her and she jumped slightly.

“Miss Kincaid, I’m sorry. I didn’t mean to scare you. The LT said you would need a messenger today, with the rain.”

“What?” asked Jennifer, opening the door and stepping into the office, the man following.

“Lieutenant Perez said the PA wouldn’t be very effective. She didn’t say why. Just that I should come over here and run errands for you.”

“I see.” Jennifer sat down behind her desk. She flipped her dripping hair behind her and turned her laptop on. As she waited for it to boot up she looked up at the man. “Sit down. Why were you standing out in the rain? The door wasn’t locked.”

“Ah... Well...” he stammered, moving the straight back wooden chair over to a clear space by the wall.

“What?” asked Jennifer, her voice much sharper than she intended.

The man stood up quickly, bringing a quick ‘sit down’ from Jennifer which was meant as an apology, but made the man even more nervous.

Realizing the situation was rapidly deteriorating, Jennifer clasped her hands in her lap, sat up straight in her chair, and calmed herself for a moment.

She forced a smile and her voice tightly controlled into a pleasant conversational tone, said, “Sorry. Didn’t mean to bark. What is your name, by the way? I don’t think we’ve met.”

“Johnny Vanducci, Ma’am. I came in just a few days ago.”

Seeing he was much more at ease, Jennifer said, “Hi, Johnny. Welcome aboard. Now, why was it you said you were standing out in the rain, waiting for me?”

Johnny had a slightly embarrassed smile. “Well... the LT told me to come over here and wait for you. That I’d better not screw up or she’d have me running laps around the estate. I wasn’t sure if you would want me in here by myself or not, so I just waited. During PT for the college students yesterday, one of the girls was playing around on the course, instead of doing it right, and Lieutenant Perez had us all take a lap.

“I didn’t think some of us would make it, as fast as we ran.” A look of wonderment came into his eyes. “But she ran the whole lap backwards, watching us!”

Jennifer quickly looked down, to hide her smile. “Jack was probably right. Those laps I gave her were probably a nice diversion for her,” she thought. Putting a neutral look back on her face, Jennifer looked over at Johnny again and said, “She is an excellent athlete. And she knows the importance of discipline. Where this expedition is going, goofing off at the wrong moment could be dangerous.”

“She said about the same thing.”

Jennifer knew she was just postponing the inevitable, but couldn’t quite bring herself to send Vanducci to get Crenshaw right now.

“Do you know your way around the camp very well?”

“Pretty well. I think.”

Jennifer opened a drawer, pulled out a sketch of the rear of the estate, with the trailers and other facilities that had been moved in, neatly drawn and labeled by her own hand.

Jennifer handed it across the desk and Vanducci quickly jumped up to take it. “Wait just a second,” Jennifer said, placing the paper on her desk and taking up a pencil.

Quickly drawing in and labeling the location of Jack’s tent, she handed the paper to the college student. “Study that.”

Johnny sat down again and looked at the paper as Jennifer pulled up the file of the list of prospective expedition members from which the current members of the expedition had been drawn.

This was the kind of work she could almost do in her sleep, the manipulation of data. As she compiled a list of geologists from the master file, her eyes on the screen, she asked, “Johnny, what is your specialty? I can’t remember your résumé.”



“Psychology. I’ll be assisting Dr. Sinclair in his research of the psychological aspects of the social impact of development in isolated, agrarian communities.”

“Oh, yes,” said Jennifer, as she dumped the list of geologists’ files to the printer. “If I recall correctly, you are one of only three underclassman selected to go on this trip. Congratulations.”

“Thank you. But it wasn’t such a big deal, I think. Most of the project work is actually a Sociology specialty. Dr. Sinclair needed someone to help do paperwork and things. I’m more of a gopher than anything.”

Jennifer looked up sharply at his words. He didn’t seem to notice and continued, “But it is a great opportunity for me. The work has to be done, which I don’t mind, because I’ll be seeing things first hand, and experiencing things most people in this field will never get the chance to do, even peripherally. This expedition will tell me if I want to pursue a career in psychology. I still haven’t completely made up my mind.”

Jennifer sighed. Jack was right again. As she waited for the printer to complete the print run she stood and shrugged out of her wind breaker. A little shiver shook her shoulders as she hung the jacket up. Her hood had not been up when she was outside and not only were her hair and jeans wet, but apparently much of the rain had found its way down the collar of the jacket.

“Miss Kincaid, can I get you some coffee? You look cold.”

“That sounds nice, Johnny. If you wouldn’t mind?”

Before she could say another word Vanducci was out the door, on his way to the kitchen for coffee. In the short time he was gone, Jennifer collated the geologists’ personnel files she had just printed and placed one set in a file folder, placing it on Jack’s desk, putting the other out of the way on hers.

Johnny was back quickly, with a tray carrying a thermal pot, a sugar bowl, a bowl of lightener, and four cups and saucers.

He looked around, finally setting the tray down in the straight backed chair and poured a cup of the coffee, handing it to Jennifer. “Do you want cream or sugar,” he asked, turning around to pick up the bowls for her.

“No thank you, Johnny.” She sat down in her chair again, took a sip of coffee, sighed, and asked Johnny, “Would you find Mr. Sandusky and tell him I would like to talk to him?”

“Right away!”

“No! You don’t have to hurry.” Her sentence trailed off softly. He hadn’t even heard the beginning of it.

Jennifer drained her cup, then stood and went into her bedroom and on into the bathroom. She brushed her wet hair back out of her eyes and looped a rubber band around the ponytail she gathered at the back of her neck.

She had just poured herself another cup of the coffee and sat down when Jack entered the trailer, followed, rather like a puppy, thought Jennifer, by Johnny Vanducci.

“Do you want some coffee, Mr. Sandusky?” asked Johnny, stepping over to the chair that now doubled as coffee stand.

“No thanks, Sly. I don’t drink coffee.” Jack spotted the file folder sitting on his desk as he came around to sit down. A single quick, close look at Jennifer convinced him that she had realized the type of man that Crenshaw was.

He was more than a bit surprised he hadn’t seen it the moment he stepped in. “She has excellent self control,” he thought. “Doesn’t show emotion, much, except anger. Comes from all that practice at pretending to be a cold fish, I’ll bet.”

“Yo, Sly,” said Jack, looking at Johnny Vanducci. “Outside, but stay close. We’ll need a couple of people fetched in a bit.”

“Yes, Sir, Mr. Sandusky.” Johnny went out the door and Jack sat down.

“Are you all right?” he asked Jennifer.

“Of course, I am.” She said it almost angrily, knowing as she did so, that it was only a cover for her own disappointment in herself. Jennifer took a deep breath, and continued, “You are right about Mr. Crenshaw. I ran off a list of other geologists. We will need to try to get someone else as quickly as possible. But I suppose the first order of business is to break the news to Mr. Crenshaw that he won’t be going with the expedition.”

Jack called, “Sly!” Jennifer was amazed that, though it didn’t seem all that loud to her, Johnny Vanducci obviously heard Jack, since he

came bouncing into the trailer. Jennifer was sure he had been out of normal hearing range. She knew he wouldn't take a chance of getting on Connie Perez's list, if there was any way to avoid it.

"Yes, Sir?"

"Find Mr. Crenshaw and ask him to report to the office, as soon as possible. Then tell Miss Wilson that Mr. Crenshaw will be leaving."

As Johnny headed for the door at his usual pace, Jack quietly said, "Sly." Johnny Vanducci stopped, looked back and asked, "Sir?"

"If anyone else knows anything about what goes on in this office that I or Miss Kincaid hasn't told personally, you and I will be having a very animated discussion about the matter."

Jennifer could see Johnny actually gulp. He did manage to squeak out a feeble, 'Yes, Sir' before running out to get Crenshaw.

"Why don't you go get another pot of coffee, Miss Kincaid. I'll give Crenshaw his walking papers."

For some reason Jennifer felt that Jack was actually trying to do her a favor this time, and was not getting her out of the way so he could bully Crenshaw.

"No, Mr. Sandusky. This problem has developed in large part because of my lack of ability. I will handle this."

Jack felt a sudden sense of pride for Jennifer. Even knowing now the type of man he was, she still insisted on handling the problem herself. He gave a silent sigh of relief, though. She hadn't asked him to leave while she fired Crenshaw, and was sure now that she wouldn't. He would have had to refuse, which would have made things a bit worse. They waited silently for the few minutes it took for Crenshaw to arrive.

Crenshaw entered the office without knocking. "Yes, what is it? This better be important. That little punk woke me up to tell me to come over here."

Jack had risen and was sitting on the edge of his desk, near Jennifer's. Jennifer stood and came around her desk to face Crenshaw.

"This is very important, Mr. Crenshaw," she said. "Your services to this expedition are no longer wanted. It has come to my attention that your presence is highly disruptive. That cannot be allowed in a group that must live in close quarters, which will be even closer when the expedition reaches Brazil."

Before Jennifer could continue, Crenshaw burst out, angrily, “That little wet back Mario put you up to this, didn’t he? His tramp of a wife has been putting the moves on me ever since I arrived. He’s a wet back and she’s just poor white trash. I am an eminent geologist. If anyone leaves it should be them.”

“Crenshaw,” said Jack in a light conversational tone, “if Mario knew you had hassled his wife, you would be walking around with a bandage between your legs, and nothing else.”

Jennifer spoke again. “It doesn’t matter how I found out about the situation with Maggie, or the other women you have pestered, Mr. Crenshaw. It is part of my job to know such things. All that matters is that I know, and that because I do know, you will not be going on the expedition.

“Appropriate remuneration for the work you have already performed will be sent to the address we have on file for you. Now please pack your personal belongings. Transportation is being arranged.”

“I’ll sue. No one will believe these lies.”

“Mr. Crenshaw,” asked Jennifer, “are you sure you can afford to have your personal activities for the last several years brought up in a court of law?”

Jack and Jennifer both saw the color drain from Crenshaw’s face.

He turned to face Jack. “You are a bastard, Sandusky. Hiding behind a skirt. You had to cheat this morning to win, just like with O’Hanlon. And now that you know I’m a better man than you, you have this bitch do your dirty work.”

The slap caught Crenshaw totally by surprise. Jack had seen the color drain from Jennifer’s face when Crenshaw called her the name. He saw the slap coming only a fraction of a second before she hit Crenshaw’s left cheek with her open palm. He had time to think, “Damn! She’s got fast reflexes!”

Crenshaw turned white, then immediately fiery red. “You bitch!” he bellowed and raised his right hand, curled into a fist to hit her. Jennifer took one step back, but was staring defiantly into Crenshaw’s face.

Before he could start the downward blow, Crenshaw’s right wrist was locked in a vise like grip by Jack’s left hand. Jack had stepped

between Crenshaw and Jennifer, standing toe to toe with the enraged man.

Jack's voice was almost a whisper, but Jennifer heard it as well as Crenshaw, "Very bad move, Crenshaw. I do not take kindly to people that abuse someone weaker than they, or even try to abuse them. If you want to leave this place with all your body parts in working order, I suggest you relax, and then go do as the Lady asked. Namely pack your things and leave."

From the door came two thumps and the words, "That's not necessary. I packed his things for him."

Jack didn't take his eyes from Crenshaw's hate filled ones. He knew it had been Dinny speaking.

Finally, after what seemed an eternity to Jennifer, she saw Crenshaw relax his right arm slightly, then yank it out of Jack's grasp. He turned sharply, and went to the open office door. "Get out of my way, you bitch! If any of my things are missing I'll have the law on this place like a duck on a June bug. Nobody treats me this way and gets by with it."

Crenshaw picked up the bags and headed to the driveway with them. A cab was pulling up to Lieutenant Perez, who stood at the end of the gravel driveway into the camp. She leaned into the driver's window handing the driver a pair of folded bills with her left hand while giving him instructions.

When Crenshaw came up to the cab, Perez straightened and opened the rear door of the cab for him, again with her left hand. It was only when he had clambered inside and Perez slammed the door closed that Crenshaw blanched again, this time upon seeing the short, ugly shotgun Perez had been holding down along her right leg.

"What's that for?" Crenshaw managed to ask.

"I heard there was a rabid rat around that might need immediate killing if it attacked someone."

What little color remained in Crenshaw's face left it when he realized she would really have shot him had he injured Jennifer Kincaid. Crenshaw leaned forward and growled, "Get me out of this loony bin."

The cab backed along the drive, going out of sight around the house. Lieutenant Perez headed back to the semi-trailer that contained the weapons locker to replace the shotgun.

Dinny, still standing in the open office door, asked Jack, “Should we double up the watch the next few days?”

Jack shook his head. “No. One-shot and Slide will be floating around the area anyway. If Crenshaw is stupid enough to try anything up at the house, he’ll realize his mistake quickly enough. Sikes will take him apart a piece at a time if he so much as smudges a rug.”

Dinny nodded and stepped down off the entry porch.

“Sly!” called Jack, bringing Johnny Vanducci bounding up the stairs, into the trailer.

“That your motorcycle hidden out by the gate?”

“How did...” At the sharp look Jack shot toward him, Vanducci quickly said, “Yes, Sir.”

“Follow the cab. If Crenshaw doesn’t get on a plane, train or bus in town you come back here and tell me. Or Perez if I’m not handy.”

Jack turned around and started to step behind Jennifer’s desk, where she had sat down after Crenshaw left, when Johnny said, “Me? Sir?”

Jack looked over his shoulder at the young, insecure college student. “You have a hearing problem, boy?”

“No. No, Sir.” Johnny left the trailer at a dead run, headed for the front gate and his hidden motorcycle.

Jack went to the door and closed it, then went around Jennifer’s desk. Her hands were clasped tightly in her lap. Her chin was down on her chest, shoulders hunched as if weathering a blowing snow.

Jack stepped behind her chair, putting his hands on her shoulders, feeling the muscles clinched tightly under the skin. He began to knead the corded muscles gently but firmly.

“I’m impressed, Miss Kincaid. You handled yourself very well with Crenshaw.”

With an angry shrug of her shoulders Jennifer threw Jack’s hands away from her. She stood up and turned to face him.

“Don’t patronize me, Mr. Sandusky! I hate to be patronized. You were right and I was wrong. I’ve already admitted that. I know you could have handled the situation better than I. And that he would have hit me had you not been here.

“But I wanted one last chance to see if I could handle the type of situations that I have learned may occur with much more regularity than I ever dreamed possible when I started planning this expedition.

“I’ve never failed at anything at which I really wanted to succeed. Until now. It is a painful process to realize you are not nearly as adept as you thought. Now if you will excuse me, I have a bit of packing to do myself. I’ll be moving back into the house. You can bring in someone that knows what they are doing. Someone that can help you, instead of hinder you.”

“This is your grandfather’s and your dream. I know how important it is to you. It will have a long term positive affect not only on Brazil, but much of the world, if things work out the way you intend.”

“How in the world could he know that?” Jennifer thought to herself. “It doesn’t matter,” her thought continued.

Instead of voicing those thoughts, she said, “The expedition will still occur. I don’t have to be with it for the dream to come true for... for Grandfather.

“It might not come true if I go along. It has become rather obvious I am much more of a liability than the asset I fancied myself.”

Jennifer started to move toward the bedroom. But Jack suddenly reached out and grabbed her shoulder. With a deft flick of his foot he rolled her chair behind her and with firm pressure on her shoulder she fell back into the chair.

“Hey!”

“Just sit there and listen to me, you little brat.”

Jennifer struggled, but with his hand on her shoulder she couldn’t quite get the leverage needed to get out of the chair.

After a moment, when Jennifer paused in her struggles, Jack asked, “You through trying to get up?”

“No!” Jennifer lunged, but managed only to raise herself a couple of inches off the chair seat before Jack forced her back down.

“You’re as bad as Crenshaw, you bastard!”

“Such language, Darlin’. It doesn’t become you.” Jack was beginning to enjoy himself. “She’s working a little of the tension out, at least,” he thought to himself.

This time a long, grunting squeal accompanied the flurry of activity as Jennifer tried to rise.

She relaxed again and Jack said, "Are you through now?" Jennifer glared up at Jack's face, the slight smile she saw infuriating her.

"All right! All right! You are three times stronger than I am. I'll sit and listen. I promise." She looked at him with as much sincerity as she could muster, knowing that as soon as he released her she was out of the office like a shot.

"Sorry, Darlin'," said Jack, still gripping her shoulder. "A promise isn't quite good enough in this situation. I need your word of honor." He decided she needed a bit of nose rubbing and added, after a tiny pause, "As an Officer of this Expedition and a Lady."

Jennifer's eyes narrowed, and, if possible, began showing even more anger.

"All right! You have my word of honor." She lifted her head defiantly. "As an Officer and a Lady."

As soon as the words were out of her mouth Jack released her and stepped back, giving her a clear path to the outside door.

She lunged upward slightly and Jack thought she would actually leave. He was immensely relieved when she stopped her motion and stayed in the chair, despite the cold stare she gave him, and the angry words that went with it. "You really are a barbarian, Sandusky."

"So you've said, Darlin'. As have many others."

"Dammit, Sandusky! I'm sitting here. Just get on with your speech. And stop calling me 'Darlin'. I hate those stupid names you give people. Especially the ones that you use just to infuriate someone. Like me."

"All right. Miss Kincaid it is."

Jennifer felt a little pang at his words. None of the others had really seemed to mind his special names. Even Doctor Ramos had seemed pleased to be termed Leech, at least after a little while.

"This is a serious conversation anyway. I just want you to tell me how you failed. If nothing else, it will help you avoid it in the future, in other endeavors you will eventually be involved with."

"I just failed. That's all."

"But how? Analyze it for me."

"Will you let me get up and leave then?"

"My word of honor. As a barbarian."



Jennifer felt another pang. For some reason she felt like she had hurt, or insulted him in some way. Which really surprised her. Men like him weren't supposed to have sensitive natures.

"All right then." Jennifer watched Jack walk over and sit in his own chair. She said, almost defiantly, "I had the major say in the choice of most of the scientists and specialists. That included Mr. Crenshaw. He was here because I wanted him here."

Jennifer stopped talking and looked at Jack.

"So?"

"So I'm the one that got him here."

"Of course. On what did you base your choice?"

"His bio in several science journals. I sent requests for résumés to people on a list I compiled of major talents in several fields.

"He responded with a résumé. That was part of it. There was the personal interview, after the groups were narrowed down. Then another when the choices were down to one of three. Or less in a couple of cases.

"Adam Sinclair was one of the first people picked, because I knew I would need a professional opinion on these things. That the expedition would be stressful. We wanted to eliminate people with serious health problems and so on, including psychological ones."

"Exactly," said Jack, again with that infuriating little smile.

"Exactly what, Mr. Sandusky? Would you please make your point so I can leave?"

"You had a careful, methodical process of choosing members of the expedition, including a basic screening by a qualified shrink..."

"He's not a shrink. He's a... Never mind." interjected Jennifer, then fell silent.

"Including a basic screening by a qualified shrink. And what did you find to indicate there would be a problem?"

"Nothing."

"So where was the failure? There were no indications of a problem."

"Okay. On paper there were no indications. But I've been working with him for several days now and neither saw nor sensed anything out of the ordinary, and I'm a woman. One of his potential victims. I've been around. I should have known.

“You were here for less than a day. You are a man. Not just any man, but one that he wouldn’t tackle on his best day. Not even remotely a chance of being his victim. And you knew immediately.”

“For one that not only does not like me, but considers me a barbarian, you give me an overwhelming amount of credit.

“I have pretty good instincts, if I do say so myself. But they have come from several years of practice. But I had already decided that Crenshaw was a problem before I even met him for the first time. Dinny and Sizu have kept status reports of the camp, including observations about things such as this. I went over everything with them yesterday evening.

“You should read your own file, Miss Kincaid. There is a comment in there about the fact that you need some guidance to help you develop better leadership skills. That is a daily process. Not a one shot, learn it all in a single session, possibility. If I thought you had screwed up, you would now be making laps around the estate.”

Jack stood up and started around his desk toward the door. “Speaking of which, I have a few of those myself to run.”

Jennifer was caught completely off guard. “You? You ran almost seven miles this morning, through broken wilderness, in a cold rain, with thirty pounds on your back for half of it. Why are you going to be running laps?”

“Because I screwed up royally. I forgot to take any money with me. Had to come back. That used the entire allotment of time I figured I had to spare. That meant I had to push close to the limits. Which increased the possibility of error. Which occurred. I fell. Which then made me run really short of time.

“I had to push even harder and carry that pack on an injury.

“There was a need to test Crenshaw. I needed to get it done then. So I did. That part isn’t the screw up. But I wound up risking a serious injury, then risked compounding a minor injury, because I forgot my money. I’m a damn good barbarian. I don’t make those types of idiot mistakes very often.”

Jack put his hand on the door knob. “Of course, when I’m doing this kind of idiot detail, fortunately very seldom, the troops always know I’m just running the kinks out from the run this morning. Or whatever is appropriate for the situation.”

Jack opened the door, stepped through, pausing only long enough to say, without turning, “You can pack up and leave now. If you think it best. For the expedition and the people involved. I think you should stay.”

Then he was gone, leaving Jennifer to stare at the closed door. She sat there for a very long time, her mind in turmoil. Finally she stood and walked to the window near the door. Looking out she saw Jack jogging rapidly along the distant wall.

“Maybe... Maybe I can learn enough to be an asset.” Jennifer pulled the locket that always hung around her neck out of her polo shirt and snapped it open. “Momma. Poppa. I promise to be a good girl. I’ll really, really try to learn what I need to so I can go. I promise that I won’t go if, when the times comes to decide, I don’t think I can do my job properly.

“You have my word of honor.” The tears began to trickle down her cheeks. “As an Officer and a Lady. I love you.” Jennifer snapped the locket closed, raised it to her lips for a gentle kiss, then dropped it back down the front of her polo shirt to hang just above and between her breasts.

Jennifer wiped the backs of her hands across her cheeks, clearing away the last of the tears, took her jacket off the hook beside the door and stepped out into the rain to begin her education.

Flipping up the hood of the nylon windbreaker she headed for the wooded area that lay perhaps fifty meters behind the trailers. Every time she had seen Jack’s friend One-shot, he had been somewhere near the trees, or Jack’s tent.

She searched the edge of the tree line as she approached, but saw nothing except trees and rain. Stopping just at the edge of the line of trees, she looked first to her left, then to the right, finally into and among the trees. Most grew a couple of meters or so apart, with a few closer, and an occasional area five or six meters across without a tree.

She had never been allowed to play out here when she was little because the forested area on the other side of the tall fence that ended at the tree line was in turn bordered by the river. There had been sporadic reports of wild dogs, even wolves, roaming along the river. Jennifer smiled at the memories of her mother telling her the story of Little Red Riding Hood. She used to wander as close to the woods as she could get,

looking for the big bad wolf, before her mother would scold her and make her come back to the house.

Jennifer stood quietly peering into the woods. Finally she called softly, "Mr. One-shot, are you out here?"

"Yes, Ma'am."

Jennifer focused her eyes on the sound of the voice coming from almost directly in front of her. She was about to decide he was behind one of the trees, when she suddenly realized the object she was looking at was not a bulge on the side of a tree, but a man leaning against it.

She had seen no movement. He had been there the whole time. She had simply not seen him until that moment. And doubted if she would ever have seen him unless he had spoken.

When he saw that she had seen him, the man tipped his wide brimmed hat. "Howdy, Ma'am. You don't have to say mister. Just One-shot."

Jennifer took the few steps forward it took to reach him and stopped, facing him. One-shot straightened, pushing against the tree with his elbow.

Jennifer reached her hand out, saying, "I'm Jennifer Kincaid, One-shot."

The man took her hand in his, squeezing it in a firm handshake. Jennifer had to squeeze firmly in reply or have her hand hurt. He released her hand when she held the squeeze tightly.

Jennifer said, "I haven't had a chance to read your file, so I don't know your full name. If you tell me your name I'll use that. I imagine only your friends call you One-shot."

"From all I've seen and heard, I expect us to be friends."

Jennifer smiled. "I guess that means I can call you One-shot?" It was more of a question than a statement. Jennifer saw One-shot's tiny smile flatten out.

"Never guess about anything, Miss Kincaid. Never. Know. Or make a thorough evaluation based on available information and decide. Never ever guess."

Jennifer immediately sensed that this man was very similar in attitude to Jack Sandusky. He would have said something very similar. Though with quite a few more words. One-shot seemed to be one that used few words.

“But,” she thought, “very good ones.”

“One-shot it is. Friend.” She smiled, which brought that tiny glimmer back to One-shot’s face. Jennifer thought, “That isn’t really much change in his face, but then again it is very, very obvious which is which.”

“My friends call me Jennifer. Or Jenny.”

“I prefer Jennifer. It rolls off the tongue nicely. The way good Tennessee Sipping whiskey rolls on.”

Jennifer suddenly realized that they had started moving slowly, deeper into the woods. She looked at One-shot, noticing he went from one shadowy position to another, not really pausing in each, because her movements were constant, but it seemed so, as his head, or more accurately, she noticed, his eyes, made several sweeps of the area from within each tree shadow.

Jennifer felt herself shiver within her jacket and realized, though the rain did not penetrate directly through the huge old trees, it did drip down, from leaf to leaf to her.

“Mr. Sandusky suggested that I might be able to learn about the wilderness from you.” She started to say, “I’ll be glad to pay you to teach me.” Jennifer caught herself just in time, knowing it would be the absolutely worse thing she could possibly say just then.

“I need to know more than I do. Where we are going it could be important.” Jennifer looked around at the trees, and up at the small patches of gray sky, a thoughtful look coming onto her face, which One-shot noted with satisfaction. “I’m beginning to believe it is important here, where we are already.”

Suddenly realizing she was thinking out loud she added, “I don’t mean right here, I mean...”

One-shot had squatted near a tree and leaned his back against it when Jennifer had stopped and looked around. “I know. Here.” He made a small gesture with his left hand.

“This area, this county, this state, this country. In the sea and the boonies and the burbs and the cities.

“It all started in the sea, passed through the wilderness, and stopped someplace after that. Except for some things. A few in the wilderness, many in the sea. Some even chose to leave the wilderness and return to the sea.”

Jennifer chuckled at the expression on One-shot's face when he added, "Though I cannot fathom why anyone or anything would willingly leave the wilderness.

"Lessons the wilderness teaches are basic. A hunt is a hunt, whether for an animal for food and clothing, or for a job to provide the same things.

"The honor it takes to not make the easy kill of a doe that won't leave its fawn is no different than the honor it takes to not buy stock as an inside trader.

"Dodging a charging lion isn't much different from dodging an obnoxious party guest."

One-shot reached into his shirt pocket and pulled out two short, narrow strips of reddish brown material. Still squatting against the tree, he held one up toward Jennifer.

As she took it One-shot said, "Lunch time."

Jennifer started to look at her watch, but it wasn't on her wrist. "Must have forgotten it this morning," she thought. "How do you know it's noon?" she asked One-shot.

"Didn't say it was noon. Said it was lunch time."

"Okay. So how do you know it's lunch time."

"There's that little glimmer again," noted Jennifer, mentally.

"Cause I'm hungry." One-shot bit off a piece of jerky and began to chew.

"I see." Jennifer bit off a small piece, expecting it to be rather difficult, like it was in the movies. Instead, the meat broke cleanly when she bit down on it. As she chewed the first small piece she realized how hungry she was.

But she also suddenly realized how cold she was when another hard shiver shook her shoulders.

One-shot stood in one quick, fluid movement. "You are cold."

Jennifer nodded. "If I go and change into warmer clothes, could I come back and talk with you some more?"

"Let's try this first." One-shot moved over to one of the few stands of brush that existed in the woods. He looked back over his shoulder at Jennifer. "The Sandman said I could cut a little wood. But it is your grandfather's place. Is it all right?"

She nodded, then gasped when One-shot slid the largest knife she had ever seen from a sheath that seemed to be part of his pants leg or boots. There was the tiniest swish of sound when he took out the knife.

“Sorry about the noise. I just made a new sheath. It will be broken in before we leave.”

Jennifer shook her head. She had barely heard the sound, and he seemed to think it was loud. She watched, fascinated, as One-shot worked, the cold almost forgotten, chewing the jerky absently, moving occasionally to get a better view of what he was doing.

When he had cut a dozen small brushes off at ground level... “No. He’s cutting them just below the ground,” she thought to herself. One-shot brought together the tops of the ones on each side of the area he had cleared, intertwining their branches so they would stay in place.

He bent more of the head high small trees and bushes down, lacing their tops into the branches of the first two.

Then, with firm strokes of the knife, he cut off the smaller branches from the bushes he had cut down and weaved them into the top and sides of the dome that was taking shape. The cut trunks and large branches, stripped of the small branches, he set down in a neat stack along the inside edge of the dome.

Standing, One-shot reached into his hip pocket and pulled out a small square of fabric. He gave it a firm shake and it billowed, becoming a piece of very thin green material, with thin strands of line hanging from the edges in several places, double lines hanging from five places on the surface.

It was tied firmly in place, on the top and the side of the dome away from the arched opening, in just a few moments, creating a small, but wind resistant and nearly rain proof shelter.

“Come along, please,” One-shot said, after tying the last cord into place.

Jennifer had to nearly jog to keep up with One-shot’s long, even strides as he weaved through the trees, traveling perhaps forty meters away from the shelter. She made sure she looked back several times, wanting to be sure she could again find the clearing with the shelter at one edge.

When he stopped, One-shot pulled his knife and lopped off a branch from a tree. When he cut the second one Jennifer realized that each was a dead limb with no leaves or new growth.

“Ah-ha. Dry wood for a fire. Good. I’m freezing!” all ran through her mind. “But wait a minute. This stuff is just as wet! It has been out in the rain, too.”

One-shot had handed the branches to her when he cut them off. Jennifer checked the cut ends now as she walked along beside him. The ends were as wet as the bark now. “I wonder how he’ll start a fire with this wet wood?”

One-shot gathered several more pieces of the standing dead wood as they worked back toward the small shelter. On the way Jennifer made it a point to watch the way One-shot moved and tried to emulate, but felt she had little success.

When they reached the shelter One-shot took the branches from Jennifer and set them in with the others. He stepped around to the back of the shelter and squatted down. Jennifer moved so she could see what he was doing, but he stood up before she was in position.

He turned around and she saw the two one quart Zip-lock plastic freezer bags in his hands. Each was filled to the lock with water. “I propped these against the dome so the membrane would divert water into them while we were gone.”

After setting one down, he handed the other to Jennifer. “Hold it with both hands.” Jennifer held it carefully as One-shot opened the zip-lock a little way. He reached into his pocket and took out a small bottle.

After unscrewing the top, he shook one tiny tablet into his hand and dropped it into the bag of water. He re-closed the bottle and dropped it into his pocket. Taking the bag from Jennifer by holding the top corners, he carefully set it on the ground, without closing the zip-lock.

He picked up the other bag and the two of them repeated the same process.

Jennifer’s fingers were shaking now.

After he set the second bag down, One-shot told Jennifer, “Let me have your jacket.”

She started taking it off, very reluctantly. She couldn’t quite bring herself to meet One-shot’s eyes when she said, “I’m a little cold.”



One-shot took the nylon windbreaker from her as he said, “I know.” He reached into the shelter and spread the jacket out, outside down. When he straightened up he shrugged out of his leather jacket and spread it over her shoulders. “Sit down inside now.”

As One-shot’s hand on her shoulder moved her toward the shelter she tried to take the jacket off, saying, “I didn’t mean for you...”

“Sit down and watch.”

Jennifer sat down cross legged on her jacket, grateful for the warmth of One-shot’s leather jacket around her shoulders. She slipped her hands under the jacket and put them in her armpits to warm.

She leaned forward and watched as One-shot pulled his knife yet again. He reached in beside Jennifer and picked up two of the smallest of the branches that lay there. Using the butt of the knife he drove the two sticks into the ground a long arm’s reach from the dome, about three hand spans apart, parallel to the arched opening.

“Pardon me,” One-shot said, and reached forward, to slide his hand into the left hand, large outside flap pocket of his leather jacket. He pulled out a folded square of aluminum foil.

Rocking back on his heels, he unfolded it and wrapped one edge around one of the vertical sticks, and then did the same around the other vertical stick to form a small reflector for the fire he would soon build.

This time he reached into the shelter and pulled out one of the dead branches he had cut on the way back to the shelter. Using long strokes One-shot shaved the bark and thin layer of wet wood away, leaving the dead, dry wood exposed. Working almost too quickly for Jennifer to follow the movements, One-shot quickly raised long shavings on the stick, without cutting them free. When he had a hand-span’s length of stick fuzzed, he cut through it.

“Hold that under the jacket,” he said, giving it to Jennifer. She took it, held it a moment to admire the way the large fuzzy mass of long shavings were still attached to the tiny center stalk that was all that was left of the once solid branch.

One-shot shaved two more fuzz sticks out of the first branch and handed them to Jennifer to put under the jacket to keep dry. The second dead branch he split in half lengthwise after shaving away the wet parts. With another chopping blow each, he split first one half and then the other half again, leaving four long, triangular lengths of dry wood. These

he snapped in half one by one with his hands. Jennifer added them to her lap, under the jacket.

One-shot took several of the limbs from the brush he had cut to make the shelter, broke each in pieces and lay two of them on the ground in front of the aluminum foil wall. Then he lay several more, side by side, but not touching, across the first two.

One-shot's eyes met Jennifer's. "Now we have to work fast." He reached out his hand. "The fuzz sticks."

Jennifer handed them to him carefully, so as not to break the delicate shavings away from the stalk. They were leaned against each other, shavings pointing downward.

Jennifer handed One-shot the cut dry sticks several at a time. These he stood on end like a tee-pee around the fuzz sticks. Using more lengths of broken limbs like Lincoln logs he quickly built a small, square, tapered pyramid shape around the fuzz sticks and the dry cut sticks of wood tee-peed around them, leaving clearance between each parallel limb.

Reaching into his pants pocket with his right hand, One-shot pulled out a slender metal butane lighter, flicked the igniter, and directed the long flame down low along the platform so it licked up into the shavings of the fuzz sticks.

He held the lighter in place for only a moment, then released the valve and moved it way.

"What?" he said, glancing over at Jennifer, who looked up at his face after staring for a moment at the lighter he held in his hand. As the flames began lick around the wet sticks of the pyramid, One-shot slid the lighter back into his pocket and asked, "You were expecting two sticks to be rubbed together?"

Jennifer laughed. "Well, maybe not quite that. But I wasn't expecting you to flick your Bic, that's for sure!"

The fire was going well. One-shot picked up first one of the zip-lock bags, then the other, holding the tops closed and shaking them, then forcing a little of the water out through the tops. He slid his fingers along the tops, snapping the zip-locks closed. One-shot set them down near the fire, swung around and sat down beside Jennifer in the shelter.

Jennifer shuffled over slightly to give him room.

"That was amazing, One-shot."

“Even with the lighter?”

Jennifer looked over at him. He was actually grinning. “Even with the lighter.” She held her hands out toward the fire. It was beginning to grow smaller after the first bright burst when the fuzz sticks flamed hotly.

Jennifer reached over to pick up more sticks to lay on the flames.

“When it comes to camp fires, Jennifer, smaller is better.”

Jennifer set the sticks back down.

“The purification tablets have had time to work. I have tea or beef bouillon. Which would you prefer?”

“Tea sounds nice.”

“There should be another zip-lock in the right hand pocket,” One-shot said. He leaned out and picked up one of the bags of water from where they sat between the fire and the aluminum foil reflector. Jennifer held open the one she found in his jacket and he poured about a third of the water from the full bag into the one she held.

Zippering the bag he held closed; he set it out near the fire again. One-shot took the bag from Jennifer, zipped it closed and moved out closer to the fire.

“Microwave safe freezer bags are the toughest,” One-shot said. He held the bag flat, stretched between his hands, over the fire.

Jennifer noticed he was careful not to get the bag too close to the flames and kept sloshing the water back and forth.

After a few minutes he sat back under the shelter. Jennifer handed him the tea bag she had found in one of the jacket pockets. He opened the tea bag wrapper and then dropped the tea bag into the bag of water, re-zipping it and setting it back out near the fire, again between the fire and the reflector.

“Break a stick and add it to the fire.”

Jennifer picked up one of the sticks she had started to lay on the fire earlier and broke it. She started to put the pieces on the small flames.

“Again,” One-shot told her.

It took a concerted effort, but she broke each piece again. These she set onto the fire, careful to not scatter the coals.

“A student learns the most by testing his teacher.” They had been sitting quietly for a couple of minutes, watching the misting rain, an occasional drop sizzling in the fire when One-shot spoke.

Jennifer thought for a few seconds before opening her mouth, because she had a feeling **this** was a test of some type.

“Student. That has to be me. Teacher is One-shot. Learn by testing... Learn by testing... Can’t be as in causing trouble and testing patience... Testing is like a quiz... But the teacher is the one that gives the test. They know the answers to the questions...” Jennifer’s eyes widened in comprehension.

“Why did you squeeze the water bag and waste the water?”

“That water wasn’t wasted. It was clean and cleansed the opening of the bag as it passed, leaving behind a safe way to get the clean water out.”

Jennifer nodded. She watched One-shot’s hands as he talked. He had taken out his knife again and as well as a flat piece of plastic, gray on one side, and purple on the other. The gray side had many small circles embossed on it. It was that side that One-shot began sliding along the edge of the blade in long smooth strokes, first on one side and then the other.

“It was clean rain. Why treat the water?”

“Without an extensive lab to test it and prove otherwise all water not from a source you are absolutely sure, personally, is safe, is contaminated with potentially dangerous organisms. No exceptions in the assumption means all water is treated which means the maximum level of safety reasonably possible.

“Point of information. I also have a very good filter. I use one or the other, sometimes both, depending on circumstances.”

One-shot leaned forward and picked up the zip-lock bag of tea. “Normally a guest should have first drink, but observe.”

Jennifer watched the way he held the bag to his lips. She doubted if he actually took any of the tea.

She took the bag when he handed it to her. Jennifer was careful to hold the bag the same way One-shot had. She managed to get a drink of the tea without spilling it. Had One-shot not demonstrated the correct way to do it she knew she would have dumped the whole thing all over herself.

The tea had been very warm, but not truly hot, but it gave her an exceptionally warm feeling, inside. When she handed it back to him,

One-shot took a shallow drink. Jennifer looked at the fire speculatively, then broke another stick and added it to the fire.

Another question occurred to her. “You cut the brush below the surface of the ground with your knife, without digging around them first. Does not the ground and things in it dull the blade?”

“Soft ground does little harm to a good blade a good sharpener doesn’t correct when used often and well. As it should be. Less time, fewer disturbances, ergo, signs of passage.”

Jennifer sat quietly, reviewing everything One-shot had shown her so far. She took the bag of tea when it was handed to her and took another drink.

Suddenly One-shot said, softly, “Rub your stomach and pat your head at the same time.”

Jennifer looked at him, but did the childhood game.

“Stop. Explain.”

“It develops a child’s coordination, through practice, by the expedient of trying to do two different things at the same time. Not trying, I gue... Not trying. Doing two different things at the same time.”

Jennifer suddenly looked down at the fire. It was nearly out. “Oh, No!” She quickly picked up a stick and broke it. As she was about to set the pieces on the dying coals One-shot touched her arm to stop her. Reaching past her, he gathered up the pieces he had shaved off the dead limbs. These he fed one at a time into the remaining flames, gradually building up the fire again.

“The lesson?” he asked as he motioned her to put the sticks she had broken up onto the restored fire.

“Pay attention.”

“More.”

This time Jennifer thought a bit longer before answering. “Pay attention to what is most important, even when you must do other things at the same time.”

“There is one more swallow of tea,” said One-shot and handed her the bag.

She drained the last of the tea and almost crumpled up the plastic bag with the tea bag inside to throw onto the fire. Instead, she handed it back to One-shot.

He removed the tea bag, used some of the treated water to rinse the zip-lock bag they had used to make the tea and carefully folded it up, smoothing all the air out of the wrinkles.

“Another use or two,” he said, slipping it into a side pocket on the leather jacket Jennifer still had over her shoulders. He used the rest of the water to douse the fire, move the sticks apart and douse them again. One-shot picked up each stick, felt the area that was blackened or burned on each and when he was satisfied there was no heat left, set them inside the shelter with the remaining pile of firewood.

One-shot removed the foil, again carefully folding it and flattening it out. He put it in the proper pocket of the jacket, pulled the two sticks that had held the foil and set them inside the shelter. Getting out, followed by Jennifer, who picked up her nylon windbreaker, One-shot went behind the shelter and removed the fabric from the laced together bushes.

It too was folded and stashed away.

Jennifer expected him to undo the bushes and straighten them up next. Instead he squatted down, and felt the ground where the fire had been with the back of his hand for several long moments.

He rose again and held out his hand. Jennifer slipped his jacket from her shoulders and handed it to him, quickly putting hers back on.

She looked at him and finally gestured at the remains of the shelter with her hand, asking, “The shelter?”

“Is still a shelter. For an animal or a future passerby. It will grow more dense, more water and weather proof for a time. Then will fill with other undergrowth, finally disappearing into the mass of the wilderness.”

Jennifer nodded, looked toward what she was fairly sure was the house. One-shot noted with pleasure that she might not be perfectly located, but she did know where home was.

“Go to the tree with the yellow leaves, then the two with a single trunk.”

Jennifer spotted the tree with yellowing leaves and turned back to thank One-shot, but he wasn't there. She sighed, not really surprised and started toward the camp. After only a few steps she heard, faintly, “I'm rather fond of licorice.”

Jennifer made her way back to the camp, unable to stop smiling. She made the turn around the end of the office trailer and saw Tina

Blount pull her head out of the door opening and close it. “Tina,” called Jennifer, “over here.”

Tina spun around and quickly came down the steps and over to Jennifer. The woman put her hand on Jennifer’s arm as the two made the few steps to the platform. She had to drop her hand, as Jennifer went up to the office door ahead of Tina.

“You look upset, Tina. Is something wrong?”

Jennifer took off her windbreaker and hung it beside the door, with Tina following her inside.

“That’s what I wanted to find out. I haven’t been able to find you since just after breakfast. I thought something might have happened to you.”

Jennifer was surprised. “Me? Why?”

“When I heard that that animal Sandusky had attacked Andrew Crenshaw and thrown him off the estate, and then I couldn’t find you, I thought he might have done something to you. I knew you wouldn’t stand by and let a man of letters like Andrew be brutalized by the Great Bwana,” the words were a curse the way she said them, “or one of his thugs.

“I was afraid that you tried to stop him and he hurt you. He was building more muscles, running around the estate like some kind of a king. I tried to get him to tell me what happened, but he only looked at me like I was a bug, and said, ‘Tell it to the Chaplain’, and kept running.”

Jennifer looked at Tina in amazement. Tina was shaking slightly. Jennifer was shocked at the look that came into the woman’s eyes when she continued.

“So I called the police. They arrested him, and took him to jail. When I called I told them about all the guns and that some of his friends might try to shoot it out with them.”

“Tina!” exclaimed Jennifer.

Tina looked at Jennifer, adding, “There was no trouble. He got into the car with them and left. Not even that man that slinks around the camp since he arrived tried to stop them. Or his harlot. The Indian.”

Jennifer was sure there was a note of disappointment in Tina’s voice, due to the fact there had been no violence.

“Oh, Tina! You don’t know what really happened!”

A bit miffed at Jennifer's words, Tina said, "Well, you obviously haven't been hurt. But a man like that shouldn't be allowed to roam the streets anyway. He could become savage at any time and hurt someone."

Jennifer hurried over to her desk. "Tina. Look. I'll tell you what happened, but later. Okay? I have to get this straightened out. If you see Lieutenant Perez on your way back to the other trailers, would you tell her I need her here, as quickly as possible?"

Jennifer had sat down behind her desk and picked up the phone, flipping open the phone book to find the number for the police. She looked up, however, when Tina spoke again, this time with anger. "I'll not speak to that woman for any reason. I'm sorry Jennifer, but I think it was a mistake to have a person like her included. She is even worse than Sandusky. She is a woman, after all."

Jennifer spoke sharply. "I don't have time for this right now, Tina. Just leave, please."

"Well!" barked Tina and rushed out of the office.

Jennifer spun the chair around, and grabbed the PA mike. Jennifer keyed the mike and spoke. "Lieutenant Perez and Miss Wilson to the office, please." The words sounded garbled to her and Jennifer wished Sly was around to run messages for her.

Setting the mike down, she turned back to the desk and the phone book. "Damn! I should have made her tell me which police force. Metro or county."

Quickly checking both numbers, she wrote them down on a pad and picked up the phone. "Well, Hell!" The phone was not working. Jennifer stood and went to the door, grabbing her jacket. "Have to go to the house. I should have brought my cellular out here," she thought. She hesitated. "Where are Dinny and Connie? We need another runner."

Another split second that seemed like an eternity to her and she had decided to go find at least one of them, to learn which law enforcement agency had arrested Jack. She knew they would have made sure to notice. That would probably be quicker than calling each agency and asking.

She reached for the door knob, but had the presence of mind to step back out of the way when she heard the thump on the platform outside.



“Yes, Ma’am?” asked Lieutenant Perez as she followed her knock into the office. Dinny came through the door just moments later.

“Good,” said Jennifer, addressing both of them. “I just found out about Jack. Which agency picked him up? I’ll get my lawyer and we’ll get this straightened out. The Scanlon Corporation has a bit of influence in the area. I don’t think there will be too much problem, once I clear up the things Tina Blount told the officers.”

Connie looked at Dinny. Dinny closed the door, and touched Jennifer’s arm.

“Take it easy, Jennifer,” said Dinny. “Jack’s just fine. If you go blowing in there with a lawyer, you’ll just embarrass him.”

“But he didn’t **do** anything. You both know that. That idiot Tina...” Dinny and Connie exchanged smiles. Jennifer was looking out the window, staring toward the drive. “Tina completely misunderstood what happened. This phone is out. I’ll go up and use a phone in the house. Just call.” Jennifer turned around and looked at the other two women.

“It was the State Patrol. I think the locals were a bit intimidated by what Miss Blount told them. One of the Troopers told me Metro called County. And County called State.”

Jennifer was reaching for the door knob, but stopped. She looked at Connie. “You talked to the State Trooper? Why didn’t you do something? Stop them.” Her voice was a bit plaintive.

“This isn’t the Wild West, Miss Kincaid. The officers were only doing their job. There was no call for a huge scene. Though I suspect Miss Blount was rather hoping for a shoot out.” Connie looked at Jennifer and continued. “Besides, even had I been inclined to interfere, which I wasn’t, I wouldn’t have anyway. Jack was upset about this morning. He had already run at least five laps, full out, when the troopers arrived. I wasn’t about to put myself in the position to be joining him when he gets back. I’d be doing crap duty until we got back from Brazil if I’d done anything at all, except cooperate. With a smile.”

Dinny said, “And I’d probably be joining her for not making sure she didn’t cooperate. Jack handles his own problems. He’ll handle this.” Dinny laughed. “He’d already slipped the cuffs and given them back to the other Trooper before they had walked to the car. Normally he

doesn't flout authority when people are not abusing their position. And these two troopers were professional all the way."

Connie smiled wryly. "In other words, Jack's pissed."

Dinny nodded. "Big time."

Jennifer looked stricken. "You don't think he would get mad? Maybe do something... And the officers hurt him?"

"Jack? No way. The man is smooth as they come," said Dinny. "He wouldn't do anything that would get someone hurt or in serious trouble."

"Even though he is as upset about this as you say?" asked Jennifer.

"Especially because he's upset," responded Dinny. "The more steamed he gets, the quieter he becomes. The wheels in his head start turning so fast you can almost hear him thinking."

Jennifer slowly walked back to her desk, dejectedly dropping into her chair.

"Another notch on my belt of mistakes. He is going to really give it to me for this."

"With that kind of attitude what else can you expect?" remarked Connie to Jennifer's words.

"Connie!" said Dinny, quietly, but forcefully.

"Ah... Sorry Miss Kincaid. I was out of line. It is none of my business. Now you know why I'm still just a Lieutenant."

"Bull," laughed Dinny. "You are still a Lieutenant because you prefer field work to paper work. And you know the higher you go, the more paper work and the less field work you do."

"There is that, too," said Connie.

Jennifer told them, "You two can knock it off. I don't need to be distracted. And Connie, when we are in private like this, feel free to express any opinion you wish. I'm getting used to hearing things I don't like."

Dinny looked at Jennifer and asked, "Are you going to be all right until the Chief gets back?"

Jennifer looked at the two and said, "Yes. I've got some work to do. I won't call. You both can go about your duties and not worry about me making things worse."

Connie and Dinny went out of the office together, leaving Jennifer to begin working on the computer. She pulled up the personnel files and

began to read each one again, this time with a slightly different perspective about the various entries. And she read very carefully those files that Jack Sandusky had added for the additional people he had brought to the expedition.

Jennifer entered additional notations in some of them, including the fact that One-shot liked licorice. She added the word black and a question mark in parentheses. He had not said red licorice so she evaluated the available information and decided that he preferred black.

She smiled. Jennifer had saved One-shot's file until last. Quickly closing and exiting the personnel file, she started to create a new file, but hesitated, fingers hovering over the keys.

Instead of creating the file, she pulled up the main menu and pushed the laptop back out of the way. Opening a desk drawer, she pulled out a yellow pad and took up a pencil.

As she wrote, in her small, fluid script, a smile, a thoughtful expression, confusion, realization, and the occasional frown all crossed her face from time to time. After filling several pages, she stopped writing, leaned back in her chair, and stretched. Leaning forward over the desk again, Jennifer pulled free the last page of the pad along its perforation and set it on top of the pad.

She wrote a short list of items, one to each line, paused a few moments and added two more. Folding the paper, she stood, went into the bedroom and put the list into her purse.

She stepped into the bathroom for a few minutes and returned to her desk. Just as she pulled the computer to her, there was a knock on the door.

Jennifer looked up and said, "Come in."

It was Maggie, carrying one of the trays from the kitchen. "I saved you some supper. You didn't join the rest."

Jennifer glanced at the clock. It was almost seven. Her stomach suddenly told her she was starved, by growling in a very un-lady-like manner.

"Thank you, Maggie." Jennifer moved the computer out of the way and Maggie set the tray down on Jennifer's desk. "It wasn't necessary. But it is very welcome. I should have come over when the others were eating."

Out of the blue it seemed to Jennifer, Maggie asked, “Is Mr. Sandusky in trouble? I saw him leave with the police. Mario asked Connie about it. She told him he was taking care of some permits or something, about the guns for the security people. Mario said that would have already been done. He thinks something is wrong. I like Mr. Sandusky. He wouldn’t have done anything wrong.”

“Don’t worry Maggie.” Jennifer thought quickly. “There was a problem. A misunderstanding about our stock of weapons. A lack of communication type thing. Mr. Sandusky likes to take care of things like that himself.”

Maggie smiled. “That sounds like him. I’ll tell Mario.”

Jennifer looked at Maggie. “You sound as if you know Mr. Sandusky, Maggie. Have you met him before?” Jennifer could not conceive of any situation where the two might have met.

“Oh, yes. Mario has known him for a long time. Mario told me they worked in the same lumber camp one time. I met him the first time when Mario and I were working on a Mississippi River towboat a couple of years ago.”

Jennifer saw Maggie’s eyes grow as large as saucers. Maggie leaned forward slightly and whispered, “He kept a runaway barge from hitting a big tour boat filled with kids. By holding it to the towboat that was trying to slow it down. With just his hands.”

Jennifer jerked her eyes away from Maggie’s face, and Maggie spun around suddenly, when they heard Jack say, “Come now, Maggie. You’ll have Miss Kincaid thinking I’m some kind of brute. Or a barbarian.”

Jack flipped his hat onto the hook by the door, from his stance by his desk. He started taking off his leather jacket to hang on the back of his chair.

“I’ll go get your supper, Chief,” said Maggie. “I saved you a plate, too.”

“Appreciate it, Mags. But I’ve had supper. Leave it handy in the kitchen, though. Someone will want it later.”

“Yes, Sir.” Maggie turned and hurried out.

Before Jennifer could say anything, Jack told her, “The Lieutenant Governor wants to talk to you.”

“What?” Jennifer had no idea what he was talking about.

“I said, ‘the Lieutenant Governor wants to talk to you.’ I think he meant now. He’s waiting out in his car. And I have the impression he gets a little peeved when he has to wait for things.”

Jennifer scrambled to her feet. Going to the window, she looked out and saw the limo at the end of the gravel drive, surrounded by several of the expedition members.

“What the...” Jennifer grabbed her jacket and hurried out.

Jack chuckled. He leaned back to stretch, but came up short when the back of the chair hit him, just under his shoulder blade, hard enough to draw a slight grunt of pain.

Jack carefully arranged himself in the chair, picked up his feet and set his left ankle on the corner of his desk, crossing the right ankle over the left. He picked up the file of the list of geologists and was going through it when Jennifer returned to the trailer.

She stripped off her jacket and hung it beside his hat.

“He apologized for the mix up. He doesn’t even like my family. We campaigned against him during the last election. What happened?”

“Some other time, Miss Kincaid. Your supper is getting cold, and we have quite a bit of work left to do tonight.

“Why don’t you eat while I finish going through this list.”

“But...” Jennifer started to protest. Instead, she clenched her fists for a few moments, arms hanging down her sides. She made herself relax, decided she would make herself eat and calm down a bit more, so went to her desk. Once she picked up the fork, however, she realized that she wouldn’t have to make herself eat. She was very hungry.

Jennifer gave a sideways glance at Jack from time to time as she ate. Each time he was still concentrating on the papers in his hands. She couldn’t take it anymore, and finally asked, “Is everything all right? You can at least tell me that, can’t you?”

Jennifer was looking at him. He didn’t look up, but did say, “Everything is fine. It was just a little misunderstanding. We got it cleared up in no time.”

Jennifer felt herself actually physically relax at his words. She continued to eat. A few minutes of silence later, there came a soft knock on the office door.

“Enter,” said Jack.

Dinny came into the office and stood silently after closing the door. Jennifer looked from Dinny to Jack, then back to Dinny.

Jack finally set the papers down onto his lap and looked at Dinny.

“What’s the word?” he asked.

“Paper work. Permits.” Dinny cut her eyes to Jennifer for a moment. Jack caught her look. She looked back at Jack and continued, “According to what Maggie told Mario, you went in to take care of some mix up yourself. So whoever screwed up wouldn’t get into trouble.”

“That last must be Maggie’s,” commented Jack.

Dinny nodded. “It’s floating pretty well, despite a dissenting voice or two.”

Jennifer had to concentrate to follow their verbal shorthand. She realized it must have developed over a long period of time.

“How’s Sly?”

Dinny grinned, white teeth glowing against her dark skin. “Cold and wet. But sticking. Slide’s tracking him. Got a message a little while ago through Sikes.”

Jack nodded. “Staff meeting at zero eight hundred. Oh. And by the way, Dinny, here’s a phone number.” Jack pulled a business card from his shirt pocket. “I told Trooper Owens you asked me to ask him for one. He didn’t seem to mind giving it to me.”

“You’re a slug, Boss,” said Dinny, her grin belying her words. “Thanks. See you in the morning.” Dinny left the office.

Jack looked over at Jennifer and said, “Now, Miss Kincaid, we need to decide on another geologist, tonight. The rest can wait until later.”

Jennifer decided to let things go, for now. “Okay. You have the list. The top six choices are marked. There was another I would have liked to include, but she refused to even consider going.”

“That had to be Kathleen Timmons.”

“Damn!” thought Jennifer, “Does he know everyone in the world?”

“What did she say?” asked Jack.

“She said... Let’s see if I can remember. I didn’t actually put it in the file. Oh yes. She would go where it is hot or she would go where it is wet. But there was no way she was going anywhere it was hot and wet.”

“I’m surprised there weren’t at least a couple of invectives included.”

Remembering the woman's exact words now, Jennifer smiled. "There were, in her version," she said.

"That sounds more like Red. What are your recommendations? Who was your next choice, after Crenshaw?"

Jennifer hesitated, remembering her conviction that she had been right about Crenshaw and what that had turned into.

More gently than Jennifer would have thought possible, Jack said, "Mistakes are made, Miss Kincaid. Life goes on. Learn, but don't brood."

Jennifer met his eyes for a moment. Then quickly averted hers.

"Actually, Timmons was, even ahead of Crenshaw. She has the best credentials for this expedition. There will be as much surveying work done as sampling. We decided that satellite technology would develop enough in the next few years to justify buying satellite time to do mineral deposit search and analysis in conjunction with the survey and drilling program. We've already booked the time for three, four and five years down the line, with options on more. Therefore, only routine core drilling will be done. Only if there are strong indications of something will specific mineral search work be done.

"But Timmons was very adamant about it. I'd like to have her. Albert says she has done some work for one of the subsidiary companies. They were well pleased with the work."

Jack nodded. "What about the others?"

Jennifer and Jack discussed each one thoroughly.

Finally Jack said, "Red is the best choice. Kathleen Timmons, I mean." Jack gave Jennifer a long look and said, "You aren't going to like her much. At least at first."

Jennifer, always averse to having people tell her what she would and would not like, snapped, "What? Is she too much like you?"

Jack grinned. "Like me? No. She is a lot like you."

Jennifer glared at Jack. "Oh. I'm not going to like her because she reminds you of me?"

"Basically."

"Bull. If she is anything like me, that means she is the antithesis of you. Which means we should get along famously."

Jennifer paused, then added, "But it's a moot point, anyway. She was adamant about not going."

“Give her a call tomorrow. If you can’t talk her into it, then mention my name.”

“What gall! You think the mere mention of your name is going to send a woman running off to a place she obviously hates? I can’t believe you consider the two of us at all similar, if you think that of her.”

Jack dropped his feet to the floor and stood. “We shall see what we shall see. If she won’t go, I think the guy in Nevada will do.”

Slipping into his coat and heading toward the door, Jack said, “Now if there isn’t anything else, important, I have some more laps to do.”

“Now?”

“It impresses the troops, at least when they don’t know the real reason they are being run. We barbarians have to keep up the image, you know.”

Jack had his hat on his head and was out the door, before Jennifer could react.

“Connie and Dinny were right,” thought Jennifer. “He’s really p... er, upset. That last crack hurt. It was always a joke before, when he went along with me, and said he was a barbarian, just to aggravate me.”

Jennifer walked slowly to the bedroom, turned into the bathroom, feeling more tired than she had in a long time. She knew it was as much emotional exhaustion as physical, but it didn’t lessen it any, the knowing.

She showered, dried off perfunctorily and fell into bed, again forgetting about the precious metals stashed under the mattress.

“OOOwww!” Jennifer rubbed the lump that was raising on the lump she already had on the base of her skull.

Angrily, she turned onto her side, doubting if she would get any sleep at all, despite how tired she was. She needn’t have worried. She was asleep in moments.

When Jack left the office trailer, he didn’t head for his tent to take off his jacket to start running. Instead, he walked over to the supply trailer that Dinny had told him had become the unofficial hangout and poker parlor when the mess trailer was closed up.

The rear doors were closed, but the side door of the semi-trailer was open a crack. Jack didn’t go up the crude stairs leaning against the trailer, knowing that what he, as leader, didn’t see, and therefore didn’t



know about, wouldn't have to put a stop to, because it was against the rules.

He also knew Dinny would be in there, because though she was a mediocre poker player, it was one of the places where the information was. The camp gossip, rumor, dissent and many other things imperative for a leader to know, but had no access to directly.

So Jack knocked lightly on the side of the trailer and called, "I need to see the Chaplain."

Dinny had also told him Adam Sinclair could usually be found there for a couple of hours before bed.

Dinny was shuffling the cards for the next deal when Jack called. She looked over at Adam, who looked back without understanding.

"That's you, Adam. The Chief wants to talk to you."

"Me?" Adam asked. "He said the Chaplain. I'm not a priest. I didn't even know there was a priest coming with us."

"Take my word for it. He meant you. And if he has to come in here our poker games are over."

Half a dozen poker chips pelted Adam. "All right. All right. But I'll be back in a minute."

Adam Sinclair opened the side door of the trailer and leaped down to the ground, not bothering with the steps.

"Let's take a short walk, if you don't mind, Doctor Sinclair."

Adam looked up, at the sky. The rain had stopped and the clouds were breaking up, but it was still a cool night.

"Okay. But I don't quite understand. I'm not a minister." Adam put his hands up into his armpits. He was going to have trouble dealing when it was his turn.

"Doesn't matter. You are the expedition psychologist, here as much for the expedition members as the research trip itself. As such you are the person someone that has minor emotional or social problems will go to for guidance, advice and help. And who, if I suspect someone has a problem or potential problem, during the expedition, I will send them to for counseling.

"Jennifer Kincaid needs someone to talk with. I don't believe she is of the mind to do so on her own. I would appreciate it if you took the time, tomorrow if possible, to give her a chance to talk. To a friend."

They had stopped walking, when out of easy earshot of anything. Jack had been standing, turned partially away from Adam, not looking at him. Instead he had been staring toward the office trailer.

Adam Sinclair had watched him, only a dark shadow in the night, trying to figure out the person that stood before him. The file he had read on Jack Sandusky, as he had read all the personnel files as part of his duties, was only a shallow version of the man, and not necessarily accurate, he was coming to suspect.

“That was all I wanted. You can go back to the poker game that I don’t know anything about.” Adam heard him chuckle at that. “Good night, Chaplain.”

Even before Adam could say his own good night, Jack Sandusky was lost in the shadows as he moved away.

“How do he and Dinny and the others do that?” he asked himself, hurrying back to the trailer and its warmth.

It was nearly one thirty in the morning when Lieutenant Perez spotted Johnny Vanducci walk up the driveway. He stopped, looked toward where Jack’s tent would be in the darkness. He looked at the office trailer, its white walls visible in the darkness.

After a few more seconds hesitation Vanducci made his way toward the women’s dorm trailer. A tiny smile on her face, Connie moved forward silently, waiting to see exactly what the young man would eventually do.

When he raised his hand to knock on the door of the dorm Connie touched his shoulder and asked softly, “Looking for me? Or looking to get into serious trouble with a lot of angry, sleepy women?”

Johnny Vanducci almost had a heart attack. He did have the presence of mind to whisper when he said, “Jeez, LT! You almost gave me a heart attack.”

He took a deep breath, expecting Connie to blow up at him for the tone of his words, even if he had whispered. But nothing happened and he let the breath go.

He said, “I was looking for you. I’m not sure what to do.”

Connie had guided them away from the trailer. Johnny continued to explain. “Mr. Sandusky told me to come back and tell him if Mr. Crenshaw didn’t leave town. He didn’t leave right away, so I kept

following him. I think he hit half the bars in the city, before he went out to the airport.

“But he did get onto a plane. I waited to make sure the plane left, then I came straight back here. I don’t know if I should go tell Mr. Sandusky what took me so long. Or wait until tomorrow or what. I knew you would know what to do.”

“Well, you have to learn how to make your own decisions if you plan to work with the Chief.”

Johnny couldn’t see Connie’s grin when she heard his groan upon hearing her words.

“But if it was me, and I knew that the Chief knew, that since I had not come back to tell him otherwise, that Crenshaw had left, and I had just come back at one thirty in the morning on a cold, wet night, I’d be getting something warm to eat and then some sleep, because I know PT still comes early, no matter how long the night before was for me.”

Johnny said, “Oh. Okay. Thanks Lieutenant. I think I’ll just go to bed. I don’t want to mess around in the kitchen. Mario...”

Connie said, “Chief made sure something was left for you. But if you wake anyone up I am going to have your hide nailed to one of these trailer walls by tomorrow night.”

Johnny gulped. “Ah...” His stomach growled. He hadn’t eaten anything except a candy bar since breakfast. “I won’t wake anybody.”

Connie sensed the two men come up to her before she could see them. Slide said, his voice like part of the night itself, “The Boss sure can pick ‘em. Somebody taught that kid to ride a motorcycle, I hope to tell you. I had trouble keeping up part of the time. I was sure he would go down once, on a wet curve, when his rear tire lost grip, but he pulled it out of it.

“He never once let Crenshaw out of his sight. Of course Crenshaw is an idiot and never suspected he was being tailed, but the kid did a pretty good job of staying out of sight, too.”

One-shot said, “Didn’t eat either. Heard his stomach growl twenty meters off.”

One-shot handed Connie her night vision goggles, paint pellet pistol and Ghillie suit he had brought out for her. Then gave Slide a set of the same equipment. He already wore his goggles and Ghillie suit.

He watched the two slip into the mesh coveralls abundantly layered with overlapping rows of strips of thick fabric. The goggles made the scene brightly visible, though everything was in shades of green.

When Connie and Slide were ready One-shot handed each a tube of the special paint pellets. Instead of the normal water based paints that Adventure Paint Gamers used, these were filled with a clear liquid, when seen in normal light.

But though all the paint balls had a clear liquid, each would fluoresce a different color from those in the other tubes, when an ultraviolet light was shined on them.

Even the infrared goggles would not see anything but a dark blotch caused by the wetness of the liquid when the pellets splattered on the Ghillie suits. But even after it dried, the liquid left the residue on the fabric that caused the florescence for several hours.

So when one of them scored a hit they usually knew who they shot, but the victim seldom knew who shot them, until they checked the suits with the UV light after the time limit for the game had passed and they met to score the game.

Connie had come up with the special version of the game quite a while before, with some of the people in her Reserve unit, but she was so good at the game none would compete against her after the first dozen matches. There hadn't been many that wanted to go out between midnight and four in the morning to play, anyway.

Dinny had other duties and had to get her sleep when she could. When Slide and One-shot had arrived, however, Connie found kindred spirits.

Slide whispered, "You know if the Boss finds out about this, we are in trouble. He said no horsing around. Wants to keep the civvies off his back as long as he can."

One-shot whispered back, "He has many duties. Even he sleeps. But we'd better leave a couple hundred meters extra safety margin around his tent."

"Good idea," said Connie. They had made their way to the wooded area. Had anyone been out in the night without night vision equipment, and caught a glimpse of them, they would have sworn they saw three large bushes sort of just drifting across the lawn.

The three stopped at the edge of the woods. Each checked their watch, and Connie said, “Okay. Better just make it ten minutes until Go, and then fifty to Assemble. We don’t have a lot of the night left.”

“Check,” said One-shot.

“Check,” said Slide.

The three had their goggled eyes on their watches. Connie said, “Mark,” and they each headed into a different part of the woods.

None heard or saw what looked like another bush begin to move, nor did they hear the soft, ‘Check’ it voiced.

But when they met an hour later, carrying their equipment, at the furthest semi-trailer from the dorms, they quickly realized someone had to have been out in the woods with them.

The Ghillie suits were laid out on crates, fronts up. Slide turned on the UV light so they could see who had shot whom.

They counted the few hits made that night and Slide turned off the UV to help turn the bulky suits over so they could check the backs.

“Oh crap!” said Slide when he flicked the UV light on again and turned it toward the Ghillie suits once more.

They forgot all about their own hits and misses when each saw a fluorescing hand print on each of the suits, high up in the middle of the back.

They used blue, yellow and green colors. The hand prints were fluorescing bright red.

Connie remarked dryly, “I think we’re It.”

“I didn’t feel, hear, see or sense a thing,” said Slide. He looked at One-shot. Do you think he did it before you got the suits out?”

“Checked them like always, to mark any remaining fluorescence. They were clean.”

“He’s scary,” said Connie. “I didn’t think anyone could come up on me. Not since my granddaddy, anyway. He’s the one that taught me how to move.”

“And the Sandman cometh through the night, for to put the children to their sleep.”

“Dammit One-shot! This is spooky enough, without you making it worse,” remarked Slide.

Connie looked at the two men. “You know him a lot better than me. Would he accept a strategic relocation to the rear? Or do we drop the flag?”

“Retreat or surrender,” said One-shot. “I say a disarmament, as galling as it would be. He’s a fair man. It would be temporary.”

Slide picked up one of the paint pellet guns and handed it to Connie. One-shot did the same. Connie leaned over and picked up the third.

“Why me?” she asked plaintively.

The two men smiled. “Rank hath its privileges,” said One-shot.

Slide added, “And we’re not in the chain of command.”

Connie Perez used an Apache word she didn’t use often, and headed toward the office trailer.

As he was eating breakfast Adam Sinclair was also wishing he had gone straight to the dorm trailer after his talk with Jack. Even Dinny had taken him for a couple of bucks. And she was the camp pigeon. He knew why she played as often as she did, to keep her finger on the pulse of the camp, but it didn’t keep him from taking her money when he could.

His thoughts had kept drifting to Jennifer, and even more often to Jack Sandusky.

When he had gone to bed, Adam had made a point to set his alarm for four. He had heard some of the others say they were going to get up and watch Sandusky do PT.

Adam was up and dressed by four twenty. He had gone out to the PT course only to be met by half a dozen people coming back to the dorms.

One of them told him, “He’s already finished. We caught the last obstacle.” The man turned to one of the others in the group and said, “I still say he cleared it.”

The man he addressed responded, “No one can high step a four foot A-frame. He had to have hit at least one of the cross-bars. We were just too far away, and it was too dark to see it.”

A third voice, this one a woman’s, said, “You didn’t see him run it yesterday, with a pack, after he had just run six miles through the woods.”

Adam followed the people back to the dorms, and entered his own little cubical. Wide awake now, he picked up his copies of the personnel files and began to read Jack Sandusky's once again.

When he almost fell out of the chair, he realized he had dozed off, the file in his lap. He looked at the clock. It was almost seven. He jumped up. "I guess I can forget about a donut."

When Adam went into the kitchen trailer Johnny Vanducci waved at him. Making his way among the tables, responding to the occasional 'Good Morning,' with one of his own, he looked for Jennifer. He didn't see her.

"I saved a jelly donut for you, Doctor," said Johnny, when Adam sat down beside him.

"Hey, man, thanks. I thought I'd lost out." Adam looked around, saw several cups steaming on different tables, as the people waited for Maggie to announce that the chow line was open. "I hate to sound ungrateful, but, I don't suppose there's any coffee?"

"I didn't think about coffee. O'Hanlon almost beat me to the last donut. The pot that Miss Kincaid made this morning is already gone. Maggie should have another one ready pretty quick."

"Got to be grateful for small favors, I guess. Thanks again for the donut." The psychologist licked his fingers and said, "I don't see Jennifer. You say she made the coffee?"

"Like usual. I saw her come in here when I was with the other students doing PT. We got off easy this morning. So did the women sci-techs."

Adam looked at his assistant. "Sci-techs?"

"That's what Lieutenant Perez calls the scientists, technicians and specialists."

"I see. And what does she call the students?"

"People."

"What?"

"People. You know. Like, 'Okay now, people. This is the way I want this done.' Or, 'Run it again, people, faster.' "I hate it when I hear that."

Adam looked at Johnny Vanducci. Though nineteen, he seemed more like fifteen or sixteen. His file listed a high degree of intelligence

and noted the slight immaturity, which had caused him a few problems at his college.

Adam asked, "Do you think she is making the PT too difficult?"

Johnny looked at Adam, thought a moment, and said, "Well, I guess not. She's never told me to do something I didn't wind up doing." He thought a moment more. "Actually, no one ever seems to not be able to do what she tells them. You know Sandi. She's kind of stocky. But she always seems to be able to keep up with the rest of us. A couple of us help her sometimes, if she's having trouble, when Connie isn't looking."

Adam smiled at the shiver that shook Johnny's shoulders slightly. "If she ever catches us, we're dead meat."

Adam knew, that unless they were really obvious about it, Connie would never catch them helping Sandi, just the way Sandusky hadn't known about the poker game.

"Don't ever tell her you think she isn't being fair. I told her I didn't think it was fair for the students to do PT every day, and the men and women Sci-techs only on alternate days."

Intrigued, Adam asked, "What happened?"

"I had to run the perimeter. That wasn't that bad. I'm a pretty good long distance man. But, Jeez! It's embarrassing when you can barely keep up with someone running backwards or sideways."

"She ran it with you?"

"Every step of the way." There was admiration in Johnny's voice.

Maggie called out that the serving line was open and the two of them joined the line to get their breakfasts.

When they sat down again, this time with trays, Adam told Johnny, "I found that book you asked for. I couldn't find you yesterday to give it to you."

"Ah... I was pretty busy." Johnny hurriedly added, "And I'll get that data compiled this evening. I'm sorry I didn't get it done yesterday." Johnny kept his head down, and concentrated on eating.

"No problem, Johnny. Connie told me you would be helping in the expedition office some. But I can't figure what would have you tied up all that time. What happened?" It was a casual question. Adam was just making conversation.



But Dinny, sitting behind Johnny, with her back to him, one table away, listened carefully for Johnny's response. She smiled slightly at his response.

"Sorry, Doctor Sinclair. I'm not allowed to discuss what goes on in the office. I can't tell you what I was doing yesterday. It wouldn't be ethical. Kinda like doctor patient privilege."

"Hey! It's okay, Johnny. I understand," said Adam.

Johnny breathed a sigh of relief. "Thanks. I didn't want you to think I don't trust you. But Mr. Sandusky trusts me. I can't tell anyone."

"That's good, Johnny. I think he made a good choice."

The two finished breakfast shortly afterwards and left the kitchen trailer. Johnny headed for the office trailer and Adam went back to the dorm, to take a short nap. "I'll catch Jennifer after the staff meeting," he thought.

Johnny was waiting on the porch of the office trailer a few minutes later when Jack came up the steps. Johnny straightened imperceptibly. "Yo, Sly! Beautiful morning isn't it?"

"Yes, Sir."

Jack turned and stood beside the young man, looking out toward the tops of the trees visible over the estate's wall. "I do love the rain, Sly. But, a cool, crisp sunny morning has its merits. Wouldn't you say?"

Johnny smiled. "Yes, Sir."

"Are you a coffee or tea man, Sly?"

"Coffee."

"I'm a tea man, myself. I never acquired a taste for coffee. But there's nothing quite like a nice hot cuppa. If the others arrive before I return, inform them I'm on the way."

"And remember that this isn't just the office. It's a Lady's quarters as well."

Johnny wasn't sure what Jack meant, and doubted he would have asked anyway, but he knew he had lost the chance as he watched Jack swing his left leg up parallel to the porch railing. Then the other leg lifted and Jack was over the railing, on the ground, and walking toward the kitchen trailer.

"Jeez. How does he do that stuff?"

"Effortlessly."

Johnny turned around. Another man was standing on the porch beside him. "I'm One-shot. Moves like a cat, the Chief does. Only better."

"He said he would be right back."

"I'm in no hurry for this meeting." Johnny didn't hear the note of wry humor in One-shot's voice.

"Nor I," added Slide, coming up the steps, carrying a cup of steaming coffee in his left hand.

Connie Perez joined them, then Dinny just moments later.

As casually as her nature allowed, Connie asked, "How's the Chief this morning?"

She was looking at One-shot when she spoke. He gave a slight shrug and she winced. Glancing toward Slide, she asked, "Slide?"

"I haven't seen him yet, either."

Dinny looked at the three and shook her head. "Tsk, tsks, tsks."

Johnny had no idea what was going on, and didn't ask, but as instructed, said, "Mr. Sandusky told me to tell you he was on his way."

The four turned when Jennifer Kincaid came jogging around the end of the office trailer. "Forgot my watch again. What time is it?" she asked as she trotted up the steps and moved to the office door.

"Quarter after," said Dinny.

Jennifer stepped into the trailer, saying, "Good. I've got time to clean up a little." She moved toward the bedroom, leaving the office's outside door open.

When the other four started to enter the office, Johnny steeled himself and edged toward the door, taking a quick step before Connie Perez reached it.

"Ah... Maybe we should wait. Until she's back in the office itself."

Connie looked at him a second with her flat black eyes. Johnny quickly amended his statement, adding, "Mr. One-shot, Mr. Slide and myself, I mean."

He edged away from the door. Connie stepped forward, grabbed the knob and pulled the door closed. "We're together. We'll wait together."

Johnny breathed a sigh of relief. He suddenly realized that he wasn't actually afraid of any of these people. They wouldn't hurt him.

But he desperately didn't want to do anything that would make them think poorly of him.

It was only three minutes later that the door opened again, from the inside. Jennifer looked out at the group, her hair, which had been escaping from the rubber band that held it in a ponytail, now brushed back and retied. Her hands had been washed, removing the mud and soot, and she had on a fresh polo shirt, the other one having had several smears of mud, soot, and just a little blood.

"I thought something had happened. Why are you waiting out there?"

One-shot said, "Johnny thought it best."

Jennifer looked over at Johnny, a question in her eyes, as the five moved into the room.

He dropped his eyes, and said, "Well... These are your quarters, too... Not just an office."

Jennifer smiled. Everyone there with her would have sworn that the already sun filled room brightened even more when she smiled at Johnny.

"That's sweet, Johnny. Thank you for your courtesy."

Johnny blushed, then turned even redder when One-shot said, "A fellow, or lady for that matter, could learn a bit from a man with those attitudes."

"My apologies for not thinking of the situation myself," he added.

"And mine as well, Ma'am," said Slide. "I'm Slide, by the way." He reached forward and Jennifer shook his hand.

"Jennifer Kincaid." A quick glance at One-shot, and she looked at Slide again, adding, "My friends call me Jennifer. Or Jenny, if they lack appreciation of good Tennessee whiskey."

She moved around behind the desk and sat down. "There was no intent to imply a lack of courtesy," Jennifer said, looking at each man.

Johnny, fidgeting slightly, felling a bit guilty about the fact that he had received such pleasant praise for something that another had pointed out to him.

After a few moments he said, "Actually...", but stopped when One-shot gave him a quick look and a tiny shake of the head.

Jennifer looked over at him expectantly, and asked, "Yes, Johnny?"

Johnny knew One-shot was Jack's friend, so he went with his instincts and answered, "Nothing. Sorry. Just clearing my throat."

"Oh," said Jennifer and looked down at her laptop to turn it on and get the main menu up and ready to use.

Johnny looked over at One-shot, saw a slight nod, and felt immensely pleased, as if he had accomplished something very important.

Jennifer looked up at the clock every few seconds. She glanced at Dinny and asked, "Should I have Connie bring Mr. Sandusky's computer on-line, Dinny? I have no idea how he might run a meeting. If he would need it or not."

"He'll want it. He likes to have information at his fingertips, ready when he wants it."

Jennifer looked at Connie. "If you would, please?" Jennifer knew she could have done it herself, but couldn't quite bring herself to go the few steps to his desk.

Connie quickly sat down at Jack's desk, looking first not at the computer, but for the paint pellet pistols she had set down on the desk earlier that morning.

She had set them right in the center, between the laptop and the edge of the desk. When she entered the office she had tried to see if they were still there, but had not been able to see around the display from where she had been standing.

They weren't there. "So he knows. 'Cause if Jennifer moved them she would have said something already," Connie thought, as she brought the terminal on-line for Jack.

She looked at One-stop and Slide, giving a small shake of her head to indicate that the pistols were gone.

Dinny told Connie, "He'll probably want medical first."

Connie said, "Those are locked. I can't access the menu."

Jennifer said, "That's okay, Connie. I'll access it if needed."

Connie nodded and stood up, joining the others near the door.

Jennifer frowned and looked up at the clock once again. Just as the clock flipped from eight twenty nine fifty nine to eight thirty Jack stepped through the door and said, "Sly, ask Doctor Ramos to join us."

Johnny Vanducci jumped at Jack's sudden appearance, then headed out the door on the errand as Jack, per his usual custom, walked

to his desk, flipping his hat toward one of the coat hooks on the wall near the door. Dinny had to dodge slightly as it came sailing past. She didn't turn, knowing it had caught on the hook. She had never seen him miss hanging his hat.

Slipping off his leather jacket, Jack hung it on the back of the chair, sat down, looked out at the group, with barely a glance at Jennifer, and said, "In view of Sly's short absence, a report, please. Slide?"

"A trooper, Chief. Never slacked. And he rode that bike like an expert."

"One-shot," asked Jack, "Any thoughts?"

"Good instincts. He picked up on a couple of subtle nuances just a while ago. I'd ride the river with him."

Jack nodded. "Sizu?"

"Doing good. It pushes me to stay with him on the punishment runs. I have to stay in his face to slow him down enough to keep up. He makes sure Sandi gets a little hand on the PT course when he thinks I'm not looking.

"He doubted himself last night when he came in, and was going to wake me at the dorm to ask my advice. And he faced me just a few minutes ago. He wavered, but it won't be long."

Jack smiled. It took courage to risk Sizu's anger. "Good. Dinny."

"He wouldn't even tell Doc Sinclair what happened. I had just a couple of doubts about that. But he stuck. Straight forward and no lies."

"Miss Kincaid?"

Jennifer had listened to the others in amazement. She wasn't sure what some of the comments meant, or what some of the references were, but she would ask Connie to explain later. Right now Jack wanted her opinion.

"Ah... He's eager," she said, and couldn't think of anything else at all. "Come on, Jennifer," she thought, "you can think faster than that."

"Another good trait. Anything else?" said Jack.

Jennifer remembered what One-shot had said the day before, about learning by asking questions. Some things would wait, others were more important.

She gritted her teeth and said, "A question."

Jack looked directly at her for the first time since he had entered the office. "Yes?"

“Why the stress on his not telling what happened yesterday? Everyone will eventually find out.”

“True. But RTOs...”

At Jennifer’s blank look, Connie hurriedly interjected, “Radio telephone operators.”

Jennifer nodded her thanks and Jack continued, “RTOs and messengers hear, see and know almost everything that happens in the inner workings of a group like this, in part because they receive and carry the messages within the group and with the outside as well. Also in part because they are always at hand, within earshot, or nearly so, to be there when called upon to carry out their duties.

“The grapevine always grabs everything eventually, but leaders need time to evaluate information and make decisions. An RTO or runner that can’t keep their mouth shut is a problem, because although much of the information flows through them, not all does.

“The leaders, at least the good ones, use all the information available, including advice and opinions of trusted staff, and base their decisions on much more than just the things transferred by the RTO or runner.

“The members of the group, no matter how intelligent and capable, tend to make decisions, even if subconsciously, based on information available to them. If little is available, they will accept decisions from the leadership, especially when situations are explained as fully as possible at the time the decisions are passed on, with little trouble.

“But rumors, false or inaccurate information, and so on invariably winds up causing dissent in the ranks as factions develop, trouble for the leadership, not only because of the trouble of maintaining discipline within the ranks, but also when there is dissent in the ranks all orders and instructions start being challenged, subtly at first, then openly.

“Morale is shot, and then things start getting really bad.”

Jack added the last very dryly. He looked at Jennifer, a neutral expression on his face.

It seemed to make sense. Jennifer knew she would have to think about everything he had said for a bit to try and fully understand it, but knew it would have to be later. So she simply nodded.

Jack turned to his computer, hit a series of keys, noted that he couldn’t access the general medical files. He had noted that Jennifer’s

computer was now turned slightly away from his direction. “She’s monitoring my computer access. Well, well,” thought Jack.

He stepped back through the menus to the main one. “Please ready the general medical records for annotation, Miss Kincaid. Doctor Ramos is here.”

Jennifer reached for keyboard to clear her monitoring function and pull the records as she looked up. She hadn’t seen the doctor come in. Doctor Ramos opened the door and stepped inside, followed by Johnny.

She controlled the impulse to cast an annoyed glance at Jack. “Lucky guess on the timing,” she thought. Jennifer had the records ready in an instant.

“Johnny said you wanted to see me?” said Doctor Ramos.

“Yes. Outside, Sly,” said Jack. Doctor Ramos looked at Johnny as he exited the office and then turned back, eyebrows arched.

Jack said, “He’s trustworthy, Leech. But not cadre. Not yet anyway. How are the physicals going?”

“A bit slowly. The facilities are a bit limited.”

“Maintain a list of recommendations about equipment. It will be reviewed in a couple of weeks. How is the cooperation with the examinees?”

Doctor Ramos raised his eyebrows, surprised at the question. “Good. There are always a few that resent physicals. Some that only want their family physician poking around on them.”

Jack nodded. “I noted there is no nurse listed on the roster, male or female.” He was looking at Jennifer when he spoke.

She responded. “The people I consulted in the early stages of the planning didn’t feel it was necessary with a doctor along. I asked all the doctors we interviewed if they had a problem doing some of the detail work a nurse would usually do. A couple didn’t like the idea. But Doctor Ramos indicated he didn’t mind.” Jennifer looked at the doctor for confirmation.

“That’s correct, Mr. Sandusky. I know some doctors think it beneath them. But I understand the need to keep the number of people going trimmed as much as possible. I can handle the nursing aspects myself. I don’t mind. Besides, it actually helps maintain a closer relationship with the patients.

“Of course it isn’t really practical in a full practice, too many patients and too little time for the doctor to do it all. But this is a limited situation.”

“True. I am not doubting your ethics or personality doctor. I appreciate your understanding of and cooperation in some of the limiting parameters of this operation. But common ethical medical practice is to have a female nurse or assistant present or available when a male doctor is with a female patient.

“I doubt there has been much problem as these are all intelligent people and the walls are thin. Help is a quiet shout away.

“But I prefer that you select one of the female members of the party to assist you with female patients. I suggest Anne Bodine. She has some medical background, though I don’t expect her to act as a true nurse. Simply as a safety mechanism for yourself and the expedition in terms of liability. And under the more highly stressed conditions once we leave here, she may provide an added measure of relaxation for the female patients.

“I’m not fully familiar with the student files as yet, but you might check with Miss Kincaid about finding an alternate to Miss Bodine for times when she is the patient, or otherwise unavailable.

“Finally, have any problems turned up that we should know about in terms of limited abilities that would affect the assignment of physical activities? Game leg, bad knee, susceptibility to heat problems, and the like.”

Jack saw the doctor begin to protest.

“I’m not asking you to violate doctor patient privilege, Leech. All I want is advice and instructions that my people can use in order to get the most effective results with the least negative impact on the individuals of the group. At times they will be asked to do things outside their specialty.”

Jennifer watched as Doctor Ramos immediately lost his sudden flare of anger. He looked thoughtful for a moment, then said, “Offhand the only thing is Maggie. She shouldn’t be asked to do much outside physical activity. I’ll check my files and get back to you on anyone else.”

“Very good. As Miss Wilson and Lieutenant Perez will be directing most of the physical activity, they may be informed first, but



Mr. Crane, Miss Kincaid and I should be kept informed in a timely fashion, by you, in case we have questions or need more information.

Doctor Ramos nodded.

“Thank you, Doctor. Sly!”

Doctor Ramos recognized the polite use of his title and the ‘thank you’ as a dismissal and left the office as Johnny popped in. “Doctor Sinclair, please,” said Jack.

“But he’s... I’ll wake him.” Johnny Vanducci was out the door again.

Jennifer had been watching and listening to the exchange between Jack and Orlando Ramos with more than a bit of amazement. Jack Sandusky just kept surprising her.

Jack glanced at her and asked, “We won’t need the medical files for Doctor Sinclair.”

Jennifer looked at her display. She hadn’t even entered the note about Maggie. Without looking over at Jack she said, “Ah... Right,” and hurriedly annotated the file and stepped out of it. Grabbing a pad out of a drawer, she picked up a pencil and quickly made a note for herself to check the student files with Doctor Ramos later.

“One-shot,” asked Jack, “how do the camp equipment lists look?”

“Good basis. Need some work. They’re more temperate North American with some African influences than tropical American. No real problem to get up to speed.”

Jack listened, then said, “Do a revised listing with a comparison against inventory on hand and items on order and their status. Then run an expense break down with Miss Kincaid. When you have the figures, tell me. Mr. Crane, Miss Kincaid and I can then make the final decisions.”

One-shot nodded.

“Any news on the maps, Slide?”

“Nada, Boss. Not yet. But Stinker guaranteed it.”

“Okay. Check with Doctor Klienschmidt. He may have access to some Spanish maps. Maybe Incan. That’s his specialty.”

Jack looked over at Jennifer. “Does the server in the house have a plotter?”

Jennifer shook her head. “Just a line printer and light duty color ink jet printer.”

“Is the computer capable of handling high resolution graphics suitable for mapping? We could always lease a plotter,” said Jack.

Feeling totally inadequate, which sparked her anger, Jennifer again shook her head. “We have what survey and satellite maps there are available. Several sets.”

“I know. But old maps can be very useful. The more information we have the better.” replied Jack. He asked Jennifer, “What is the closest subsidiary of the corporation that would have computer mapping capability? Preferably with a high resolution scanner input.”

“I’ll have to check.” Jennifer hated not being able to recall the information. “He makes me feel so mad. And that distracts me,” she thought.

“That’s fine. Maps aren’t here anyway. Let Slide know, and get him clearance to use the system.”

Jennifer looked at Slide, dressed in clean khakis, as was just about everyone Jack seemed to know. He had long hair, a full beard and huge hands, even for his full two hundred centimeter height.

“You can operate a computer graphics mapping system?” she asked, managing to suppress most of her incredulity. But not all.

“Yep. This isn’t just another pretty face. Beauty and brains. A rare combination.”

“Jeez, Slide!” said Dinny. “Have a heart. Somebody has to clean these floors. Ease up on the bull!”

Jennifer had turned slightly red, as soon as she realized how she must have sounded. But everyone was laughing at Dinny’s little joke, including Slide. She decided she shouldn’t make a big deal about it right now. She could apologize later. Jennifer managed a slight, forced smile as the others laughed and jotted down a note to get the computer information and another to remind her to make the apology.

Johnny and Adam Sinclair entered the office as the laughter died down.

“Sorry it took so long. Johnny had to beat on the door to get me up. I...”

“Save it, Chaplain. It doesn’t matter why,” said Jack, cutting off Adam Sinclair’s explanation, noting that Johnny Vanducci had already made himself scarce again.

Adam Sinclair broke off, his eyes narrowing slightly at Jack, the implication clear that though the why didn't matter the fact that there had been a delay, did. Jennifer, he noted, started to protest, but held her tongue, allowing Jack to continue.

"How is the group shaping up, socially? General terms only. Details can wait for a while."

His slight irritation was suppressed by the opportunity to get into a discussion of what was turning into a fascinating situation. Namely the interaction of the people making up the expedition. "Fairly well. I have had a few surprises. For instance..."

Jack's face was slipping from a neutral, attentive, look to one bordering on impatience.

"Thank you, Doctor Sinclair. The 'fairly well' is sufficient."

Adam could hear the slight edge in Jack's voice. He was a little surprised at himself for not reacting more angrily at the man's seeming arrogance. Rather he felt himself begin to study the situation, with the psychologist part of his brain, even as he listened to Jack.

"Now, if there isn't something of an immediate nature that we need to know about that might adversely affect the group you can return to your other duties."

This time Jennifer did speak up. "Mr. Sandusky! There is no..."

Jack held up his hand, palm toward Jennifer, but didn't look at her. She stopped speaking at the motion, and the room seemed to take on a severe chill.

Jack was still looking at the others in the room. "Out."

They moved quickly to the door, Dinny quietly saying to Adam Sinclair, "Come on, Chaplain. It will only be a minute or two."

He looked over his shoulder at Jennifer. She was looking at Jack, a defiant expression on her face, staring at him sitting there, arms now crossed in front of his chest, watching them quickly leave.

When the door closed behind them, Jack swiveled his chair to look at Jennifer.

Head slightly up, ready for a tirade, Jennifer saw a look on Jack's face that cut her to the quick. It wasn't anger, only disappointment.

"Miss Kincaid," said Jack, his voice firm as always, but soft. "Please refrain from emotional outbursts during these meetings."

Jennifer, though the knot in the pit of her stomach was telling her not to, was still angry enough to say, “There was no reason to be so rude to Adam!” She desperately wanted to say more, but again could think of no words.

“There was, Miss Kincaid. I want him in the inner circle of leadership. He is a good psychologist. And an even better researcher, which is why he is in the group.

“But most important is the fact that, because of his training, he is an excellent observer of people. He can give the leadership valuable insights into situations that can be the difference between a smooth, efficient, cooperative group or one filled with constant bickering, pettiness and jealousies caused by so many different elements I doubt they could be enumerated.

“Some are obvious. Others, experienced people like Dinny, Sizu and One-shot spot quickly. But extra eyes are always a help. Plus there are other problems that we won’t spot.

“But they can be observed in their infant stages by a trained observer such as Doctor Sinclair. Most he will handle himself because of his training as a psychologist and the very nature of his personality. The rest we will handle because we will know about them before they get out of hand.

“He will be a valuable asset to the leadership. But he is a sociable man. He likes to talk. It is part of what makes him effective. But I need him to learn that at times I need only what I have asked for, and no more.

“I need only an overview at this time. We will be going over things, in even enough detail to satisfy Doctor Sinclair, in about a week or so.

“My barbaric rudeness might shock him. But he will realize, may already, I think he’s that good, that it is important that he follow our lead. When we indicate we need a synopsis, that is what he should give us. Unless he has information we do not that tells him to give us more than we ask for. He will know when. Once he breaks the old habits. Rudeness is only one of my habit breakers.

Jack paused. He took a deep breath, releasing it slowly. Jennifer’s eyes widened slightly. She could see a tiny bit of anger coming into his face now.

“Within the cadre opinions must flow freely. Criticisms included. Decisions must be made. I want the honest opinions, thoughts and calculated projections of everyone in the cadre. I have never, and will never discipline anyone that has an honest and open disagreement with me.

“But when it is within the leadership cadre, it must be kept there. Visible dissent within the leadership is disaster. Leaders must have the respect not only of the people they lead, but the leaders above and below them. Respect is earned slowly and it can be very fleeting. It must be maintained on a day to day basis. Sometimes hourly in extreme cases.” Jennifer saw his eyes suddenly focus in the distance but immediately come back to her face.

“Nothing destroys the respect of a leader faster than an act of disrespect toward one leader by another leader, no matter how unintentional. Something that would be a joke among a cadre could be and often is seen in an entirely different light if witnessed by others.

“I don’t particularly care what most people may think of me personally, but I will not allow any disrespect toward myself or anyone else in the cadre by someone that knows better. It will be punished harshly. Not in retaliation, but it is the only way that the damage can be lessened. It can’t be totally corrected, except by time.

“And inexperienced leaders subject to lapses quickly learn that it is a bad trait to have. So they become, first, very conscious of not making a mistake, and then finally, it becomes second nature.”

Jennifer had begun to understand, at least she hoped so. Her anger began to fade. He did make a lot of sense.

But then he said, voice somewhat harsh, eyes flashing, “You’ve run laps once for basically the same mistake. Had it been in front of anyone except the Chaplain this time, you would be running laps right now. You make the same mistake again, with me, and you’ll get a lesson you won’t forget.”

The anger came back in a rush. Before she had a chance to vent it, Jack glanced at his watch, then back at her and calmly said, “You have two minutes to state your side of it and voice your opinion.”

Jennifer was livid. She stood up from the chair, though she just stood in front of it.

“You arrogant bastard! I have never in my life met anyone with so high an opinion of himself or his abilities! This is not a military operation.” Jennifer’s voice, loud and almost sputtering at first, was now becoming much quieter and taking on a tone that seemed to drip ice.

Her eyes narrowed, and Jack saw the fire in them as she continued.

“We don’t need a Napoleon with delusions of grandeur shouting orders just to satisfy his ego. And we don’t need a little Hitler who thinks he is better than anyone around him, demanding ‘siege heils’ every time he struts past.

“And we sure as bloody hell don’t need some muscle bound barbarian walking around demanding unconditional respect from people with three times his intellect. Especially when he has not an ounce of respect for anything himself. You will not even address people properly. You may be my grandfather’s friend, but by all that’s dear to me...”

Jack saw Jennifer unconsciously touch her polo shirt, above and between her breasts, as she continued her tirade.

“...I’ll scrap this operation before I’ll let you humiliate and insult a group of people so far above you in the evolutionary cycle that calling you a barbarian has been an insult to barbarians. Not to speak of the possibility of putting you into a situation with a group of primitive people whom you probably think you could rule like a king.

“You were hired for specific skills, just like the other members of this expedition. Give me one more excuse and you are out of here and I’ll straighten it out with Grandfather later.”

Jack’s expression had not changed. His face had maintained its usual neutral expression through the whole speech. Only his eyes had changed.

Once, a softness few had ever seen came into them, when Jennifer touched her chest.

And then, when she called him less than a barbarian, another softness, this time of pain, that had appeared only a handful of times. And been seen by only two people.

Jennifer, feeling the anger begin to drain, started to sit down.

Jack calmly looked up at her and said, “Very good, Miss Kincaid. Clear. Concise. To the point. Just the way I wanted Doctor Sinclair to present his information. Another object lesson may not be necessary after all.”

That stopped her motion to sit down. She froze halfway down, her hands on the arm of the chair supporting her weight. Her eyes flashed fire again and she stared directly into Jack's eyes.

"If you ever, and I mean **ever**, lay a hand on me without permission, I will cut your heart out of your chest and chop it into little pieces! Is that clear, concise and to the point enough for you to understand?"

"Quite, Miss Kincaid."

Jennifer dropped into her chair, and looked away from Jack, suddenly feeling numb and not understanding why.

Jack looked at her for a long moment, the pain in his eyes again. This woman affected him like no other he had ever met.

"I am afraid I have stepped across a line that I failed to see, Miss Kincaid. I am as I am. I cannot tell you that I will act any differently than you have already experienced. I will not make a promise I cannot keep. "I will leave at your word, with no arguments. Nor will there be a problem with your grandfather.

"Any of the people I brought to the expedition that you wish to retain will remain, if I leave, and give you their best effort, without reservation. Any usable information or materials in my possession will be made available through them.

"Perhaps, Miss Kincaid, you would like a moment alone. I will wait outside if you wish to freshen up before we continue with the meeting."

Jack began to rise.

"Sit still, Mr. Sandusky." Jennifer's voice was low, calm, and almost without emotion. "Some of your points are well taken. It would be against the best interests of the group for our personal animosities to be revealed by your exit. I shall be only a moment."

Jennifer stood and walked quickly into the bedroom, turning into the bathroom. She ran a little water into the sink and turned off the faucet, her eyes on her reflection in the medicine cabinet mirror. "Why do you always lose your temper around him?" she whispered. "You've never been prone to that before. Why now? He has provided insights into situations that have each time been entirely correct. His assistance is important to the success of this expedition. You have to control your

temper around him. Think before you react to his words, no matter how irritating they may be.”

Jennifer looked down at the sink and dipped her fingers into the water perfunctorily, then reached for the hand towel. Her eyes went back to the mirror for a last check before she turned to leave.

Suddenly her eyes widened into saucers at the memory of her threat to Jack. “You said if he touched you without permission! Not simply if he touched you! Jennifer, get a grip. You are losing it. You have to maintain you control over your anger when he brings it out. You can’t even voice a logical threat without making a mistake in wording when you let your irritations get the best of you.”

Jennifer closed her eyes, took a deep breath, released it, and reopened her eyes.

A faint, self amused smile raised the corners of her lips when she voiced one last thought. “Talking to your reflection is not a really good sign, you know.”

Jennifer returned to her desk chair. Jack was using his computer and did not look toward her. She said, “Ready.”

Barely raising his voice, Jack called, “Dinny.”

The door opened and Jennifer looked at the clock. She was amazed. Only a little over five minutes had elapsed since the group now reentering the office had left. “It feels like it has been hours,” she thought.

Adam Sinclair looked at Jack, who met his gaze calmly, without expression. Looking over at Jennifer, Adam could see she too was expressionless.

Jack started without preliminaries. “Is there anything of which we need to be aware, Doctor Sinclair?”

“At first there was some disturbance about Mr. Crenshaw. But several of the women have expressed relief at his departure and the general attitude is now better. But, in laymen’s terms, everyone is a bit antsy. A number of little things are beginning to generate some friction. The closeness of the quarters, limited facilities,…”

Adam felt himself start to get into the psychological aspects of the camp situation, and quickly controlled himself. “An so on. We need some type of diversion.”



Jack looked at Adam and nodded. "My feelings exactly. A baseball game, and perhaps a barbecue?"

"Why, yes! That would be good. But..." Adam paused.

"Speak your mind, Doctor, if you have something of value."

Adam cleared his throat at Jack's gentle but pointed reminder.

"It would be better if the activities took place off the estate. That will lessen the feeling of spatial restriction and give more opportunity of individual activity. Here it would be completely a group affair."

Jennifer started to speak, stopped, then decided that her thoughts were constructive. They could be taken or rejected, after discussion.

"There is a large park in the downtown area of the city. They have sports fields and picnic areas. I don't know if it would be an asset or a problem, but there is a huge mall just a block away from the park."

"An asset," said Jack. "From what I've seen, everyone has been cooperating very well, trying to get things ready. No midnight runs into the city for drinks and such. Saturday. Let everyone know that if things go well the next two days Saturday will be a day in town. That will make it a reward for a job well done rather than a Gimme."

"We can make a day of it. No PT. Breakfast here, perhaps a bit early, and then into the city. Turn everyone loose to sightsee, shop, relax, whatever. They can lunch in the mall, then go to the park for some group sports."

"Individuals can scatter as much as they want through lunch, though I would prefer everyone be at the mall to eat, but it isn't necessary. I do want everyone at the park. Make sure that is understood." Jack looked at Connie and Dinny. They nodded.

"After that, they're on their own again. Those that want can go out, have supper in a nice restaurant, catch a movie, whatever they want."

Jack looked at Jennifer and asked, "Is there a hotel close to the mall?"

Jennifer nodded, very curious, and said, "Yes. Part of the mall complex itself, actually."

"Good. We should book a couple of suites, one for the men and one for the women, so those that want to take a change of clothes will have a place to change."

Again Jack looked toward Jennifer, "Can we find money in the budget for that?"

“This is important enough. I’ll find it.”

Jack looked back at the group before him. “Make sure everyone is aware that the two suites are for changing clothes. Any liaisons will have to be handled on their own, elsewhere, and discretely.”

Jennifer cut a quick glance at Jack, then looked back at the others. Johnny Vanducci looked a bit shocked, but she was surprised that Adam seemed to take that comment in perfect stride.

“Transport. Dinny?” asked Jack.

“We have the car and the pick up for the expedition. And three people brought personal vehicles, despite the request not to.”

Jack caught the blanch cross Johnny’s face, but it cleared quickly.

Jennifer quickly said, “There are three cars here at the estate that can be used. And I can get at least two more company cars and a small bus.”

“That will get everyone into town,” commented Jack. “If someone wants personal transportation they can rent a car, on their own, after arriving in the city.

“Make it known that everyone should be back here by, say, two, Sunday morning. Don’t make it a curfew. We need to know how everyone will cooperate on arranging to get back, and see who might have a tendency to stretch a guideline.”

Then, for Jennifer’s benefit, Jack added, “That will tell us a bit about how members of the expedition might act when on individual and small group assignments in the field.”

Jack looked over at Jennifer again, and said, “There may be several people short of ready funds, especially some of the students. Can arrangements to make a draw against pay be set up?”

“The finances system was set up to issue checks on a monthly basis, sent to the home addresses,” responded Jennifer. “But I’ll find some way to make sure cash is available, against the next paycheck. It would be a shame for someone to have to miss out on a good time because of not being able to cash a check.”

“Fine.” Jack scanned the group. “Any questions, comments or suggestions?”

Dinny asked, “When do we let everyone know?”

“As the opportunity arises. But keep it pretty casual. Mister Vanducci can help spread the word.” Jack looked toward Johnny, standing near the door.

“Mister Vanducci.”

“Yes, Sir?” There was hesitation in his voice, that made Jennifer look at him closely.

“I trust you know which portions of this information is for public consumption.”

“Yes, Sir. I think so.”

“Fetch Mister O’Hanlon.” Johnny turned and left the office.

“Anything else on the outing? Doctor?”

“It’s an excellent idea. It will be a good release for everyone. And with the way it is arranged, may prove educational.”

“Okay, Doctor Sinclair. Thank you.”

Johnny Vanducci followed Frank O’Hanlon into the office.

Jack glanced at Adam Sinclair, who had moved to one side, but had not left. Adam saw the look, noted the fact that Jack had not started speaking to O’Hanlon, and suddenly realized he had been dismissed.

“Oh! Sorry.” He hurried out of the trailer and headed toward his cubicle in the dorm trailer to read the file on Jack Sandusky again.

Jack looked at O’Hanlon. “The phones don’t work. We need phone service now. Find the electronic technician and do it.”

“Right, Boss.” O’Hanlon turned and left, eagerly. He loved a challenge.

Jennifer said, “I have the cellular up at the house. And one in my car...”

Jack smiled. “I want them to come up with something on their own. And since you brought it up, how is everyone taking the cell phone restriction?”

Dinny grinned. “Oh, at first there was some real protest at that. But most everyone now has adjusted. Many are liking the lack of diversion.”

“I don’t quite understand why no cell phones here during training,” Jennifer said.

“Fairly simple and straightforward, Miss Kincaid,” Jack replied. “Cell phones have become common place. People depend on them to a great degree. We won’t have service when we’re in the jungle. I do not want anyone thinking they can just call home when they want when they

are there. They can't. I want the lesson learned, for safety reasons. They will have to do without them down south. I want the lesson learned here, now. Another lives could depend on it situation. I want people thinking on their feet, not their cellphone."

Jennifer nodded. "It has been difficult... I understand."

"On another subject, Miss Kincaid," added Jack, "When is Albert scheduled to arrive?"

"It will be Friday. There was a problem with the trucking permits to get the Ducks to the dock. He had to stay an extra day to handle it."

"Very well. And Miss Hansen?"

"Tomorrow. She was here for two days, getting early basics, but needed to wrap up another project. She's flying in late tomorrow."

Jack nodded, looked at Connie Perez. "What's the word on the in-house security?"

Dinny made a slight motion. Jack said, "Mister Vanducci, will you wait outside, please?"

Jennifer again saw a bit of a hurt look on Johnny's face, as he turned and left the office.

Connie looked at Dinny, then at Jack. "They're in the slammer in Mississippi. The hearing is tomorrow. They should be here Friday, too."

Jennifer looked up. "Close the door," she said. Connie reached back and closed the office door that Johnny Vanducci had left open when he left.

As soon as it was closed, Jennifer, carefully controlling her temper, addressed Jack. "Am I to understand our security is to be a pair of felons?"

Everyone could hear the sharp, controlled anger in her voice.

"I am sure there were no felonies involved," said Jack. He looked at Connie. "Explain."

"They got into a fight at a bar."

"That's much better," said Jennifer, the sarcasm very evident.

"Connie?"

"They wouldn't say what happened. I put Dinny on. They wouldn't tell her either. I trust my man."

"And I trust mine. But we found someone to stay at camp Saturday and police the area."

Jennifer managed to not blow up at the realization that Jack's comment indicated he intended to keep the two men as security.

Her voice obviously tightly controlled, she gave a hard look at Jack and said, "You still intend to have them on the expedition."

"Yes. The decision stands."

Jack looked at her calmly, expecting her to tell him to leave.

Jennifer almost did that very thing. The words were coming up her throat, but she choked them back with a visible effort.

"They are allowed only on probation. If I think they are dangerous, they won't be staying."

"Both are dangerous, Miss Kincaid," said Connie Perez. "That is why they were picked. But they aren't dangerous to the expedition, only to those that would cause us harm."

Jennifer looked around at the group, knowing they all supported Jack.

"MY decision stands. What is next?" she said, looking over at Jack.

Jack said, "That is my agenda. Problems?"

Dinny said, "There is the attitude of Tina Blount. She is the only one left that refuses to do PT. Also tends to foment problems, primarily between the staff and the scientists. Without much success, fortunately. You are aware of her feelings toward you. She has really been pushing Connie."

Jennifer wasn't sure if she would have spoken, had the problem with Tina been just about Jack, but when Dinny mentioned Connie, she knew her personal dislike of Jack was outweighed by the needs of the expedition.

This group needed to know everything possible about the situation. Despite her feelings about Jack, she knew that the others would not take undo advantage of any information she gave them.

Jennifer said, "She considers Mr. Sandusky a..." Jennifer had almost said barbarian, but changed it as the word came to her tongue.

"...coarse man. She believes that he and Connie are having an affair. I don't really know her well, but she seems to be a bit of a snob."

Jennifer couldn't quite bring herself to mention the full extent of what she had called Connie Perez.

“She is too good a sociologist to lose, if there is any way to prevent it,” said Jack, again surprising Jennifer. “I’ve read her paper on the Vietnamese in the Texas fishing towns, and a couple other works of hers, too. She has excellent insights, when it comes to pure research on cultural development and interaction. Her personal feelings do not seem to enter her work. I think she could do a good job analyzing the situation in Brazil. Is the situation controllable?”

“I think so,” said Dinny, “but it will be tricky.”

Jennifer was listening in amazement. After what Tina Blount had done to Jack, she expected his friends to do their best to get her removed from the expedition.

“We may need to bring the Cha... Doctor Sinclair in on the situation. He might be able to help, if it doesn’t go well.” Jack looked at Connie. “Connie?”

“A lot of people don’t like me.” She shrugged. “What’s one more?” She grinned. “Besides, being the Chief’s lover ought to get me some special privileges. I’d go that far to keep the peace. No pun intended.”

Jennifer looked at Connie in shock.

“Jeez, Connie,” said Dinny. “You’re worse than Slide. You’ll have Jennifer thinking you are some kind of little Indian harlot.”

It hit Jennifer. They knew exactly what Tina thought of Connie. At least Dinny and Connie did. And were still willing to try to get along with her. “I’m not sure I could do that,” she thought to herself.

Connie looked pointed at Jennifer and said, “Nah. She knows me better than that.”

Jennifer said, “Of course. I knew it wasn’t true when Tina said it.”

Connie tried to look hurt, and said, “Hey! Have a heart! Allow that there was at least a possibility it was true. It hurts to think I’m not even mistress material,” but she was laughing.

One-shot rolled his eyes, looked at Slide and said, “And they say men think about sex all the time.”

Slide laughed and Dinny joined in. Jennifer couldn’t help herself, she chuckled as well. “These people are just so comfortable with each other it was impossible not like them,” she thought.

Jack waited for the laughter to slow, though he didn't join in, then said, "Monitor the situation for the mean time. We will discuss it further when warranted. What else?"

"The kid," said Dinny.

Jack nodded. "Get him."

Dinny opened the office door, leaned out and called, "Johnny."

He entered the office, shooting a quick look to Jack, but dropping his eyes to the floor.

"Mister Vanducci, like everyone else in the expedition has other duties to perform. We need an additional runner. Who is next up in seniority after him?"

"That would be Sydney Smithson. He's a senior. An archeology major. He'll be helping Dr. Klienschmidt primarily," said Dinny.

Jennifer pulled up the file. Dinny had been correct.

Jack saw Johnny Vanducci react slightly, as if he started to say something.

"Mister Vanducci," Jack said, "if there is something important we need to know..."

"Well..."

"Please Mister Vanducci," said Jack, his voice calm, "Don't feel like a snitch. I doubt if you would speak if you didn't think it was important to the efficiency of the expedition."

Jennifer looked at Jack, yet again. He was handling an obviously sensitive boy with kid gloves.

"Well. Sid likes to brag. Around girls. You know." Johnny turned slightly red. "To impress them."

"I see. In other words he might tend to let things slip that should be considered confidential."

Johnny nodded.

"Then he's out. Who is next up?" asked Jack

"Angela Worester. Working with Doctor McKinley," responded Dinny.

They all looked at Johnny. He said, "I like her. I think she would do a good job."

Jack looked around at the others. He saw no objections. "See to it after the meeting, Mister Vanducci. Explain what is expected of her."

“Anyone have anything else,” asked Jack. When he saw each of the others shake their heads he said, “That’s it then.”

He stood, started putting on his jacket and said, “I have some things to do. I’ll be back later.” With that he had his hat on and was out the door, almost before any of the others had moved.

Johnny waited until the others had exited the office, then hesitatingly asked Jennifer, “Can I talk to you for a minute, Miss Kincaid?”

Jennifer was turning off her computer and had not realized Johnny was still there. “Yes, of course,” she said, looking up.

Johnny took a deep breath, let it out and asked, in a rush, “Have I done something wrong? Is Mister Sandusky mad at me?”

Jennifer smiled. “No. Of course not. We all knew you have been working well. But you do have other duties. Angela is just going to help take a little pressure off, that’s all.”

“Oh. I know that. I’ve been a little worried about getting things done for Doctor Sinclair. I can use the help.”

Jennifer looked puzzled and said, “I’m afraid I don’t understand then, Johnny. Why would you think Mr. Sandusky is upset with you? He even started calling you Mr. Vanducci, instead of Sly.” Jennifer added the last, feeling a bit of pride in herself. Maybe she had made an impression on Jack Sandusky after all.

“That’s just it. He calls his friends and the people he likes by those names he gives them. Except, you know, when it’s really important. He didn’t call me Sly, or call me in again, after we all came outside. The next time he wanted me, Miss Wilson called me.”

Jennifer was confused, the sudden feeling of pride that she had accomplished something was suddenly replaced with the feeling that it was she who had caused Johnny Vanducci’s obvious hurt.

“You like him to call you Sly?”

“Sure. And he usually says, ‘Yo, Sly’, deep in his throat. You know, kinda like he thinks of me like Rocky or Rambo. The characters Sylvester Stallone plays.”

Jennifer saw the far off look come into his eyes. It seemed to mirror some disappoint in his past. “No one has ever thought I was anything like Stallone before.”



Jennifer remembered the movies. She had never seen them, but realized that a person would have to have been living in a remote cave for the last several years to not know who Rocky or Rambo was. She sighed. Her understanding had holes in it a person could drive a truck through, she decided.

“Don’t worry, Johnny. He’ll be calling you Sly again, I’m sure.” Jennifer gritted her teeth, and thought, “If I have to eat a little pride and ask him to.” She smiled at Johnny and said, “I’ll start calling you Sly, too. But don’t be disappointed if I forget sometimes. And I don’t think I can do that ‘Yo’, at all.”

Johnny smiled at her attempt. “That’s all right. You don’t have to call me Sly. I like it when you call me by my first name. The same way Miss Wilson and the Lieutenant call me The Kid. I know I’m not anything like Sly Stallone and it sounds kinda silly coming from everybody else.”

“Except Mr. Sandusky.”

Johnny nodded.

“I understand, Johnny. Just don’t worry about it. Everything is just fine.”

“I’m glad. I don’t want to disappoint him. So I guess I’d better go find Angela.”

Jennifer nodded and watched Johnny’s back disappear out the door.

Deciding to forego attempting work on the accounting program for a while, knowing in her present mental state it would have to be redone later, she instead decided to go practice making another fire, as she had this morning. “That trip Saturday will give me a chance to get a good knife. That knife from the kitchen is next to useless for the field, good as it is as a kitchen knife.”

She was at the door, ready to go out, when a knock came. She opened the door and stood aside as O’Hanlon entered, followed by the expedition radio operator and electronic technician, Wallace Spencer.

“Here, you go, Jennifer. We’ll have this ready in just a minute or two.”

The two proceeded to set up a cellular phone on Jack’s desk, and run the coax for an outside antenna through the nearest window.

O'Hanlon said, "This is temporary until we come up with something else." He continued to talk as Spencer went outside and started to feed the coax into the window to O'Hanlon. "I sure am glad Sandusky knows that guy up at the house. For an old man he's got some pretty good moves."

"What are you talking about?" asked Jennifer.

He caught us, ah... borrowing a cellular phone out of one of the cars. The green Jag. Had us cold. I started explaining that Sandusky wanted a phone. That seemed to satisfy him."

"Why didn't you just ask, first?"

O'Hanlon looked at Jennifer. "It was a bit of a challenge. No harm, no one to get hurt. Sandusky knew we couldn't do anything about the commercial phone system. He wanted to know how resourceful we are. Don't worry. We aren't thieves. We wouldn't have done it if it wasn't family."

Jennifer started. "Family?"

"Yeah. Well, corporate family." At Jennifer's blank look, O'Hanlon paled slightly.

"This place is owned by the man that runs the Scanlon Corporation, isn't it? It isn't rented or borrowed or something? If it is and I was stealing a phone from someone else's car, Sandusky will have my hide! And I wouldn't blame him. I should have checked on ownership first."

"No. It's Mr. Scanlon's estate."

O'Hanlon relaxed. "There for a second I thought I was dead meat."

"That should do it," he said, handing her the handset. "You want to call Time and Temperature or something to check it?"

Jennifer punched in a number, got through, and replaced the unit.

"Just fine. Thank you, Frank."

"No sweat." He started for the door.

"Frank, would you tell Mr. Spencer you will be with him in a few minutes? I need to talk to you."

"Sure." O'Hanlon opened the office door and saw Spencer rounding the trailer with the ladder. "Lose the junk, Sparky, then go on over to the PT course. I'll be there in a few minutes. Show you how a Marine runs PT."

Frank turned back toward Jennifer, closing the door behind him. “Sparky’s great, but he’s Navy. Wimps. Every last one of them.”

Jennifer smiled. She had already heard of the friendly running feud between the two men. Still standing at the end of her desk, she said, “Frank, I’m really sorry about the other day. I had no right to put you in the position I did. Mr. Sandusky should not have hit you, especially without warning the way he did. I feel it is my fault. I hope you will accept my apology.”

Jennifer held out her hand.

Frank looked at it a moment, but didn’t take it. He looked up at her face and said, “Miss Kincaid, I’m sorry. I can’t accept an apology. The Boss had to do what he did. He was openly challenged. He would be an idiot if he didn’t do it the way he did.

“It wasn’t like he really hurt me. From what I’ve seen since, he only used maybe sixty percent, and he pulled the hits on contact. He made his point, and that’s all.

“I have to tell you, had I realized it was Sandusky I wouldn’t have set myself up the way I did. I guess I’m getting old. I just didn’t connect the name. Even after Dinny told me, I still didn’t. Maybe because I’ve never had many people really slip past me like that. But then when I saw him, and he gave me the chance to settle up, it came to me, ‘This is Sandusky!’”

“May I ask why you didn’t take advantage of his offer, to let you hit him, twice? He had just hit you twice, without warning. He knocked you out.”

“Oh. You heard that, huh?”

Jennifer nodded.

“Like I said, he had to do it. I understand that. He offered to let me get my own back, in private so it wouldn’t hurt the expedition.

“I didn’t want to hit him after he offered. You don’t hurt people that just gave you their life.”

Jennifer’s shock was evident on her face. “You wouldn’t have killed him!”

“I’m not explaining this very well. Maybe the LT or Dinny could do it better. But I’ll give it one more try. See, when he offered to let me hit him, it meant I was a part of a team he was leading. Which in turn

means that the good of the team comes before all else, including the leader.

“Which, again in turn, means the leader’s life, in extreme situations. Now this isn’t a combat mission, or anything like that, but even if it was a walk in a park, it means the same. If the situation warrants, he’ll die before he’ll let me die.

“But the best thing about the good guys like Sandusky is the fact that if the good of the group calls for it, he wouldn’t hesitate to ask me to risk it all, and maybe die for the group.

“I was in the Marine Corps. Believe me, risking other people’s lives is a thousand times harder than risking your own. At least for most people. I’ve known a couple of officers that didn’t really care. They weren’t very good officers and their men did only what was expected of them.

“It would be the very last resort for Sandusky. With him, his people always come first. He is doing everything he can to reduce the chances of any injuries. The PT is only one example. There is only one place worse than a jungle, and that’s the Arctic. If you aren’t fit you die. In the jungle, if you aren’t fit, you get sick or die.

“Even the facts of how he took me down show how he tries to protect everyone. I can fight pretty well. I’m big, I’m fast, and I know what I’m doing. And he knew it. If he hadn’t nailed me with those first two punches, he would have had to hurt me to win.

“And he had to win. If he fought and lost, even the pacifists in the group would have lost any respect they might have had for him. Because the perception is that leaders don’t make mistakes. If a leader is seen making a mistake, he is no longer a leader.

“Doesn’t matter what field of endeavor. A political leader, a bank president, a school teacher. Anything. Make a mistake that in the smallest way indicates a lack of ability and not immediately take action that restores the perception that you are in control, then those around you will begin to doubt every action you take.”

“I’m not sure I fully comprehend all that you said, Frank, but I think I am beginning to get a glimmering of understanding. But, still, I am the one that put you in the posit...”

Frank waved his hand casually and said, “You were just doing what you thought right, too. I don’t blame you for that. If it had been

someone that didn't handle things the way Sandusky did, well... You needed to know that."

Frank smiled. "I'm more of a doer than a teacher. But if you ask me, it's not such a big deal. Anyone sharp enough to get Jack Sandusky for ramrod has what it takes. I need to get going, if that's all right. I don't want to let Sparky think I'm afraid to run PT with him."

Jennifer smiled. "What do Marines say? Semper Fi?"

Frank O'Hanlon's face split into a wide grin. "Yes, Ma'am! I knew you had what it takes! Semper Fi!" He threw his right hand up in a sharp salute, turned on his heel and left.

Jennifer leaned her hip against the desk and sighed. She wasn't hearing what she wanted to hear about Jack Sandusky. "I'm just as confused now as ever. Maybe more so," she thought.

She glanced over at the temporary phone, then to the door. "I guess practicing fire making will have to wait a bit. Work comes first." Jennifer sat down, brought her laptop back on line and pulled up Kathleen Timmons' file. She dialed the number and was ready to hang up when she heard the receiver on the other end lifted and a voice say 'Hello.'

Jennifer said, "Hello. This is Jennifer Kincaid. I'm trying to reach Kathleen Timmons."

"You got her. What time is it?"

"It's almost ten here. Eleven there. I could call back. But this is rather important, Miss Timmons."

"Hang on a minute."

Jennifer heard the receiver bang down on something, faint rustlings for at least three minutes. She was beginning to get annoyed.

Then she heard Kathleen Timmons say, "You still there, honey? Had to take a leak and get some coffee. Thank God for microwaves. What do you want?"

Jennifer controlled her irritation. Jack might be right about one thing. She wasn't going to like Kathleen Timmons very much.

"We spoke once before, Miss Timmons. About the Scanlon Corporation expedition to Brazil."

"Yeah. I remember. I told you I wasn't going to a hot, stinking, steaming jungle, honey."

“You made yourself quite clear. However, I was hoping you would reconsider. The geologist we had on staff has had to leave. You are one of the best we could possibly hope to get for this work. I really wish you would reconsider.”

It galled her, but Jennifer said, “We would be willing to offer you an additional ten percent over the initial presentation as a bonus, due to the short notice. And your stated reluctance due to the working conditions.”

“You must be an accountant, honey. I can be had. But I’m not for sale. It wasn’t the money the first time. I just don’t want to go. You get up an expedition to go to the Riviera, give me a call, ‘cause I’m your gal. I got things to do, since I’m up, so good-bye.”

“Wait, please,” said Jennifer, quickly before the woman could hang up.

“Will you wrap it up! I’ve got a life to get on with here.”

Jennifer closed her eyes for a moment, opened them, and almost hoping it wouldn’t work, said, “Jack Sandusky thought you might be interested in joining the expedition.”

“Sandusky is running the show? Hell, honey! Why didn’t you say so. What’s the address there?”

Jennifer told her how to get to the estate, then added, “If there is a problem with getting a leave of absence from your present employer...”

Before Jennifer could continue, Kathleen Timmons said, “There won’t be a problem. If they don’t want to give me a leave for this, I’ll quit. Put a lighted candle in the window, honey. I’ll see you this evening.”

Jennifer was left listening to the hollow sound of a terminated line. She set the receiver onto the power pack and leaned back in her chair. Irritated that the mere mention of Jack Sandusky’s name had completely turned the situation around with Kathleen Timmons, Jennifer spun her chair around, intending to get up and go practice the things she had learned from One-shot, and cracked her knee against the corner of her desk.

“Damn you, Sandusky!” she whispered, rubbing her knee. She stood and headed for the door. She had her hand on the knob, when another knock sounded.

Again she opened the door. This time it was Adam Sinclair. Jennifer frowned, thinking, "I'm never going to get to practice making a fire."

"Jennifer," asked Adam, seeing the frown, "is this a bad time? I can come back later."

Jennifer smiled wanly. "No. Adam. Come on in. I just cracked a knee."

Jennifer stepped back and closed the door behind Adam when he entered. She said, "I'm sorry about the meeting this morning, Adam."

As she started to continue Adam waved his hand and said, "I know I tend to ramble on when I start talking psychology. I don't often have the chance to discuss things with anyone that can understand the nuances the way Jack can."

"When we were outside the trailer Dinny told me why I needed to keep it a little more concise. Even then I found myself starting to go into a bit more detail than needed."

"Why does everyone keep coming to his defense?" thought Jennifer to herself.

She asked Adam. "What was it you wanted?"

Adam noted the fact that she was diverting the conversation away from Jack. "I came by to see if I could get the files on the new people."

"Ah, good," thought Jennifer, "back to routine things."

"Sure," she said, moving to her computer again. "There have been some revisions to several of the files that you already have. I'll just run another full set for you."

She worked at the computer for several moments, in silence, as Adam pulled the straight backed chair over near her desk and sat down, waiting in silence with her.

When the printer began humming quietly, Jennifer spun her chair toward Adam, careful not to bump her knee again. Leaning back slightly, she crossed her arms in front of her chest.

She looked over at the printer and said, "It'll be a couple of minutes, Adam."

Adam just nodded, watching her without speaking. In the state of mind she was in, he knew if he pressed her at all to talk, she would resist, resenting the intrusion.

Jennifer was staring at the floor, arms still crossed when she suddenly said, “Adam, do you think I have any leadership abilities?”

“Bingo!” thought Adam. “Jack knew what he was talking about.” Adam looked at Jennifer. When he hadn’t spoken after a few seconds, Jennifer glanced over at him.

“Jennifer, your job with Scanlon Corporation is an important position. You’ve been very successful, from all I’ve seen. You couldn’t do the job you do if you didn’t have leadership abilities. You told me once the financial section of Scanlon Corporation has dozens of people in it. They all follow your lead.”

Jennifer spun the chair around and put her forearms on the top of her desk and leaned forward. “I know. And I don’t think it’s too immodest to say that I do a very good job. But that is office work. I deal with people primarily on the phone, the fax, and through the corporation computer network. It’s a highly controlled situation. I make large scale decisions which get handed down to others to implement.”

“But don’t you keep track of what happens? Give a hand in the direct operation from time to time?”

“Of course. I have to. I know the whole picture. I have the contacts and knowledge that the others need for specific operations.”

Adam arched his eyebrows.

Jennifer frowned. “It’s not the same, Adam. It’s still a controlled situation. What we are getting into is going to be a highly fluid situation. Many diverse things going on at once, in concert and separately. Some close at hand and some at a distance. All in a foreign nation where many of us won’t know the language.”

“Aren’t those possibilities the reason we are here, now, getting things ready, instead of everyone just showing up in Brazil, ready to grab equipment that was shipped, and start working?”

“Well. At least part of the reason,” replied Jennifer.

“And don’t the things you ask to get done around here get done?”

“Yes. But...”

“But what?” said Adam, gently. “I can’t tell you that your doubts are suddenly going to go away. You care about people Jennifer. I’ve known you long enough to see that. That means you are going to worry sometimes.”



“Try not to let it get you down. We’ve all been working pretty hard, in close quarters. The day in the city should help everyone out.”

Jennifer brightened visibly. “I am looking forward to that. I need a couple of personal things I hadn’t thought about before. I wouldn’t feel right about running in, when the general policy is for everyone to stay at the estate, except for specific tasks.”

Adam smiled. “See. That’s a leadership decision. A good one I think. They say the best leaders never ask their people to do things they wouldn’t do themselves. You’re already better at this than you think you are.”

“I hope so. Because I think sometimes I’m not very good at all.”

“You don’t show it. Which is another good sign.”

Jennifer had to smile. “You’re pretty good at making people feel better about themselves.”

“Any time you need someone to talk to, Jennifer, I’ll be around.” Adam laughed. “Johnny told me the other day he thought I’d try to analyze a rock, if I could just get it to talk to me.”

Jennifer laughed. The printer shut down and she went to get the files for Adam. “Here. You can separate and collate them yourself. I guess I should go run the PT course. I missed women’s PT this morning. Can’t let the troops think I’m slacking off. Besides, I’m having trouble on the rope swing.”

The two went out of the office together. Adam said, “I know what you mean. For me, it’s the balance beam. The furthest I’ve made it without falling off is halfway.

“And Connie just stands there, shaking her head. Then she pretends to dust me off, and then yells at me to go do it right. But she’s never around to see me fall the second time. Thank goodness.”

Adam gave Jennifer a sideways look and asked, “Do you think she’d want to see a movie Saturday, after the game?”

“Why Doctor,” laughed Jennifer, “Heal thyself. You’re a psychologist. Analyze the situation and see if you think she would accept an offer of a date.”

“You’re a lot of help!” he replied, rather sheepishly, and turned off to go to the dorm trailer as Jennifer angled over to the PT course.

As she came up Frank O’Hanlon and Wallace Simpson were just walking back from the far end of the course. “Who won?” she asked.

O'Hanlon winced. "Sparky got lucky."

"Yeah, Right," said Simpson. He looked at Jennifer and added, "Old Semper Fi here should have remembered it's the Navy that gets the Jarheads where they're going. We know how to get from one place to another, expeditiously."

"Expeditiously! Listen to him! We'll see who's the most expeditious, next time."

Jennifer watched the two men walk away, still engaged in their friendly argument. Turning, she paused, took a breath, and then started off at a slow run, through the obstacle course.

By the time she reached the ropes hanging over the shallow water pit Dinny was standing beside it coaching her.

"Don't hesitate. Just grab the rope and let your momentum carry you across."

This time, Jennifer was pleased to note, only her feet dragged the water just before she reached the other side.

Dinny waited until Jennifer finished the run, turned around and ran it the reverse way. Dinny held the rope ready as Jennifer approached at a hard run. Dinny watched carefully, timing Jennifer's steps and then yelled, "Now jump!"

Jennifer made a hard step, both hands going high on the rope. She swung clear, landing half a meter clear of the edge of the water. Turning red at the cheer that several people let loose that had been standing nearby, she finished the run.

Several of them had been in attendance her first few attempts when she unceremoniously landed in the water, in a variety of poses. The most embarrassing one being, sprawled face first, spread-eagled, when she hesitated, then tripped. "God," she thought, "I'm glad Jack wasn't around then."

Johnny came up to her, as she walked toward the kitchen trailer. "See. I knew you would finally get it. It just takes practice."

Several of the others that were beginning to congregate near the kitchen trailer for lunch congratulated her as well. Dinny walked up and said, "See how one smooth motion works better than stopping and then jumping at the rope?"

Jennifer nodded. "I think I may have that beat, if I just keep practicing. I still don't know why I kept hesitating. I'm not that poor of an athlete."

"Never can tell. Everyone has little quirks. It just happened to be one of yours. Me. Now I had the hardest time learning to keep my knees up going through the parallel logs when I was in basic training. I must have gone around with a bloody nose for two weeks from constantly catching a toe. Not to mention the grief from the DI. Just one of those things."

Jennifer watched the people around her. Apparently the word had already made the rounds about the outing on Saturday. Almost everyone seemed to be making plans of one sort or another.

She heard comments several times about making sure someone got certain jobs or activities completed on time so they wouldn't miss the chance of going into the city.

Jennifer entered the dining area with the others when Maggie came to the door and told them things were ready. When Jennifer had her tray filled she saw Anne Bodine at a table and went to join her.

"You know the area," Anne said to Jennifer. "What's to do in the area for a nice single girl, out for a good time?"

When her question brought several friendly snide comments, Anne put her thumb to her nose and wriggled her fingers at the offending table.

Jennifer laughed. "The mall is beautiful. But the art museum is just a few minutes away."

Someone nearby called, "How about an Italian restaurant?"

Mario, carrying another steam counter tray out to the serving counter said, "Didn't I make spaghetti just the other day? I even made a batch of jalapeño bread to go along with it, just for you."

"That was supposed to be garlic bread, Mario. Garlic," yelled Tony Willhouse, the man that had asked about the restaurant. "I had to drink two gallons of milk before I cooled my mouth down."

Mario grinned evilly. "Oops!"

The whole room laughed. Anne told Tony, "That'll teach you to try to tell Mario how to cook. I couldn't believe you went in there and tried to tell him how to make the sauce. If it'd been me, I'd have poisoned you."

“Hey! I’m Italiano! What do you expect?” quipped Tony.

“You’re about as Italian as the LT, Willhouse,” Steven Benson, one of the college students told him.

“Well,” retorted Tony, “I love Italian food.”

Jennifer told him, “You can have Italian to your heart’s content, Tony. About three blocks from the mall is the best Italian restaurant in the city.”

That started a quick question and answer session, with Jennifer as the answer lady, giving directions to a dozen different people or groups wanting everything from kosher to Thai.

Tina Blount brought her tray from the table at which she had been sitting, and joined Jennifer and Anne at their table.

“What of the theatre, Jennifer? They must have some type of theatre in a city this large. Even an outdoor symphony would be a relief from the primitive conditions here.”

Jennifer’s irritation level rose slightly. She was proud of the city’s cultural activities. But she had a hard time not smiling when Anne rolled her eyes and held her coffee cup up daintily, little finger extended, all where Tina couldn’t see her.

“As a matter-of-fact, Tina, I believe *Carmen* is being presented this week at the Roxy. The corporation is a supporting sponsor of the theatre. We have a block of tickets for employees. I’m sure there are some available.”

“Oh, that would be wonderful. Would you mind? I’ve nothing really suitable to wear, but I have my gold cards with me. I’m sure I can find something. Would there be a Saks in the mall, by any chance?”

“Yes. There are many excellent stores. I do much of my shopping there.”

Tina stood, leaving her tray at the table, rather than taking it to the counter as was normal custom, and started for the door. “I should go through the little jewelry I brought along and see what I might wear.”

When she was out the door Anne said, “I’m no fan of hers, but I’ve got to admit, I wouldn’t mind an evening at the theatre. I love *Carmen*. Reckon you could wangle me a ticket, too?”

Jennifer nodded. “Of course. And if you didn’t bring anything you would want to wear, I’m sure I have something you could borrow.”

Anne looked down at her own ample chest, then at Jennifer's rather more modest bust line. "Got a needle and thread to go with it? I'm no prude, but I'd hate to have something fall out onto the table in the middle of dinner."

Jennifer laughed. "I have a couple outfits in mind that wouldn't take much alteration. I rather had the idea that you wouldn't mind showing a bit of cleavage."

"I wouldn't want to get arrested, or shock Tina," said Anne grinning.

"Either of these dresses would be all right, then. Barely. What the hey. I think I'll just wear the one you don't. I've been busy lately. I'm not overly fond of *Carmen*. My taste runs more to musical comedy, but a night at the opera would be nice. We should do it up right. Eat at the Skyview. Great seafood, and a view of the city that is truly spectacular."

"Ah... Jennifer," said Anne, "I've got pocket money. But I don't know if I could swing that. With the checks going home, it takes a while to get..."

"Don't worry. I'd spring if you'd let me. But you will be able to draw cash against the next salary check, if you want."

"Oh. Good. I might do a little shopping at that mall myself, then. I'd rather not buy a dress, if you don't mind loaning one of those you mentioned, but I don't have any really dressy shoes with me. And I know I can't wear yours."

"Speaking of the cash, I guess I should go back and get the changes made on the payroll system. This wasn't part of the original system," said Jennifer.

"And I need to get on with my work. Anyone that screws this up for the rest is going to get strung up by the thumbs."

They both rose, bused the table, taking Tina's tray to the counter, sweeping the remains of the meals into the trash can, and placing the trays on the counter.

Just as they stepped toward the door, it opened and Jack Sandusky entered. He removed his ever-present hat and with a flick it sailed toward one of the coat trees set along the wall.

"Miss Bodine, Miss Kincaid," he said, holding the door open for them to leave.

“Hi, Boss,” said Anne, looking toward the coat rack where the hat had landed gently, and was now making a one last swing before it stopped moving on the top post of the furthest coat rack.

She looked back at Jack and asked, “Do you ever miss?”

“I have, Miss Bodine. But seldom.”

Jennifer moved on through the door, and Anne followed her. “He must be preoccupied,” said Anne.

Jennifer looked at Anne, before they went down the steps. “What makes you say so? I’ve not seen him change expression much.”

“It wasn’t his looks. It’s the first time he’s called me Miss Bodine since we were first introduced. Usually it’s ‘hey Shark Bait’. I hope he’s okay. I’d hate for him not to go into the city with us. Normally I’d ask him to go with us to the opera, and not just to spite Tina. But I’m ready for a girl’s night out. Unless of course you want to ask him. They are your tickets, after all.”

“I think not. I’m like you. The guys are nice, but I could use a little time apart myself.”

The two went their separate ways.

The dining room emptied quickly, everyone wanting to get as much done as possible during the afternoon. Jack was left alone with his lunch, as Maggie began straightening the few items left at the tables, and helping Mario pull the steam rack pans and return them to the kitchen.

Jack finished his lunch quickly, and carried the tray to the counter, adding it to the stack in the dirty dish container. He picked it up and carried it to the kitchen, setting it down near the big triple sink.

“Why don’t you sit for a while, Maggie. I’ll do a load of these for you. I haven’t washed dishes in a long time. I’d hate to lose the touch.”

“You shouldn’t be doing that, Boss,” said Mario.

“No,” said Maggie, adding her protestations to her husband’s. “You have much more important things to do.”

Jack laughed. “Nothing is more important than buttering up the cooks,” he said, turning the faucet on and filling the sinks with steaming water. “I may want a special dish some time on this trip. And besides, I haven’t had a chance to visit with the two of you since I arrived.”

“Hey, Boss, you know all you have to do is tell us what dish, and you’ve got it,” said Mario.

"I know Mario. Thanks." After a tiny pause Jack said, "I heard about the baby. I'm sorry." Jack began scrubbing the dishes.

Maggie stepped over to Mario and put her head on his shoulder. Mario wrapped an arm around her and said, "The doctor said we could try again, but to wait about a year. That was a couple months ago.

"That's part of the reason we're going on this trip. By the time we get back, we can start trying to have another baby. It helps keep our minds off things. It was pretty rough on Maggie for a while."

Maggie managed a wan smile. "Mario too. He's been so good to me." A tear ran from each eye.

"I wish I'd been around to help."

Mario said, "It just wasn't meant to be this time. The doctors said there shouldn't be a problem next time. We just have to wait and let Maggie heal, inside."

"Are you sure she should be on the trip?" asked Jack, gently, scrubbing, then rinsing and finally scalding the dishes, placing them in the drying rack.

Maggie had straightened up and stood by Mario, hips touching, arms around each other. "Oh, yes. The physical activity is good for me, as long as I don't overdo it."

"Did you tell Doctor Ramos everything? He really needs to know so he can take the best care of you."

"Oh, yes. I don't want to take any chances. Mario and I really want to have a baby."

Jack smiled at them. "I'm glad you are doing so well. And I'm glad you're going with us. No one cooks like the Russell's."

Jack had gone through the first pan of dishes and started to reach for the top dish in the next. But Maggie grabbed his hand and held it for a moment, and said, "You may be the boss, but this is our kitchen. Out. You have other things to do."

Jack turned around, dropping the scrubber in the sink. Maggie dropped his hand and wrapped her arms around his chest, under his arms, in a tight hug.

Mario reached out and took the hand Maggie had dropped and squeezed it in a tight handshake. Neither man moved their hand, just gripped the others hand tightly for a few seconds in shared grief, understanding and respect.

When Maggie released him, Jack turned toward the door, and left silently. He picked up his hat and went out the door of the trailer. Making his way toward the office trailer, he stopped at the foot of the steps and hesitated. But it was for only an instant. He went up the steps and knocked on the door.

He heard Jennifer call, "Come in." He opened the door, stepped inside and hung up his hat.

Reaching his desk he deposited his coat on the back of the chair, sat down and brought his computer on line.

"Before you get started," said Jennifer, "there are a couple of things..." Her voice trailed off hesitantly.

Jack looked over at her. "Yes, Miss Kincaid?"

She took a deep breath, released it and said, "I have apparently made a bit too much of your propensity of giving special names to people. Johnny was worried you were upset with him, when you didn't call him Sly. And even Anne seemed to miss being referred to as Shark Bait.

"The fact that I don't care for them shouldn't have any bearing on the situation. It is between you and the individual. If they don't object to the names you use, neither will I."

She met his eyes. Jack nodded, and said, "I understand. The other matter?"

"Kathleen Timmons said she would be here this evening."

Again Jack nodded. He said, "A point of information, Miss Kincaid."

Jennifer arched her eyebrows questioningly.

"Kathleen Timmons has a strong personality. She could take some getting used to. As with me, her stay is on your say-so, as she is one of my recommendations."

Jennifer nodded and turned back to her terminal.

Jack, though he had brought the computer on line as a matter of routine, pushed it out of the way and picked up his copy of the expedition plan book. Taking a pad from a desk drawer he slid a sleek gold Cross pen from his pocket and began to take copious notes in a small, clear hand.



The two worked silently, except for an occasional interruption when someone would knock and come in for instructions, and twice, for signatures on truck waybills when deliveries of equipment were made.

It was almost five when Doctor Ramos knocked and entered. He had his bag with him. "I thought I'd stop and see how your back is, Mr. Sandusky."

"That's not necessary, Leech," Jack said, "I've been changing the bandage on schedule. It is still weeping a bit, but there was no blood this morning."

"I would prefer to take a look myself. I'm sure you know SOP between a unit doctor and commander."

"I do. Though I'm not particularly fond of it." Jack cut his eyes toward Jennifer, who was watching the exchange. Jack quickly said, "We can go over to your dispensary."

"Don't be silly. This will only take a minute. Take off your shirt. But I do expect you in one day soon for your physical. That goes for you, too, Jennifer." Doctor Ramos set his bag down on Jack's desk and opened it, lying out packets of sterile gauze pads and a roll of tape.

Jack hesitated with the buttons of his shirt. He said, "Perhaps Miss Kincaid should excuse us."

"I'm sure Miss Kincaid has seen a man without a shirt. I had no idea you would be so shy, Mr. Sandusky. You surprise me."

Jack quickly undid the buttons on his shirt and slipped it off. He turned quickly, hoping the doctor would move with him, but Doctor Ramos touched his shoulder and said, "Turn around. I need the light. And drop the shirt. I need you to lift your arms so I can see how the muscles are moving."

Doctor Ramos was reaching for the gauze pad covering the wound in the center of the huge bruise on Jack's back, near his shoulder. He heard Jennifer gasp, and when he looked at her, saw her sitting in her chair, her hands to her mouth, staring at Jack's chest.

He stepped around and looked to see what she was staring at. When he saw Jack's chest he looked up at Jack's face. His face contained the same neutral expression almost always there, but his eyes held a guarded look.

"You seem to have had a major surgery or two," said the doctor. "In rather primitive conditions, I might add."

Suddenly Jennifer stood, managed a strangled, "Excuse me," and rushed into her bedroom.

Doctor Ramos looked at Jack's face again and said, "I'm sorry. I should have taken you to the dispensary for this. I had no idea. I have never seen such terrible scars." He stepped around behind Jack and took a closer look at his back. There were none of the massive scars like those on the chest and stomach, but he saw four faint marks, three of which he recognized as healed bullet wounds and suspected the fourth to be a knife slash.

As he pulled the gauze from the wound he asked, "Are there more?"

Jack said, "Afraid so. Several." There was the tiniest touch of bitterness in his tone when he added, "Not even a barbarian is immune to modern technology."

Doctor Ramos placed a fresh gauze pad in place over the healing wound and taped it firmly.

"Okay," he said, and Jack picked up his shirt. "I'd like to hear the details of the operations, sometime, if you wouldn't mind."

Jack buttoned his shirt and tucked it in, saying, "Perhaps sometime. If you have enough booze." He moved back to his chair and sat down, picking up the plan book again.

Jack looked up at the doctor, and said, softly, "Perhaps you should check on Miss Kincaid, Leech. Seeing me without a shirt can be a shock to the system."

He nodded and went to the Jennifer's bedroom door. Doctor Ramos knocked and said, "It's Doctor Ramos." He entered at the faint, "Come in".

"Are you all right?" he asked.

Jennifer was sitting on the edge of her bed, a damp washcloth to her mouth. She nodded. "I lost what was left of my lunch, I'm afraid." Jennifer took a deep, shuddering breath. "How could anyone endure whatever caused the injuries that resulted in those scars, Orlando?"

"I don't know. And at least two of the medical repairs of the injuries were less than expert. Crude in fact. He is either one of the luckiest men alive, or one of the toughest."

Jennifer looked up at the doctor. "I feel like a fool, running in here like I did. But I have never seen anything like that in my life. It took me totally off guard. I didn't notice anything, after the race."

"Nor I," said Doctor Ramos. "But when I think back on it, he did keep his back to the room. And both Dinny Wilson and Connie Perez were right there. They must have been shielding him from you."

"Orlando, what do I do? I have had disagreements with him, but it must have been insulting to have me run like that."

"It's obviously happened before. He wouldn't have tried to avoid the situation, had it not. I'm sure he understands."

Jennifer stood. "Would you mind going? I'd rather face him alone. Tell him I'll be out in a moment."

Doctor Ramos nodded and did as she asked. Jennifer stepped into the bathroom again and tossed the washrag into the sink. Stopping at the bedroom door, she steeled herself and went out, into the office.

Jack was sitting at his desk, still making notes as he went through the planning book. He looked up, and before Jennifer could speak, said, "I'm sorry. I should have warned you, or insisted you leave, or gone somewhere else, despite Leech's objection. Please don't judge yourself too harshly. Men of strong will have turned a bit green at the first sight of my several failures."

Jack looked down at the book again, hoping she would drop it.

Distracted by his last statement, she moved to her desk, and, as she sat down, asked, "Failures?"

Jack looked at her again, "You don't get the injuries that result in scars when you are doing things right. Only when you have failed. I'm not proud of my failures. I'd prefer if we dropped the subject, please."

He looked at her, face more blank than she had yet seen it. Even his eyes had lost some of the shine that always seemed to be there. They were flat, and almost dull, empty.

Jennifer nodded, and turned to her computer.

They worked in silence for another hour, neither wanting an evening meal. Both looked up when the knock at the door came and Dinny entered. "Things are calming down for the evening. Any special instructions?"

"Kathleen Timmons is on her way. See she finds her quarters." Jack closed the plan book and stood up. He lifted his jacket from the

back of his chair and said, "I need to work off a little energy. I've been sitting too long. Good evening, Miss Kincaid."

As he set his hat on his head and stepped out the door he said, "Night, Dinny."

She stood just inside the doorway, waiting until he was out of earshot.

"Jennifer," Dinny said, "it's a beautiful evening out. I think some of the group are going to sit out by the mess trailer and watch the sun set. There is another storm brewing to the west. It should be something to see."

"Perhaps in a few minutes. I want to finish this up."

Dinny nodded and left.

Jack stopped at the kitchen trailer, moving out of the way once as Frank O'Hanlon brought out a pair of chairs to add to the several already in front of the trailer.

"Sunset party?" asked Jack. O'Hanlon nodded. Jack went into the trailer and back to the kitchen.

Mario and Maggie were preparing pitchers of iced tea and an urn of coffee, as well as setting cups and glasses on trays.

"Boss, most of us are going to watch the storm for a while," said Mario. "Maybe listen to some music. You coming?"

"Not this time, Mario." He turned to Maggie and said, "Could I impose, Maggie? Perhaps a couple of pieces of dry toast and a cup of Chamomile tea."

"Are you feeling ill?" she asked, the concern obvious in her voice.

"I'm fine, Maggie. However, Miss Kincaid is a bit queasy. If you wouldn't mind taking it over to her?"

"Of course not," replied Maggie, turning to prepare the toast and tea.

"Maggie," Jack said, his back to them as he stopped at the doorway on his way out of the kitchen, "if she asks, could you stretch things just a little? You thought she might be a bit under the weather because you noticed she missed supper?"

Maggie and Mario exchanged a quick glance, as Jack went out, without waiting for a response.

As Jack circled around the trailer and headed for his tent, Maggie grabbed the two pieces of toast as they popped up, set them on a napkin

covered plate, folding the napkin over them to keep them warm, and added boiling water to the Chamomile teabag she had placed in the china teapot she kept in the kitchen for her own use.

Setting the plate, teapot, and a cup and saucer on a tray she picked it up and hurried over to the office trailer. Carefully balancing the tray on one hand she knocked and opened the door when Jennifer responded.

Maggie set the tray down on Jack's desk and said, "I missed you at dinner," she said as she set the plate of toast onto Jennifer's desk, then the cup and saucer, which she filled with the brewed tea.

"I hope you don't mind. A lady needs to keep up her strength. I was making iced tea and coffee. Some of us are going to sit outside and watch the sun set into the storm."

"Oh, Maggie! This is just what I need. My stomach wouldn't take anything richer than this. You are so sweet."

Maggie almost told her it had been Jack's idea, but she held her tongue. Jack had asked her not to.

Jennifer took a small bite of the toast, and then a sip of the tea.

"I forgot to bring sugar or milk," Maggie said, "I'll go get them."

"Don't bother, Maggie. This is fine. Perfect timing, too. I just finished on the computer. Anyone that needs cash for Saturday can get it now. Well," she added, "they could have had it anyway, but I'd have been tallying receipts by hand for days."

Maggie turned toward the door. Jennifer said, "Thanks again, Maggie. And Maggie, would you save me a seat? I'll be over in a few minutes."

Maggie looked back and smiled. "Sure thing. You can sit with Mario and me." Maggie noticed that with only a few bites of the toast and a few sips of the tea, the paleness that had been in Jennifer's face was now being replaced with a bit more color.

Jennifer finished both pieces of toast and the first cup of tea after Maggie left. She replaced the items onto the tray and carried it back to the kitchen trailer, setting it inside, on one of the tables. She poured the last of the tea from the pot into her cup and carried it out with her to join Mario and Maggie.

She was just in time. The group that had gathered, almost the entire expedition, suddenly fell silent as the orange ball of the sun first touched the dark clouds gathered on the western horizon.

Someone had a radio playing. When the conversation stopped, at the sight of the sunset, the heavy metal music sounded harsh.

“How about something a little softer?” asked one of the people near the person with the radio.

Jennifer suggested he tune to another of the local stations. “They are an easy listening station.”

The radio owner began spinning the dial. As he went through a place on the dial with few stations everyone in the group heard the same sound.

“Wait. Turn that down a minute, Stevie. Listen,” said Anne Bodine.

With the radio off, everyone strained their ears, trying to hear the sound again. Suddenly a breeze sprang up, directly into their faces, from the west. And the sound was clear. One-shot and Dinny, both standing at the back of the group, exchanged a long look.

“Man,” someone whispered, “I’d love to have that album. Somebody can flat blow a sax!”

As the group continued to watch the sun drop behind the clouds and then, in the darkness, watch the lightning in the distance, they stayed almost completely silent, listening to one tune after another, being played on the lone saxophone. Each song seemed more sad and lonely than the one preceding it.

During a slight pause, Frank O’Hanlon said, “Boy! Someone has it bad this evening.”

Jennifer looked around. She saw more than one tear glistening on cheeks, in the group surrounding her. She looked up suddenly. The music had stopped much longer than usual than it had before between the different tunes.

They could all hear the rumble of thunder in the distance now, though it was still faint, as the wind picked up a bit more. Suddenly there was a long drawn out wail from the saxophone, that turned into a lively swing number, entirely different from the earlier, soulful, tunes.

“Jeez, that is sweet music,” said O’Hanlon. “Who lives next door, Jennifer?” he asked.

“No one, really. That is all wooded area, to the edge of town.”

One of the students, Jennifer couldn’t tell which, said, “Somebody is out there, with a really super sound system.”

“You dunce,” said O’Hanlon. “That’s not Memorex. That’s live, man. And it’s not even regular songs. Whoever is playing is just jamming, all on his own.”

The wind was picking up even more now, the thunder louder, and the lightning brighter as the storm approached.

The saxophone now seemed to almost be accompanied by the sounds of the storm. There was suddenly a long series of powerful notes from the saxophone, at the height of the longest and loudest, came a triple clap of thunder, as if to cap off the song, because, though they strained for many seconds in the silence until the next thunderclap, no one heard the saxophone again.

Dinny stood up and said, “Okay everybody. Looks like the show is over. Let’s get these chairs squared away before the storm gets here.”

As everyone rushed to help get the chairs back into the trailer, Jennifer heard Frank O’Hanlon say, “I’m kinda glad that whoever that was must have only had their heart bruised and not broken. There for a while I wasn’t sure. But when the swing numbers started I could tell the heart was still in one piece.”

“Must be the size of an elephant’s, too,” said Anne. “‘Cause that was some powerful music. The last two songs were kind of spooky. Almost like the storm was his background drummer.” Anne shivered.

“And I got it all on tape,” said Alex Gordon. He held up a video cassette and wiggled it. “I had set up my mini-cam to get the sunset. The only thing I missed were the first few notes. I grabbed my parabolic mike and got it plugged in pronto. I’ve got the rest.” He suddenly looked worried. “I hope I had everything set right. He suddenly finished putting the camera away in its case and picked up the tripod. “I think I’ll go check this in the dorm trailer.”

The first drops of rain began to fall as the group scattered, heading for the dorm trailers, with a handful running for the supply trailer poker parlor.

Dinny stood under the kitchen trailer awning with Jennifer, the last two left of the group that had watched the sun set.

There was the sudden glare of headlights coming around the house, and the two turned to see the cab pull up to the end of the gravel drive near the trailers.

“Timmons,” said Dinny, and moved to the cab. She helped with the bags, and as the cab backed out of sight around the house, the two women hurried in under the awning, carrying the two bags unloaded from the cab.

“I’m Timmons,” said the red-headed woman, reaching her hand out toward Jennifer. They were almost the same height, Jennifer noted, as she shook the woman’s hand and said, “I’m Jennifer Kincaid. Thank you for changing your mind. We...”

Kathleen dropped Jennifer’s hand after a quick, strong shake, looked around, and cutting off Jennifer’s comment, asked, “Where is he?”

Jennifer and Dinny both knew she meant Jack Sandusky.

“His tent, I assume,” said Jennifer, rather taken aback by Kathleen’s abrupt manner.

“I saw him near the perimeter, earlier,” said Dinny. “He’s probably taking a run before turning in. He asked me to see that you found your quarters, before he started.”

Kathleen picked up her bags and said, “Sounds like him. It’ll have to wait until morning then. Lead on, MacDuff.”

Jennifer watched, more than a little annoyed at Kathleen Timmons’ complete lack of recognition of her presence, except for the perfunctory handshake, as Dinny led the woman toward the women’s dorm.

Jennifer took a long look along the length of the wall of the estate, looking to see if she could see Jack, even stepping into the rain to look around the end of the kitchen trailer, toward the point everyone made the turn at the end of the wall to run parallel to the edge of the woods, on the route set up around the estate for disciplinary runs.

Suddenly she saw, in a flash of lightning, a dark figure leave the wall and run across the grass, heading in the direction of the tent set up near the far edge of the trees on the other side of the estate.

Jennifer turned and ran for the office trailer, hesitated at the steps, and went past them. She stood in the rain for several seconds, watching the place she knew his tent stood, though she could see it only when the lightning flashed.

“He must have made it all the way across and into the tent before I even made it from the kitchen trailer to here!”



Jennifer hurried back and up the steps, going into the office and then her bedroom.

After a shower, she climbed into bed, this time remembering the gold and silver under the mattress. Climbing out, she moved the coins, stacking the rolls neatly under the sink in the bathroom. "Should have done that in the first place," she thought to herself, rubbing the tender spot on the base of her skull.

But the softer bed didn't seem to aid her sleep that night. She awoke the next morning with images of ladders, railroad tracks and spider webs, each bloody, and the sounds of a groaning saxophone haunting her.

When Jack entered his tent, he found One-shot inside, sitting on the rolled sleeping bag. As Jack put away the aluminum gun case he used to protect his saxophone when he traveled, One-shot said, "I borrowed your stove to make a pot of Earl Grey before the rain hit."

One-shot filled the thermos bottle cup and handed it to Jack, pouring some of the tea from the thermos into the metal collapsible cup he took from his pocket and extended until it locked securely.

Jack sat cross legged on the sleeping bag pad facing One-shot in the dark, the only light coming from the nearly constant lightning flashes.

"Thanks. I was going to brew a pot when I got back."

One-shot took a sip of the tea, then said, "Spectacular sunset."

"It was. I went down and watched by the river."

"So we heard."

"Damn! I thought someone had a radio blasting."

"Obviously."

"They don't know, do they?"

"You know none of us would say anything. Though I don't know why you hide it. You play beautifully. Never heard you do the Blues quite that way before, though."

Jack was glad the lightning had slowed for a while and the tent was dark. One-shot could read him better than anyone else.

"Just fooling around."

After several moments of silence, broken only as each man sipped the hot tea, Jack was surprised when One-shot asked him, “When was the last time you talked to Rebecca?”

“Three months maybe. Why?”

“*Carmen* is playing in town Saturday.”

One-shot smiled in the dark at the tone he heard in Jack’s voice when he responded, very casually, “Really?”

“Thought you’d like to know. See you.”

One-shot drained his cup, carefully collapsed it and popped the top into place. He dropped it into his pocket. He would rinse it when he got back to his own tent, further back in the wooded area.

One-shot left the tent, neither man saying anything else. Jack unrolled his sleeping bag onto the self-inflating mattress, then undressed. As was his usual custom, even here, he placed his pants legs down around the tops of his boots, ready to step into the boots and pull up the pants if there was a sudden need in the night. Jack set his hat handy to the door of the tent, and his forty-five under the bag of rolled up extra clothes he used as a pillow.

Long training had allowed him to sleep almost at will, and he was out moments after settling in. But the fingers of his left hand traced the myriad lines and dots of the scarring on his chest and stomach during the few seconds before he fell asleep.

He was up at his usual time the next morning, thankful for the rain that was still falling. There were no spectators this time as he did his PT regimen. He ran through the course six times each way, going as hard as he could.

After the last pass, he stood, feet apart, bent over at the waist, hands on his knees, breathing hard, for almost two minutes. Then, from that stance, he burst suddenly into a dead run toward the wall at the west side of the estate. He turned parallel to it when he approached and started the first of four of the almost mile long laps.

He was joined silently on the last by Dinny and Sizu, just as the misting rain finally ended.

As Jack headed for the dorm trailer to take a shower the two women cut over to the PT course to begin the morning routine of PT for the rest of the expedition members.

Jack slowed and watched Jennifer join the students for their stint of PT. She was dressed as usual, in polo shirt and jeans, black athletic shoes on her feet, hair pulled back in a ponytail. “She moves like a cat,” he thought, “smoothly, sensually, totally unaware of her movements.”

Jack suddenly turned his head away and went into the dorm, and down the short hall to the shower room. He had been thankful when he first arrived and discovered the showers were individual stalls. He hated the comments about his scars, even from men.

After his shower, Jack put on fresh khakis and headed toward the house.

As was the custom, most of the group were congregating at the kitchen trailer waiting for the donut delivery while those whose turn it was at PT did their time and got showers before breakfast.

Tina Blount saw Jack walking toward the house and said, “Why is he privileged to be allowed to go to the house? I still say we should be allowed to have rooms in the house, and eat there, instead of using these trailers.”

“Get off it, Tina,” said one of the others. “He and old man Scanlon go way back. They’re friends. Besides, he’s ramrod. The fax and some of the other things are up there. Grow up.”

Tina spun around, and said, “You can keep your opinions to yourself, young lady.” She went up the steps and into the kitchen trailer as several of the others started to comment on her petty attitude.

“Who is the society whiner?” asked Kathleen Timmons. She had just come from the dorm. As someone told her the rounds of introductions began to be made.

After meeting everyone nearby, Kathleen moved a bit nearer the PT course and watched the men going through their PT, led by Dinny and Connie. Jennifer had stayed and was running the course again, with the men.

Kathleen cupped her hands around her mouth and yelled, “Hey! Blondie! What are you, butch or something?”

The PT course, having been well used for almost two weeks was becoming sparse of grass. With the rain two days before and again the night before, there were several slightly muddy spots that had been turned into deep pools of soft mud by the feet of the students as they ran before the men.

Jennifer was just clearing the last of the high stepping logs when Kathleen yelled at her. Jennifer, having run the course several times already, was tired and concentrating on carefully clearing the logs. At Kathleen's yell she looked up, breaking concentration. Her right foot failed to clear the log and she went flying, sprawling face first into one of the pools of soft mud.

Jennifer brought her hands under her and raised herself to her knees, and then stood. She was covered head to foot with clinging mud. She took two quick steps toward Kathleen as everyone started to laugh. Most quickly stifled their laughter. But Kathleen was laughing deeply.

Connie Perez, when she saw Jennifer go down had moved closer, to see if she had been hurt. When Jennifer stepped toward Kathleen, Connie quickly stepped up to her and said, almost under her breath, "Cool down. Laugh it off."

Jennifer gritted her teeth a second, then forced a grin, which shined in her mud covered face. She turned toward the office trailer, intending to shower and change. That had been the last PT run she was going to do anyway.

But then Kathleen called, "Too bad, Blondie. Maybe tomorrow you can make it all the way down the course."

Jennifer stopped, looked at Kathleen a moment, and then brushed the mud from her face. She wiped her hands as clean as she could on the seat of her jeans.

Dinny had turned the men and started them back down the course when Jennifer fell. They were on the way back again.

After each round of the course Dinny and Connie let the participants rest for a few seconds before sending them on another run. Jennifer lined up with the men once more.

Jennifer concentrated on making it through each obstacle properly, staying at the end of the pack as the group went through the course. She made it without a bobble on the way out.

When Dinny and Connie turned the men around for the pass back toward the trailers Jennifer called, "I'm going to finish off with a perimeter run."

Several of the men turned and looked at her, as did Connie and Dinny.

Jennifer started toward the wall at a slow jog. When she had made the loop around the front of the house and started toward the rear of the estate she had to slow to a walk for a while. She decided to cut across to the office trailer and the shower when she cleared the house. The mud was beginning to dry on her clothes and skin.

She broke into a jog again when she cleared the house and was a bit amazed when she continued along the hedge toward the rear of the estate and the wooded area, instead of cutting over.

“Hell. I can make it,” she said out-loud. She paced herself, never slowing to a walk again, though part of the route was done in a fast shuffle. But she gritted her teeth when she made the turn where the woods met the wall and sped up.

When she turned away from the wall, and headed toward the trailers she saw several people still outside the kitchen trailer, including one with flaming red hair. She saw Dinny standing there and one shorter person in khaki shirt and shorts that had to be Connie.

Remembering the effect that Jack’s run had had on the spectators during the race, Jennifer angled toward the PT course. She didn’t clear the obstacles the way Jack had, but she made each one cleanly, including the high stepping logs, though it took all of her energy to do it.

Jennifer jogged past the kitchen trailer, studiously avoiding looking at Kathleen. She made it to the trailer without faltering, even managing to bounce up the steps, though it took the very last of her energy. Reaching for the door, she felt herself falling, knowing the whole agonizing episode was going to be wasted, because Kathleen was going to see her collapse after all.

But the door suddenly opened and she was still vertical when she went through. Jennifer felt her knees buckling and threw her arms out to try and keep from falling face first into the desks.

She felt a pressure around her waist, and was suddenly standing on shaky legs again. She looked over, but had to shake her head a couple of times to clear the grayness from around the edges of her vision.

By the time she blinked her eyes several times and tried to look again, she was staring at the wall of her shower. Her brain seemed to be in the same gray fog her eyes were. She couldn’t figure quite why the shower was in the office.

But suddenly the shower stall door hit her on the arm and hip and the cold water hit her in the face. Things began to clear rapidly. Gasping, Jennifer twisted the faucet handles to add warm water to the stream.

She skinned out of the muddy and now soaked clothing, kicking it into a corner of the shower. She let the water run, helping to revive her as she hopped on one foot, then the other, to remove her shoes. These she tossed outside the shower stall.

After a long shower, Jennifer stepped out, dried off and dressed in dry, clean clothes. She had to rustle through her bag to find another pair of shoes. She said a little prayer when she found the white athletic shoes she wore when she played tennis. She wasn't sure she had brought them from the apartment. She really hadn't wanted to go into breakfast wearing the soaking black ones.

Quickly putting her hair into a ponytail, she went into the office. No one was there, so she hurried to the kitchen trailer, fully revived now, but ravenously hungry.

When she approached the serving line several people called to her, with comments including, 'Nice run, Jennifer' and 'Way to go, Miss Kincaid.'

She smiled and called back, "It's all in the training." Jennifer looked over to the table at which Dinny and Connie sat and gave them a small salute.

She controlled the impulse to thumb her nose at Kathleen when she passed the table where she sat with several others, apparently getting caught up on what had been going on in the camp for the last several days, from what little Jennifer heard.

Jennifer put her tray down on the table and sat down across from Connie and Dinny. "I don't know how you got past me to the trailer and opened the door but thanks," she whispered. "And for throwing me in the shower. I almost passed out."

Connie and Dinny exchanged an amused glance. "Sorry Jennifer. It wasn't either of us. But I'm glad you made it. Kathleen is all right, but she can be a pain, sometimes," said Dinny.

"Someone put me in that shower." Quickly adding, "Clothes and all. I almost fell flat on my face. Whoever it was kept me from getting another nasty crack on the head." Jennifer turned slightly red. "Jack?"

“Couldn’t have been the Boss,” said Connie. “He’s still up at the house.”

Just then Jennifer saw One-shot at his usual table in the far corner, sitting with Slide. She caught his slight wink. Jennifer couldn’t help herself. She winked back, a smile splitting her face.

Connie and Dinny had seen the exchange. Connie asked, “One-shot?”

“Had to be, I guess,” said Jennifer. “He acts like he is in on something.”

“He likes you,” said Dinny. “And he doesn’t take to people much.”

Jennifer looked at Dinny and then at Connie. “He seems to get along with Connie well. And we both met him the same time.”

Connie said, “We’re kindred spirits. Dinny meant he doesn’t take to... Ah...”

Dinny looked at Connie exasperated. “I should have believed you the other day. Maybe you do like paper work and do just stick your foot in your mouth accidentally.”

Jennifer chuckled. “Don’t worry. I know I’m considered a straight laced, cold hearted, cold fish, penny pinching business woman.”

“Not by everyone,” said Connie. She felt the not so gentle kick under the table, but showed no reaction. She did add, “I think you’ve been doing really well. You sure showed that Kathleen you’ve got what it takes.”

Jennifer smiled again. “I shouldn’t have tried to show off like that.”

“Hey, kiddo,” said Dinny, “you didn’t try. You did. And that’s what counts. Kathleen had no idea you were dying inside.”

Jennifer noted that Dinny had not made it a condescending remark. A simple statement, showing that Dinny knew the agony she had been in.

Connie gave Jennifer a wolfish grin. “But it was worth it, wasn’t it?”

Jennifer’s smile broadened. “Yes. As a matter-of-fact, it was.”

As the breakfast time came to a close, Jennifer and the others of the inner circle began to congregate at the office. Jennifer caught a moment and told One-shot, “Thanks, friend.”

One-shot touched the brim of his hat and drifted over to talk to Slide.

Johnny Vanducci came up to Jennifer, a young woman with him.

“Morning Johnny, Angela,” she said.

“Good Morning, Miss Kincaid,” both replied.

Jennifer smiled at them and said, “I wish you would stop calling me Miss Kincaid. I’m not that much older than either of you.”

“Okay, Jennifer,” said Angela.

Johnny didn’t respond and both women looked at him. “Well... Maybe sometimes. When it isn’t official... Jennifer,” he said, after a pause.

“That’s a little better anyway,” replied Jennifer.

Deciding to go in and get the computers on line, before the meeting started, Jennifer turned toward the steps. Kathleen came over and asked, “This the morning staff meeting?”

Jennifer looked at Kathleen, keeping a neutral expression on her face. “Yes, Miss Timmons. We’ll be starting in a few minutes.”

“What was your name again, honey?” Kathleen asked.

Jennifer felt her temper flaring, her hand tightening on the step railing.

“Jennifer Kincaid. I’m the Scanlon Corporation representative on the expedition, Miss Timmons.”

“Right. I’m not too good with names. Why don’t you lose the Miss Timmons. Call me Katy or Kathy.” She gave Jennifer a sharp look. “But don’t call me Red. I hate being called Red.”

Jennifer remembered that Jack had referred to Katy Timmons as Red. She let a small portion of her smile break through. She didn’t want to let the full width show, afraid of giving Katy the wrong idea.

Jennifer said, “And I prefer Jennifer or Jenny. I’m not overly fond of Blondie or Honey.”

Katy looked at her and grinned. “Sorry about that, then. I’ve got a bit of a mouth on me. No offense, Jenny.”

Jennifer nodded, and told a tiny white lie, “No problem, Katy.” She went up the steps, but turned around on the platform and asked, “Do you drink Tennessee sipping whiskey?”

Katy looked up at her surprised. “Tennessee Whiskey? Me? No way. Scotch is my drink. Why?”



“Just curious.” Jennifer turned to the office door and suddenly caught sight of One-shot. He was leaning against the side of the trailer, well within earshot of Jennifer’s and Katy’s conversation. He smiled slightly at her. She had to grin, and throw him a wink as she entered the office.

Jennifer was already closing the door when she noticed Jack sitting at his desk, his fingers flying over the laptop keyboard.

“Oh! You’re here. Someone said you had gone up to the house. I came in to turn on the systems. I’ll tell the others to come on in.”

“A moment, Miss Kincaid.”

Jennifer released the door knob and moved to her desk. As she turned on her computer and pulled it close she found herself watching Jack at work on his terminal. He had some of his notes propped up on the right side of the display and was apparently entering the data into a file.

Fascinated, she continued to watch his hands flying over the keyboard. Jennifer noted that he never looked at the display, except when he flipped a page of his notes, when he would glance at the screen, once, before beginning to type again.

He had three pages of script entered, she realized, in less than half the time she could have done it herself.

Jack hit another series of keystrokes and Jennifer heard the printer beside her begin to hum. Then Jack was turning to her, having saved the file after dumping it to the print spooler.

Jennifer looked up at him when he stood and moved to the printer to get the printer output. “How fast do you type?”

Jack looked at her, surprised, “I have no idea. Never timed it. Why?”

Jennifer, irritated at herself for feeling so impressed at his ability to type, said, “Just curious. Never mind.” She turned to her laptop and pulled up the main menu, as Jack pulled the paper from the printer.

He carried the stack of paper to his desk and separated the sheets, then slipped them into the top desk drawer. Looking over at Jennifer he asked, “You ready?” She nodded.

“Yo! Sly!” called Jack. The door of the office opened after a moment, and Johnny Vanducci came in.

“Tell the rest we can get started,” said Jack.

Johnny turned and motioned to those outside. Katy was one of the first into the office. Jennifer watched closely, her gaze switching between Katy and Jack.

She saw no reaction at all on Jack's face. But she thought she detected a note of excitement on Katy's.

Jack had given Katy a perfunctory glance. His eyes stopped on Angela Worester. "You're Angela?" At her nod, Jack asked, "Has Sly explained things to you?"

"Yes, Sir."

"Find Doctors McKinley and Klienschmidt please. Ask them to come to the office. And Angel," said Jack, as she turned to go out the door, "wait with them outside until I call. We have some other business to conduct before we need to see them."

"Yes, Sir," said Angela and went out the door.

Jack stood and walked around the desk. He leaned his rear against the desk, crossed his arms and looked at Kathleen Timmons.

"Hello, Red. You at this meeting for a reason?"

She walked over to stand in front of him. She looked at his face and asked, "You sure you don't want this conversation in private?"

"There is no one here I don't trust."

Jennifer was watching the two with interest. When Kathleen drew back her left arm and slapped Jack across the cheek with a powerful swing, even Jennifer could see that the blow was coming well before it landed. She knew Jack had to have seen it as well. She also knew he could easily have avoided the slap, but he just stood there and let Katy slap him, with enough force to turn his head slightly and leave the bright imprint of fingers on his face for several seconds.

"It's good to see you again, too, Red," said Jack, dryly, still half leaning against the desk, his arms crossed. "Do you have it out of your system now? Or do I turn you over my knee and paddle it out of you?"

"You wouldn't dare, you bastard!" said Katy, her green eyes flashing, red hair waving, as she put her hands on her hips and stared at his face.

Calmly Jack said, "You know me better than that. Besides, I'm a barbarian now too, not just a bastard."

Jennifer winced at his last comment. But she was almost hoping Katy would do something else. She had no doubts that Jack could, and would make good on his threat.

Katy looked at Jack for a long moment, then said, "I suppose I do. And you do have a bit of the barbarian in you." After a pause she added, "Okay."

Jennifer felt a flash of irritation at Katy again, at her use of the word 'barbarian.'

Katy stepped back, then demurely asked, "Where away, Jack?"

"Robert Alderhousen is the graduate student you'll be working with. He has Crenshaw's plan book. You'd better get started. You have a lot of catching up to do."

Katy nodded and said, "I'll catch up, don't worry. And who's idiot idea was it to have that dweeb, Crenshaw, on this thing in the first place. The guy is a jackass."

Jennifer felt herself turn red, not with embarrassment, but with anger. She did not like Kathleen Timmons' brash ways.

Jack said, still looking at Kathleen, "It was the selection panel's decision. As soon as the situation was evaluated, steps were made to correct the mistake.

"Everyone involved in the expedition is subject to a continuing evaluation. Any person that shows an inability to handle the constraints of the specific circumstances involved in this project is subject to replacement."

Katy looked at Jack. "I get the message." She turned, and went out the office door. Jack moved around behind his desk and sat down.

"Tell Angel to bring the doctors in," said Jack.

Angela followed McKinley and Klienschmidt into the trailer and moved over to stand beside Johnny.

"Doctor McKinley, Doctor Klienschmidt" said Jack, "I suppose you have heard about the outing, Saturday."

"Yes. It's the talk of the camp. Everyone is looking forward to it," said Anson McKinley

"Both of you are free observe the Sabbath if you wish, rather than participate in some of the activities on Saturday."

The two men exchanged looks. Anson McKinley said, "I'm not all that strict. I celebrate the major holidays and observe the Sabbath rather

privately. I've been in the field before. I've learned to deal with the circumstances."

Jack nodded, "Doctor Klienschmidt?"

"I'm the same way. No problems."

Jack said, "Give Mario a list of the foods you want so he can be sure to have Kosher items in the kitchen stocks."

Jack smiled, "And if you're careful how you ask, he can cook anything you might want. He'd be more than glad to do it, he enjoys preparing ethnic dishes. But he is a bit touchy about his kitchen."

Both men nodded in understanding.

Jack said, "Thank you, Doctor Klienschmidt. Doctor McKinley, could you stay? There are several more things, concerning expedition business."

When Klienschmidt left Jack asked, "What is the situation with the lab equipment?"

"So far, so good. It is trickling in from the suppliers slowly. I test each piece, calibrate it, and then pack it for transport to the ship. According to what I was told, we will install the major items in two of the vehicles, as mobile labs."

"Correct. And the replacements and repair parts?"

"Same procedure, except they are going into the heavy storage cases."

"Have any problems cropped up, and do you have any suggestions or recommendations?"

"No problems. The equipment is the best on the market. My assistant and I have found only one or two minor problems, easy to correct. But the testing and calibration process is a bit tedious and time consuming. We could use someone to help case and pack the equipment for shipment."

Jack thought for a moment, and then said, "Sydney Smithson is Doctor Klienschmidt's assistant. According to his file he has been on several digs. He should know how to pack delicate materials."

Jack looked over at Dinny. "Coordinate Smithson's schedule with Doctor Klienschmidt so he can assist Doctor McKinley."

"Done," responded Dinny.

Jack looked back at Anson McKinley and asked, "By the way, Doctor, what is the forecast for Saturday?"

“According to the radio...” said Anson McKinley.

Jack interrupted him, “I meant your forecast, as expedition meteorologist.”

“I don’t have my equipment set up. It’s here, but I saw no need...”

“I would like twelve hour, twenty-four hour and seventy-two hour forecasts, before breakfast and before lights out. And notify Albert Crane, Miss Wilson, Miss Kincaid or myself of any important occurrences or changes in the weather as soon as you forecast them. Sparky Spencer and Frank O’Hanlon can help you get your weather equipment set up and operating, if you wish. I would like a forecast by ten this evening. Thank you, Doctor.”

Jack looked at Angela. “Angel, help the doctor locate Sparky and the Marine, if you please.”

The two went out and Jack said, “That’s all I have this morning. Any problems?”

There were several shakes of the head.

“Anything else?”

Jennifer said, “I need to pick up some Peruvian, Colombian, and Bolivian currency that was transferred to the bank for me. And pick up enough cash from the payroll account for Saturday. Connie, can you go in with me?”

Jack said, “She has other duties, Miss Kincaid. Take Jerome.”

“I prefer to take someone I know and trust.”

“Do you trust Dinny, Miss Kincaid?”

“Yes, of course. I thought she would be needed here more than Connie, or I would have asked her,” replied Jennifer.

“She is. Dinny, tell Miss Kincaid if Jerome is suitable for this assignment or not.”

Dinny looked at Jennifer and said, “I trust him.”

Jack asked, “Is that adequate recommendation, Miss Kincaid?”

Jennifer looked at Jack for a moment, then over at Johnny Vanducci. “Johnny, would you ask Mr...?”

Jack said, “Donnelly.”

“Mr. Donnelly to meet me at the garage in about twenty minutes please?” said Jennifer.

“Yes, Ma’am.”

After Johnny went out the door, Jack asked, “Anything else?”

Everyone shook their head. Jack said, "Carry on."

He turned to the computer again as the others filed out. Jennifer shut down her computer and stood. "I'm expecting a call from Candy this morning. If she calls while I'm changing, get her flight number and time of arrival and tell her I'll be there as soon as I can."

Jennifer moved around the desk. Jack stood up, "Ah... You're going to change before you go to the bank?"

She turned to look at him. "Yes."

Jack moved around to the front of his desk, and moved toward the office door. "I'll be outside. Lock the door. If the phone rings and there is no answer, she will call back."

Jack was picking up his hat when Jennifer said, "There is no need to leave. My room has a door."

Jack was facing the door. He didn't turn when he spoke. "I am a barbarian, Miss Kincaid. I have no wish to be considered a voyeur or potential rapist as well. I'll wait outside."

"I..." started Jennifer, but Jack was out the door, flicking the lock button in as he went through. She had started to tell him she didn't even lock the office door at night. That she felt perfectly safe in the camp.

When she turned to her bedroom she suddenly had the thought, "Maybe he thinks his friend Red wouldn't like it." Then she had the thought, "Why should I care what he thinks, anyway?"

As she changed, Jennifer made a concerted effort to think about the business at hand, in order to keep her mind away from the random, confusing thoughts she had been having since Jack Sandusky arrived.

She came out of the office a few minutes later in one of the conservative gray business suits that were her normal attire. With her briefcase in hand she headed for the house and garage.

Jennifer looked around, but Jack was nowhere in sight, and the others were all going about their business. She walked up to the house, turned on the walk at the back patio and went into the garage.

Jennifer smiled. Jerome Donnelly was leaning across the fender of her grandfather's pride and joy. A restored Stutz Bearcat. She saw Sikes sitting in the driver's seat. "Try it now, Mr. Sikes," called Jerome.

Jennifer heard the engine rumble to life, and as Jerome fiddled with something under the hood, listened to the sound change to more of a purr, although a tremendously powerful purr.

Jerome straightened up, wiping his hands on a rag, as Sikes stepped out of the car. Sikes looked across the engine compartment of the car and Jerome said, "Nothing to it. Just a minor tweak. Close the hood."

Sikes pulled the hood down and latched it. He turned to Jennifer and said, "Mr. Donnelly has quite a way with an automobile. Mr. Scanlon has not been happy with the performance of the Stutz for quite some time. I think he will be pleased."

Jerome said, "You might suggest to Mr. Scanlon a hard run would help her feel better. She'll be feeling her oats now. I think this one likes to run." Jerome ran his fingers over the sparkling white paint of the fender, almost lovingly.

Jennifer said, "Mr. Scanlon is out of town for a few days. He'll be back early next week."

"Ah. Too bad. She is eager for the road. I'll shut her off, if you don't mind, Mr. Sikes. It's a shame to let her sit and idle too long. It isn't good for a thoroughbred to be held back too much."

Sikes said, "If you are going into the city, Miss Kincaid, perhaps you would consent to use the Stutz. Mr. Donnelly seems to be a master mechanic. Perhaps he could check it further for Mr. Scanlon. For his regular fee, of course."

Sikes' statement floored her. He had never let anyone near her grandfather's cars except himself, the regular mechanic and Jennifer.

"Well," said Jennifer, stalling for time, trying to think. She didn't want to hurt Jerome's feelings.

Jerome settled it for her. "The car is fine. Besides, Jack told me Mr. Scanlon is very particular about this one. He'd ream me good if he found out."

"Oh, really, Mr. Donnelly," said Jennifer. "Don't worry about Mr. Sandusky. You are to accompany me, and we are taking the Stutz. Send him to me if he says anything to you. Why don't you back it out of the garage and turn around. I'll be right with you. I need a word with Sikes."

"Are you sure, Ma'am?"

"Yes."

Jerome climbed into the car, and slowly and carefully backed out of the garage.

“Sikes,” said Jennifer, “You have never let anyone touch that car. Why Jerome Donnelly?”

“Mr. Scanlon had mentioned to Jack that it was running roughly. Jack suggested that we have Jerome look at it while he was in residence. When I came out to see who was at the garage, he introduced himself. So I took the opportunity to have him check the car. And he treated the Stutz with the same type of respect that Mr. Scanlon himself does,” explained Sikes.

Sikes, more of a favorite uncle to Jennifer than house servant said, “I’d be interested in why you were so eager to take the Stutz when Jerome said that Jack wouldn’t like the idea. You always said it was too hard to keep your hair in place.”

“I’m not quite sure, Sikes. Our Mr. Jack Sandusky drives me to distraction, at times. It was an impulse, I suppose.” Jennifer saw Jerome set the brake, get out of the driver’s seat and wait for her. “I need to go. I’m meeting someone at the bank at eleven. ‘Bye, Sikes.”

“Drive safely, Jennifer.”

Jennifer walked out to the car, and when she sat down behind the wheel Jerome closed the door and ran around to climb into the passenger seat.

When they reached the open road, headed toward the city, Jennifer asked, “Mr. Donnelly, have you known Jack Sandusky long?”

“Years,” said Jerome. “I wish you would call me Jerome. If you don’t mind me saying so.”

Jennifer glanced over at him and said, “No. Of course not, Jerome. And please call me Jennifer.”

“Sure thing, Jennifer.” He settled himself in the comfortable seat, enjoying the ride. “You have a nice touch, Jennifer.”

She smiled at him. “You mean, for a woman?”

“Nah. For a suit. My wife broke me of that other stuff a long time ago. She partnered with me on the truck until our kids came along. Never saw too many people that were comfortable in a suit that were also really good in a rig.”

“When I read your file I noticed that you were married. We didn’t try specifically to exclude people that were married, but since this is going to be a long project, not many of the married people we contacted wanted to go.”



“Jack said we would have a few days at home next month, just before we leave. My wife is used to me being gone for several weeks at a time. I was on the road for a long time. And she has a couple of grown kids from her first husband. They’ve been after her to take a long trip.

“She is going to go with them on a long cruise, then stay at their places while I’m gone. I think it will be good for the both of us. Things have been a little stale lately.”

“I rather had the impression you had worked with Mr. Sandusky before on this kind of thing.”

“Never anything out of the country, or for this long. We ran the support truck for a couple of Baja runs for a guy Jack knows. “I did the mechanic work and Jack did everything else.

“And I helped him run supplies up to an outfit in the Rockies once. He said I was the only person he knew that could keep those trucks going under those conditions. The first time though, was right after I recovered from the accident that killed my truck partner. I was banged up bad for a long time. Lost the truck, all our savings and the house. My wife was working and just barely keeping us in a tiny little apartment.

“I couldn’t get a truck of my own and none of the outfits would hire me on ‘cause I was still having trouble with my back. Jack blew into town, said he had a job he needed some help with. Some big mining outfit up in Colorado was building a road into a mine location. I mean this thing was forty miles from nowhere. Not a city, from the nearest county road.

“Jack was running the supply train. You know, bringing in food, water, tires, fuel. Everything a hundred people need on a location. He moved the camp as the road was extended. I always thought it was a lot like the old railroad construction camps.

“Anyway, he brought me in as mechanic and driver, on really good wages, even for that type of operation. And when it was finished, he said part of the arrangement was for him to get one of the semi rigs, since the mine had no use for it any longer.

“He said he had no use for it either, and gave it to me. Just gave it to me. It was what got me back in the business, with what I was saving from my pay. He was providing all the groceries, even supplied work clothes and boots.

“I believe to this day that he kicked in on my pay out of his own pocket. And I think he bought that truck out of what was left of what he made.”

Jennifer listened, her thoughts swirling again. Jerome’s description just didn’t fit with her image of Jack. She asked, “And this was the first time you met him?”

“Oh, no. Just the first time I worked for him. It was the strangest thing. I’m from a little town in Missouri. It’s been known as a truck driver’s town since the thirties.

“Jack showed up one day, and started hanging around the cafes. He sat down at my table one day and said he wanted to learn to drive a truck. That he’d been watching me, and decided I was the best one around. Now that floored me.

“Jack told me he didn’t want any pay, that he would pay his own way. And help with the loading, unloading and servicing. If I would let him ride with me and show him the ropes so he could take the test and get his ticket.

“I was a bit disinclined, if you know what I mean. There I was, maybe thirty-seven or eight at the time, and here was a kid, couldn’t have been a day over the legal limit for a CDL, wanting me to teach him to drive.

“I just figured he was muling drugs, and just wanted a cover. So I turned him down flat. But he just kept hanging around. I’d see him asking questions, lending a hand, helping guys load and unload. Now, even I knew that drug runners didn’t work that hard, for no pay.

“I’d just about decided to see if he still wanted to ride with me, after my next run. The very next morning, I was in the cafe, getting my thermos filled, ready to hit the road, when he sat down, and said he still thought I was the best driver around and still wanted me to teach him. So I did. It’s uncanny how he seems to know just when things are right to do something.”

Jennifer had listened, getting ever more confused about Jack. “So you worked together for a while. Partnered on the truck, I think you called it.”

“That’s just it,” said Jerome. “He learned quick, that boy. He was ready. Took the test. Got his Commercial Drivers License with all endorsements. Any outfit on the road would have hired him on. I offered

to partner with him, and several other independents did, too. Because no one worked harder, did better maintenance or handled a rig better than he could.”

Jerome grinned at Jennifer. “Except me, of course.”

Jennifer laughed. “Of course, Jerome. That went without saying.”

“I kinda of like you,” replied Jerome, then added, “But we pulled into town after a run, he shook my hand, and said ‘Thanks, Jerome. You’re a good teacher. I’ll see you around.’”

“Well, I asked him who the weasel was that bought him out from under me. He just looked at me and said he wouldn’t consider driving with anyone but me, if he was going to be a truck driver.

“He told me he had just wanted to know how. Now he knew and was thinking about going to Wyoming or somewhere else out west and see what he could learn about hard rock mining.”

“You mean he never had any intention of truck driving as a profession? He just wanted to know how?”

“Yep. Don’t it just beat all. I see him every once in a while, like I told you. He just shows up. Says hello and leaves. Or has a job that pays good and gives me a chance to see some country it would cost a fortune to see if you had to pay a tour guide to take you.”

They were entering the city proper now, and Jennifer was glad for the distraction of city driving to keep her mind off the things that Jerome had told her.

When they pulled up in the bank parking lot and she turned the engine off, Jerome said, “Jennifer I need to ask a favor.”

“Yes, Jerome? What is it?”

“Jack doesn’t like people to talk about him. I mean he doesn’t like it a lot. I love that boy, like he was my own son. And I’m proud as punch of him. So I tend to talk about him more than he likes. I’d appreciate if you didn’t let on like you know anything. I don’t like to disappoint him. But you’re awful easy to talk to.”

“Don’t worry, Jerome. I won’t let on. Come on in with me. There’s always a plate of donuts and a pot of pretty good coffee here.”

“No, thanks, Missy. I’ll stick with the car. I’d like to keep my eyes on things. How long will you be?”

“Not over twenty minutes,” she said.

“Fine. I’ll check on you if you aren’t out in twenty-five.”

“Check on me?”

“Yep. I’m riding shotgun on this run, aren’t I?”

“Well, I am picking up some money, but...”

“No buts Missy. When you’re a member of Jack Sandusky’s crew, everybody looks out for everybody else, especially in potentially risky situations. Banks do get robbed, you know.”

Jennifer leaned forward slightly, and asked in a low voice, “You don’t have a gun? This city has very strict laws.”

“Me? No. Jack doesn’t let his people violate local laws, no matter how stupid or unconstitutional, except in really extreme conditions. This is routine.”

“Well, even if something did happen, what could you do, then?”

“Don’t know. Observe the situation, evaluate the situation and act in whatever way the situation dictates. Jack isn’t a bad teacher himself. I’ve got to admit I learned a thing or two from him over the years.”

Jennifer sighed and walked toward the bank. More things she wasn’t really wanting to hear about Jack Sandusky.

She was back in fifteen minutes. Jerome had a shop rag in his hand, carefully wiping water marks off the paint, from the splashes that had been thrown up from the wheels because of the occasional puddle from the rain the night before.

“That isn’t necessary, Jerome. Sikes will have the car washed when we get back.”

“I enjoy it. A Lady always likes to look her best, Missy.” Jerome shook the rag out, carefully folded it and replaced it in a side pocket of his gray, one piece coveralls.

As the two climbed back into the car Jerome looked over at Jennifer and asked, “I hope you don’t mind me calling you Missy. I’ll stop if you want. But you just seem like a Missy to me.”

“That’s quite all right, Jerome. It seems everyone has a special name for everyone else, at least since Mr. Sandusky arrived.”

“Yeah. Ol’ Jack has a name for almost everybody. I’ve seen him call people names that the person would kill anyone else for using. I mean literally. But everyone seems to know that he never does it as an insult.”

Jennifer thought to herself, as she pulled out of the parking lot, “Not everyone.”

Suddenly, Jennifer saw a truck backing out of an alley, and gunned the Stutz, whipping to the left, between two cars, and then back to the right, when the car in the left traffic lane began stopping.

“Nice move, Missy.” Jerome patted the outside of the door of the Stutz and said, “See. Didn’t I tell you she was feeling her oats. Jumped like a rabbit when you needed her to, didn’t she?”

“That she did, Jerome.” She turned and looked at him for a moment. “I’ve heard ships talked about the way you talk about the Stutz. But I’ve never seen anyone treat a car quite the same way you do.”

“I know it’s a little silly. But sometimes one is a bit special. Most mechanical things are just that, mechanical things. Every once in a while I find one that just has a certain feel about it. Like this one.” Jerome patted the side of the Stutz again.

Jennifer suddenly said, “Look for a parking spot, Jerome. I just thought of something I need to pick up for a friend.”

“I don’t see anything, Missy.”

Jennifer went around the block twice, and had still found no parking spot. She missed spots three times, filled just before she got there. Finally she stopped in the middle of the street.

“Slide over, Jerome. Keep circling until I come back out.”

Jennifer jumped out of the car and Jerome quickly slid under the wheel. He pulled away as Jennifer hurried into the candy store. She saw Jerome drive past once, as she was being waited on, but was waiting on his second pass.

He made move to slide over, but Jennifer called to him as she ran to the car. “Stay there. I’ll ride.”

She opened the car door and sat down, closing the door after her, and fastening her seat belt as Jerome drove down the street.

“I’ll find a spot and we can switch back,” he said.

“Just head back to the estate. I have to make a phone call. I cannot believe I forgot that I was supposed to be picking up Candy Hansen at the airport.” She picked up the cellular phone and punched in the number for the camp.

“Scanlon Corporation, Special Projects Division. May I help you?”

“Mr. Sandusky? Is that you?”

“Ah... Miss Kincaid. No need to fret. I dispatched a car to pick Miss Hansen up at the airport.”

“What? How did you know that was what I was calling about?”

“Simple barbarian reasoning, Miss Kincaid. One small automobile, three people, one medium size mound of equipment. The last four items will not fit into the first.

“Is there anything else, Miss Kincaid? I have other work to do.”

“No.” Jennifer put the phone back onto the stand rather forcefully.

“I don’t want to insult you, Jerome. But your friend, Mr. Jack Sandusky, is the single most aggravating man I have ever met!”

Jerome smiled. People had been reacting strongly to Jack ever since he had known him.

When Jerome pulled into the garage and turned the key off, Jennifer stepped out of the Stutz. “Jerome,” she said, “Sikes usually washes the car after it is used. Would you mind doing it?”

“Be glad to,” he said.

Jennifer said, “Sikes will show you where everything is.”

She picked up her briefcase and started back toward the office trailer. Suddenly turning around, Jennifer went back into the garage.

“Jerome,” she said, “It’s almost one. Wait until after you get something to eat to do that.”

“It needs to be done before things cool down. I’ll get something a little later. Me and Mario get along. He’ll slip me something out the back door.”

“Are you sure?”

Jerome nodded.

Jennifer made her way to the office trailer, carrying the briefcase containing the foreign currency she had picked up at the bank. Jack was walking toward the office door, reaching for his hat, when Jennifer entered the trailer.

“Good afternoon, Miss Kincaid,” he said, setting his hat on his head and stepping through the open door just after she came through.

She started to thank him for having Candy Hansen picked up at the airport, but he had already closed the door behind him.

Jennifer went into the bedroom, started to add the currency to the pillow case with the other foreign currency. “This is ridiculous,” she thought to herself.

Jennifer changed from the gray business suit back into her jeans and polo shirt. She went into the office and sat down at her desk. Reaching for the phone, she noticed that Jack's computer was still on.

She looked toward the door. On an impulse, she said to the door, in a normal conversational tone of voice, "I'm back in the office, Mr. Sandusky. You may come in." Suddenly feeling silly, she reached for the phone again. But Jack was opening the door, flipping his hat onto the coat hook.

She had felt rather silly that she had spoken to the closed door. Now she was angry that he had actually heard her. "What did you do, have your ear glued to the door?"

Jack stopped short on the way to his desk. Jennifer saw his eyes flash toward her. She could see the sudden anger in them. "No, Miss Kincaid. I did not. And I find it very insulting that you would suggest it. Not that you would think it, for I have come to expect that of you. Now if you will excuse me, I think I would rather be somewhere else, at this particular point in time."

Jack turned, snatched his hat from the hook, and went through the door, not bothering to close it this time.

Jennifer looked at the open door way. She saw Jack suddenly stop. She heard him call 'Sly!' and then Johnny Vanducci came into her field of view. Jack talked to Johnny for a few moments. Jennifer thought she saw Johnny hand Jack something.

Then Johnny turned away out of her sight and Jack started walking toward the driveway, his strides long and even.

Jennifer felt a hollowness in her stomach. She reached for the phone, picked it up and absently dialed the number of the business supply company she had used for most of the supplies for the expedition. After ordering the largest office safe they currently had in stock, she set the phone down.

Jennifer rose, intending to go to the kitchen and see if she still had time to get some lunch. Despite the hollow feeling in her stomach, she knew she needed to eat something. Her meals had been a bit irregular lately.

She saw Connie come up onto the platform at the office door and pause. Connie knocked, catching Jennifer off guard.

"Connie! The door is wide open. Come on in."

“The Kid said Jack asked him to have me close down a file and shut off his computer for him.”

Jennifer glanced at Jack’s desk, then nodded to Connie. Connie moved to Jack’s desk and sat down.

Jennifer looked around when she heard footsteps on the platform through the still open door. Dinny was standing at the door. She, like Connie, stopped and knocked, waiting until Jennifer asked her in.

“What’s going on? You know you don’t have to be so formal.”

“I wasn’t sure I was still welcome,” said Connie. “I like the Boss.”

“That’s enough, Lieutenant. Go back to your other duties,” said Dinny.

“Yes, Ma’am,” Connie, having saved the file, powered down the laptop, and stood. She moved around the desk and headed for the door.

But she paused before she went through. She turned and looked at Jennifer for a moment, then said, quietly, “I thought we were going to be friends.”

“All right, Lieutenant! I want ten laps, now. Put Frank on your detail and get started.”

“Yes, Ma’am.”

“Dinny, what is wrong? Connie is obviously very upset with me. And I get the impression you are none too happy, either.”

“Johnny said that Jack asked him if he could use Johnny’s bike. And to tell me I was in charge.”

Dinny walked to the door, crossed her arms and looked out. “He had told us he might be leaving the expedition, before we headed for Brazil. By us, I mean One-shot, Slide, Jerome, Connie and me.

“Jack asked us to stay and help you, for as long as you wanted us. He doesn’t ask his friends for anything very often. You can count on our help. For as long as you want. I’ll have a talk with Connie. She won’t mouth off again.”

Dinny turned to look at Jennifer again. “I need to get back to what I was doing. Is there anything you need me for right now?”

Jennifer looked at Dinny for a long moment, seeing the distance in her eyes.

“Dinny, I’m sorry. I said something to him I shouldn’t have. But I didn’t ask him to leave.”

“I wondered about him just taking off like that.”



Jennifer could see the visible relief in Dinny's face. Dinny continued, "Jack never, ever shirks his responsibilities. I knew he would have gone over things with me before he left, if he wasn't coming back."

"Dinny," said Jennifer, "He just makes me so angry, sometimes. But it was a cheap shot. I shouldn't have said it. But I really don't understand why he was so upset."

Jennifer looked at Dinny and said, "About Connie. Ten laps is almost ten miles. Shouldn't we let it slide? She has a right to her opinions."

"Of course she does," said Dinny. "As do I, and everyone else. But there are times to express them, and ways. She was improper on both counts. Jack isn't going to be pleased."

"It seems I have made another error," said Jennifer. "Maybe I should be out there running with her."

Dinny grinned, and Jennifer felt a vast sense of relief. Dinny said, "No offense, Jennifer. But you couldn't make it. Even Connie is going to be beat after ten laps. Besides, you put your time in this morning, on that run for Kathleen Timmons' benefit."

"Was I that obvious?"

"Probably not to anyone except a couple or three of us. The rest of the group isn't too surprised when they see you putting out a bit of extra effort. They have come to respect you, and expect it. The way they do Connie, Jack and myself."

"Me? But I can't even come close to doing what the three of you do!"

"It isn't so much the quantity, as the fact that you are doing, period. You do things that aren't absolutely necessary. Just about everyone has dealt with you in your capacity as the company rep and financial officer now. That doesn't really call for direct physical involvement in the expedition process. But you do it anyway."

"You make a visible effort to get better. To learn. To help and encourage the others. In short, you consider yourself part of the team. Not outside of it, insulated from the daily grind. You lead by example. You don't sit back and 'Manage.'"

"People follow leaders willingly. Managers sometimes get a good job from the people they manage. But they are never the cohesive group that true leadership produces."

“I don’t know,” said Jennifer. “I just don’t see myself that way.”

“I really do need to get back,” said Dinny.

Jennifer nodded. She followed Dinny out of the trailer, pulling the door closed behind her. She intended to go the kitchen trailer, but suddenly felt even less like eating than she had before.

Returning to the office, she opened her briefcase, and took out the package she had picked up in the candy shop. She walked slowly out toward the wooded area, looking carefully around the area for One-shot.

Angling into the woods, she paused a moment and stood looking at Jack’s tent. She knew where it was and could now pick it out easily. Carefully scanning the area behind his tent, deeper into the trees, she finally spotted what she thought was One-shot’s tent.

But when she approached, she realized it was only a large bush. Jennifer then worked her way back to the west, intending to see if he was perhaps near the shelter he had built for her earlier.

As she passed directly behind Jack’s tent again Jennifer heard a whistle. She stopped and carefully looked all around.

The whistle came again, and Jennifer suddenly looked up into the branches of a tree, perhaps four or five meters to her left.

There she saw One-shot sitting in the crotch of a huge, old oak tree, three meters up, where a large limb met the bole. Jennifer knew he was there, but she had to concentrate to actually see him.

For a moment she couldn’t understand why it was so hard to see him. The crotch of the tree was flooded with sunlight, the beam angling down through a large opening in the foliage of another nearby tree. “It should be easy to see him,” she thought.

Then suddenly she noticed that the shadows of the leaves completely broke up One-shot’s silhouette, dappling his khaki clothing with darker spots here and there.

The spots and blotches seemed to shimmer a moment, as One-shot moved, then he was falling from the limb, bringing a gasp from Jennifer. But One-shot landed on his feet, in a slight crouch, at the base of the tree.

“Lo, Jennifer,” he said, swinging a small, light brown pack from his shoulder.

“What were you doing up there?” she asked.

“Working.” He held up his copy of the plan book and a five by eight notepad in a leather cover. One-shot put the items in the pack and pulled out his leather jacket. “Getting a bit of sun. Tad cool with the damp and shadows.”

Jennifer realized he was right. It had seemed pleasantly warm since early morning, with the sun shining brightly after the storm the previous night. But the ground was damp under the trees, the leaves on the trees still losing a drop of water occasionally. And the sun penetrated only in isolated beams such as the one One-shot had been sitting in.

She had been standing there, arms crossed, feeling the chill seep in without realizing it, until One-shot mentioned the coolness. “This is getting to be a habit,” said Jennifer as One-shot handed his jacket to her.

“Had lunch?”

Jennifer shook her head.

“Was about to fix myself a bite. Join me, if you like.”

“I’m not too hungry, but I’d like to watch.” She turned and walked beside him. “Didn’t you eat at the trailer?”

“Not today. Mario is the best. But it’s a bit crowded at times.”

“You don’t care much for crowds, do you?”

“Not much.”

They had gone only a few steps when One-shot stopped. He stepped to a tree, untied the green rope knotted around the trunk, and lowered the bundle that was tied to the end of the rope that led over a limb six meters off the ground.

“Food draws animals, some not so friendly,” said One-shot.

Jennifer nodded. She looked at the rope, leading up to and over the limb. “What about squirrels?”

One-shot handed the bag for Jennifer to hold as he opened the draw string top. He lifted the rope. Resting against a knot tied in the rope a few centimeters above the bag was a flat plate with a hole in the center.

One-shot opened a small latch and spun the flat circle into a compact bar, then opened it again, like opening a Japanese fan, only full circle, around the rope and fastened the latch.

“It’s unstable and provides no purchase, even for claws.”

One-shot let the rodent protector down and reached into the bag. “Beef stew or beef stew?” he asked.

Jennifer smiled and said, "I think I'll have the beef stew."

One-shot took out a package of freeze dried beef stew, a tomato, and two small, aluminum foil wrapped items.

"Use a slip knot," said One-shot, holding the items he had taken out of the provisions bag.

Jennifer went to the trunk of the tree, pulled on the rope until the bag swung well clear of the ground, and tied it off. She walked with One-shot just a little further. Jennifer finally saw his tent. It was identical to Jack's. The tent was screened on three sides with brush, though none was close enough to touch the tent, even in high winds.

"Latrine's yon, with the requirements. Cover any leavings." One-shot made a motion in the direction of the deeper woods.

"Thanks. I'm fine," said Jennifer.

One-shot nodded. "Pull up a rock," he said.

Jennifer found herself looking around the tiny clearing in front of the opening of the tent.

"It's an expression."

Jennifer felt herself turn slightly pink.

"Roll the sleeping bag, put it in the stuff sack, and use a ground cover. Faux chair. And mind your feet. There's a brush inside the door," added One-shot as Jennifer moved toward the tent.

Jennifer unzipped the opening of the tent, leaned forward onto her hands and then spun, to sit on her rump, inside the tent, her feet still outside. She saw the small, stiff bristle brush.

Jennifer carefully brushed her shoes free of mud and debris before pulling them inside the tent.

When her feet were clear, One-shot stepped forward, and with a smooth motion, squatted, turned, and sat down, his rear in the tent, at one side of the door.

He was sitting cross-legged, under the small awning over the door, made by the fly, his rear just inside the tent. He set the food packets down, clear of the door, and slipped the small pack off his back, setting it beside the food.

Jennifer had watched One-shot as he sat down. It had been one smooth motion, without using his hands. Jennifer saw him pick up a green ditty bag sitting near the door and take out a compact stove.

As he set it outside, on the bare ground, Jennifer looked around the tent. "This is as clean as the house," she thought. "And more neatly kept than my apartment," she added to herself.

The mummy style sleeping bag was lying on a thick, self-inflating mattress, near one wall of the tent, zipper half-way down. The upper portion of the bag was neatly folded open, with the hood portion of the bag spread flat. There was another bag, obviously filled with something soft, lying on the open hood, for a pillow.

Near the head of the sleeping bag Jennifer saw a small flashlight, a compact candle lantern and a butane lighter, all sitting in a small, carved wooden box, which had the lid folded back on leather hinges.

Nearby, within reach of the sleeping bag, sat a huge backpack. There was a large duffel bag near the other wall, sitting atop a green painted metal long-gun case.

After setting aside the pillow, which Jennifer discovered contained clothing, she rolled the sleeping bag and, with difficulty, forced it into the stuff sack she found peeking out under the edge of the mattress.

One-shot had the stove set up. He reached into the small backpack he had just removed and handed Jennifer a piece of plastic.

He indicated a spot to his right, "That'll put your back to the wind."

Jennifer stepped out of the tent, past One-shot, putting one hand on his shoulder to keep her balance as she crowded past him. She spread the plastic out, holding the sleeping bag between her knees, then put the bag on the plastic and sat down on it.

"Nice digs," Jennifer said. "I hate to mess up your tent. I could have just sat on the ground sheet," she said.

One-shot leaned backwards into the tent, pulled the end of the self-inflating mattress to him, and rocking forward on his ankles, slipped the end of the mattress under his rear.

"Why? I have gone out with just my clothes, my knife, and flint and steel, just to prove to myself I could. And I still practice primitive skills. Some rough it, just to rough it. Don't get it myself. I trim weight and size where it isn't necessary.

"Sleep is important. I use a good mattress and bag. A little extra weight and bulk.

“I live in this tent, not for a weekend or maybe two weeks, but for weeks sometimes. It’s the size of similar three person tents, heavy duty, with two doors. Tough, versatile, with space to move around in. Heavier, slightly larger to pack.

“I’m in many different areas. This stove uses several types of fuel. Makes it a few ounces heavier. But I don’t have to have special fuel.

“Bad water can kill you, or make you wish you were dead. The filter I use is expensive, and a bit heavier than other filters, but is the best available.

“I know the weight I can carry. I’m not in competition with someone to see who can get by on the least weight of equipment. I want to do my job and get where I’m going, while staying healthy and happy. I’ve slept on bare ground, in the cold and wet, with just an occasional drink of water and handful of berries. The experience left me neither healthy nor happy.

“I have little respect for anyone that makes things more difficult than a situation warrants. Except as a training exercise, under controlled conditions.”

One-shot looked up from another ditty bag that had been beside the one containing the stove, from which he was removing the cooking kit. He saw Jennifer looking at him, her eyes very large. One-shot smiled wryly. “Bit of a speech, there. I had to pack a guy out of some mountains one time that went up with a thirty-one pound pack. He was so proud of having cut off the handle of his toothbrush and razor.

“Micro weight bag, bivy shelter. That’s a tent, slightly longer, slightly wider and slightly taller than the sleeping bag itself. You can sit up, if you are one foot three inches tall. Ultra-light this, that and the other. An eighth of an ounce saved here, a full ounce saved there.

“He stayed warm. It was all good equipment, for the most part. But inappropriate for the situation. Rocks are hard. Lying in a bivy for three days with the snow whipping around is not fun.

“He couldn’t sleep, he couldn’t move around, couldn’t see in the dark after the first two days. His birthday candles ran out, cause he burned them all, reading, out of boredom. He had plenty of food, but he lost weight because nervous tension and lack of sleep kept his metabolism high constantly.

“I carried him down the mountain. And his pack. He had put himself and others in danger to reduce the weight of his pack from fifty pounds to thirty-one, because his friend went from forty down to thirty-three. He was an idiot. I don’t care for idiots much. Details are to achieve an overall purpose. They aren’t the purpose.”

Jennifer nodded. It was a long speech for One-shot, that was for sure. It must be something he wanted her to remember.

One-shot reached inside again, picking up a large canteen and poured water into a small pot, which he set on the lighted stove. He set a lid on the pot and reached for the small pack again.

“Can I help?” asked Jennifer.

One-shot took a zip-lock bag from the small pack and tossed it to Jennifer. She saw that it contained salad greens. He set the canteen within her reach and said, “Pour a good shot of water in the bag, shake it up good to wash the greens and shake each piece off when you take it out.”

“I use as little plastic as I can. And what I use, I try to use heavy weight for maximum life. Zip-lock bags are one modern creation I would really hate to give up. I found the greens, here and there, as I took a stroll, before buckling down to work. With a couple of zip-locks in my pocket all the time, if I find edibles, water, curiosities, whatever, I can get them back to camp.”

He handed her two more of the bags, smiled, and said, “Make decent salad bowls, too.”

Jennifer began taking the greens from the bag, tearing them and putting the pieces into the other two bags, as One-shot told her what they were.

After the description he said, “Most greens should be cooked. There really aren’t that many wild greens that make good salads. Most are far too bitter without cooking or other preparation.”

He reached into the small pack again and brought out yet another zip-lock bag. “Only found three good mushrooms.”

Jennifer watched as he pulled a knife from behind his belt. She had not noticed it being there. It was vastly smaller than the one along his lower leg.

As she continued to tear the greens, One-shot sliced the mushrooms, after carefully wiping them off with a rag he took from the cooking kit ditty.

He quartered the tomato, then cut the quarters in half, dropping the pieces into the two bags.

“Set the bag with the water down. I’ll rinse it later,” he told Jennifer, when she had the last of the salad greens cleaned, torn into pieces and placed into the two bags doubling as salad bowls.

One-shot wiped the knife, replaced it in his belt, and picked up the package of beef stew. He tore the package open, spread the top open and set it on the ground. After touching the bail of the pot, to make sure it wasn’t too hot, he carefully poured boiling water into the package of stew.

He set the pot back onto the stove, pulled the small knife again and stirred the stew to mix it well. One-shot carefully closed the top of the package, folding it over to let the hot water be absorbed.

One-shot ran two fingers along the flats of the blade of the knife, licked them clean of the stew and then swirled the knife blade in the zip-lock bag of water that had contained the greens.

Folding open one of the aluminum foil packets, he took the piece of onion it contained and sliced several rings into each salad bag, then re-wrapped the remainder. He did the same with the other foil packet, slicing slivers of hard cheese onto the salads.

One-shot rinsed the knife again, wiped it with the cloth, and replaced it behind his belt. Reaching once again into the small back pack, he pulled out a four ounce squeeze bottle.

“Made a pass by the kitchen on my walk, to get it filled again. Vinegar and oil, heavy on the vinegar, with a touch of black pepper.”

One-shot handed the bottle to Jennifer, and she squirted a little onto her salad. She returned it to One-shot and he did the same, then secured the cap and set the bottle with the onion and cheese, to be returned to the provisions bag.

The lid on the pot of water rattled. One-shot turned the stove burner off, looked at Jennifer and said, “Tea’s in the left outside, flapped pocket.”



Jennifer reached into the pocket of One-shot's leather jacket, felt the packets with her fingers and took out two teabags, in their foil packets.

She handed them to One-shot. He opened the packets and dropped the bags into the water to steep.

One-shot reached into the cook kit ditty bag again, handing Jennifer a stainless steel bowl and a cup. He added a spoon to the cup, then reached into the bag one more time. He handed Jennifer a set of short chopsticks, keeping a set for himself. He put the two piece chopsticks together. After watching One-shot, Jennifer did the same.

One-shot took out his collapsible cup, opened it and poured a bit of water into it, from the canteen. He poured a like amount into Jennifer's cup, set the canteen aside, picked up the packet of beef stew and, using his chopsticks, poured half the stew into Jennifer's bowl.

"Bon appétit," he said, and began to eat, using the chopsticks. Jennifer used the spoon for the stew, and the chopsticks for her salad.

During a pause between bites, Jennifer said, "I know people say this often, when they eat outdoors, but I really have had meals in restaurants that aren't this good. I think it's the company."

One-shot smiled. "You usually eat two hours earlier. Hunger is a great spice, herb and garnish."

"There is that, too," said Jennifer. She took another bite, then suddenly set the bowl down.

One-shot continued to eat, watching her for a few moments, as she looked down at the bowl, lost in thought.

"Eat. Not eating won't help."

Jennifer looked at One-shot, sharply. "Won't help what?"

"Guilt. About Jack."

One-shot continued to eat as Jennifer looked at him. "Maybe I'd better go back to the office," she said, but didn't move. After a few moments more, she asked, "Did you hear? What happened, this time?"

"Nope. Don't know. Don't care. It's between you two. The other times, you thought you were right. Jack knew you thought you were right."

"This time you didn't. You know. Jack knows. Jack knows you know."

"I'm sorry I said... what I said."

“Telling me doesn’t help. Not eating doesn’t help. Does it?”

Jennifer slowly shook her head. And picked up the bowl. She finished the stew and the salad. Finishing the last swallow of water, she handed her cup to One-shot. He filled it, then his cup, with tea.

Suddenly remembering, Jennifer reached into the hip pocket of her jeans and took out the paper sack she had placed there, before coming out to find One-shot. She handed it to him. His tea in one hand, One-shot took the base of the sack in his other hand, and shook it slightly, flicking the top open. He pointed it to Jennifer, without looking inside.

Jennifer reached in and pulled out one of the twisted sticks of black licorice. “I hope you like black,” she said.

One-shot set the bag down, and took one of the licorice sticks for himself. “If it’s not twisted black stick licorice, it isn’t licorice, just candy, no matter what flavoring is used.”

He took a small nip off the end, savoring, the flavor. After he finally swallowed, then took a sip of his tea, he said, “A grown man should not enjoy licorice this much. Thank you.”

Jennifer said, “I don’t know why I get so angry around him. I’ve always had almost absolute control. Never got angry at employees, friends, co-workers, whatever. When something happened, I worked it out, calmly, rationally. Without letting the anger or temper show. Jack just sets me off.”

“Jack seems to be a catalyst. He tends to bring out whatever is inside a person. Not change them, really. Just bring into reality what was only potential, before.”

Jennifer stared down into her cup of tea. She looked up at One-shot. He saw a touch of sadness, and concern in her eyes.

“Doesn’t say much for me, does it? Seems like all I have inside is anger.”

“If I thought that, you wouldn’t be my friend. If Jack thought that, he, nor any of us that came with him would be here.”

Jennifer looked up at One-shot and asked, “How could he think anything else? We haven’t had a civil word between us, since he arrived.”

“Jack knows people. It is his business. The knowledge of equipment, places and procedures are all important to the jobs he does.

But the real core of his abilities is his capability to deal with and handle people.”

Jennifer felt her anger flare, yet again. “I’ll not be ‘handled’! If he thinks he can manipulate and get around me, he had better start thinking again!” Jennifer looked at One-shot contritely. “One-shot, I’m sorry. I’m not upset with you. But see what I mean? The least little thing about Jack sets me off. And to be completely honest, I’m not really sure why.” She sighed.

“You will, eventually.”

The two sipped their tea silently for a while. Finally Jennifer said, “I guess I’d better get back to the office. I have plenty of things to do. Wish I could just stay out here, all day. I am already beginning to understand why you love the wilderness so much.” Jennifer quickly added, “Not that I think that this is wilderness. But away from... other things.”

Jennifer stood up and started to pick up the sleeping bag. “I’ll police up, before I find another sunbeam. You go ahead. I’ll let you return the hospitality sometime.”

Jennifer nodded, handed One-shot his jacket and turned toward the camp. One-shot watched her walk slowly through the trees and smiled. “Jennifer isn’t the only one with things buried inside coming to the surface. Jack’s in a bit of turmoil, too. And he doesn’t understand it any more than Jennifer,” thought One-shot, as he cleaned up the camp and put things away. Taking up his small daypack, he headed deeper into the patch of woods.

When Jennifer returned to the office, she took time to add a few notes on the legal pad she was using to record the lessons she was learning from One-shot about the wilderness. Then she turned back to the computer and began working on the few glitches that were turning up in the operation. Back ordered equipment, government bureaucratic screw ups, scheduling conflicts, all the little things she had known always occur in a large project.

She had kept the plans flexible; knowing there would have to be changes. Jennifer began to incorporate the new information into the plans. It was nearly five when she looked up on hearing a soft knock. Connie Perez was standing in the door. “Can I talk to you for a few minutes?”

“Of course, Connie. Pull up the chair.”

Jennifer watched Connie move the chair from the wall over near the desk and sit down. Connie’s khakis, normally crisp and fresh looking at all times, even when she was conducting PT, were now soaked through with sweat. Jennifer thought, “She actually looks tired.”

“I’m sorry about what I said. And my attitude.” Connie had met Jennifer’s eyes for the apology, but now she dropped them to her lap. “I don’t have many friends. The friendships I do have developed over long periods of time. And I have almost no close friends outside the service. Dinny and I hit it off quickly, but we are both military, with friends and acquaintances in common. I have never made two friends, outside of the service, at the same time.

“I’d heard of Jack, through the grapevine, and had always wanted to meet him, maybe work with him. And when I met him at the meeting at the office, we hit it off. You, I thought were a cold fish. But when we got to the camp, you might have had your reservations, but you were right in there with us. You didn’t care that I was a short, stocky, half-breed Indian squaw. Didn’t think I was gay because I’m military, or any of the other things that I run into all the time.

“When Jack arrived I saw the tension. And suddenly, today, I thought I was going to lose two friends. But what is between the two of you is none of my business. I can be friends with each of you, even if you aren’t friends with each other. Assuming you still consider me a friend.”

“I do, Connie. And I’m glad you still want to be friends. I’m sorry that the trouble between Jack and me caused you so much grief. I feel like it was my fault that you had to run again.”

Connie smiled. “I just should have said what I did in private. Like now.”

“Why don’t you grab a shower and relax a bit before supper,” said Jennifer.

“I think I may just do that.” Connie stood up, and moved toward the door.

“Connie,” called Jennifer. “Thanks. I don’t really have many close friends either. I know how important they are.”

Connie gave a slight wave and stepped outside.

Jennifer turned back to the computer, to finish the file she was working on, before heading over for supper herself. Jennifer suddenly looked up and saw Jack.

Jack was already almost to his desk, his hat swinging on the coat hook before she looked up. Jennifer felt her temper rise. “How did he slip in so quietly on me?” she thought. “He knows who is coming before they knock, even when the door is closed.” But she quickly, and fully, suppressed the flare of anger.

As Jack sat down, Jennifer turned her chair, looked at him, meeting his calm eyes and said, “I’m sorry.”

Jack said, “Accepted. It’s forgotten, now.” He turned to the laptop and was turning it on when he added, “We should think about seeing if Sly would consider bringing his bike along on the expedition. It could be useful.”

Jennifer nodded. “I ordered a safe. They said it would be delivered this evening.”

“Good,” replied Jack. His fingers were flying over the keyboard of his laptop again. Jennifer turned back to her computer and felt slow as molasses as she finished up the last detail in the file on which she was currently working.

Jack was shutting down his computer at the same time Jennifer was. He stood up, and said, “I’ll wait for the safe while you go to supper, but I have to go over to the men’s dorm to answer a call of nature first. If the delivery van arrives, don’t let them unload until I get back.”

He was moving toward the door. Jennifer said, “Just use the bathroom off the bedroom.”

Jack cut a quick glance at the bedroom door, then at Jennifer. “Ah... I’ll use the head at the dorm. I won’t be long.” With that, Jack was out the door, leaving Jennifer standing, shaking her head.

She walked out onto the platform and watched Jack walk toward the dorm. He stopped several times, as people heading for the kitchen trailer hailed him for one reason or another. Jennifer saw the office equipment delivery truck come around the corner of the garage just as Jack disappeared from sight behind the kitchen trailer on his way to the men’s dorm.

The truck was backing up to the platform as Tina Blount, Anne Bodine and Candy Hansen walked over to ask Jennifer if she wanted to join them at a table for supper.

“I want to show the deliverymen where to put this, then I’ll be right with you,” she said, as one of the men used a hammer and removed a section of the railing around the platform. The other man was pushing the safe, set on a wheeled dolly, to the rear of the truck.

Tina, Candy and Anne were standing on the ground between the truck and the office trailer looking up at Jennifer. She stood beside the opening in the railing as one of the men braced the safe and the other eased it off the back of the truck. The bed of the truck was almost even with the platform, being no more than a centimeter or so higher.

The men had maneuvered the safe on its dolly halfway onto the platform when Jack came into view. “Don’t!” he yelled and began running toward the truck.

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Jerry D Young