

BEHIND THE CURTAIN

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*For Colonel John B. Sollis
Commanding Officer
Marine Barracks, Washington, D.C.
December 1992 – July 1995*

Also by Laurie Powell

Embrace and Flow

Color by Number

The Flight Jacket

Behind the Curtain

A NOVEL

LAULIE POWELL

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Behind the Curtain

February 2003

JULES WAS AWAKE; THE CALL to prayer from the Mosque two blocks from her room woke her at 0415 every morning. As she lay there in the darkness, part of her mind was listening to the incomprehensible Arabic, the morning prayer broadcast over the neighborhood where she worked in Bahrain at the U. S. Naval Base, and wondering what the call to prayer would have sounded like if the man had not been chanting using a microphone, she thought, perhaps . . . more prayer-like. But she also found herself thinking about her tour at “8th and I,” Marine Barracks, Washington, D.C. Yesterday, the time she had spent there and the people who inhabited that world came rushing back to her after she had seen Chris Holderman, reporting into Marine Corps Central Command, where she had been stationed since the buildup for the coming war against Iraq had begun over six months ago.

Seeing him, and then, talking to him, she was struck with how little he had changed. They had seen each other, and in fact were beginning to be introduced by the officer who was accompanying Chris around to the different staff sections to meet everyone. Before the officer had even gotten her name out of his mouth, Chris cut sharply in on the introduction, “I know Lieutenant Colonel Walker. This is a strange place for you to be . . . ma’am.”

Seeing him in the flesh, she realized her negative feelings for him had softened around the edges with the passing of time. So, she said lightly, with a smile, “The Marine Corps is a small place, isn’t it Major Holderman?”

Ignoring her remark, he had asked, “How long have you been here?”

She remembered how curious he was, especially everyone’s status: who they knew, how they had been chosen for the particular job they had, and whether they were “players,” thinking of the Marine Corps’ officer promotion process as a game, and the object of the game being to make it around the board to the rank of general officer.

“I arrived here about six months ago,” she said, “from Hawaii. MARFORPAC has responsibility for the Middle East, and the command where I’m stationed, Marine Corps Base Hawaii in Kaneohe, falls under MARFORPAC. So . . . how did you end up here?”

“I’m on the Operations staff at II MEF,” he said, self-importantly. “The CG thought he should have a man here at MARCENT since II MEF will be central for the assault into Iraq.”

It’s all she could do to keep a straight face, and not scream “BULLSHIT!!” back at him. She had been here long enough to know it was I MEF, which was designated for the main Marine Corps assault. But, she replied, in her best, upbeat voice, “Good. Welcome aboard.”

The officer who had Chris in tow took her words as his cue they should move on, saying, “See you later, ma’am,” as he nodded his head for Chris to come with him as he started in the direction of the work spaces for Operations, located in a huge tent called ‘the Big Top,’ set up across from where they were standing.

She stood there for a moment, watching their backs as they made their way past the crowd of Marines, trying to stay out of the sand by keeping to the plywood sidewalks.

Now, she shook her head, thinking about him.

She remembered the Barracks’ commander, Colonel Mansfield, had once told her that the Barracks was made up of people who, on the surface, looked to all the world like what they represented - the selfless, the fearless, the brave and the strong - stalwart and steadfast, neither flinching nor budging in the face of adversity -

purposeful and steady - bigger-than-life heroes for a nation. But below the surface - the distance between the two as thin as a fingernail he said – they were just people, with all of their many faults and problems, just like everybody else. Thinking about his words now, she thought that was so true. But, she thought, that still didn't change the fact that Colonel Mansfield had the ability to tap into the commonality of the diverse men and women he commanded, to inspire them to reach inside themselves to strive to represent the idealized Marine Corps while stationed at the Barracks.

As she got out of bed to get ready to begin her day, she decided right then and there that when she saw Chris again, she wouldn't avoid him. Maybe not quite treat him like a friend, she thought, but rather like a compatriot, if for no other reason than for what they had shared during their time at the Barracks.

February 1994

“HI, JULES! TAFT AUSTIN HERE,” said the cheerful voice on the other end of the phone.

“Taft!” she exclaimed. “What a nice surprise. What’s up?”

“I just called to see if you had the time to grab lunch with me today. There’s something I want to bounce off of you,” he said, a smile in his voice as he added, “Plus, it would be good to see you.”

“Sure! What time and where?”

“Let’s say about 1145 at that little Italian place, Leonardo’s, down the street from the Barracks. They have great pizza by the slice . . . salad, too, I understand.”

“Sounds perfect. See you then,” she said, as she hung up, smiling.

On this cold morning, she was at her desk, in her tiny office at the Washington Navy Yard. For the last year and a half, Captain Julia Anne Walker, known as Jules, had been stationed there. A Marine Corps lawyer, she had gotten orders upon leaving Okinawa to the Navy-Marine Corps Appellate Review Activity, working as an appellate prosecutor, writing briefs and occasionally arguing briefs in front of the Navy-Marine Corps Appellate Court across the hall from her office. She had yet to argue a case in front of the Court of Military Appeals, or COMA, appropriately called, she thought, for the boredom of appellate work. Researching the legal issues, and then composing a logical legal response to the issues in the defense brief bored her out of her mind. She felt she didn’t have the innate talent to really do the job justice; hating to admit outright to herself she wasn’t intellectual enough to cope ade-

quately with the job's demands. Lately, she had felt like she was slipping into mediocrity.

She had been assigned this job when her husband, Matt, was selected to attend Amphibious Warfare School at Quantico. It was the only job available to her anywhere near Quantico at the time he was scheduled to begin school. He had completed the nine-month school, and then gone up to Newport, Rhode Island to the Naval Justice School for eight weeks. He was now happily settled in at Marine Corps Base Quantico as a prosecutor. She wished she could be as happy with her job as he was with his.

Getting out of the office and having lunch with Taft would be a welcome break from reading through the records of trial regularly occupying her afternoons. She and Taft had become friends during their tour on Okinawa, and it had been too long since they had a chance to talk and catch up on each other's lives.

As she came in the door of the restaurant, Taft saw her, smiled, and waved at her, from where he was standing in line at the counter. Taft was a little over six feet tall, fit and slim, blonde with a "high and tight," the Marine Corps' signature male haircut, blue eyes, and square jawed. She had always thought he could make his living as a male underwear model. Jules, on the other hand, was five foot, four inches tall, one hundred twenty-five pounds with auburn hair, cut very short, in a pixie cut. She thought of herself as average-looking with unusual golden-colored eyes. Both of them were dressed in their normal working uniform of khaki shirt and dark green pants. Because the weather was cold, they were also wearing their green "wooly-pulley" sweaters, a uniform item fashioned after the British uniform sweater with green leather on the elbows and shoulders.

When she walked up to him, he was ordering, and asked her, "Do you know what you want?"

"I'll have what you're having," she said, "and a Coke."

He nodded, telling the young girl at the counter, “You heard her . . . make that pizza order a double and I’ll have a coke, too.”

After they sat down with their food, they quickly caught each other up on what each of their spouses were doing, (Matt was enjoying prosecuting cases and Connie was substitute teaching at elementary schools); told each other what they were working on (Jules was working on a brief concerning the instructions given to a jury in an aggravated assault case and Taft was doing an inventory of the safe in his office which held all of the Barracks’ classified documents); and they tried to figure out how they lived within thirty minutes of each other, but never got together.

Taft picked up a slice of pizza and said, “Connie and I have decided to go home to Texas.”

“Did something happen?” said Jules, surprised.

“No . . . it’s just we’ve been kicking the idea around for a while,” he said, matter-of-factly. “Connie has had an offer to work for the Congressman who she worked for during her summers in college. Plus, she’s homesick. And I have to admit, so am I.

“We talked about where we see ourselves in five years. We both see ourselves back in Texas. I’m lucky . . . my dad can always use another lawyer at his company in Dallas, so I’ve always had a job waiting on me.”

“Wow!” said Jules, sitting back in her chair. “So, when’s your Marine Corps’ commitment up?”

“In a couple of months, which is why I wanted to talk to you,” he said. “How would you feel about taking my place as the Adjutant at the Barracks?”

“Me?” she said, amazement in her voice. “Well, quite frankly, I would do just about anything to get out of my job at NAMARA. Appellate briefs are not my forte. But . . . I thought you had to be tall and handsome to get orders to the Barracks.”

“The times they are a changin’, as Bob Dylan would say,” he said, seriously. “The new Barracks CO has some different ideas about running the Barracks. He’s intent on making it more modern. One

way he's decided to do that, he's working on getting more women assigned there. For the Adjutant, he wants someone who's a lawyer when he needs one, but who can handle the parade reservations aspect of the job. Realistically, the Adjutant never has the time to devote to learning all the parade marching shit. So it doesn't really matter if you're a midget or not."

"Very fun - ny," she said, smiling.

"I know you'd like it, and you're right here in D.C.," he said. "What do you say?"

"I say . . . what do I need to do?"

That afternoon, at Taft's suggestion, she drove over to Headquarters, U.S. Marine Corps near the Pentagon, to personally see one of the Manpower Monitors, an officer whose job it was to figure out which person in her military occupational specialty would work best in particular jobs. When she finally found him, after looking through the different cubicles, he basically blew her off, saying, "You're not qualified for that job. You're too short."

He didn't say what both of them were thinking, and you're a woman.

When she had relayed the monitor's message to Taft, he said, "Well, it's not his call. It's the CO's call. I tell you what, you put on your Alpha's, and make sure you get new ribbons to put on your uniform. You have to look perfect—hair, make-up, whatever women do—and come over here on Friday at lunchtime. I've already talked about you to Colonel Mansfield. I'll introduce you to him."

She had done just that, even putting on some mascara and lipstick, a rare event for her.

At noon on Friday, she walked the two blocks to the Barracks from the Navy Yard. She found Taft in his small cozy-looking office, which looked out over 9th Street. Sitting down on the old green leather couch, she asked, "So, what are you working on?"

She had just gotten the words out of her mouth, when the commanding officer came into Taft's office. Both she and Taft immediately got to their feet.

"Sir, this is Jules Walker, the lawyer I told you about," said Taft.

"Nice to meet you, sir," she said.

The colonel and Jules looked each other over. He was a little over six feet tall, slim, dark-headed, and handsome in that idealistic, military man sort of way. He looked like a hero, exuding confidence with a direct piercing stare and a no-nonsense manner about him.

"I've never seen a young captain with an MSM . . . although you ARE altitude-nally challenged," he said to her, one eyebrow raised, his voice betraying no regional accent.

He smiled the barest of smiles, and then he added, "How long would it take you to get here?"

"I could get here pretty quickly, sir. I just work down at the Navy Yard," she said.

"Very well, then," he replied. He looked at Taft, saying, "How's it coming on clearing out the safe?"

"Good, sir," said Taft, grinning. "There's stuff in there that was probably there when they rebuilt the Barracks . . . or at least, when you were here as a lieutenant."

"I'm not surprised, at least on the second count," he said, turning, "I'll leave you two to your lawyerly discussions."

They could hear his steps as he went back down the hall.

Taft smiled at Jules, and she looked back at him, dumbfounded, shaking her head.

It was a done deal. Colonel Mansfield gave the monitor a call, and like Taft had told her, Colonel Mansfield had the final word. She magically transitioned to the Barracks in less than a month.

March

SHE SLOWLY DROVE UP TO the entrance of the Barracks' parking garage, which was below street level under "I" street. The Marine guard at the gate, a tall, good-looking Hispanic lance corporal, seemed to be expecting her. Once he checked her I.D., he told her, checking a clipboard hanging beside him, "You've been assigned parking space number twelve. It's near the stairs, ma'am."

"Are the spaces marked?"

"Yes, ma'am . . . big numbers in the middle of each space." Saluting her crisply, he raised the gate.

Slowly going down the ramp into the garage, she envisioned a well-lit garage with rows of cars. Instead, she was surprised to find more than just parked cars. Over in a cleared out corner, there was a platoon of Marines headed by a First Lieutenant going through the manual of arms in synchronicity. Each of them was dressed in his Charlie uniform with the wooly-pulley sweater, and uniform cover. They also carried an antique-looking rifle, and the officer had a sword.

After she found her spot and parked, she saw two other Marines in the corner nearest her car, throwing a wooden rifle replica back and forth to each other at a dizzying speed. She did a double take when she looked more closely at them. Approximately the same height and build, with the same proportion of arm length to leg length, both were lance corporals and were dark headed but their faces were very different. She had never seen members of the

Silent Drill Platoon before, and seeing them now (she was sure that's what they were, what with the whole "rifle" throwing exercise), she wondered if the rest of the young men in the platoon looked as much alike as these guys.

She moved silently in the direction of the stairs, not wanting to disturb either group. Seeing daylight at the top, she started up when she heard footsteps behind her. Turning around, she saw a very Nordic-looking male captain, who caught up to her and said, "Hi. I'm Dave . . . Dave Fitz-Simmons."

She took him in at a glance: six feet tall, lightly muscled, very blond with a "high and tight," a triangular-shaped face with light blue eyes. She figured he was about thirty years old. Did they have someone at Headquarters Marines Corps who spent all of their time looking at pictures of officers to find the handsomest ones to assign to the Barracks? she thought, fleetingly. She came out of her momentary reverie and realized she should introduce herself, too.

"Oh, hello," she said, "I'm Jules Walker. I didn't mean to be rude, but I think I'm just overwhelmed with the fact I'm actually here."

He looked at her like he didn't understand what she meant.

Catching his look, she said, "Today's my first day here."

"Yeah, me, too." he said.

"Really?" Jules said, "Oh, good! It's good to meet another newbie."

"A newbie?" he said, considering the word. "You know, that's not a very Marine Corps word."

"I guess not," she said, smiling, "so how about . . . I'm glad to meet someone else who is new to the place, too?"

He grinned and she continued, "So, what's your job here going to be?"

"Going to be in charge of all the guards here and up at Camp David."

"Camp David?" she said.

"Yep. Camp David's part of this command. All of the young Marines who are assigned here as military policemen eventually rotate up to guard duty at Camp David."

“Well, I didn’t know that. Now, I do,” she said, reaching out her hand to shake his.

Shaking her hand, he said, “Nice to meet you Newbie Jules.”

She smiled, as they both started walking up the stairs.

Dave looked over, “What will you be doing?”

“I’m going to be the Adjutant . . . I’m a judge advocate. I understand the Barracks likes having its own lawyer and so a lawyer is assigned the job as the Adjutant.”

He nodded his head in understanding.

At the top of the stairs, they found themselves standing in the parking lot of the Barracks, looking out over the amazingly beautiful grounds.

Marine Barracks, Washington, D.C., takes up an entire city street block in southeast Washington, forming a rectangle. 8th Street borders the front, with the guard post and five houses backing up along the street, making up one long side of the rectangle. Four of the early 20th Century houses were homes, two for lieutenant general officers, one for the Assistant Commandant of the Marine Corps, and the other for the commanding officer of the Barracks. The fifth house was the Officer’s Club. All of them were identical from the outside: three-story brick structures with a screened-in porch, fronting each house. Every house, except the Officer’s club, had a small yard, surrounded by a four-foot wrought iron fence. Down at the northern end of the block was the Home of the Commandants, the residence of the Commandant of the Marine Corps. An 18th century home with a commanding three-story presence, it’s one of the Washington structures to have survived the War of 1812. Bordering the Home of the Commandants on the other long side of the rectangle, backing onto 9th Street, the structure of the Barracks ran the entire length of the block. Two story, red-brick with wide arches and an arcade running down the front of the structure, it was refurbished at the turn of the 20th century when the houses were built. In the center, bordered by concrete sidewalks on three sides, was the grass-covered parade deck.

To their left was the Band Hall, a building originally designed for concerts given by the U.S. Marine Corps Band, and named the John Phillip Sousa Band Hall. They were standing in a small parking lot, large enough for a dozen cars. This morning it had been salted to melt the snow, which had fallen during the night. The large birch trees bordering the front of the houses were still bare, with snow clinging to their branches. Jules looked at Dave. His face reflected the beauty of the site, a picture from a fairy-tale.

“Which way are you going?” Dave was the first to ask.

“I’m headed to find Taft, the guy I’m replacing. His office is down there,” she replied, pointing down to the opposite end of the arcade from where they were standing.

“I’ll walk with you part of the way.” he said, “I’m headed to check-in.”

She noticed, now, he had his Service Record Book under his right arm.

They walked together the short distance to the door with the sign, “S-1” hanging above the doorway. Dave turned to go in the door, saying, “Nice meeting you, Jules. See you later.”

“It was so good meeting you, too, Dave,” she said, smiling. When she reached the door with the sign “Adjutant” hanging above the doorway, she stepped up into the narrow hallway, with two offices along the hall to her right. The first office was occupied with three enlisted male Marines, talking quietly. Two were at desks, while the third, was standing next to the desk nearest the door. Beyond them, through the large windows on the back wall over-looking 9th Street, she could see the bare limbs of the trees, frozen icicles covering them, the morning light sparkling, creating refracted patterns. On the wall to her left were prints, depicting famous Marine Corps Historical Events, Marines battling foes. The other office was Taft’s.

At his desk, backed into the right corner, near the window, Taft was intently reading something. Looking up at her as she knocked on his open door, he said, smiling, “Good! You’re here!”

He got up out of his chair, and walking around his desk, unlatched a small wooden cubby-hole-looking door in the wall between his office and the office next door, saying, "PFC Sanchez! Come on, we're ready to go."

"Go?" said Jules. "Where are you going?"

"Not me . . . us," he said.

Seeing the look of surprise on her face, he said, "We're going up to Camp David. It's not just so that you can see what it looks like. We have an investigation going on up there. Of course, I'm the lawyer helping the young officer out with the JAGMAN investigation. I need to light a fire under him so he can complete the investigation before I leave."

Snatching his cover, sitting on top of the radiator under the window, he said, "It'll take us a while to get there, so you'll have plenty of time to ask me questions and understand this mini-tempest."

"Alright," she said. "Lead the way, I'm your shadow."

"Oh . . . I almost forgot," he said, reaching for a notebook off of his desk with the words "Turn-Over File" written on the front in black magic marker. He handed it to her, saying, "This is for you. It covers the things you're responsible for, and things I've dealt with over the two years I've been here. It won't help you with everything, but it'll give you a feel for what to expect out of this job."

"Thanks," she said, taking the notebook. She followed Taft back down the hall, thinking, I'm so glad I met Dave. She wouldn't tell Taft she hadn't known about Camp David's connection to the Barracks.

On their drive up to Camp David, he filled her in on the investigation concerning an incident of hazing, the practice of causing harassment, abuse, or humiliation, used as a way of initiating a person into a group. She knew that in the Marine Corps, it was used for correction of negative behaviors seen as "weaknesses," like falling asleep on post.

“You know,” he said, “I have a lot of trouble with punishing simple hazing . . . that is, silly stuff, which doesn’t hurt anyone. I think of it as an age-old right-of-passage for young Marines. And, of course, this isn’t the first time we’ve dealt with it here at the Barracks.

“Dealt with it?”

“Yeah . . . you know, at the command level.”

“Really? Do tell, then.”

“Well, when I arrived here, the Barracks was in the national spotlight for a hazing incident involving the SDP—Silent Drill Platoon.”

“I don’t remember hearing about it,” she said, seriously, “National spotlight?”

“Yep . . . *Sixty Minutes* . . . some kid in SDP took a video of their initiation ceremony at Yuma. They used edge dressing . . . on the new members privates . . . to initiate them.”

“Jesus!” she said, turning to look Taft square in the face.

“I know. Very bad juju and outright stupid,” Taft said, with a “hard to believe” look on his face. “So, how do you feel about it? As a punishable offense, like court-martial punishable?”

“Well,” she said slowly, “I’ve never really given it any thought. Maybe because I’ve never been in any type of group where there was any sort of initiation at all.

“I remember when I was in college, my dormitory was near Fraternity Row. And from time to time, I would see weird stuff, like drunk guys in girls underwear, but I never connected it with anything abusive. I just thought it was silly guy stuff.

“Of course, now, in looking back on it, who knows? But,” she said, “hazing among grown men in the military, just seems, I don’t know, a disaster waiting to happen and totally fucked-up.”

Taft sat back in his seat and gave her a sidelong glance. She caught the look in his eyes.

“I know, I admit it,” she said, throwing up her hands, “I don’t understand this particular masculine behavior. So, what happened this time?”

“As I understand it,” said Taft, “the guy was just ‘tea bagged.’”

“Tea bagged?” she said. “What does that mean?”

“It’s a term meaning the guy was rubbed in the face with everybody else’s penis and testicles,” said Taft, grinning.

“Oh, gross!” said Jules, scrunching up her face in disgust.

Private First Class Sanchez, driving, listening quietly to their conversation, looked at them in the rear view mirror, a grin on his face.

Shaking her head, imagining what it must have taken to think up this ritual, and to give it such a catchy name, said, “On a sliding scale, where would you put tea bagging as a hazing ritual?”

“Well, if it were just me, I would rate it pretty low. It doesn’t cause any physical pain, and it’s just sort of weird, teen-age stuff.”

“Is it a common thing?” she said.

“As a matter of fact, I don’t know,” he said, reflecting on her question. “And, I thought I’d heard of pretty much everything teenage guys do to other teenage guys by way of initiation.

“Well,” he shrugged his shoulders, saying, “the private who was hazed has the same attitude you do about this particular initiation rite. He told his squad leader who then passed the information up the chain. From what I understand, this private is now a pariah. He’s been transferred to Quantico . . . you know . . . to make sure nothing happens to him.”

“That seems so wrong!” said Jules, heatedly.

“Yeah, I know, but it was just the smart thing to do,” he said, soothingly. “And you just don’t know what the other Marines up there really think about it, or what they might do to him.

“They’ll tell the investigating officer what they think they should tell him. Being assigned to Camp David is a big deal and no one wants any negative attention focused on him. You mark my words, when we get up there, they’ll have closed ranks and every single one of them will be like those three stupid monkeys. You know . . . see no evil, hear no evil, speak no evil.”

“That makes perfect sense . . . from their perspective,” she said.

Glancing up at Sanchez, she turned her gaze back to Taft, say-

ing, “I *do* want to understand your perspective on hazing, could you try to explain it to me?”

“Sure,” he said, surprised. “Well, I’ll try.”

He looked at the back of Sanchez’s head.

“Sanchez, this conversation is confidential, you understand?”

“Yes, sir,” replied Sanchez, looking at Taft in the rear view mirror.

“Well,” said Taft, gathering his thoughts, “first off, my introduction to hazing started with pee-wee football and continued through college . . . like you mentioned . . . fraternity life. In my experience, the hazing was all about making a young man an accepted and valued member of the group. And, again, in my experience, the hazing was harmless.

“But, of course, these things can and do get out of hand. So, the Marine Corps, just to make it absolutely clear, prohibits the whole spectrum of actions called hazing. Have you read the Hazing order?”

Jules shook her head, “Never had any reason to.”

“The Marine Corp order,” he said, “specifically prohibits things ranging from striking someone, to forcing them to drink too much alcohol, to the stuff like shaving or greasing somebody. But the language tries to encompass the whole shootin’ match of possible acts.

“And of course, there’re a lot of Marines who feel like hazing is bonding, not barbarism. So, despite the danger of punishment, they do it anyway. The official Marine Corps opinion is the hazing of a fellow Marine to make him a better warrior is ass-backwards and dead wrong, but many senior Marines were hazed, and, so, turn their backs to it. Needless to say, it still flourishes, if underground.

“Again, unfortunately for the guys involved in this insignificant incident, they are Marines at Camp David. Since these Marines have responsibility for guarding the President, they can’t do this kind of stupid shit. If it’d happened somewhere else, they would probably be given a good ass-chewing, but these guys are looking at maybe going to a court-martial.

“Plus, Colonel Mansfield’s in the limelight. You’ll find out that’s always true when anything happens at the Barracks because the Commandant lives right next door, small things become big things. You’ll see,” he finished by saying, and gave her a knowing look.

When they arrived at Camp David, Jules was immediately struck with how unassuming it was. For one, the Presidential cabin was small and rustic. For another, there wasn’t much else there. A few nondescript buildings, which she assumed must house the Marine security guards and the Secret Service agents when the President was there. It reminded her of an upscale fish camp, minus the lake.

Taft walked ahead of her, leading the way to one of the nondescript buildings where they were scheduled to meet with the investigating officer, a first lieutenant. After introductions, Jules sat down, listening to the investigating officer’s explanation of the events making up the investigation. As she listened, the whole thing seemed petty. The Marine who was the recipient of this unwanted “tea-bagging” wasn’t injured in any way, and he was the only witness who had stepped forward to tell what had happened. The other four Marines, including the squad leader who it appeared was the instigator, all retained their right to remain silent. Not one of them had said a word about what happened.

After listening to the recitation of the facts, she realized she was sympathetic to the squad leader. The victim admitted being late for his duty the day before the incident. The day of the incident, he had not only been late again, but when his weapon, in this case a 9mm pistol, was inspected before he assumed duty, it was found to be wanting in the required level of cleanliness. She mentally shook her head, knowing how these young Marines had been drilled in the care and maintenance of their weapons. Personally, she thought they were completely maniacal about their weapons, but she understood the reason for this maniacal behavior: to make sure their weapons were always ready to be fired. So, he was sort of a slacker, and this ritual was a bizarre way to bring him into line.

From there, she and Taft went with the lieutenant to meet the squad leader and the three other Marines. When she and the others walked in the door, the four of them stood. Each was dressed in utilities, pressed to perfection, and their boots were so shiny they shone like mirrors.

Taft walked over to them, shook their hands, and introduced himself, telling them his role in the investigation. He excused the three junior Marines, asking them to wait outside and then he told the squad leader, a corporal, to have a seat.

“So,” Taft said, “Lieutenant Phillips tells me you’ve refused to make a statement. Is that true?”

“Yes, sir,” said the Marine.

Jules thought he had the look of a leader: intelligent eyes, and a fearless way about him. Evidently, Taft saw in him the same things she did, because Taft said, “That’s too bad. You know, I guess, it makes you seem guilty.”

“Yes, sir,” said the Marine. “But my father is a lawyer and he told me the facts sometimes have a way of being misconstrued, and it was better to remain silent until I had a chance to talk to my own lawyer.”

Taft, who was standing in front of the Marine, listening, responded, “Misconstrued? Huh? I take it you have informed the other three what your father said?”

“Yes, sir.”

“O.K., then, you’re free to leave. I’ll make arrangements for the four of you to be assigned defense counsels.”

“Thank you, sir.”

Rising from his seat, he made his way out the door.

After the door closed, Taft said, shaking his head in disbelief, “God-damn it! His father is a lawyer! What are the chances of that?”

When Jules and the lieutenant failed to answer his rhetorical question, he shrugged, saying, “It sounds like this case is going nowhere . . . fast.”

Turning to the lieutenant, he stood there discussing getting the investigation to him as quickly as he could, and other incidentals involving the investigation. When he had finished, he said to Jules, "Would you like to see the Presidential cabin while we're up here?"

"Sure!" she exclaimed, "Why not?"

The two of them said good-bye to the lieutenant and started walking back up to the cabin she had seen when they drove up.

"You know, there probably won't be any reasons for you to come up here again," he said.

"True," she said. "I don't see myself being a guest of the President's. And, you know, in my mind's eye, I always thought of this place as bigger, grander, and certainly not a nondescript cabin in the wilderness."

"Well, one woman's cabin in the wilderness is the President's place to come for peace and quiet. Can you imagine living the kind of life the President lives?" he said.

"No! God, no," she said, vehemently .

They walked up to the cabin. Taft knocked, and a Secret Service Agent opened the door. Taft told the man who they were and asked him if they could take a look. The agent, a genial man with a "like the guy that lives next door" way about him, said, "Sure, guys. But, I can only let you two take a look at the living room. The bedrooms are strictly off limits. But . . . come on in."

He walked them through the entrance into the living area. Jules somehow expected the furnishings to, at least, look comfy. The room was sparsely furnished, almost Spartan.

"When the President wants to get away from the grandeur of the White House, I guess this is the place he comes to?" she asked the Secret Service agent.

"Actually, President Howard and his wife don't come. The former president and his first lady came here all of the time," he said.

"It must get pretty boring, then," said Taft.

The Secret Service agent didn't respond. He just grinned, and turned, leading them back to the front door.