BAUMHOLDER
1961

A novella

Charles Deemer

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Dedicated to Monterey Marys everywhere

1/

Sgt. Malinowski took several steps into the Enlisted Men's Club and stopped. He had never seen the linguists of Processing Company this drunk, this loud or this disorderly. Everyone was yelling at once, small groups trying to make their conversations heard over their loud neighbors. Someone stood on a table, his pants dropped, mooning the universe (the sergeant didn't recognize the buttocks) while other linguists clapped and yelled catcalls. My God, thought Malinowski. May their mothers never learn about this, or recruiting into this man's Army would crash to a standstill. What mother would send her son to a school of drunken debauchery?

The E. M. Club was located in a Quonset hut no larger than a basketball court, and Malinowski scanned the small room for Sullivan. This was Sullivan's short-timer's party, he realized, and the linguist would be devastated by the news the sergeant had for him. This was why Malinowski had two M.P.s waiting right outside, just in case Sullivan took a swing at him. A short-timer's emotions were unpredictable on any occasion, and an Irish short-timer's provided twice the uncertainty, certainly more considering the unfortunate news the sergeant brought. Malinowski had considered waiting until breakfast before breaking the news but by then Sullivan would be packed, waiting for the bus to take him to the airport. Better to tell him tonight, let him blow up, and if he caused sufficient trouble, tuck him away for the night in the small cell in Headquarters Company built just for such an occasion.

Seventy-odd men sat along the row of double-tables the men had pushed together across the center of the room.

Over half the company of Russian linguists were there, almost all of them wearing civvies – Malinowski had never been in an outfit where there was such a rush to change out of uniform. Beer bottles and cans cluttered every table, four or five times as many containers as drinkers, bottles of German beer and cans of American beer, some full, some empty, each obscenely inexpensive on a Nickel Night like this, beer so cheap that most linguists bought them five at a time, slapping an American quarter or a Deutsch mark at Jake, the German national who ran the club. Sullivan had made sure his going-home party took place on a Nickel Night.

Bass, whom everyone called Bear, held his guitar and was entertaining troops at the far end of the long table. Malinowski couldn't hear what he was singing but the sergeant had heard rumors that sometimes Bear sang anti-military songs of his own composition. Malinowski wouldn't put it past any of them to harbor such feelings. They were college boys who had joined the Army Security Agency a step ahead of being drafted. Not a career soldier among them. Foot soldiers called the linguists "Monterey Marys" after the Language School in Monterey, California, where they'd learned Russian. In Baumholder, 30,000 infantry, paratroopers and special forces were stationed across town at Smith Barracks. The "Animals" spent most of their time training for war in the surrounding farmland but this weekend were in town on pass, which is why the Marys stayed up on their hilltop base. The Animals frightened them, and the sergeant didn't blame them.

Closer in, Malinowski saw the overweight linguist nicknamed Buddy-pooh holding court, gesturing wildly as he talked, or yelled, over the din of everyone speaking at once. A major trouble-maker, Buddy-pooh. Malinowski had heard that he'd put Hitler speeches to memory to recite for free drinks to the farmers in the local gasthaus.

Buckley, one of the few Negroes in the company, sat next to Buddy but looked dazed, even frightened. Buckley

was a newk and not yet seasoned to the wild party habits of college boys turned soldiers – if translating Russian could be called soldiering. Malinowski, who had fought in Korea, had mixed feelings about this.

Finally the sergeant found Sullivan in the crowd, his ruddy complexion redder than normal from so much drinking, laughing and carrying on.

"Hey, Sarge!" somebody yelled. Only a few people heard this and turned his way. Malinowski nodded and stepped toward the troops. He stopped when he stood behind Sullivan.

"Sullivan," he said, bending forward so his lips were close to an ear.

Sullivan straightened up and turned.

"Hey, Sarge," Sullivan said.

"Come with me a minute."

"What's up?"

"It's important. Follow me."

Malinowski started toward the exit. Halfway there, he saw Sullivan saying something to the group he was sitting with. When the linguist finally moved forward, Malinowski continued on.

Onside the sergeant told the M.P.s to move off but stay alert. He didn't want to freak out Sullivan by their presence but he wanted them close in case there was trouble.

In a moment Sullivan exited the Quonset hut.

"What's going on?"

"President Kennedy gave a speech tonight," Malinowski began.

"Yeah, I read something about that."

"Then you know the shit Khrushchev's been pulling in Berlin."

"A little. What's this got to do with me? You know I ship out tomorrow, right?"

"That's what I wanted to talk to you about. Kennedy said Berlin is in a crisis. He extended everybody with less than a year left of his tour."

There, he'd said it. Malinowski watched Sullivan carefully, tense, ready to duck if the linguist started swinging. Sullivan was short and slight and Malinowski large but the linguist had an Irishman's temper.

Sullivan grinned and shook his head.

"This is a very sick joke you're pulling, Sarge. Come on in, and I'll buy you five beers."

Before Sullivan could turn away, Malinowski had a large hand on his shoulder.

"No joke," he said. "You don't go home tomorrow."

Sullivan's mouth dropped open but no words came. Then the mouth contorted into a grimace, and Sullivan appeared to be in great pain. Finally he yelled an excruciating declaration of agony.

Malinowski saw the punch coming and ducked aside. The two M.P.s appeared quickly from out of the shadows. When Sullivan saw them, he stepped back, palms held forward as a shield against their approach.

"What am I, under arrest for getting screwed?" Sullivan asked.

"You're not under arrest unless there's a reason to be," said Malinowski.

"This is really fucked, Sarge."

"Welcome to the Army."

"Why me? I mean, what the fuck does it matter to the safety of America if I'm here or home?"

Malinowski didn't think such an unpatriotic question deserved a response.

Sullivan shook his head again.

"Okay," he said.

After a silence, the sergeant asked, "You going to be okay?"

Sullivan nodded.

"Do you know how long I'm extended for?"

"I think three months. Not that long."

"Fuck no. What's three months? I've been two years in this shit hole. What's three months?"

He started nodding again.

"Well," said Sullivan, "if I'm not under arrest, I think I could use a beer. Offer's still open, Sarge."

"I'll take a rain check. You take it easy tonight, Sullivan. Don't do anything stupid after the club closes."

Sullivan nodded and reentered the club.

"You are totally shitting me," said Bass when Sullivan told him the news.

Bass and Sullivan were tight enough that Bass recognized as soon as his friend returned that something was terribly wrong. Displeasure was in Sullivan's body language, in the way he stormed back to the table and chugalugged a beer with the ferocity of a man wanting to disable his senses. Bass quickly finished the song he was singing (a Weavers' tune called "Lonesome Traveler"), put the guitar in its case, slid the case under the table and hurried to Sullivan's side to see what was up. Sullivan leaned close and told him the news in a broken voice.

"Three months," Sullivan added. "It might as well be for eternity."

"Damn," said Bass. He couldn't think of anything to add, so gave a quick squeeze of Sullivan's shoulder.

"I want to go to town," said Sullivan.

"The Animals are in town," Bass reminded him.

"Maybe I'll pick a fight with a paratrooper."

"Yeah, right."

"The president thinks I'm a soldier, thinks I'm worth extending. Maybe it's time to prove myself by punching out a paratrooper."

Across the room, somebody yelled, "Fuck Kennedy!"

"I think the word's spreading," said Bass.

Buddy-pooh appeared and said, "Sullivan, you hear the news?

Sullivan nodded.

"I think some songs are in order," Buddy-pooh told Bear.

Bass said, “I don’t think I’m in the mood.”

“He’s right,” Sullivan said. “I want to sing every anti-Army song you ever wrote.” Then he started singing at the top of his lungs, words Bass had written to the tune of “Ragmop”:

“I say F … I say F, U … F, U, C … F, U, C, K … F-U-C-K A-R-M-Y, fuck the Army, beetle-leet bop-be-da-ba … fuck the Army, beetle-leet bop-be-da-ba …”

As soon as other linguists heard Sullivan, they joined in, many standing and moving to gather around Sullivan and Bass, faces straining to sing louder than a neighbor, everyone spelling out the Fuck the Army Ragmop song. Someone fetched Bass’ guitar and brought it to him. Buddy-pooh suggested the next song, and Bass started it alone, to the tune of an old labor song, strumming along as he sang:

“I don’t want your spit shine, mister. I don’t want your shiny brass. As far as I am concerned, mister. You can shove them up your ass.”

By the time Bass reached the last verse, dedicated especially to the Russian linguists with their top secret codeword clearances, everyone was singing in a loud chorus, defiant and solemn, as if the song were an anthem:

“I don’t want your secret clearance. I don’t want your world-wide badge. All I want is a pair of my civvies. And the freedom I once had.”

No one wanted to stop when Jake decided to close at midnight. Buddy-pooh led a delegation to buy beer to go, filling up paper cups, which was the only way Jake would let beer out of the club. Box tops were gathered to serve as trays for the cups of beer, and volunteers recruited to carry them to the baseball field at one end of the kaserne, which was enclosed by a security fence. Across the fence were the officer billets, and in the past their post-club excursions to the ballpark had gotten several of the linguists in trouble, especially Buddy and Sullivan as ringleaders. But this didn’t seem to matter on a night when short-timers found

themselves extended. If ever there was a night to lament being a soldier, it was this one.

Bass wasn't sure when he lost track of Sullivan. He had meant to keep an eye on him. About half the crowd in the club made the march to the ballpark to keep drinking. They sat in the bleachers and passed around the cups of beer. Bass was persuaded to sing another song. He chose a traditional folk ballad, hoping to keep the crowd quieter than they'd been in the club. He thought it was time to settle into a more subdued state of mourning. When he finished the song, Bass realized that Sullivan wasn't in the bleachers any more.

"Where's Jim?" he asked the crowd.

"That way," a linguist said, pointing toward the billets.

"Maybe he crashed," suggested another.

Buddy-pooh laughed.

"Not Sullivan, no way. I think he's up to no good."

Bass and Buddy left the others to finish the beer and headed for the billets. They found Buckley in the Day Room, shooting pool by himself.

"You seen Sullivan?" Bass asked.

"I saw him walk by outside a moment ago."

Back outside, Bass and Buddy-pooh looked in a direction opposite from the ballpark. If Sullivan were headed for the Operations Building, he'd have gone across the central parkway before reaching the billets. Either he was going to Headquarters Company, where the kaserne's maintenance, transportation and other support personnel were housed in their own billets, or continuing on to the Command Building.

Buddy said, "He's going to piss on the captain's avocado plant."

Bass shot him a confused look.

"I'm serious. When we saw Mr. Roberts a few weeks ago, Sullivan said somebody should piss on the captain's plant."

Bass had skipped the weekly movie because he'd

already seen it and was in the middle of reading "Grapes of Wrath." He remembered how in an act of defiance in the film, Henry Fonda had thrown the captain's potted tree overboard. Would Sullivan take this as inspiration to do something similar?

"Better check it out," said Bass.

If Sullivan had pissed on the avocado plant in the hallway outside the commanding officer's door, he'd finished by the time Bass and Buddy-pooh found him. Now Sullivan was carefully burning all the notices and rosters on the duty board, carefully blowing on each sheet of paper so it would hang off its thumbtack as a delicate ash.

"Come on, Jim," Bass said. "This isn't going to get you home any earlier."

"Look at this," said Sullivan. Half a dozen shapes of ash hung off the corkboard like skeletal flowers. "This is art, is what it is."

"Beautiful. Let's go home."

Bass put an arm around Sullivan and gently started leading him away. A few steps later he noticed that Buddy-pooh was finishing up the job, blowing on a duty roster he'd just set on fire.

"Damn it," said Bass. "Let's get out of here."

Sullivan wanted to go back to the ballpark. Bass didn't think it was a good idea.

"I'm going back," said Buddy-pooh. "You can come with me," he told Sullivan.

"I don't need a fucking chaperone."

Bass said, "You don't need to get in trouble either. If you got company punishment, or court-martialed, God forbid, they could extend you even more. I heard guys as short as you only got extended three months. Three months is nothing."

"I'm still going back to the ballpark," said Sullivan.

Bass went along, too. He didn't trust Sullivan to be left on his own or in anybody's care but his. But as much as Bass tried to keep Sullivan out of trouble, once again the

short-timer slipped away.

This time it happened when Bass went under the bleachers to take a leak. When he climbed back into the bleachers, Sullivan was gone.

"Where's Jim?" he asked again.

Buddy-pooh looked around.

"He was right here a second ago."

"He went to town," said Bass, thinking aloud.

"The Animals are in town."

"He said he wants to fight a paratrooper."

"He's that fucked up?"

"Wouldn't you be?"

"Honey," said Buddy-pooh, "I'd never be so fucked up that I wanted to fight a paratrooper."

"I'd better go get him."

"Are you crazy? The Animals are out there. Probably pissed, too, if they got extended."

"They always re-up. That wouldn't bother them."

"You're right. But it's still dangerous in town. What is it Sgt. Davis is always saying? I'd rather fight than eat."

Sgt. Davis, like Sgt. Malinowski, was a soldier of the old school, somehow assigned to a company of Russian linguists for whom military duty had nothing to do with physical exertion or violence. The linguists translated and analyzed military communications of the Russian army in East Germany. No fighting, thank you very much. Monterey Marys. Period, end of story.

Bass said, "I'll find him before he finds a fight."

"There's wishful thinking if I ever heard it."

"Fuck you."

Bass started away.

"Do you have a pass?" Buddy-pooh asked after him.

Bass turned.

"I'm officially on leave. I just hung around for Sullivan's party. I go to Denmark tomorrow."

"You have a ticket to Denmark and hung around for a party in the club?"

"A special party," said Bass. He headed off again.

Although he had leave papers, Bass decided to skip the hassle of showing them to the guards at the front gate and instead ducked out through a hole in the fence behind the billets. It was the standard way linguists came and went if they had had too much to drink or wanted to avoid the guards for some other reason. Every now and again Support wired up the hole but the repair never lasted more than a few days. Support soldiers from Headquarters Company used the hole themselves.

The walk to town was about a mile down a twisting two-lane road. The moon overhead dropped a pale light to mark his way. Walking along, Bass realized it was unusually quiet, no sound of artillery coming from across the fields. The Animals were off maneuvers and in town to drink, screw and fight.

At the bottom of the hill the road veered left for another hundred yards, passing Gasthaus Konrad, the local establishment most favored by the farmers who remained in the area, living off their land leases to the American army or the bars some had invested in. Now and again the linguists stopped at the gasthaus for local color, an experience that typically went from shocking to puzzling to darkly comic. Most of the farmers in the area were unreformed Nazis, some of whom viewed the recent World War the way Americans view the World Series, a best-of-seven conflict which had the Americans ahead of the Germans two wars to none – but with considerable future battle left to do. Around ten p.m., after the last routine visit of the German police, Konrad, the owner, sometimes went to the jukebox, opened it, and put on several banned Nazis marching songs for the delight of the farmers. On more rare occasions, especially near the end of the month when they were broke, Buddy-pooh led a contingent of thirsty linguists to the gasthaus, where he recited Hitler speeches he had memorized in German. For this entertainment the farmers kept the beer flowing for as long as Buddy tickled their nostalgia for the

glorious days of Aryan superiority.

On the walk to town, Bass decided to rent a room for the night in the gasthaus. He'd made plans to catch the late morning train but this might have to be delayed, depending on whether or not he found Sullivan tonight. Bass didn't look forward to entering a bar filled with Animals but this couldn't be helped. Sullivan was his good buddy. Buddies looked out for one another, and Sullivan clearly was too upset to behave in his own best interests.

Bass was over halfway down the hill when it occurred to him that Sullivan might be going to town for a reason other than picking a fight with a paratrooper. He might be looking for Heidi. The more Bass considered this, the more likely the possibility seemed.

Heidi was a Russian spy, most of the linguists agreed to this now. All the same, Sullivan had fallen in love with her. Whether it was love or lust, Bass never could decide, but Sullivan, more than the other linguists Heidi had gone out with, took the plunge into emotional turmoil and personal obsession with more energy than anyone else. Sullivan had tried to convince Bass that the attraction was mutual.

"She loves me," Sullivan had told Bass on a night almost a month ago when they were drinking alone in the bleachers after the club had closed.

"She's using you," said Bass.

"I know she's a spy. Jesus, Bear, give me a break. I'm a spy, too. So fucking what? We love one another. We want to get out of the spy business."

"She's using you, Jim."

"After I get out and touch bases with my family, I'm coming back. I'm meeting her in Spain."

"You've got to be kidding."

"Fuck you."

"She asked you to defect. She wanted you to walk into the sunset in East Germany."

"And I told her I wouldn't do that. But I would start a new life in Spain with her."

"And she said yes?"

"Actually she said she'd think about it. Change is harder for her. I get discharged soon. She'd have to defect, so to speak. She loves me, Bear. I think she's going to do it. She's going to meet me in Spain."

"And if she doesn't?"

"She'll break my heart. But I have to try. I have to be there like I promised I would."

Extended, Sullivan wouldn't be able to keep his appointment. Maybe he was looking for Heidi to tell her. Sullivan, as far as Bass knew, hadn't seen her in over a week.

Bass remembered the first day he and Sullivan had seen Heidi in the gasthaus. They'd never seen anyone like her in Baumholder before. It wasn't only that she was pretty in a fresh girl-next-door kind of way, with white skin, blonde hair, blue eyes, though a tad plump for Bass' tastes. She was reading The Portable Faulkner in English. Heidi, looking like a college student, was definitely out of place in a German village so transformed that the city newspapers had begun calling it Sin City.

New young women appeared in Baumholder all the time but they usually brought a pallor of tragedy in their expressions, a vacant longing in their eyes. Most had escaped from East Germany and thought they were going to work as waitresses, not barmaids for G.I.s at wages so low prostitution was not only encouraged but became necessary for survival. Bass had heard the rumor that a German syndicate orchestrated the sex trade serving American soldiers. For several days before the Animals charged into town with weekend passes and lustful appetites, Baumholder's thrice-weekly train schedule exploded to several trains a day to haul in all the girls ("Veronikas," the Germans called them) who would be needed for the weekend ahead. Sipping a beer in the bahnhoff, watching all the prostitutes parade in, was the most surreal experience

Bass had ever had.

In this context, to find a beautiful young woman sitting alone in the gasthaus on a Wednesday afternoon was a significant break in the local pattern of introductions. And she was reading Faulkner!

Bear and Sullivan were working mids, which gave them a free day as long as they kept sober enough to go to work at midnight. They'd slept through the morning. They entered the gasthaus for a beer and bockwurst, a German lunch, before continuing on to town. And there she was.

"She's reading Faulkner," Sullivan noticed first after they'd taken a table with their bottles of German beer. "In English."

"Fishy," said Bass. They spoke in low tones, as if discussing a secret.

"Not necessarily."

"Yeah, Jim, she's a graduate student in American Studies who happened to drop by Sin City for a quiet week of working on her Ph.D."

"What are you trying to say?"

"Think about it. Look what she's reading. Not just any Faulkner. The Portable Faulkner, with his name shouted in block print on the cover so you can read it across the room. Has any bait ever been more obvious?"

"Bait? Interesting. As in fishing for …?"

"One of us, is my guess."

"One of us."

"A linguist. A spy."

Sullivan laughed. The young woman, only a few tables away, looked up and smiled. Then she went back to reading.

Sullivan said, "So what you're saying is, you think she's a spy planted here to pick our brains?"

"It's been done before."

True enough. Not quite a year ago, a spy working as a barmaid had appeared at the Family Club, the linguist's favorite bar in town. She'd appeared out of nowhere, was

fluent in English, bright and attractive. She'd taken an immediate liking to Lt. Baker in the company, who reported her abnormal interest in what happened in Processing Company on the hill. Before sex and after, all she wanted to hear about what was what the linguists did on the hill. Baker reporter her but before security had time to look into the matter, the woman was gone as suddenly as she had arrived.

"Spies hustle officers," Sullivan said.

"Not necessarily. We know more secrets than the C.O. when you get down to it."

What the linguists knew was a good deal about the chain of command and activity of the Russian army in East Germany. It would be useful if the Russians knew how much the Americans knew, just as it would be useful for the Americans to know how much the Russians knew about what really went on in Processing Company.

"Look at Harry Smith," Bass added.

Harry Smith. No soldier was more controversial, even now, six months after his defection – if it had been that. What was known was that Smith and a Veronika Spy who called herself Ilse had disappeared at the same time. Smith was always falling in love with one Veronika or another, so most of the linguists assumed he had been easy pickings for a pro like Ilse. But Sullivan was a dissenter.

"We don't know what happened to Harry," Sullivan said. "Excuse me. I'm going to check her out."

Bass watched Sullivan get up, move across the room and speak to the woman. Bass was shocked and speechless. Then Sullivan sat down with her. Bass went to the men's room and when he returned, the woman had joined their table.

"This is Heidi," said Sullivan. To the woman he said, "Everyone calls him Bear."

"This is your name?" she asked. Her English was almost without accent.

"Robert Bass."

"Nice to meet you."

They chatted for half an hour, Sullivan doing most of the talking, obviously smitten, and the more Bass listened, the more he was sure the woman was a spy. She said she was in town to visit an ailing aunt, a flimsy explanation at best. She was reading Faulkner because she loved American literature and hoped to study in the States one day. Yes, she'd heard all the stories that had given Baumholder its reputation as the Sin City of Europe, but this was where her aunt lived, so here she was. Heidi had no intention of frequenting the G.I. bars in town. She'd confine her movements between the gasthaus, where she had rented a room upstairs, and her aunt's home. She expected to be in town for a week.

In the gasthaus Bass found Konrad behind the front counter, where one signed in for a room. There always seemed to be vacancies. Given the late hour, only a few local farmers were inside, drinking beer and playing cards at a corner table.

"Das Bar," said Konrad. "Where are your comrades?"

"I was just going to ask if you'd seen Sullivan."

"Sullivan?"

"Young Werther."

This was the German's nickname for Jim. The first time the proprietor had met the linguist, Sullivan, much like Heidi later, was sitting alone at a table reading, in this case the Goethe classic, The Sorrows of Young Werther. Here, thought Konrad, is a melancholy American who always pines after what is lost, lost innocence and lost youth, but especially when the loss is a beautiful young woman. Thereafter Konrad called Sullivan Young Werther.

"Yes, he was here asking about Heidi."

"Heidi's still here?"

"No. I sent him to the Family Club. I heard she spends a lot of time there now."

Heidi at the Family Club. She finally was making the

bar scene, looking for new victims.

Bass began filling out the card on the counter.

"I need a room for the night," he said. "I'll be back later."

2/

There were 57 bars in downtown Baumholder, a figure made astronomical by the fact that downtown consisted of nine square blocks. Most of the bars had names chosen to appeal to Americans: the California Club, the Florida Club, the Texas Club, Jazz Alley, Blues Alley, The Liberty Bar. Others tried to lure in soldiers with exotic names like The Golden Hirsch, Dancers A'GoGo, The Femme Fatale, Gangster Den. Bass believed the rumor that most of the bars in Baumholder were owned by a syndicate of German businessmen, most of whom lived in Berlin and Munich. But others were owned locally, the way Konrad was said to be a partner in The Family Club, which the linguists called their off-base home. Seeing how much money was being made by serving the troops, some local farmers joined the frenzy to make a quick mark off the Americans, who after all had more money to spend than the Germans had seen in a very long time.

The bars had come to Baumholder during the troop buildup of the Korean War. A Soviet invasion of Germany was a threat real enough to respond to, and the U.S. responded by bringing tens of thousands of soldiers to West Germany. Baumholder, before World War II a small farming community in southwestern Germany's Rhineland area, with a population never exceeding 3000, was chosen for the major American buildup because the Germans themselves had trained here, taking advantage of the bare, rolling hills for their military maneuvers and war games. The Americans did the same.

Almost overnight, new bars opened downtown to

entertain and serve the American G.I.s. Bakeries became bars, barns became nightclubs. Because the American army was segregated at the start of the Korean War, the new bars became segregated. The Florida Club, for example, became a bar that only black troops frequented. The tradition of segregation had remained even after the army became integrated, and today if Bass entered The Florida Club, he would be one of only a handful of whites there, the others young Germans eager to hear the American jazz on the jukebox. The jukeboxes in the white American bars featured country-western music.

The Family Club became the hangout for the Monterey Marys because it was the first bar one reached coming down from the hill at the east end of town, which also made it the farthest from Smith Barracks, Baumholder's main post, where 30,000 Animals were stationed beyond the west end of town. There was a certain sense of security in the fact that a thirsty Animal would have to pass 56 bars before reaching The Family Club. Of course, under normal circumstances the linguists avoided the Animals at all costs and therefore stayed on the hill whenever the Animals came to town. The linguists, numbering only one hundred (with another hundred in Headquarters Company), knew full well that beating up a Monterey Mary would be considered great fun among the paratroopers and special forces after six or seven weeks of shooting at each other in war games in the field. It was always more fun to take hostility out on a stranger than on a comrade.

For Bass, tonight was far from normal circumstances. As he approached The Family Club, he expected to find Animals inside, not linguists, unless Sullivan himself was there.

The neon signs of the bars stretched blocks ahead of him. Surprisingly few Animals were on the street, perhaps because most had already had too much to drink. Bass climbed the steps – The Family Club was a converted home – to cross the porch and enter the bar. He had about an

hour before the Army curfew began, and the M.P.s started checking for overnight passes. Even though he was officially on leave, Bass had learned never to trust an encounter with the military police. Some of those boys had a power complex.

The Family Club was only half full, testimony to its being the last bar on the trail from Smith Barracks. Unlike the linguists, most of the Animals came to town in uniform.

Bass looked around for a familiar female face and found Amazon hurrying his way. She was aptly named, over six-foot and over two-hundred pounds, with a honeycomb of black hair piled on her head that made her look even larger than she was.

"Vat is going on?" Amazon said in her German accent, moving so close Bass could smell the sour liquor on her breath. "You never come vit Animals here."

"I'm looking for Sullivan."

"I zee. Of course."

"Have you seen him?"

"He come vor Heidi. Dey go."

"Where? How long ago?"

"Dey vant to be quiet. I know notting vere dey go."

A drunken paratrooper staggered past and, seeing Bass, did a double-take. He stopped and asked, "What outfit you in?"

Amazon jumped in to the rescue, taking the paratrooper by the arm and leading him toward the jukebox. Bass heard her saying, "You promise dance vit me, soldier-boy. You promise dance."

Bass took advantage of the moment to slip outside.

Sullivan had been here and left with Heidi. What was Heidi doing in The Family Club with the Animals in town? They also had secrets of interest to a spy. How many soldiers were training in the field? A fact worth knowing.

Amazon said they'd left to go somewhere quiet. Usually a Chinese restaurant at the far end of town served this purpose but not with the Animals in town. Nothing

would be quiet in Baumholder unless they walked somewhere off the main drag. Maybe to the soccer field. It had bleachers, they could sit and talk in the moonlight. Right up Sullivan's alley.

The main soccer field was about a mile south, in the "festplatz" park. Bass moved into a residential neighborhood, which was dark without the density of neon signs along the main drag. He marveled at how askew his habitual notion of Baumholder was, a three-block procession of bars, a town full of hustlers and prostitutes. Here, in the shadows away from the action, Baumholder resembled the tiny German village it had been before the American soldiers arrived.

The festplatz was empty. Bass sat in the bleachers to think a minute. Had Sullivan and Heidi already run off to Spain together? Not easy to believe. In fact, from the beginning Bass found it hard to believe that Heidi, a spy, had fallen in love with Sullivan, certainly not enough to run off into the Spanish sunset with him. It just didn't make sense. Sullivan hadn't given defecting to Heidi's side a second thought. Wouldn't her loyalty be the same?

Sullivan had been reluctant to admit that Heidi must be a spy. In the beginning, blinded by his attraction, he let himself believe that she wasn't seeing any other soldier except himself. He was spending as much free time with her as he could, which wasn't much because Heidi seemed to be spending most of her time with a sick aunt. But there wasn't a sick aunt.

Bass discovered this one afternoon when he went to town alone. Sullivan, unable to go on a picnic with Heidi because she was spending the afternoon with her aunt, had decided to stay on post, sulking in the E. M. Club, so Bass, always eager for a change of scenery, had walked to town alone.

As he approached Gasthaus Konrad, he saw Buddy-pooh awaiting outside. Bass was about to call to him when

Heidi came out the front door. She walked to Buddy and took his arm. They moved off like familiar lovers.

Bass followed them to festplatz park, where they bought rolls and sausages at a concession stand. They ate together at a picnic table as Bass watched from across the park, hiding behind a tree, trying to figure out how he was going to break this news to Sullivan. After eating, they began kissing, nothing hot and heavy but kissing nonetheless. Later Heidi took a small camera out of her purse. She took a picture of Buddy-pooh. Bass had seen enough and left.

He brooded over beer at The Family Club, wondering what to tell Sullivan.

"You look zo zad," said Amazon, joining him. "You vant to go upstairs?"

"I'm fine."

"No true."

"Do you know Heidi? She has a room at Konrad's."

"Heidi the spy?"

"I think that's the one."

"I never talk to her. Somebody like her comes, dey take deir pictures, and dey go."

"What do you mean, take their pictures?"

"Get many pictures of soldiers. Vind out vat dey can vind out. Den poof, on de train and back to East Berlin."

That night at the E. M. Club, Bass learned something else about Heidi. Sullivan had gotten drunk early and crashed, no doubt longing for his next date with the love of his life. Joining Bass at a table was Luke, another linguist, who sat down with a big grin on his face.

"I think I'm in love," said Luke.

"With a Veronika, right."

"With a student. She's here to take care of a sick aunt."

And then it came, a story just like Sullivan's, just like Buddy-pooh's if he cared to share it, the story of an immediate attraction, a picnic in festplatz park, a little smooching – and Heidi taking his photograph. Bass

wondered if the woman was trying to fill her photo album with the entire company of linguists.

At breakfast after mids, Bass couldn't hold back the news any longer. He told Sullivan that Heidi had gone out with Buddy-pooh and Luke and probably more.

"Now will you believe she's a spy?" Bass asked.

Without replying, Sullivan stood up and walked out of the mess hall. Bass figured he was heading to town for a showdown with Heidi. He let him go.

Bass left festplatz park and took a circuitous route through the village to approach Gasthaus Konrad from the rear. He then walked around the two-story building and entered through the front entrance. His plan was to crash, get an early start in the morning to see if he could find Sullivan, and maybe still catch his train to begin the scheduled two weeks' leave in Denmark. But if he missed the train, he missed it. There would be plenty of departing trains the next few days after the Animals returned to the field. Riding a train filled with Veronikas would be something to write home about.

Konrad wasn't anywhere to be found. The group of farmers playing cards had gotten smaller. At the front desk, Bass pushed down the bell.

In a moment Konrad appeared. He looked surprised to see Bass.

"I need my room key," said Bass.

"Of course, of course. Did you find your friend?"

"No luck."

"Maybe tomorrow."

"Maybe."

Bass took the key and headed upstairs.

As soon as the linguist was out of site, Konrad gestured to the farmers, who had been watching closely. The proprietor raised both hands, as if to say, Who can figure out the Americans?

Konrad took the door behind the counter into his living

quarters. In the sitting room, Sullivan and Heidi were huddled close, talking in low tones.

"Your friend is back," said Konrad. "He went to his room upstairs."

"Thanks," said Sullivan.

"You still want a room?"

Sullivan looked at Heidi. She said something that Konrad couldn't hear.

Sullivan said, "I'd better not."

"Where will you stay?"

Again they whispered to one another.

"I have a friend," said Heidi.

And more enemies than you know, Konrad thought, but he bit his tongue. The communists were more stupid than the Americans.

"How much longer you want to talk here?" asked the proprietor.

"We'll go now," said Sullivan.

They stood up. Sullivan took out his wallet.

"How much I owe you?"

Konrad looked at his watch, but before he named a price, Sullivan slipped him a bill and said, "Keep the change."

Konrad walked them to the door. As soon as they were gone, all the farmers started shooting Konrad questions at once in their native German.

"Does he know she's a spy?"

"Is he defecting?"

"What does he think he's doing?"

Konrad raised his hands in mock surrender.

"I'll bring over a bottle," he said.

Everyone gathered around a larger table. Konrad passed around glasses and set a bottle of Steinhager on the table. One by one, the farmers filled the small glass, drank and filled again, then passed the bottle on. At first there was little conversation, as if to initiate a new moment of the night, Konrad's favorite moment, when the gasthaus was

officially closed and the proprietor could relax with a few men he had known all of his life.

It had not been easy for any of them after the war. Konrad naively had expected everything to return to normal. He would run the gasthaus as before, and the farmers, many his friends, would come for food and drink, and travelers would rent a room for the night. But then everything changed, and changed rapidly, because the world itself had changed.

What was different was that former allies, the United States and the Soviet Union, were suddenly engaged in a conflict for influence in Europe. With the Korean War, the communist quest for dominance was no longer just a political theory, and the Americans responded by deploying tens of thousands of soldiers to Germany's Rheinland area as insurance against a possible Soviet invasion of the country. Baumholder, with existing German military bases, was the immediate center of this effort – and Konrad, along with everyone else in the village, watched in shock and disbelief as thirty thousand American soldiers moved in. Farmland was confiscated so that the Americans could train and hold their military maneuvers. They would play war games six weeks at a time. But eventually they would need a little rest and recreation; eventually they would be given passes to come into downtown Baumholder.

Eastern European immigrants had arrived to open the bars and nightclubs the soldiers needed for entertainment. Quonset huts, even tents, went up almost overnight. Empty buildings were rented. Vacant barns were rented. From across Germany, and even farther, from the Netherlands and Scandinavia, prostitutes flocked into the former village to get part of the action. Suddenly the business of Baumholder was not farming but entertaining the American G.I.s. A mere five years after the war, Konrad's village had been transformed into a loud, raucous playground for American soldiers. The Sin City of Europe.

Those like Konrad who had been born here and who

still called Baumholder home had watched this transformation with dismay. They felt like strangers in their own homeland. Only when it became clear that the soldiers were here to stay, despite official protests of civic corruption and immorality by the religious leaders of the community, did Konrad and others decide to get part of the action themselves. Konrad rented rooms to Veronikas, women who if not prostitutes by profession nonetheless were willing to sell sex to soldiers for quick cash. Konrad also invested in several bars in town, mostly in The Family Club because it catered to a small company of Russian linguists who were more educated and less violent than the soldiers in the field.

The final step in the development of Baumholder's entertainment industry was its takeover by a syndicate of businessmen as part of a German-wide network of G.I. bars and Veronikas who worked in them. Most of these businessmen had companies in Berlin and Munich. The Eastern European immigrants who had opened the first bars were bought out whether they wanted to sell or not. A few local owners, like Konrad, were left alone as proof that a country-wide syndicate did not exist. This was the situation today, with all but ten of Baumholder's 57 bars owned by the syndicate, the rest by local farmers and businessmen.

"How's Karl?" a farmer named Hans asked.

Konrad's son was all he had left. His wife had died from cancer during the war. Both daughters had been killed during an attack on Frankfurt near the end of the hostilities. Karl was 24, his father's pride.

"His soccer team played in Idar-Oberstein. I couldn't go because Hermine took ill."

Karl coached a boys' soccer team, and Konrad tried to go to as many games as he could. Hermine, his bookkeeper, could run the gasthaus in his absence.

"Did they win?"

"I don't even know. Karl will give me a full report later."

Albert, a farmer who had bought into The Family Club at Konrad's recommendation, said, "Before he left, Fredrick said President Kennedy gave a tough speech tonight against Khrushchev. Maybe they'll be war."

"It's too soon for another war," said Hans. "The banks decide when it's best."

"What do you think, Konrad?" Albert asked.

Konrad shrugged.

"Khrushchev will go as far as he thinks he can without the Americans doing anything. And then he will stop. Only time will show how far that is."

Konrad was weary of politics and world conflict. He didn't like Germany being the stage for the conflict of Russians and Americans. When Germany rose again, as surely it must, the ideal must be self-sufficiency and border security. Konrad still believed in German superiority despite losing the war. Americans, who won the war, had no culture. All you had to do was step into a bar and listen to the music they played. What country could touch the achievements of Wagner, Bach, Beethoven, Brahms?

Konrad said, "I am tired. I think I'll close up."

When they were gone, Konrad went to the jukebox and played the opening of Brahms' First Symphony, played by the Berlin Orchestra. It was still playing when Karl stepped into the room and said, "What's going on with Heidi and the American?"

Konrad stood to embrace his son.

"Sit down. You want a drink?"

"No thanks. I came the back way to avoid all the soldiers in town. They were walking along like a nice young couple on their way home. Do you know what's going on?"

"They rented a room here. Just to talk, they said. That seemed to be it. Then Young Werther's friend rented a room, and he didn't want to be here any more."

"Why not?"

"He's avoiding him. I think I know why. Same old story: Young Werther is in love with a woman he can't

have. He doesn't want his friend to know how foolish he is."

Karl laughed.

"Father, you know what she is. She wants his secrets."

"If he has any worth knowing."

"Well, they seemed very romantic, holding hands, strolling in the moonlight past the dark houses. I bet they were going to the Jew Isaac's home. They say he rents rooms to soldiers."

"Yes, I heard that, too."

"Maybe we'll put him out of business. They should rent from you."

"There's enough soldiers to go around."

"I don't like Jews. I don't care what people think. Jews are as bad as communists. Americans aren't much better."

"Let's not worry about communists and Jews and Americans. Tell me how the game went. You're home late. You had a meeting afterwards?"

"Yes."

Karl belonged to an informal association of young men who called themselves Deutsche Patrioten, or German Patriots. Sometimes Karl wore a cap with D.P. on it in bright red letters.

Konrad said, "First tell me about the game, then tell me about the meeting."

Even though his son had turned down a drink, Konrad poured two fingers of Steinhager in a small glass.

"Cheers," he said, and the father kept holding out the glass until the son obediently picked it up and touched it to his own, the sound ringing like a bell, and then both men tilted back their heads to drink.

3/

Despite Konrad's nickname, Goethe's Young Werther

sounded nothing like Jim Sullivan: "Ah, how the thrill of it shoots through me if my finger happens to touch hers or our feet meet beneath the table! I recoil as if from a fire yet some secret force draws me on again – and all my senses grow dizzy. And oh! her innocence and her ingenuous spirit do not feel what agonies these intimacies put me through. Indeed, if she places her hand on mine when we are talking and, excited by the conversation, moves closer, so that her divine breath brushes my lips – I feel as if l shall sink into the ground, as if l had been struck by lightning."

No, no, Sullivan had no appreciation for such romantic hyperbole, which struck him as juvenile and sappy, the stuff of afternoon soap operas. His literary tastes went in a more classical direction, as evidenced by the thesis on Alexander Pope he was working on when he realized he soon would be drafted – and therefore joined the army, like so many of his colleagues, in order to choose an office job over carrying a weapon in the field. Like most recruits with college degrees, Sullivan was put into the Army Security Agency and scored so well on the language aptitude test that he was sent to the Monterey Language School to become a Russian linguist, an intellectual foot soldier on the front lines of the Cold War.

Sullivan disliked sentiment and sloppy thinking and sometimes performed a routine that demonstrated as much. With a few drinks in him, he was known to recite a portion of a poem by William Blake to much delight and hoopla from his inebriated colleagues: "Tiger, tiger, burning bright," Sullivan would begin, his blonde hair short but long enough to comb, which really meant long enough to look uncombed because Sullivan always had the shaggy look of an absent-minded professor, and as he began the poem, his hand would sweep the hair from his forehead in a theatrical gesture, "in the forests of the night, what immortal hand or eye, could frame thy fearful symmetry?" Here Sullivan would look positively baffled by the question, as if it had cosmic significance. "What the hammer?" he asked next.

"What the chain? In what furnace was thy brain? What the anvil?" – and at this precise moment Sullivan would scrunch his ruddy face into an expression of speechless horror and bewilderment, as if the questions were too great for the contemplation of mere mortals, hanging in the air like painful reminders of human ignorance and insignificance – and after holding the moment for all it was worth, and perhaps making yet another theatrical sweep of his hand to brush hair from his forehead, Sullivan would shout with an exuberance that never failed to set the first-time listener aback, "What the fuck!? WHAT THE FUCK!?"

This was not a forlorn Young Werther but a cynical Jonathan Swift. Sullivan, walking beside Heidi through the dark neighborhood, did not feel like he had been struck by lightning. He felt frustrated, unable to understand why Heidi wouldn't go to Spain with him.

They had talked over the matter for an hour in the room at Gasthaus Konrad. Sullivan kept rephrasing the same argument, as if some language barrier blocked her understanding and if he kept using different words, eventually the right combination would enlighten her.

"I don't see why this should be complicated," he began in one of these permutations. "I love you. You know that. You've said you love me. I believe you. We belong together. We can't belong together as long as our countries are enemies. I can't ask you to come to the U.S., to renounce being German. And vice-versa. I can't defect. You can't defect. The only way to be together is to escape the world. To create our own world, together, in a country divorced from all the conflicts and tensions we've been caught up in. We can start a new life in Spain. We can start a new life together."

Heidi smiled at him and said nothing but he saw the sadness in her smile. He understood that her answer was not yet yes and might never become so. She could not easily change her life in so profound a fashion.

Walking through the neighborhood, holding hands,

Sullivan said, “At least you have three more months to think it over. Listen to me. You’d think I like being extended. If it gives you time to change your mind, maybe it’s a blessing in disguise.”

“Please. Let’s talk about something more pleasant.”

They rented a room for the night from a German whom Heidi called Isaac. The room was small but in the back of the house with its own entrance. They could go in and out without disturbing anyone.

Heidi, as if finding more comfort in sex than conversation, seduced Sullivan as soon as they were alone, covering his mouth with hers whenever he tried to talk, whenever he tried to broach the subject of their future from another angle. Only after making love, as Heidi smoked in bed and Sullivan sat in a chair across the room, restless and somehow unsatisfied by sex tonight, did they talk again.

Sullivan said, “I may go to Spain right now.”

“What do you mean?”

“I’ve been counting the days to getting out for eighteen months. I’m not sure I can stand three more. Even with the possibility that you’ll change your mind. So I go to Spain right now. I’ll get settled, and if you join me, you join me. The door will be open.”

Heidi blew smoke at the ceiling and said, “I don’t understand. If they find you, you go to prison for desertion.”

“If they don’t, I live happily ever after. Well, almost. If you’d come to Spain…”

Heidi shook her head.

“Such dreamers, you Americans. You think anything is possible.”

“I don’t think anything is possible. I don’t think world peace is possible. I don’t even think it’s possible for the United States and Soviet Union to coexist.”

“Then why you do this? You don’t want your country to win?”

“Yes, actually I do. But I don’t think my contribution

to the cause matters. I can't save the world. I can only save myself."

"And you do this by running away to Spain. I don't understand."

Across the room, the end of her cigarette getting brighter and dimmer as she smoked, Heidi looked older to Sullivan than she was. She looked tired and resigned to her life. For the first time Sullivan felt in his gut that his case was hopeless, she would never join him in Spain. In her world, freedom was an abstraction, not the simple act of doing something because you wanted to do it.

"I think I'll leave in the morning," said Sullivan. "I could use your help."

"You need me to borrow a car?"

"It'd be safer for me to catch the train in Kaiserslatern. Can you get a car?"

"I can always get a car. Why should I do this? Maybe I want you to stay."

"Why would you want me to stay?"

"I like this. I like you. I don't want you to go when I can be with you for three months more."

"I didn't know you cared."

There was clear sarcasm in his voice that Sullivan regretted as soon as he heard it.

"I'm sorry, that came out wrong. I do believe you love me."

But did she really? There was a silence.

"Yesterday, I thought you were going to join me. I really did. Now I see I was wrong."

"I'm sorry. I try to believe this is possible. Everything is happening too fast. Please stay. I need time to think."

"I don't think I could stay without cracking up."

"Of course you can."

"Now you're the one believing anything is possible. I haven't seen you like this since you tried to get me to defect."

Had it been only two months ago?Sullivan had just

learned from Bass that Heidi was seeing other linguists, Buddy-pooh and Luke among them, going to the same festplatz park for a picnic, the same thing he'd done with her. She'd made sure to get a photograph of each "date." For the first time, Sullivan accepted the reasonableness of Bass' early conclusion that she was a spy. He left post in an outrage to find her but by the time he'd walked down the hill, he'd cooled off enough to accept the fact that a nice-looking young woman who spoke fluent English, read Faulkner, and did not hustle you by grabbing your crotch, would get hit on by every linguist on the hill. And if she was a spy to boot, well, this was something to talk to her about.

He found her sitting alone at a table at the gasthaus. The room was quiet, only a few farmers having lunch or sipping wine to pass the time.

Sullivan took the chair across the table from her.

"Learn any secrets today?" he asked.

"Yes. I learned you are angry about something."

Sullivan leaned forward and lowered his voice.

"The rumor is, you are an East German spy trying to photograph as many linguists as you can without fucking them first."

Heidi shot him a look he'd not seen before, her narrow eyes flashing with something close to hatred, but only in quick passing before she bit her lip and then smiled.

"We will talk in private. Come to my room."

As he followed Heidi to the stairs, Sullivan exchanged glances with Konrad at the front counter. The proprietor winked at him.

Sullivan was surprised how small the room was, barely large enough for a single bed, a round table and chair at the window, and a small chest of drawers next to a small walk-in closet. He noticed a chamber pot peeking out from under the bed.

"Sit down," said Heidi.

Sullivan took one of the two chairs at the table. Heidi remained standing, not quite hovering over him.

"You are a spy," she said. "Maybe it takes one to know one."

"What makes you think I'm a spy?"

Heidi laughed.

"This is common knowledge. You are all Russian linguists up there on the hill. You intercept talk by the Russian army in East Germany and you translate it for what you can find out."

Sullivan was surprised by how much she knew of Processing Company's charge. The official line was that they did clerical work up there, and a linguist could get court-martialed for saying otherwise.

Sullivan said, "And who told you this?"

"Everybody knows it. Konrad knows. All the prostitutes know it. The farmers know it. Are you denying it?"

"If I were spying on the Russians in East Germany, wouldn't it make more sense if I was in Berlin?"

"You have spy planes. You fly along the border, crossing into Russian zone if you have to, against international law, and you intercept and record everything you can. They deliver the tapes to you on the hill."

Incredible. She knew their routine down to the detail.

Sullivan suddenly felt uncomfortable, as if other East German spies were waiting in the hallway to burst in and take him hostage.

"You know this because you are a spy yourself," Sullivan finally said.

"I told you, it takes one to know one. This is the expression?"

"Perfect. So where does that leave us?"

Heidi thought a moment. Finally she sat down. She reached across the table and enclosed his hand in both of hers.

"Let's say you are right. I am soldier, just like you. I am here to take photographs. Just like in East Berlin, one of you is pretending to be American businessman, taking

certain people to lunch in order to snap a photograph for memory. Such a game we all play."

There was a long silence. Heidi still held his hand.

"I like you," she finally said.

There was the sparkle of tears in her eyes. Either she was an extraordinary actress, or Heidi was feeling something of the attraction Sullivan was feeling himself. He knew it was absurd to be attracted to a spy working for the enemy. He knew she might be manipulating the moment. Did she wonder about him in the same way?

"I like you, too," Sullivan said.

Heidi managed to smile.

"In a movie, we would run off to Spain together and live happily ever after."

"And in real life?"

"If I am a spy, then I try to sell you on the idea of defecting to East Germany. You would be treated much better than the army treats you. You would be treated like an officer."

"I don't want to be an officer."

"I see. Then I try something else. I say, If you came to East Germany, we could be together."

"Perfect. If I want to fuck you bad enough, I'll switch sides."

"You don't have to switch sides to fuck me."

For the next hour, there was little talk. As attractive as she was, Sullivan had not thought that taking her to bed presented a real possibility. He was awkward around women, even finding it difficult to tell a prostitute he wanted time with her. Now Heidi was seducing him, and he felt no power to resist, even as he assumed he was being used for a greater purpose. But he knew he would never defect, and he knew he would never tell her anything about his work on the hill. Sex, even great sex, would not change this, though it would change other things.

"Are you coming back to bed?" Heidi asked, stabbing

out her cigarette.

"You're insatiable."

"What does this mean, in—"

"Insatiable. It means you're a nymphomaniac."

"A maniac?"

"You can't get enough sex."

Heidi laughed.

"This is good, yes?" she said. "Better than not liking to fuck."

"Yes, definitely."

At first Sullivan was shocked by her casual, easy use of the f-word, which if coming from the lips of an American girl suggested something other than the girl-next-door, which is what her appearance suggested to him. Then he realized that English was a second language to her, and she used fuck with no more native understanding than he used a German phrase like Gehen Sie zum Teufel, which he was told meant "go to hell."

"We fit good. This is how to say?"

"Yes," said Sullivan. "We fit good."

But he didn't move to the bed.

After a moment Heidi said, "You look very sad. I'm sorry I can't run away with you. I need time to think."

"Maybe it's a silly idea."

"Sometimes is nice to dream."

"Yes."

"Maybe in another life."

"I don't believe in other lives," said Sullivan.

"I don't know, yes or no."

"Buddy-pooh always says he wants to be reincarnated as a cunt hair."

"This is awful!"

Then she laughed.

"Sometimes the American sense of humor surprises me," Heidi said.

Sullivan stood up. He was in his shorts and T-shirt, his civvies piled on the floor beside the bed.

"You come to bed, yes?"

"Yes."

"We will have fuck like sleeping pill."

"A sedative," said Sullivan.

"Sedative," said Heidi, testing the word.

Sullivan walked across the room. Heidi pulled back the sheet for him. Damn, she was beautiful. He was going to miss her, no doubt about it. Maybe she was right, their destiny was to be together as often as possible in what time remained to them. He just wasn't sure he could last three more months in Processing Company.

"Now we have sedative," said Heidi.

Sullivan moved into her arms.

4/

Bass sat at the window of his room, watching the sun rise over the train station in the distance. To the south, a rare farmer who still worked his land was kicking up a cloud of dust with a tractor. Farmers started the day even earlier than soldiers. In the kaserne on the hill, they soon would be holding reveille, or more accurately Processing Company's loose interpretation of the Army's morning ritual. With the linguists working on shifts around the clock, and a flexible policy that permitted them to trade shifts, no one really was sure who was required to appear at reveille and who not. Consequently the morning muster was done on a kind of honor system, and Sullivan's absence, even if noticed, would not be reported. The Company Commander, Capt. Pierce, who had only a year to go to reach thirty and retirement, gave the linguists a lot of freedom, much to the disapproval of Sgt. Malinowski and others of the old school Army. Pierce reasoned that his men had top secret codeword clearances and were on the front lines of the Cold War. As long as they did their work, which included

frequent reports that went to the Pentagon, the C.O. ran his outfit more like a college campus than a military installation.

Bass figured Sullivan and Heidi had rented a room in town. There were usually plenty to be had, though the Animals in town might change this. But Bass had heard that Animals preferred taking a room over a bar for quick access rather than venturing out into the community for a bed. Wham, bam, thank you, ma'am, and they could be downstairs drinking with their buddies again.

If Sullivan and Heidi had stayed overnight, renting a room from a farmer, Bass thought there was a good chance they'd go to The Family Club for breakfast, with or without red beers. Beer and tomato juice was an American favorite, not a German, but most of the bars had learned to keep tomato juice in stock to satisfy the strange preferences of their foreign neighbors. Bass knew this was Sullivan's morning drink, of course, and The Family Club, again catering to American tastes, also served up an acceptable breakfast of bacon and scrambled eggs.

Bass dressed and went downstairs. Karl was working the front counter. He was wearing a dark cap with the red initial D.P. on it. Buddy-pooh had told him the initials stood for a Nazis club that was popular with the young German men in town.

"You having bier for breakfast?" Karl asked, grinning, as Bass passed the counter.

"Too early for me," said Bass.

"When too early for American to drink beer? First one on the house."

"No thanks."

Walking from the gasthaus to The Family Club, Bass didn't pass a soul. Most of the Animals would have returned to base or taken a room with a girl over a bar. Most would sleep past noon. This suited Bass fine, meaning his search for Sullivan would be more relaxed than if Animals were on the prowl.

To his surprise, several of the girls were on the porch at

the club, smoking and looking a fright. Bass wondered if they'd ever managed to get to bed.

"Look vat de cat dragz in," said Amazon.

A short plump bleached blonde who called herself Irma said, "Half price for blow job before eight."

Bass laughed, partly at himself for being shocked by the remark. He would never get used to the sexual frankness of the older and jaded bar girls. The younger ones, new at the hustling game and still shocked to find themselves trapped in it, looked vulnerable and tragic to him. In a few months, they would become as jaded as the older women.

"I'm ready for scrambled eggs," he said.

When he passed Amazon, she grabbed his crotch and said, "How come you never come upstairs vit me? Ve are vriends who don't vuck."

"It's an old American custom," said Bass.

Amazon followed him inside. She took his order and yelled it at the bartender. Then she joined him at a table. No other customers were present.

"I was thinking Sullivan might drop in for breakfast," said Bass.

"You not vind him last night?"

"I tried the soccer field."

"Dey rent a room."

"Probably."

Amazon stabbed out a cigarette and lit another. Bass noticed she was smoking Camels. When they were gone, and the Animals back in the field playing war, she would go back to her German brand.

"Vy you so vorried about your vriend?"

"It's a long story."

"You going zomevere?"

"It's hard to explain. So no fights last night? Place looks like it survived pretty intact."

"The Animals come here looking for Monterey Marys to vight. You stay on de hill and disappoint dem."

"Let me ask you something," said Bass. "When did you

find out we were Russian linguists on the hill?"

"Vat you mean?"

"We don't tell anybody what we do. If asked, we say we do clerical work."

Amazon laughed.

"The virst day I am here, dey tell me you are spies on de hill. Dis is many years ago. Everybody know dis."

Amazon stood up.

"You vant red beer?"

"Why not?"

She left him alone after delivering a bottle of German beer, a can of American tomato juice, and a glass. Bass mixed his drink and waited for breakfast. When it came, he ate alone, glad to be spared from making small talk.

After breakfast he ordered a bottle of beer without the juice. Before he finished it, Sullivan walked into the club without Heidi.

Seeing Bass, Sullivan grinned and shook his head. He bought a German beer and tomato juice at the bar and joined Bass at the table.

"I hope you haven't been looking for me all night."

"More or less," said Bass. "Where's Heidi?"

"Sleeping in. I don't think she'll be decent till noon."

"What's the verdict?"

"I'm not sure what you mean."

"Running off to Spain together or what?"

"You have a mean streak in you, Bear."

"I'm not trying to be mean. I'm trying to find out how much trouble you're in."

"I know. Shit. I don't know what I'm doing."

"Three months isn't that long, Jim."

"You tell me that when you're a short-timer."

"If she's going to run off with you now, she'd run off later, wouldn't she?"

"She wants me to stay so she has more time to think it over."

"I want you to stay because I think you'd make a lousy

prisoner. Three months, man. Come on. Get your head on straight."

Sullivan shook his head and stared wistfully away.

He said, "What the hammer? What the anvil? What the fuck?"

He shook his head again. Bass was silent.

Sullivan said, "How did you manage to escape the Animals last night?"

"How did you?"

"I was in and out in no time. Konrad told me Heidi would be here."

"I was in and out myself, looking for you."

"The Animals aren't as dangerous as everyone makes them out to be."

"I wouldn't go that far."

"So you're ruining your leave to worry about me."

"That's about it," said Bass.

"Asshole."

"Takes one to know one."

Sullivan grinned.

"What's so funny?" Bass asked.

"I was just thinking about your first trip to watch the whore parade. You've come a long way since then."

"Look at yourself, Jim. Sometimes I think Konrad pegged you right as Young Werther."

"Fuck you."

"Well, maybe not that extreme. But falling for a spy. Come on."

"Shit happens."

Amazon came over.

"You guys need revills?"

"Not for me," said Sullivan.

Bass shook his head.

Amazon shrugged and moved away.

Bass said, "I was thinking of taking a train out of here with the ladies tomorrow."

"They're ladies now. That, Bear, would be as surreal as

watching them come into the train station. You should do it."

"I still have lots of time to enjoy Denmark."

"In other words, you're finally giving up on me?"

"You're going to do what you're going to do."

"I could've told you that and saved you the trouble."

"You'd've done the same thing for me. Ever think of that?"

Sullivan considered this.

"I suppose you're right," he said.

"Friends look out for one another."

"They look so young," said Sullivan. Suddenly he laughed.

"What?"

"What you said at your first whore parade. They look so young. The expression on your face. We're all so damn innocent when we get over here. They don't tell us about this shit in school."

His first whore parade. Bass remembered it like it was yesterday. He'd only been in Baumholder for two weeks when the linguists learned from the girls at The Family Club that the Animals would be in town the following weekend, which meant the influx of thousands of prostitutes to serve them would begin in mid-week. Taking a newk to the train station to witness their arrival was a kind of initiation ceremony for a new linguist, and Sullivan, who had known Bass at the language school and on whose trick Bass had been assigned at Operations, took the newk under his wing and together, with a dozen other linguists along for the fun, they gathered at the bahnhoff to watch the first trains arrive.

Bass had no idea what to expect. The train station was a square stone building with a tower, no larger than the several churches in town. Inside were benches for travelers waiting for the train and tables for those who wanted to eat or drink as they waited. The linguists pushed several tables together and took chairs around them.

Bass couldn't stop grinning, partly from anticipation and partly from the feeling that he was somehow being suckered, like the country boy taken on his first snipe hunt. Bass knew from overhearing his colleagues that several trains a day would be pulling into the station, each filled with hundreds of women, but Bass had no way of realizing the enormity of this migration and its impact on him. So he just kept grinning, waiting, and listening for the punch line of whatever joke was being pulled on him.

The arrival of the first train changed everything. Bass did not have to watch the parade of girls long to realize this was no snipe hunt, here was an event even more surreal and dreamlike than the descriptions of his colleagues suggested. Several hundred girls spilled off the first train, marching in disorder into the train station, women varying in age from teens to forties, women of all size and description, fat and skinny and in between, pretty and plain, hardened and innocent-looking. What struck Bass first was that so many of them were younger than he was.

"They look so young," he said to Sullivan at the table beside him.

"The youngest are escapees from East Germany," Sullivan explained. "They think they're taking a job as a server in a gasthaus or a waitress in a restaurant, but it's the syndicate bringing them into their fold. Once they're captured, it's hard to get away. They arrive broke, often without family or friends. They risk everything for freedom and end up here. It's a tragedy really."

Only Sullivan's tone didn't suggest tragedy. His voice had the hardened neutrality of a doctor working the midnight shift in an emergency room, who has seen every bodily disaster many times over. Neutrality, lack of concern, was the best defense mechanism.

"Jesus, they're young," Bass said again. "The one in the bluejeans can't be over fourteen or fifteen."

"I think there's a law they have to be sixteen," said Sullivan.

"Young enough."

Some of the girls flirted as they passed by but most looked tired and travel-weary. How far had they traveled to get to Baumholder just ahead of the Animals' weekend pass? Some from as far away as Berlin, the Netherlands, even London, according to Sullivan.

No sooner had the several hundred women passed through the station than the train pulled away to make room for another behind it, and the parade of prostitutes began all over again. As the second group marched through the station, Bass heard someone shouting and turned to find a small group of young German men holding up placards in protest, though he didn't know enough German to read them. But their manner was clear: their shouts at the women clearly meant disapproval.

Sullivan leaned close to Bass.

"See the guy waving his sign? That's Karl, son of the proprietor of the gasthaus at the bottom of the hill."

"Are they a religious group or what?"

"Nazis."

"What?"

Bass stared at Sullivan in disbelief.

"Well, it's illegal, so they have to be underground and pretend they're something else. That D.P. on their caps stands for Patriots of the Homeland. Something like that. I forget the German exactly. Buddy would know. The thing is, this is so hypocritical because Konrad has a stake in the Family Club, yet his son is one of them. The Germans bitch about American immorality and then turn around and put the women in their clubs at starvation wages, which means they're forced to put out on the side just to survive."

"This is hard to handle," said Bass. He stood up.

"Where you going?"

"To the can."

In the men's room he splashed cold water on his face. On the counter was a stack of neatly folded cloth hand towels, and he took one to dry himself.

So this was the infamous whore parade he'd heard so much about. The descriptions of what awaited him were too extreme to be believed – and yet they fell short of capturing the grotesque unreality of what he was witnessing. Bass had expected to be titillated but instead had escaped to the men's room feeling light-headed and almost sick in his stomach. It wasn't that some of the women weren't attractive, many were – but there were too many of them, too extreme and blatant a display of commercial sex parading in front of him, he felt overwhelmed from the sensual overload of it all. This was more like a scene from a Felinni movie than an afternoon in the once-lazy farm village of Baumholder.

When he left the men's room, he found a young woman standing outside the adjacent ladies' room. She was crying. Bass stopped, wanting to comfort her, at least to ask if he might help, but he knew almost no German.

All the same, he asked, "Are you all right?"

She looked up, and Bass saw she was one of the younger ones, sixteen he supposed, a pretty girl, despite the swollen red eyes and grimace through which she sputtered choking words he couldn't understand. Then suddenly she was embracing him and weeping on his shoulder.

Bass stiffened in something close to terror. He could feel the soft sensual bulge of her breasts pushing against his chest. He could feel her warm breath on his neck. He was getting aroused and hating himself for it.

"Marta! Here you are!"

The deep voice belonged to a German wearing a business suit. Hearing it, the girl tightened her grip on Bass, who now tried to slip away.

"I think she is homesick," said the German. His English was almost without accent. "Marta, come on now."

The German pried her grip free of Bass, who quickly stepped back.

"Is she going to be all right?" he asked.

The German smiled.

"Of course, of course."

He had his arm around her and already was leading the girl away. He spoke to her in German now, which Bass could not understand.

When they were out of sight, Bass took a deep breath. He realized he was shaking. He didn't return to the table to watch the rest of the parade. Bass walked through town and up the hill to the kaserne. By the time Sullivan and the others found him in the E. M. Club over an hour later, Bass was pretty wasted.

"They don't tell you many things in school," Bass said.

Amazon came by again.

"You sure you don't vant anyting?" she asked Sullivan.

"I'll be back later."

Amazon shrugged and went back to the bar. Sullivan stood up.

"I want to get back before Heidi gets up," he said. "You going to be around in an hour?"

"I could be. What's up?"

"We'll be by for breakfast."

"Then I'll be here."

"Good. I thought you might be hanging out. When's your train leave?"

"I was thinking of catching the late morning if I leave today. I may wait till tomorrow to ride with the ladies."

"You mentioned that. Chance of a lifetime. So I'll catch you later."

"Later."

As soon as Sullivan was gone, Amazon was back. She sat down at the table.

"Vat going on?"

"You know as much as I do," said Bass. "Probably more."

"Dey run avay togeder?"

"I don't know."

"You don't tink she's a spy?"

"Of course she's a spy. That's not the point."

"Two spies have zometing in common," Amazon said. She punched Bass playfully on the arm. "Zorry, I zay zometing vorbidden."

"I think I'll take a walk and come back later."

"You mad at me?"

"Never."

"You vant beer on de house?"

"You bribing me to stay?"

"Look around. Vat else to do?"

"No Animals upstairs?"

"Of course. But dey not vinish vucking till avternoon."

"I thought you'd appreciate the peace and quiet."

"Peace and quiet is boring. Maybe you vant to go upstairs."

Bass grinned.

"You don't give up," he said.

"You nice boy. Vy no like me?"

"I love you. You know that."

Amazon studied him a moment.

"You queer?"

Bass laughed.

"It's taken you a long time to ask that. No, I'm your average red-blooded American guy. I just don't jump in the sack very easily."

"You virgin?"

"I'm out of here."

He was halfway to the door when Amazon said after him, "You come back, yes?"

"Yes. If Sullivan gets here first, tell him to wait."

Time to kill. He considered going back to the kaserne to make sure Sullivan wasn't in trouble. Bass was sure he'd have been covered at reveille. All the same, Malinowski would want to know what was going on before he went too far out on a limb for him. The problem was, Bass wasn't sure what was going on himself, what exactly he could tell the sergeant to help Sullivan's case. Jim talked as if he

might still be going AWOL to Spain, even if he had to go alone. Maybe he'd get a better sense of the situation when he saw them together. Heidi, it seemed, wanted Sullivan to stay. She might make the difference.

The Baumholder streets were still deserted. The stretch of neon signs over the bars, last night bright and inviting, were dark and dismal. Nothing was quite as bleak as the look of a bar on the morning after.

Bass walked west on the main drag, past the Alabama Bar and the Silver Slipper, past the One-Two-Three Club and the Texas Playhouse. 57 bars in three blocks, counting the clubs on the side streets. Two years from now, when he was back in college in the states, would anyone believe him when he described Baumholder? Even if they believed him about the bars, would anyone understand the eerie experience of the whore parade? Maybe Baumholder was like a bad marriage, something you put behind you forever when you left. Or maybe it was an experience that would change Bass forever.

5/

Buckley was typing a memo for Sgt. Malinowski when Buddy-pooh rushed into Silver Section, waving a sheet of paper. Silver Section was the hub of activity in Operations, off of which more specialized sections processed the information obtained in the translation of Soviet military communications in East Germany. Orange Section analyzed personnel and chains of command; Blue Section categorized equipment and weaponry; Black Section analyzed troop movements and maneuvers. Malinowski managed the Silver Section, reporting to Lt. Brown, and Buckley was the section clerk.

"I need to see the sergeant," Buddy told Buckley, looking around the room. The four linguists on trick were at

their desks, bent over translations they gleaned for relevant information.

"He went to the canteen for coffee," said Buckley. "Anything I can help you with?"

"Not unless you know how to stop WW III. I got hot shit here."

Before Buckley could say more, Buddy was racing away. He went back to typing the memo, too new to the rhythm of work in Operations to be seriously concerned. He'd already observed that Buddy-pooh, training to be an opera singer in civilian life, liked to dramatize and exaggerate anything that happened.

In fifteen minutes Malinowski stormed into the area, red in the face, Buddy on his tail. The sergeant started barking orders.

"I want an immediate track on every unit! Call relevant substations for signs of troop movement!"

"What's the deal, sarge?" asked Jackson, a short-timer with an adversity to moving in a hurry.

"Jackson, just do as I say."

"Aye, aye, captain."

Jackson liked to say this to the sergeant, knowing it would piss him off first in reference to the Navy and second in reference to an officer. But Malinowski was so riled up he let it ride.

"I'm going to Black Section. I want full reports when I get back."

"When's that?" Jackson asked.

"ASAP."

Malinowski hurried off. Lingering behind, Buddy-pooh said, "I think the Russians are invading Berlin."

The linguists on trick stared at him and waited for more.

"This morning we intercepted traffic consistent with everybody heading for the big city. I mean, like the whole goddamn Russian army moving out at once."

Jackson said, "Maybe they're on maneuvers."

"They never do it all at once, every unit, everybody in sync. Everybody's heading for the big city, and if it ain't to invade Berlin, then tell me something else that makes sense."

Nobody could, and Buddy moved off to catch up with Malinowski. He figured the closer he kept to the sergeant, the quicker he'd find out what the hell was going on.

The linguists left behind exchanged glances. Buckley noticed an unusual concern in their expressions, as if, in fact, the Big War was about to begin, the one everyone knew was possible but no one wanted to believe would ever happen. Buckley wanted to ask questions, to be put to more ease than he felt in the pit of his gut now, but already the linguists were picking up phones or going through documents, trying to get ready for the sergeant's return. Buckley returned to typing the memo but had a hard time concentrating. He still hadn't finished it when Malinowski returned again. This time Buddy-pooh wasn't with him.

"Okay, troops, what do you have for me?"

Specialist McGuire said, "Visual affirmation from Station-4 in Lubeck. A convoy of Russian tanks and artillery is passing as we speak, heading south."

"Berlin is south, right?" asked Malinowski.

"South and east."

Jackson said, "Sir," unable to resist a dig even in this moment of crisis, "I talked to Heilbronn. They've picked up commo directing the 3rd Shock Army to Berlin."

"In so many words?"

"In action and words, sir."

"I'm not an officer, Jackson."

"Yes, sir. Sergeant."

Buckley couldn't believe how relaxed Jackson appeared, grinning at the sergeant. It sounded to the newk like all hell was breaking loose.

Lt. Brown sauntered into the room.

"Something I should know about, sergeant?"

"Yes, sir. We've intercepted and confirmed reports that

a good many Russian units – maybe even all Russian units – are heading for Berlin."

The lieutenant's lips puckered while he thought.

"To Berlin, sir," Malinowski repeated.

"Do you know why?"

"I think we can guess why, sir."

"You're telling me the Reds are invading Berlin?"

"Yes, sir, I am."

"Has Central Command put us on alert?"

"Not yet. We just got our reports out to them. I suspect they're still evaluating the situation."

"If this is true, goddamn right we'll be on alert."

"I expect so, sir."

"You heard these reports yourself?

"I don't speak Russian, sir."

"Right, right. But the reports were intercepted and translated."

"Yes, sir. And confirmed by four other stations in the field. There's no question about this, sir."

"We'll be on alert then."

"Yes, sir."

"Not like the monthly test. The real goddamn thing."

Malinowski nodded.

"Well, sergeant, if you learn anything else, you know where to find me."

"Yes, sir."

After the lieutenant was gone, Malinowski turned to his men.

"Better go get yourself some coffee while you have a chance. Maybe grab a sandwich to go while you're at it. It's going to be a long night once the alert is called."

Everybody but Buckley headed out. Buckley wasn't sure what he was supposed to do, so he stayed right where he was, hoping the sergeant would give him a direct order.

It took a moment for Malinowski to realize his clerk had stayed behind.

"Buckley, you don't want coffee?"

"I would, yes. Thank you, sergeant."

"Just a minute."

Buckley had stood up from the desk and now he waited for more.

"You know what happened to Sullivan last night?"

"I heard he went to town."

"He's still hot for that girl?"

"I think so."

"Dumb shit. He's just asking for trouble. He's a damn good linguist, too. One of the best in the building."

Buckley was silent, watching the sergeant try to make up his mind about something.

"I'm giving you a pass, Buckley. I want you to go to town and see if you can turn up Sullivan. You only have about an hour. Ask in the Family Club. If he stayed in town, he would've gone there. Tell him we're going on alert and his ass belongs up here."

Malinowski went to the desk and took out a form. He started scribbling on it. When he was done, he handed it to Buckley.

"This will get you through the gate and satisfy any MPs you run into. Get moving. I want you back here before things get crazy."

"What about Bass, sergeant?"

"He's probably in Denmark by now. Bass is a good soldier. Soon as he gets word the shit's hit the fan, he'll high-tail it back. Get moving, son."

Malinowski headed off again. The newk stared at the pass. It was an emergency half-day pass. Buckley folded it and put it in his pocket. He grabbed his uniform jacket from the coat rack and slipped it on. He put on his overseas cap. He took a final look around the empty section and stepped out into the hallway as smartly as a soldier on parade.

Bass, of course, had no idea of the growing panic that was happening on the hill. So when Buckley entered The Family Club, Bass was surprised on several counts: first,

that he was not at work, which suggested to Bass that the newk had traded tricks with someone; second, that he would come down the hill with the Animals in town, though the journey was reasonably safe at an hour when most Animals would still be sleeping it off; and finally that Buckley looked like someone had died. Clearly the newk was the bearer of bad news (bad news about Sullivan's status, would be Bass' guess) and Bass waited to hear it as Buckley hurried to the table as soon as he spotted a familiar face.

"The sarge sent me after Sullivan," Buckley said, sitting across from Bass.

Amazon rushed over, looking more worried than Buckley.

"Don't you know de Animals sleep upstairs?" she said, shaking a finger at Buckley. "You cauze trouble dey zee you. You leave now."

Bass stood up.

"She's probably right," he told the newk. To Amazon he said, "If Sullivan shows before I get back, tell him to wait for me."

Bass led the way outside. The day was turning warm, and the town stretched sleepily ahead without an Animal to be found.

Buckley wasted no time in getting to the point.

"The Russians are invading Berlin," he told Bass.

Bass just stared at him.

"It's crazy on the hill," the newk went on. "Everybody says the shit's hit the fan. Everybody says there'll be an alert. The sarge says it's now or never if Sullivan's coming back without getting into trouble."

Bass took a deep breath.

"Slow down, slow down. What makes you say the Russians are invading Berlin?"

"Buddy-pooh came in with a report. Everybody went crazy after that."

Buckley was more than upset now: he looked like he

was ready to break into tears.

Bass took another deep breath.

"Here's what I want you to do," he told the newk. "Go back to base and tell the sergeant I haven't left on leave yet. I saw Sullivan, and I'll be seeing him again. If the shit's really hit the fan, I think he'll come to his senses."

"Oh, it's hit the fan all right."

"Did you hear any specific details in the report?"

"The entire Russian army is headed for Berlin. Like, right now."

Jesus, thought Bass, that would do it. With its military charge of keeping tabs on Russian military activity in East Germany, Processing Company would know before anyone if the Rooskies were up to no good. Intercepted communications would give them away if they were invading Berlin.

Buckley stared at Bass, still looking on the brink of tears.

Bass squeezed his arm.

"You do what I said," he told the newk.

Buckley nodded.

"Now."

"You'll be talking to Sullivan?"

"Absolutely. Everything's going to be fine. You tell the sergeant we should be back in an hour or two."

"Okay."

Bass stayed outside The Family Club, watching the newk start up the road to the kaserne. While Buckley was still in sight, Amazon joined him.

"You got zigarette?" she asked.

Bass lit her one, passed it over and lit his own. They blew smoke in unison.

"He said the Russians are invading Berlin," Bass said.

"You kidding, right?"

"That's what he said."

"How you say? Shit in the van."

"Shit in the van," said Bass.

"How come ve have no alert?"

"I expect they'll be calling one pretty damn quick."

A real alert, Bass thought, not the play-war game that periodically was part of their training. Every four to six weeks, an all-Europe alert would be called, scrambling all American military units to designated rendezvous locations. For Processing Company, this meant the linguists piled into trucks and drove down the hill, parking along Main Street in town while they waited for the all-clear signal, a wait that could last several hours. Since the alerts were usually called between three and five in the morning, the linguists who were not on trick were in bed and not happy to be charged into activity. Most slept in the back of their deuce-and-a-halfs until the all-clear signal was given.

Bass remembered an alert that turned into a disaster and resulted in a reprimand for the entire company, which added to the linguists' reputation of being clumsy, cowardly soldiers when compared to the real troops at Smith Barracks. Somehow, in the scramble to get out the fenced kaserne through the main gate, two trucks crashed head-on and their bumpers locked, blocking the gate for all the trucks waiting to exit behind them. Processing Company had no machinery for separating the trucks and human labor, such as it was, could not separate them, which meant the linguists could not drive down the hill to their designated area. A crane had to be fetched from Smith Barracks, which took several hours, and by the time the trucks were separated, freeing the gate to traffic, it was late morning. The alert wasn't called off until noon because every soldier in Europe was waiting for the Russian linguists to reach their designated area. An investigation quickly identified the problem, Processing Company was given an official reprimand, and the Commanding Officer relieved of his duty. Not one of the linguists felt remorse, however, especially since the new C.O. was Capt. Pierce, a short timer who quickly gave the linguists more personal freedom than they'd ever enjoyed. The infamous alert had been a

blessing in disguise.

Amazon said, "I hear notting of dis."

Bass blew smoke.

"Do you know who rented Sullivan and Heidi a room last night?"

"Could be anyone. Jakob rents rooms. Isaac, Adolph. Many varmers rent rooms now."

"What time do the Animals usually come back to life?"

"Late. Noon."

Bass looked at his watch.

"I should be long gone by then," he said.

"No Denmark."

"No Denmark. If this is really happening, I expect an alert this morning."

"You no tink real?"

"The newk may have got it wrong. Probably not. Wishful thinking."

"If Russians invade Berlin, vat Americans do?"

Bass shrugged.

"You stop dem, yes?"

"I guess we'll find out soon enough."

Sullivan and Heidi held hands, taking their time along a street to The Family Club. The sun had risen over the village with mid-morning warmth that promised another hot August day. One thing Sullivan didn't like about Germany was that the beer was never cold enough. Sometimes he'd order a glass of ice, the quickest way he knew to chill the beer, and he'd drink it quickly before dilution. He made a note to get a glass of ice from Amazon.

"Freulein!"

Turning a corner, Sullivan found their path blocked by Karl and two friends, young German men not much older than himself. Karl appeared to know Heidi, speaking to her in German. When she replied, Sullivan asked her, "What are they saying?"

"You no speak German?" asked Karl in English. "Then

I will practice my English." His English, in fact, was very good.

"Modervucker," said Hans, the tallest of the Germans. "I practice modervucker."

"Kiss my ass," said Karl's other friend, whose name was Rudy.

"Cockzucking modervucker," Hans said, raising the stakes.

Karl laughed.

"This is some English lesson, yes?"

"Very good," said Sullivan.

He took Heidi's arm and tried to move around the Germans but they moved to block his way again.

"Can we get by?" Sullivan said.

Karl said, "I think she come with us."

Sullivan looked at Heidi and saw instant fear in her face.

"We don't want any trouble," he said.

"She is trouble," said Karl.

Hans added, "She is virst class East German whore."

"A communist," said Karl.

Sullivan took out his wallet.

"Let me buy you guys a beer."

Karl laughed, the cue to the others to laugh as well.

"She come with us," Karl said again.

He reached out and took Heidi's arm. When she resisted, he tightened his grip and she let out a yelp of pain.

Sullivan stepped forward, red in face, shorter than all the others but no fear registered anywhere in his manner. He grabbed Karl's shoulder.

"Let her go now!"

Karl did – but quickly shoved Sullivan, who moved backwards but kept his balance.

"Get him!" Karl barked, grabbing Heidi again.

Hans and Rudy attacked Sullivan, knocking him to the ground and kicking the linguist as he tried to protect himself.

Heidi screamed, and Karl punched her in the face, swearing at her in German.

On the ground, Sullivan's face was bruised, and blood trickled out of his mouth.

Heidi started crying, pulling to get free from Karl's grip.

"Leave him," said Karl.

Hans took Heidi's other arm, and she staggered along between him and Karl as they moved off down the street. On the ground, Sullivan moaned and squirmed in pain.

In a moment the Germans were gone, and Sullivan lay still. The morning was as quiet as before.

Bass waited and waited, and still Sullivan didn't come. With the unknown situation in Berlin, which certainly would result in the calling of an all-European military alert, Bass' anxiety increased each moment until finally he could sit still no longer.

Amazon saw him heading for the door.

"Vere you go?" she asked, hurrying to him.

"I have to find Sullivan. Give me your best guess who rented them a room."

"Maybe vrom Isaac."

"How do I get there?"

Outside, Sullivan walked briskly, following Amazon's directions. If indeed Sullivan and Heidi had spent the night in a rented room at Isaac's, Bass would find out soon enough. It was close.

The silence around him was eerie. Who would know that at this moment every Russian military unit in East Germany was racing toward Berlin? And that in the command posts of the American Army, generals were debating their alternatives for a response? If this was the beginning of World War III, as well it might be, it happened in the warming still hush of a Baumholder morning where, behind many a closed door, Animals still nursed their terrible hangovers.

Rounding a corner, Bass was jarred by the sight of a staggering figure down the block. Could it be Sullivan? Bass ran forward.

As he arrived, Sullivan slumped to the ground. Bass hurried to him.

"Jesus, Jim. What happened?"

Sullivan grunted.

One eye was almost swollen shut, and dried blood ran from his mouth over his chin.

"Who did this to you?"

It was clear speech was difficult for his friend, so Bass tried to help him up.

"We're getting you to the Family Club," Bass said.

On his feet, with Bass' support, Sullivan managed to put one foot after the other. Where was Heidi? Bass wouldn't question Sullivan more until he had him upstairs on a bed at the Family Club. He was confident that Amazon would help this happen, in case all the rooms were still filled with recovering Animals.

But by the time they reached the front of the Family Club, all hell had broken loose. Animals were streaming out of the club like residents escaping a burning hotel. Bass assumed the alert had been called, and it didn't take long to prove this correct. A Military Police jeep cruised around the corner, the soldier riding shotgun speaking into an amplified device: "We are having an alert. All military personnel return to base immediately. We are having an alert…"

Bass stopped. Sullivan, whose head had been down during most of the slow journey to the club, managed to look up. He tried to speak.

"I'll explain once we get you settled," Bass said.

The jeep headed off down Main Street. The numbers of Animals racing from the Family Club reduced to a trickle, then none came out at all.

Amazon and some other ladies appeared on the porch. She saw Bass and gasped. Then she hurried to them.

"Vat happen?"

"Can we get him upstairs? He needs to lie down."

"Ov courze."

She tried to help, supporting Sullivan on the other side, but Bass shooed her away. She opened doors for them instead.

Upstairs, she led them into the first room off the hallway. A bed with messed up sheets took up most of the room. Bass led Sullivan there and helped him stretch out.

"Vat happen?" Amazon asked again.

"Jim, you want a glass of water?"

Sullivan did not respond.

"A beer?"

Sullivan managed to nod.

"I'll be right back."

Bass took Amazon's arm and led her out of the room. They headed downstairs.

"Vat happen?"

"Somebody beat the shit out of him. I'd like to know who."

"Heidi do dis?"

Bass ignored the question and said, "Bring us two beers. No, make it four bottles."

He turned and climbed the stairs alone.

When Bass entered the room, he found Sullivan leaning up against the headboard.

"Feeling better?" Bass asked.

"They took her away. Karl and his buddies."

"Heidi?"

"I think they plan to gangbang her or something. I couldn't help her. There were too many of them."

"Well, I know where to start looking."

"I'm coming with you."

Sullivan made a move as if to get out of bed but immediately grimaced and settled back against the headboard.

"You're taking it easy," said Bass.

Sullivan mumbled something Bass couldn't make out.

"Listen," Bass said, "the Russians may be invading Berlin. It's crazy on the hill. That's why we're on alert."

"What are you talking about?"

"The newk came down looking for us. He filled me in. Every unit in East Germany is converging on Berlin. Everybody's thinking the shit's finally hit the fan."

Sullivan started to say something and stopped. Bass gave him time to form his thoughts.

"We can win the war without me, Bear," Sullivan said. "I'm not going back. I'm going to Spain. After I find Heidi and, you know, do what has to be done."

"I'll talk to Konrad and see what he has to say about his son. You stay put. I'm going to tell Amazon to keep an eye on you."

Baumholder was as still as a ghost town. Walking from The Family Club to Gasthaus Konrad, Bass knew the silence was temporary. Soon enough, the linguists on the hill would rumble down in their trucks and jeeps to convene at their designated assembly point near the festplatz park, rattling down Main Street in such numbers as to shake the walls of the buildings. Baumholder would look like a war zone, and Bass worried that this time the suggestion might be real.

With the gasthaus ahead, Bass gathered his thoughts. Should he confront Konrad right off or try to sneak into the subject from another angle? Konrad, of course, might have no idea what his son was up to. And even if he did, he might deny it, and Bass would have no way of knowing if he were telling the truth or not. For the first time, Bass considered that he might be on a fool's errand.

6/

Konrad was in the back room, smoking a cigar and

enjoying the slowness of the morning when Karl came in. Konrad saw in an instant that something was wrong.

"What is it?" he asked. Karl mumbled something. "Speak up, boy? What is the problem?"

It took Karl some time to get it all out. What he was trying to say, that he and his buddies had confronted the lovelorn G.I. and his spy-whore girlfriend and ended up taking the girl with them, to take turns with her and all, but something had come up that had made everything much more complicated. Now everything was a big mess.

Konrad replied, "Stop beating around the bush. What is going on? Did you hurt her? My God, you didn't—"

"Nothing like that. We didn't even get our way with her."

"Then what happened?"

"She's not a spy and she's not a whore. Father, she's a reporter for Das Skandal."

Konrad's mouth dropped open.

"That's not possible," he said. "If she told you that, she's lying."

"She has a press card. It looks very legitimate."

"Where is she?"

"In Hans' car out back."

"I want to see her."

The car, an old Adler from before the war, was parked behind the gasthaus next to Konrad's recent Volkswagen. Hans leaned against a door, smoking. In back sat Heidi. She looked like she'd been crying.

"Let me see her press card," said Konrad.

Hans opened the door and took Heidi's purse off the front seat. He found the press card and gave it to Konrad.

From the back seat, Heidi said, "Konrad, you should teach your boy better manners."

Konrad studied the press card. He opened the back door and stooped down toward Heidi.

"Why are you in Baumholder?"

"I'm doing a story," she said.

"What kind of story?"

"That's confidential."

"Maybe this is a fake."

Heidi didn't respond.

"Maybe I should call your editor."

Again Heidi was silent. She glared at him, defiant and obviously getting her courage back from the earlier distress.

"Wait here," Konrad told the others. He went back inside.

There was a phone number on the press card. Konrad thought the prefix belonged to Munich. He dialed.

"Hello," a male voice said.

"Is this Das Skandal?"

A pause.

"Hello?" said Konrad.

"It is. How may I help you?"

"May I speak to Heidi Steinbacher," Konrad said, reading her full name from the press card.

"Just a moment."

After a long silence, another voice came on.

"This is Roth. How can I help you?"

"I'm trying to contact Heidi Steinbacher."

There was a silence. Then:

"What does this concern?"

"Then she does work there?"

"Who is this?" asked Roth.

Now it was Konrad's turn at silence.

Roth said, "If you know her, tell her to call the office as soon as possible. It's urgent."

Konrad remained silent.

"Hello?"

Konrad hung up.

Back outside, as Karl and Hans looked at him expectantly, Konrad said, "She is telling the truth."

Konrad opened the back door again.

"Come inside," he told Heidi. "You need to call your office."

Bass stepped into the gasthaus. Konrad was not in his usual place behind the front counter. His assistant, a woman whose name Bass had never gotten, was in his place, writing something in a ledge book.

"I'm looking for Konrad," Bass said in English.

The woman looked up from her work and frowned, as if not appreciating the interruption. She was older than Konrad and, like so many older German women Bass saw on the streets, overweight and tired-looking.

When she didn't speak, just staring at him, Bass repeated, "Is Konrad around?"

Without a word the woman turned and entered the back room.

Bass waited. The gasthaus was empty except for a man in coveralls, a farmer Bass assumed, at a back table, who was smoking a pipe and staring into space. With all the farmland leased to the Animals for their war games, the local farmers had little to do.

Bass waited. He should have ordered a beer. Maybe he should knock on the door to the back room.

Before he decided on the matter, the door opened and the woman entered. Behind her was Konrad.

"Let's get a table," the proprietor said in English. He came around the counter.

Bass followed him to a table at a window. They sat down.

Konrad leaned forward.

"Let me guess," he said. "Your friend sent you to find out about Heidi." When Bass looked surprised, he added, "Karl told me everything. Don't worry. She is fine."

"That's more than I can say for Sullivan."

"What do you mean?"

"They beat him up pretty bad."

"Karl didn't tell me this. Is he in hospital?"

"Not that bad. Bad enough."

"At least not in hospital."

"So where's Heidi?"

"First I tell you something. This must be a secret between us. Do I have your promise?"

Bass hesitated. He was never comfortable trusting a German. They were, after all, very recent enemies of America. In their heart of hearts, some were still enemies of America.

"I must have your promise," said Konrad.

"Sure."

Konrad looked around. In the near-empty gasthaus, Bass figured this was for dramatic effect. Germans loved melodrama.

"Heidi is reporter for Das Skandal," Konrad said.

"What is that?"

"Very popular magazine. Published in Munich. Prints the stories other magazines don't tell you."

"Like Confidential," said Bass. This was the American magazine full of hyperbole and gossip, which in a past issue had called Baumholder "the Sin City of Europe," which actually was close to the mark.

"I not know your American magazine," said Konrad. "But Das Skandal is very popular and important German magazine."

"Heidi is an East German spy," said Bass.

"This is what everyone assumes. But she is reporter."

Bass studied him. He seemed to believe it.

"So she's here on a story?" Bass asked.

"On you. On the American spies on the hill."

"Why are you telling me this?" Bass asked.

Konrad grinned.

"Is better she is not East German spy, no? They have better future."

Bass wondered how Sullivan would react to the news.

He said, "Can I speak to her?"

"She is not here."

"I thought she was."

"She tells me her story, and I believe her. She calls her

office, and then I let her go."

Bass stood up and headed for the door.

After him Konrad said, "I think this is good news for your friend."

"She iz upztair vit him," said Amazon as soon as Bass returned to The Family Club.

Bass raced up the stairs. He entered the room without knocking.

Heidi sat on the bed beside Sullivan. They both turned to him.

Sullivan said, "I need some time alone with her."

"There's something you need to know," said Bass.

"Bear, I'm serious."

"So am I. She's a reporter for Das Skandal. She's using you for material."

Sullivan was visibly confused by the news. Heidi turned to him.

"I explain this," she said.

To Bass Sullivan repeated, "Give me some time alone."

But Bass didn't move.

"Trust me," said Sullivan. "Do I look like I'm going anywhere?"

Bass said, "I'll be right outside."

Amazon came upstairs while Bass was still waiting in the hallway.

"Vat iz going on?"

Bass shrugged.

"You okay?"

"Konrad at the gasthaus says she's a reporter for Das Skandal."

Amazon looked dubious.

"You don't think so?"

"Heidi iz zpy or I am Marlene Dietrich."

"Why would he say so?"

"She tell him. This iz her cover, no? She can't zay she

really a zpy. Dis iz cover."

Bass nodded. He saw a certain logic in this.

"Vat you do now?"

"Wait to see what Sullivan wants to do."

"You vant bier?"

"No thanks."

"I be downstair if need me."

Another half hour passed before Heidi came out. She looked angry, passing Bass for the stairs without a word.

Bass entered the room. He approached the bed.

"I'm a fucking idiot," said Sullivan.

"What happened? Is she a reporter?"

"She's a spy. This was her cover. She's been called back to Berlin, Bass. Urgently. It's part of what's coming down. She wanted me to defect and go with her."

"But you're not."

Sullivan glared at him.

"Of course you're not," said Bass.

"What pisses me off is what she said about America. How I was a puppet of Jew bankers, I'd never be appreciated as a professor or anything else in America, in East Germany they treat teachers and writers and artists like the culture heroes they are, on and on, how no place on earth sucked like the States. Man, she was really beginning to piss me off."

Bass nodded.

"I think she's a Nazis at heart," said Sullivan.

"So what are you going to do now? Still go to Spain?"

"I don't know. Fuck me."

There was a long silence.

"There's an alert," said Bass. "I need to get back. I wish you'd come with me."

Sullivan said, "History is a nightmare from which I am trying to awake."

"Excuse me?"

"It's Joyce in Portrait. I don't think I ever understood it

until now. We're all victims of history."

"I'm not sure what you're getting at."

"The shit hits the fan, and we're changed forever."

"Shit happens."

"Right. Shit happens."

Bass said, "Let's climb the hill." When Sullivan didn't immediately respond, he said, "What the hammer? What the anvil? What the fuck?"

"What the fuck indeed."

"If this is the start of World War III, you really want to spend it in Spain? If you wanted that, you might as well have gone to East Germany with her. At least you'd be getting laid."

"I wonder. Maybe she would have dropped me like a hot potato as soon as I defected. One point for her side."

"A possibility."

"I was such an idiot."

"It's more complicated than that. You're right, we're victims of history. Under different circumstances, history being different, maybe you two were meant for each other after all."

"We'll never know."

A silence.

"I do have to get up the hill," said Bass.

"I'm coming with you."

"Good."

Sullivan was able to walk without help, if slowly. They went downstairs. Amazon met them at the bottom of the stairs.

"Look at him valk," she said.

Sullivan smiled.

"We're going back to base," said Bass.

"You tink ve haf var?"

"All I know is we're on alert. Which means back to base."

He led Sullivan toward the door.

Behind them, Amazon said, "You come back, yes?"

"We'll be back," said Bass.

Outside the street was deserted. Bass and Sullivan, walking slowly, turned to climb the hill to the kaserne. They were silent. Behind them the town, Baumholder, with its 57 bars, was silent.

Finally, half way up the hill, Sullivan spoke.

"She was called back to Berlin. She's catching the train. The one you should have been on."

"Shit happens."

"So you think this is war?"

"I have no idea. I hope not."

"If the Russians invade Berlin, we'll respond to defend it."

"Maybe they're not invading."

"Then why the alert? You said their whole goddamn army was heading to Berlin."

"That's what the newk said. That's what the intelligence says."

"So they must be invading Berlin."

"I don't know, Sullivan. I just work here."

Sullivan laughed.

"You'd be surprised how close I came to running off to Spain. If you hadn't been around, I think I would have. So if something happens to me, it's your goddamn fault, Bear."

"I accept the responsibility. Correction. I embrace it."

"Asshole."

"I just remembered something. There's one good thing about returning to base."

"What's that?"

"The chow hall's open," said Bass. "I'm starving."

"Now that you mention it."

"First we eat. Then we find Malinowski and report that we're back."

"You think I'll get company punishment?"

"Fuck no. You're too valuable. You're the best linguist in the building."

Sullivan laughed and said, "Malinowski's gonna shit.

He thinks we're all commies at heart."

"He confuses rebellion with disloyalty."

"Exactly. When Heidi started bad-mouthing America, man, I don't hit women, but I came close to swinging. I hate hearing shit like that. Especially from a fascist Nazis. I swear to God she is."

Bass put his arm around Sullivan.

"We walking too fast for you?"

"I'm good."

They continued to climb the hill to the kaserne, the hill to what suddenly felt like home. They had no idea what fate awaited them, no idea what history was in the making. In a few days, of course, they would learn that the Russians were coming to Berlin in order to build a wall, a barrier to keep their citizens from escaping to the west, but the threat looked more ominous than this as they climbed the hill, more directed at America, at them, and they climbed the rest of the way in silence, each with a knot of apprehension in his gut, the future unknown but their responsibility clear, to return to base, to do what had to be done, their occasional rebellion against the army unrelated to disloyalty, and by the time they walked through the gates of the kaserne, their appetites were gone, dissipated in a still greater apprehension that was electric in the air on base now, an alert that felt like the real thing, the Russians invading Berlin, the cold war ready to turn hot; Bass and Sullivan walked through the gates and headed for headquarters in order to report in, present and accounted for, as ready as they'd ever be to face the uncertain future.

END

About the author

Charles Deemer is a playwright, screenwriter,

playwright, novelist, filmmaker and teacher. He teaches screenwriting at Portland State University. He is the editor of *Oregon Literary Review* and the artistic director of Small Screen Video.

*(I hope you enjoyed **Baumholder 1961.** You can follow my activities at my blog at http://cdeemer2007.blogspot.com. See you online. Charles Deemer)*