

peace with honor

Peace is a very complex thing—and it is by no means true that all wars are fought on battlefields, and all casualties either buried or hospitalized.

JERRY POURNELLE

ILLUSTRATED BY LEO SUMMERS

The man on the tri-v was in full form. His speech had started quietly enough, as Harmon's speeches always did, full of resonant tones and appeals to reason, the quiet voice asking for attention, speaking so softly that you had to listen closely to be sure of hearing him. But slowly, oh so slowly, the background changed subtly until now Harmon stood before the stars and stripes covering the hemisphere, an American Eagle splendid over the Capitol, and the speaker had worked himself to one of his famous frenzies, his former calm and detachment obviously overcome with emotion.

"Honor? It is a word that Lipscomb no longer knows. Whatever he might have been—and my friends we all know what he was, we all admire him for what he was—he is no longer one of us! His cronies, the dark little men who whisper to him, they have corrupted even so great a man as President Lipscomb! And what of our country? She bleeds! People of America, she bleeds from the running sores of these men and their CoDominium!

"They say that withdrawal from the CoDominium would mean war. I pray God it would not, but if it did, why these are hard times. Many of us would be killed, but we would die as men! And today our friends, our allies, the people of Hungary, the people of Rumania, the Czechs, the Slovaks, the Poles, they groan under the oppression of their communist masters, and who keeps them there? Our CoDominium! We do! We have become slavemasters! Better to die as men.

"But it will not come to that. The Russians would never fight. They are soft, soft as we, their government riddled with corruption as ours. People of America, hear me! People of America, listen!"

The Honorable John Rogers Grant spoke softly and the tri-v turned itself off, a walnut panel sliding over the darkening screen. Grant grimaced, spoke again, and the servitor brought him a small bottle of milk. With all the advances in medical science, there was nothing Grant could afford to have done for an ulcer. Money was no problem, but when in God's Name would he find time?

He glanced at papers on his desk, reports with bright red Security covers, closed his eyes for a moment. Harmon's speech was an important one, would undoubtedly have an effect on the coming elections. The man was getting to be a menace, Grant thought. Have to do something about him one day. He put the thought aside; John Grant liked Harmon, at one time they had been best friends. Lord, what have we come to? He opened the first report. There had been a riot at the International Federation of Labor convention. Three killed, and the smooth plans for the re-election of Matt Brady thrown into confusion. Grant grimaced again and drank more milk. The Intelligence people had assured him that this one would be easy. Digging through the reports he found that some of Harvey Bertram's child crusaders were responsible. They'd bugged Brady's suite, got enough evidence of sell-outs and deals to inflame sentiment on the floor. The report ended with the recommendation that the government drop Brady, concentrate support on MacKnight who had a good reputation, but whose file in the CIA building bulged with information. MacKnight would be easy to control. Grant nodded to himself, scrawled his initials on the action form, dropped it in the TOP SECRET: OUT slot. No point in wasting time, but he wondered what would happen to Brady. Matt Brady had been a good friend to the Unity Party, blast Bertram's people anyway.

He took up the next file, but before he could open it his secretary came in. He looked up and smiled gently, glad of his decision to ignore the stupid telecom. Some executives never saw their secretaries

except through electronics from the moment they came in until they were ready to leave.

"Your appointment, sir," she said. "Almost time. And it's time for your nerve tonic."

He grunted. "I'd rather die." But he let her pour the shotglass of evil-tasting stuff, tossed it off and chased it with milk before glancing at his watch. Not that the watch was needed, he thought. Miss Ackridge knew the travel times to every Washington office, allowed just enough extra for possible emergencies. There'd be no time to start on another report, and that suited Grant just fine.

He let her help him into his black coat, brush off a few silver gray hairs. He didn't really feel fifty-five, but he looked it now. It happened all at once. Five years ago, he could pass for forty. John saw the girl in the mirror behind him, standing close to him, and knew that she loved him. The usual secretary-boss situation, and it wouldn't work. Why the hell don't you get married again, John Grant? It isn't as if you're pining away for Priscilla. By the time she died you were praying it would happen. You can even admit that, now. Why the hell do you go on acting like the great love of your life has departed forever? All you'd have to do is turn around, say five words, she'd . . . she'd what? She wouldn't be the perfect secretary any longer. Good secretaries are harder to find than mistresses. Let it alone.

She stood there for a moment, then moved away. "Your daughter wants to see you this evening," she told him. "She's driving down this afternoon. Says it's important."

"Know why?" Grant asked. Ackridge knew more about Sharon than Grant did. A whole lot more, probably.

"I can guess. I think her young man asked her."

John nodded. It was hardly unexpected, but it hurt. So soon, so soon. They grow so fast, and there's so little time. John Jr. was with the Callisto Squadron, First Lieutenant of a CoDominium Navy frigate, due for a command of his own any year now. Frederick was dead in the accident with his mother, and now Sharon had found another life ... not that she hadn't before. Since he became the Honorable Deputy Secretary he might as well have died for as often as they had time together.

"Run his name through CIA, Flora. Meant to do that months ago, can't think why I never got around to it. They won't find anything, but we'll need it for the records."

"Yes, sir. You'd better be on your way, now. Your drivers are outside."

He glanced around the office, scooped up his briefcase. "I won't be back today, have my car sent around to the White House, will you? I'll drive myself home tonight."

"Yes, sir. You can send the briefcase back with your driver, then," she said carefully, reminding him of his own regulations. Too many papers turning up missing from too many houses lately. If you want to work nights, stay at the office.

He acknowledged the salutes of his driver and armed "mechanic" with a cheery wave, led them to the elevator at the end of the long corridor. Paintings and photographs of ancient battles hung along both sides of the hall, but otherwise it was like a cave. Blasted Pentagon, he thought for the millionth time. Stupidest building ever constructed. Nobody can find anything, it can't be guarded for any price, and it's too big for the important staff, too small for everything the military needed. Miserable stupid building. Why couldn't somebody have bombed it?

They took a surface car to the White House. He could have made his own clearance for a flight, but it would have been another detail, and why bother? Besides, this way he got to see the cherry trees and flower beds around the Jefferson. The Potomac was a brown sludgy mess despite the latest attempt to clean it up. You could swim in it if you had a strong stomach, but the Army engineers had "improved" it a few administrations back, giving it concrete banks . . . why the devil would anyone want to make a concrete ditch out of a river? he wondered. Now the workmen were tearing the lining out, which kept the water perpetually muddy. One day they'll be through with it.

They drove through rows of government buildings, some of them abandoned. Urban Renewal had given Washington all the office space the government needed, more, until there were empty buildings, big relics of the time when Washington was the most crime-ridden city in the world. Back around the turn of the Century, maybe before, he couldn't remember, they'd torn everything down, hustled everyone out of Washington who didn't belong there, the bulldozers quickly following to demolish the tenements. For some political reason it was thought desirable to put up offices as quickly as the other buildings were torn

down, to make the displaced people think it was all necessary, and now there were these empty tombs.

They passed the Population Control Bureau, two square blocks of humming activity, then around the Elipse and past Old State to the gate. The guard checked his identity carefully, using the little scanning plate on his palm-print, although blast it, that guard knew John Grant as well as he knew his own mother. Grant sighed and waited until the computer flashed back the "all right," was driven into the White House basement and escorted quickly up to the Oval Office. He got there one minute early for his appointment.

The President stood when Grant entered, and the others shot to their feet as if they had ejection charges under them. Grant shook hands around, but looked closely at Lipscomb. The President was feeling the strain, no question about it. Well, they all were. Too bad about the Chief, but they had to have him.

"Sorry the Secretary couldn't make it, Mister President," Grant announced ritually.

Lipscomb made a wry face but said nothing. The Secretary of Defense was a political hack who controlled a bloc of Aerospace Guild votes and an even larger bloc of aerospace industry stocks. As long as government contracts kept his companies employing his men, he didn't give a damn about policy, and since he couldn't keep his big mouth shut it was best not to tell him about meetings. He could sit in on formal Cabinet sessions where nothing was ever said and would never know the difference anyway.

Grant kept his attention on the President. Lipscomb didn't like to be reminded of the incompetence of his cabinet, the political deceptions that divorced power from its appearance. The ritual was getting old, why not just sit down and say nothing? Silently, Grant took his place at the center of the table across from the President.

Except for Lipscomb, none of the men in the Oval Office were well-known to the public. Any one of them could have walked down the streets of any city but Washington without fear of recognition. But the power they controlled, as assistants, deputies, clerks even, was immense and they all knew it. There was no real need to pretend to each other.

The servitor brought drinks and Grant accepted a small scotch. Some of the others didn't trust a man who wouldn't drink with them. His ulcer would give him hell, and his doctor more, but doctors and ulcers didn't understand the realities of power. Neither, Grant thought, do I or any of us. But understand it or not, we've got it, and we've got to do something with it.

"Mr. Karins, would you begin?" the President asked. Heads swiveled to the west wall where Karins had set up a briefing stand. A polar projection of Earth glowed behind him, lights blinking the status of forces which the President ordered, but Grant controlled.

Karins stood confidently, his paunch spilling out over his belt, an obscenity in so young a man. Herman Karins was the second youngest man in the room, Assistant Director of the Bureau of the Budget, and said to be one of the most brilliant economists Yale had ever produced. He was certainly one of the best political technicians in the country, but that didn't show in his résumé, or degrees.

He took off the cover sheet to show a set of figures. "I have the latest poll results," Karins said too loudly. "This is the real stuff, gentlemen, not what we hand out to the papers. It stinks."

It certainly did stink. The Unity Party was hovering around thirty-eight percent, just about evenly divided between the Republican and the Democratic wings. Harmon's Patriot Party had about twenty-five, Millington's violently left wing Liberation Party had its usual ten, but the real shocker was Bertram's Freedom Party. Bertram's popularity stood at an unbelievable twenty percent of the population.

"These are figures for those who have an opinion and might vote," Karins said. "The usual. 'Course there're about half who don't give a damn about anything, but they vote by who got to 'em last anyway; we know how they split off. You see the bad news."

"You're sure of this?" the Assistant Postmaster General asked. He was the leader of the Republican wing of the Unity Party, and it hadn't been six months since he told them they could forget Bertram and his bleeding hearts.

"Yes, sir, I'm sure of it," Karins said. "And it's growing. Those riots at the labor convention probably gave 'em another five points, but we don't show that yet. Give Bertram another six months and he'll be ahead of us. With elections coming up in a year. How you like them apples, boys and girls?"

"There's no need to be flippant, Mr. Karins," the President said automatically.

"Sorry, Mister President." Karins wasn't sorry at all, and he glared at the Assistant Postmaster General with triumph. Then he flipped the pages of the chart to show new results.

"This is the soft and hard vote, gentlemen. You'll notice that Bertram's vote is pretty soft, but solidifying. Harmon's is so hard you couldn't get 'em away from him without using nukes. And ours is getting a little like butter. Mister President, I can't even guarantee we can be the largest party after the election, much less that we can hold a majority."

"Incredible," the chairman of the Joint Chiefs muttered.

"Worse than incredible," Grand Senator Bronson agreed. "A disaster. Who will win?"

Karins chuckled. Bronson's appointment to the CoDominium Grand Senate expired just after the election. Unless Unity won, he wouldn't be going back to Luna Base next year. "Toss-up, Senator. Some of ours is drifting to Harmon, some to Bertram. I'd say Bertram if I had to call it, though."

Bronson sat back, relieved. Bertram's Freedom Party was not totally opposed to the CoDominium, perhaps he could do business with it. He'd have to change his stand on opposition to increased Japanese representation in the Grand Senate, though.

"You've been quiet, John," the President said. "You have no observations?"

"No, sir," Grant answered. "It's fairly obvious what the result will be if we lose, no matter who wins. If Harmon takes over, he pulls out of the CoDominium and we have war. If Bertram takes over, he relaxes security, Harmon drives him out with his storm troopers, and we have war anyway."

Karins nodded. "I don't figure Bertram could hold on to power more'n a year, probably not that long. Man's too honest."

The President sighed loudly. "I can recall a time when men said that about me, Mr. Karins."

"It's still true, Mister President," Karins said hurriedly. "But you're enough of a realist to let us do what we have to do. Bertram won't."

"So what do we do about it?" the President asked gently.

"Rig the election," Karins answered quickly. "I give out the popularity figures here." He showed another chart indicating that the Unity Party had well over a majority popularity. "Then we keep pumping out more faked stuff, while Mr. Grant's people work on the computers. Hell, it's been done before."

"Won't work this time." They turned to look at the youngest man in the room. Larry Moriarty, Assistant to the President and sometimes called the "resident heretic," blushed at the attention. He was naturally shy, hated to be noticed until he got worked up. When he was fully corn-milted to an argument, though, he could shout with the best of them. "The people know better. Bertram's people are already getting jobs in the computer centers, aren't they Mr. Grant? They'll see it in a minute."

Grant nodded. He'd sent the report over the day before; interesting that Moriarty had digested it already.

"You make this a straight old rigged election, you'll have to use the CoDominium Marines to keep order," Moriarty continued.

"The day I need CoDominium Marines to put down riots in the United States is the day I resign," the President said coldly. "I may be a realist, but there are limits to what I will do, gentlemen. You'll need a new chief."

"That's easy to say, Mister President," Grant said. He wanted his pipe, but the doctors had forbidden it. The hell with it, he thought, and took a cigarette from the pack in front of the Undersecretary for Welfare. "It's easy to say, but you can't do it. What happens after you resign?"

"I don't think I care," the President answered.

"But you do, sir," Grant continued. "We all do. The Unity Party supports the CoDominium, and the CoDominium keeps the peace. An ugly peace, but, by God, peace. I wish . . . Lord, how I wish ... that support for the CoDominium treaties hadn't got tied so thoroughly to the Unity Party, but it did and that's that. And you know damn well that even in the Party it's only a thin majority that supports the CoDominium. Right, Harry?"

The Assistant Postmaster General nodded. "But don't forget, there's support for the CD in Bertram's group."

"Sure, but they hate our guts. Call us corrupt," Moriarty said. "They're right, too."

"So flipping what if they're right?" Karins snapped. "We're in, they're out. Anybody who's in very long is corrupt. If he ain't, he ain't in."

"I fail to see the point of this discussion," the President interrupted. "I for one do not enjoy being reminded of all the things I have done to keep this office, and I am sure most of you like it no better than I do. The question is, what are we going to do? And I feel I must tell you that as far as I am concerned, nothing would make me happier than to have Mr. Bertram sit in this chair. I'm tired, gentlemen. I've been President for eight years, and I don't want it anymore."

Everyone spoke at once, shouting to the President, murmuring to their neighbors, until Grant cleared his throat loudly. "Mister President," he said, using the tone of command he had been taught during his brief tour in the Army Reserve. "Thank you, gentlemen. Mister President, that is, if you will pardon me, sir, a ludicrous suggestion. There is no one else in the Unity Party who has even a ghost of a chance of winning. You remain popular. The people trust you. Even Mr. Harmon speaks as well of you as he does of anyone not in his group. Mr. Bertram thinks highly of you personally. You cannot resign without dragging the Unity Party with you, and you cannot give that chair to Mr. Bertram. He couldn't hold it for six months."

"And would that really be so bad, John?" Lipscomb was using all the old charm now, the fireside manner that the voters loved, the tones and warmth and expressions that won ambassadors and voters, senators and taxpayers. "Are we really so sure that only we can save the human race, John? Or are we merely interested in keeping our own power?"

"Some of both, I suppose," Grant answered. "Not that I wouldn't mind retiring."

"Retire!" Karins snorted. "You let Bertram's clean babies get in the files for two hours, none of us will retire to anything better'n a CD prison planet. You got to be kidding, retire."

"That may be true," the President said, "but there are other ways. General, what does happen if Harmon takes power and starts the war?"

"Mr. Grant knows better than I do," General Carpenter said. When the others looked at him with amazement, Carpenter continued. "Nobody's ever fought a nuclear war. Why should the uniform make me more of an expert than you? But I'd say we could win. Heavy casualties, but our defenses are good." He gestured at the moving lights on the enormous wall projection. "Better technology than the Russki's. The laser guns ought to get most of their missiles. CD Fleet won't let either one of us use space weapons. We might win."

"We might." Lipscomb was grim. "John?"

"We might not win. And we might succeed in killing about half the human race. We might do better than that. How in God's Name do I know what will happen if we start throwing nuclear weapons around?"

"But the Russians aren't prepared," a Commerce official said. "If we hit them without warning—people never change governments in the middle of a war."

President Lipscomb sighed. "I am not going to start a nuclear war to retain power. Whatever I have done, I have done to keep peace. That's my last excuse, I could never live with myself if I sacrifice peace to keep power. I'd rather sacrifice my power to keep peace."

Grant cleared his throat gently. "We couldn't do it anyway. If we started converting defensive missiles to offensive, CoDominium Intelligence would hear about it in ten days. The Treaty prevents that, you know." He lit another cigarette. "Of course we could denounce the CoDominium. That would just about assure us of losing the election. And probably put Kaslov's people in power in the Soviet Union."

Kaslov was a pure Stalinist, who wanted to liberate Earth for communism. Some called him the last communist, but of course he wasn't the last. He had plenty of followers. Grant could remember a secret conference with Ambassador Chemikov only weeks ago. The Soviet was a polished diplomat, but it was obvious that he wanted something desperately. He wanted the United States to keep the pressure on, not relax her defenses out at the borders of the U.S. sphere of influence, because if she ever let the communist probes take anything out of the U.S. sphere without a hard fight, Kaslov would gain more influence at home.

Telling Grant about it was as close to playing politics as a professional like Chemikov would ever come; and it meant that Kaslov was gaining influence, not losing it.

"This is all nonsense," the Assistant Postmaster announced. "We aren't going to quit, we won't start the war, and we aren't going to lose. Now what does it take to get the support away from Mr. Clean Bertram and funnel it back to us? A good scandal, right? Find Bertram's dirtier than we ever thought of being, right? Catch some of his boys plotting something really bad, right? Working with the Japs, maybe. Giving the Japs nukes. I'm sure Mr. Grant can arrange something like that."

Karins nodded vigorously. "That would do it. Disillusion his organizers, drive his followers out. The pro-CoDominium people in his group will come to us like a shot." He paused, chuckled evilly. "Course some of 'em will head for Millington's bunch." Karins laughed again. No one worried about Millington's Liberation Party very much. When they did worry, it was whether it would survive. Without his madmen to cause riots and keep the taxpayers afraid, other measures the Unity Party had to take would never be accepted. Millington's people gave the police some heads to crack, a nice riot for tri-v to keep the Citizens amused and the taxpayers happy.

"I think we can safely leave the details to Mr. Grant," Karins grinned.

"What will you do, John?" the President asked.

"Do you really want to know, Mister President?" Moriarty interrupted. "I don't."

"Nor do I, but if I can condone it, I can at least find out what it is. What will you do, John?"

"Frame-up, I suppose. Get a plot going, then uncover it."

"That?" Moriarty said. "Man, it's got to be better than that. The people are beginning to wonder about plots."

Grant nodded. "There will be evidence. Hard core, cast-iron evidence. Such as a secret arsenal of nuclear weapons."

There was a gasp. Then Karins grinned widely, laughed. "Oh, man, that's tore it. Hidden nukes. Real ones, I suppose?"

"Of course." Grant looked at the fast youth with distaste. What would be the point of fake nuclear weapons? But Karins lived in a world of deception, so much so that fake weapons would be appropriate for this nightmare scene.

Karin chuckled again. "Better have lots of cops when you break the story. People hear that, they'll tear Bertram apart."

True enough, Grant thought. It was a point he'd have to remember. Protection of those kids wouldn't be easy. Not since one militant group A-bombed a Mississippi town, and a criminal syndicate tried to hold San Francisco for a hundred million dollars ransom. People no longer thought of private stocks of atomic weapons as something to laugh at. They'd kill anyone they believed had some.

"We won't involve Mr. Bertram personally," the President said grimly. "Not at any price and under no circumstances. Is that understood?"

"Yes, sir," John answered quickly. He hadn't liked the idea either, was eager to agree. "Just some of his top aides." Grant stubbed out the cigarette. It, or something, had left a foul taste in his mouth. He turned to Grand Senator Bronson. "Senator, the CoDominium will end up with final custody, I'll see that they are sentenced to transportation for life. I'd prefer it if they didn't have too hard a sentence to serve."

Bronson nodded, his hands clasped over his vest, a satisfied smile breaking through the doubts he'd had before. He could probably not have made a deal with Bertram, this was better. "Oh, certainly, whatever you like. Let them be planters on Tanith if they'll cooperate. We can see they don't suffer."

Like hell we can, Grant thought. Even as an independent planter, life on Tanith was no joy. He shook his head wearily and lit another cigarette.

Grant left the meeting a few minutes later. The others could continue the endless discussion, but for Grant there was no point to it. The action they had to take was clear, and the longer they waited the more time Bertram would have to assemble his supporters and harden his support. If something was going to be done, it might as well be now while Bertram's vote was soft. Give them a reason to leave his camp while they were still unsure, don't play around with it. Grant had found all his life that the wrong action taken decisively and in time was often better than the right action taken later.

He thought about the situation on his way back to his office, and after he reached the Pentagon summoned his deputies and issued orders. The whole thing took no more than an hour. The machinery was already in motion.

Grant's colleagues always said he was, rash, too quick to take actions without looking at all their consequences. They also conceded that he was lucky, that what he did usually worked out well, but they complained that he didn't think it over enough. John Grant saw no point in enlightening them: he did think things over, but by anticipating them rather than reacting to crisis. He had known that Bertram's support was growing alarmingly for weeks, had made up contingency plans for the event in case Karins' polls turned out badly. He hadn't expected them to come out *that* bad, but it only indicated that the drastic actions Grant had already planned were needed immediately. Within days there would be a leak from the, conference; there always was. Not a leak about the actions to be taken, but about the alarm and concern. Some secretary would notice that Grant had come back to the Pentagon after dismissing his driver. Another would see that Karins chuckled more than usual when he left the Oval Office, that Senator Bronson and the Assistant Postmaster General went off to have a drink together, all the little nuances, and someone else would put the facts together—the President's staff was worried. Another clerk would add that Karins was reporting on political trends, and another would overhear a remark about Bertram . . .

No. If they had to take action, take it now while it might work. Grant dismissed his aides with a sense of satisfaction. He had been ready, and the crisis would be over before it began. It was only after they left that he crossed the paneled room to the teak cabinet, opened it, and poured a double scotch.

He laughed at himself as he drank it. That's the boy, Grant. Tear hell out of your ulcer. Punish yourself, you can atone for what you're doing. What you need is a good wife. Somebody who doesn't know a damn thing about politics, who'll listen and tell you you had to do it, that you're still a good man. Everybody ought to have a source of comfort like that. He envied the statesmen of the old days when there would be a Father Confessor trained in statecraft that you could go to for reassurance. Reassurance and maybe a little warning, do this or that or you won't be forgiven.

The Maryland countryside slipped past far below as the Cadillac cruised along on autopilot. A ribbon antenna ran almost to Grant's house, and he watched the twilight scene, house lights blinking, a few surface cars on the roads. Behind him was the sprawling mass of Columbia Welfare Island where most of the people displaced from Washington had ended up, lumps of poured concrete buildings and roof parks, the seething resentment of useless life kept placid by government furnished supplies of Tanith hashpot and borloi and cheap booze. A man born in one of those complexes could stay there all his life if he wanted to, and some did. Grant tried to imagine what it would be like there, but he couldn't. Reports from his agents gave him an intellectual picture, but there was no way to identify with those people, the hopelessness and dulled senses, burning hatreds and terrors. Karins knew, though. Karins had begun his life on a welfare island somewhere in the midwest, clawing his way through the schools to a scholarship, refusing stimulants and dope and never watching tri-v . . . was it worth it?

The speaker on the dash suddenly came to life, Beethoven cut off in mid bar. "WARNING. YOU ARE APPROACHING A GUARDED AREA. UNAUTHORIZED CRAFT WILL BE DESTROYED WITHOUT FURTHER WARNING. IF YOU HAVE A LEGITIMATE ERRAND IN THIS RESTRICTED AREA, FOLLOW THE GUIDE BEAM TO THE POLICE CHECK STATION. THIS IS A FINAL WARNING."

The Cadillac automatically turned off course, riding the beam down toward State Police headquarters, and Grant cursed. He fumbled with switches on the dash, spoke softly. "This is John Grant, resident in Peachem's Bay. Something seems to be wrong with my transponder."

There was a short wait, then the mechanical voice on the speaker was replaced by a soft feminine tone. "We're very sorry, Mr. Grant. Your signal is correct. Our identification unit seems to be out of order. You may proceed, of course."

"Yeah. Better get that thing fixed before it shoots up a taxpayer," Grant said irritably. Anne Arundel County was a Unity Party stronghold, how long would it last if there was an accident like that? The taxpayers would begin to listen to Bertram and his Freedom Party cant.

"We will see to it immediately, sir," the girl answered. "Good evening."

"Yeah. All right, I'm going home." He took the manual controls and cut across country, ignoring regulations. If they wanted to give him a ticket—all they could do now that they knew who he was—let them. His banking computer would pay the fine without Grant ever being aware of it. It brought a wry smile to his face—traffic regulations were broken, computers noted it in their memories, other computers paid the fines, and no human ever became aware of them. Until finally there were enough tickets that a warning of license suspension would be issued. Since that could never happen to Grant, there was no way he'd ever find out about violations.

There was his home ahead, a big rambling early Twentieth Century place on the cove, his yacht at anchor offshore, wooded grounds. Be nice to stay there a few weeks. He wondered if he wanted to retire. The President certainly did, and most of his colleagues said much the same. The thought of a long rest, repair to his ulcer, sailing out to Bermuda, that was intriguing, but years of inactivity? He couldn't imagine life without responsibilities, and the thought of retirement was vaguely frightening. He'd seen too many old friends come apart just when it looked like they ought to be happiest.

Carver, the chauffeur, rushed out to help Grant down from the Cadillac and take it to the garage; Hapwood was waiting with a glass of sherry in the big library. Prince Bismark, shivering in the presence of his god, put his Doberman head on Grant's lap and stared into his eyes, ready to leap into the fire at command. There was irony in the situation. At home, Grant enjoyed the power of a feudal lord, but it was a power that many wealthy men could command, and it was limited by how strongly the staff felt it worthwhile to stay out of Welfare. But he had only to lift the Security phone in the corner, and his real power, completely invisible and limited only by what the President wanted to find out, would operate. An interesting thing, power. Wealth gave him the visible power, heredity the power over the dog . . . what gave him the real power of the Security phone?

"What time would you like dinner, sir?" Hapwood asked. "And Miss Sharon is here with a guest."

"A guest?" Grant asked.

"Yes, sir. A young man, Mr. Allan Torrey, sir."

"Have they eaten?"

"Yes, sir. Miss Ackridge called to say that you would be home, but late for dinner."

"All right, Hapwood. I'll eat now and see Miss Grant and her guest afterwards."

"Very good, sir. I will inform the cook." Hapwood left the room invisibly.

Grant smiled again. Hapwood was another fugitive from Welfare, a man who grew up speaking a dialect that Grant would never recognize. What had possessed him to study the mannerisms of English butlers of a hundred years before, perfecting his style until he was known all over the county as the perfect household manager? Why would a man do that?

Certainly there was money in it. Hapwood didn't know it, but Grant had a record of every cent his butler took in, kickbacks from grocers and caterers, "contributions" from gardeners, and the surprisingly well managed investment portfolio. Hapwood could have retired to his own house years ago, moved to another part of the country and assumed the life of a taxpayer investor, but instead here he was, still the perfect butler. It had intrigued Grant enough to have his agents look into Hapwood very carefully, but the man had no politics other than staunch support for Unity, and the only suspicious thing about his contacts were the refinement with which he extracted money from every transaction involving Grant's house. The man had no children and whatever sexual needs he experienced were satisfied by infrequent trips to the fringe areas around Welfare.

Grant ate mechanically, hurrying to be through and see his daughter, yet afraid to meet the boy she had brought home. For a moment he thought of using the Security phone to find out more about him, but he shook his head angrily. Too much of this kind of Security thinking wasn't good; for once he was going to be a parent meeting his daughter's intended. He left half his steak uneaten and went to the high-ceilinged library, sat behind the massive Oriental fruitwood desk with its huge bronze fittings. Behind him and to both sides the walls were lined with bookshelves, immaculate dust-free accounts of the people of dead Empires. It had been years since he took one down. Now, all his reading was confined to typescript reports, some copied by human secretaries but most generated by computers. They told a live

story about living people, but sometimes, late at night, as Grant sat in the huge library he wondered if his country were not as dead as the empires in his books. He loved his country but hated her people, all of them: Karins and the new breed, the tranquilized Citizens in their welfare islands, the smug taxpayers who grimly held their privileges . . . So what was it that he loved? Only history, the story of the greatness that had once been the United States, something found only in books and not in the neat reports with their bright red Security covers.

But then Sharon came in, a lovely girl, far prettier than her mother but without her mother's poise. She ushered in a tall boy in his early twenties. As they crossed the room Grant studied him closely. Nice looking. Long hair, neatly trimmed, conservative moustache for these times although it would have been pretty wild in Grant's day. Blue and violet tunic, red scarf . . . a little flashy, but even John Jr. went in for clothes like that whenever he got out of CoDominium uniform.

The boy walked hesitantly, almost timidly. Grant wondered if it were fear of him and his position in the government, or just the natural nervousness of a young man about to talk to his fiancée's father. The tiny diamond on Sharon's hand sparkled in the yellow light from the fireplace, and she held the hand unnaturally, not sure of herself with the unfamiliar ring.

"Daddy, I . . . I've talked so much about him, this is Allan. He's just asked me to marry him! I'm so happy!" Trustingly, sure of his approval, never thinking for a second—Grant wondered if Sharon wasn't the only person in the country who didn't fear him. Except for John Jr., who thank God was beyond the reach of the power of Grant's Security phone. The CD Fleet took care of its own.

"Hello, Allan." Grant stood, extended his hand. Torrey's grip was firm, but his eyes avoided Grant's. "So you want to marry my daughter." He glanced pointedly at her left hand. "Looks like she approves the idea, anyway."

"Yes, sir. Uh, she wanted to wait and ask you before she let me put the ring on, but well ... it's my fault, sir." Torrey looked at him this time, almost defiant.

"Yes. Well . . . Sharon, as long as you're home for the evening, I wish you'd speak to Hapwood about Prince Bismark. I don't think the animal is being fed properly."

"You mean right now?" she asked. She tightened her small mouth into a pout. "Really, Daddy, this is Victorian! Sending me out of the room while you talk to my fiancé!"

"Yes, it is, isn't it?" Grant said nothing else, and finally she turned away.

Then, impishly: "Don't let him scare you, Allan. He's about as dangerous as that . . . that moosehead in the trophy room!" She fled before there could be any reply.

They sat awkwardly, Grant coming out from behind his desk to sit near the fire with young Torrey. Drinks, offer of a smoke, all the usual amenities, anything to avoid saying something important, but finally Hapwood had brought their refreshments and the door was closed.

"All right, Allan," John began. "Let's be trite and get it over with. How do you intend to support her?"

Torrey looked straight at him, his eyes dancing with what Grant was sure he recognized as concealed amusement. "I expect to be appointed to the Department of the Interior. I'm a trained engineer."

"Interior?" Grant thought for a second. The answer surprised him, he hadn't thought the boy was just another office seeker. Well, why not? "I suppose it could be arranged."

Torrey grinned. It was an infectious grin, and Grant liked it. "Well, sir, it's already arranged . . . I wasn't asking for a job."

"Oh?" Grant shrugged. "I hadn't heard anything—you'll be Civil Service, then?"

"No, sir, Deputy Assistant Secretary. Natural Resources Control. Environments. I took a Master's in ecology with my engineering degree."

"That's interesting, but I can't recall seeing anything about the appointment ..."

"It won't be official yet, sir. Not until Mr. Bertram is President. For the moment I'm on his staff." The grin was still there, and it was friendly, not hostile, not mocking. The boy thought politics was a game, wanted to win ...

He's seen the polls, Grant thought. God knows—Allan Torrey? Just who was he on Bertram's staff? "Give my regards to Mr. Bertram when you see him. What is it you do for him?"

Allan shrugged. "Write speeches, carry the mail, run the Xerox—you've been in campaign headquarters, sir. I'm the guy who gets all the jobs nobody else wants."

Grant laughed. "Yeah. Started that way myself. Only staffer they could afford to use as a gopher, they didn't have to pay me. I soon put a stop to that, though. Hired my own gopher out of what I used to contribute. I guess that's not open to you, is it?"

"No, sir. My father's a taxpayer, but . . . well, paying taxes is pretty tough right now."

"Yes." Well at least he wasn't from a Citizen family. Torrey, now just who the hell ... he could find out when Flora had the Security report. Important thing now was to get to know this boy.

It was hard to do. Allan was frank, open, more relaxed after Hapwood brought his third drink. Grant was pleased to see that the boy refused a fourth. But there was nothing of substance to talk about. No consciousness of the realities of politics. One of Bertram's child crusaders, out to save the United States from people like John Grant although he was too polite to say so. John could remember when he was that young, wanted to save the world, but then it was so different. Nobody wanted to end the CoDominium then, they were too happy to have the Cold War under control at last. What happened to the great sense of relief when everybody could stop worrying about atomic wars? It was all anybody could think of when Grant was young, how this might be the Last Generation . . . now they took it for granted that there would always be peace. Was peace, then, such a little thing? He realized that Torrey was speaking.

"Take the Baja Project for example. All those nuclear power plants. And the artificial harbors. Thermal pollution of the Sea of Cortez! They'll kill off a whole ecology just for their cities. And it isn't necessary, sir. I know we have to have living space for cities, God knows I don't want the Citizens cooped up in their welfare islands, but that isn't what the government is planning. What they're going to build will be more estates for taxpayers, not a decent place for the Citizens." He was speaking intently, trying to burn past Grant's gentility, to get to the man underneath.

"I know it isn't part of your Department, sir. You probably don't even know what they're doing. But it's so wrong . . . I'm sorry, sir, but I really believe it. The Lipscomb government has been in too long. It's got away from the people, and ... and I'm sure you're not aware of it, but the corruption! Sir, I wish you could see some of the reports we have, some of the dirty things the government's done just to stay in power. It's time for a change, and Mr. Bertram is the man, I know he is."

Grant's smile was thin, but he managed to bring it off. "Maybe you're right. I wouldn't mind living in this house instead of the Pentagon. Might as well live in Washington for all the time I manage to get out here." What was the point of it? He wouldn't convince this boy, and Sharon wanted him . . . he'd drop Bertram after the scandals broke. And how could Grant explain that the Baja Project was developed to aid a syndicate of taxpayers, that without their support the government wouldn't last a month? The damn fools, of course they were wrecking the Gulf of California—oh hell, Sea of Cortez. Call it that, it made the six states which were formerly the Republic of Mexico happier. Of course they were wrecking it, through sheer shortsighted idiocy, but what could the government do? You might get the Citizens to huddle around tri-v in their welfare islands, smoke borloi, but without taxpayers . . . There was no point in explanations. At that boy's age, Grant wouldn't have believed it either.

Finally, painfully, the interview was over. And there was Sharon, grinning sheepishly because she was engaged to one of Bertram's people, understanding what that really meant no better than Allan Torrey. It was just a game, Bertram would be in government and Lipscomb, the Unity Party, would be the opposition, just the game that the Republicans and Democrats used to play.

How could you tell them that if Unity ever went out, the rules would change, there wouldn't be an alteration anymore. You'd get Bertram against Harmon, or Bertram against the Liberation Party, or worse, Harmon and the Liberation people working together against Bertram, and somebody would try to mobilize the Citizens, get them involved, and the whole structure would come crashing down . . . and then? Then the Leader, the Man with a Cause, the Friend of The People. It was all there, told time and

time again in those aseptically clean books all around him.

BERTRAM AIDES ARRESTED BY INTERCONTINENTAL BUREAU OF INVESTIGATION!! IBI RAIDS SECRET WEAPONS CACHE. NUCLEAR WEAPONS HINTED!!!

Chicago, May 15, (UPI)—IBI agents here have arrested five top aides to Senator Harvey Bertram in what government officials call one of the most despicable plots ever discovered . . .

Grant sat at his desk and read the transcript of the *extra* tri-v newscast without satisfaction. It had all gone according to plan, and now there was nothing left to do. The evidence was there. He could let Bertram's people wiggle all they wanted to, challenge jurors, challenge judges. The Attorney General, in a spirit of fairness, would even waive the government's rights under the Thirty-first Amendment, let the case be tried under the old adversary rules. It wouldn't matter.

Then, in small type, there it was, and he gasped. "Arrested were Grigory Kalamintor, 19, press secretary to Bertram: Timothy Girodano, 22, secretary: Allan Torrey, 22, executive assistant . . ." the rest of the page blurred. "Oh my God, what have we done?" Grant asked. He sat with his head in his hands.

He hadn't moved when Miss Ackridge buzzed. "Your daughter on Four, sir. She seems upset."

"Yes." Grant punched the button. Sharon's face swam into view, her makeup ruined by long streaks of tears. She looked ten years older, she looked like her mother during one of . . .

"Daddy! They've arrested Allan! And I know it isn't true, I was in that house in Chicago two days ago, they didn't have any secret arsenal . . . there wasn't any reason for them to have nuclear weapons! A lot of Mr. Bertram's people said you'd never let the country have an honest election. They said John Grant would see to it, and I told them they were wrong . . . Daddy, what happened? It's true, isn't it? You've done this to stop the election."

He tried to say something, but there was nothing to say. She was right. But where was she calling from, who might be listening in? "I don't know what you're talking about. I saw the newscast about Allan's arrest, but I know nothing more. Come home, kitten, we'll talk about it there."

"Oh no! You're not getting me in that big house! Have Dr. Pollard come over, give a nice friendly little shot, and I forget all about Allan ... NO! I'm staying right here until . . . I guess I just won't be coming home, Daddy. And when I go to the newspapers, I think they'll listen to me. I don't know what to tell them, but I'm sure Mr. Bertram's people can write something for me. How do you like that, Mister God?"

"Anything you tell the press about the government will be a lie, Sharon. You don't know anything." He fought to stay calm, but he couldn't think what to do. He noticed his assistant get up and leave the office.

"Lies? Where did I learn to lie? I'm only following your example, Daddy dear." The screen went blank. She had hung up on him.

Was it that thin, he thought? The trust she'd had in him, the love, whatever it was ... was it that thin?

"Sir?" It was Hartman, his assistant.

"Yes."

"She was calling from a house in Champaign, Illinois. A Bertram headquarters they think we don't know about. The phone had a guaranteed no-trace device on it."

"Trusting lot, aren't they?" Grant said. "Have some good men watch the house, but leave her alone." He stood, felt a wave of something, dizziness and something else, so that he had to hold the edge of the desk "MAKE DAMN SURE THEY LEAVE HER ALONE, DO YOU UNDERSTAND?" he shouted.

Hartman went as pale as Grant. The chief hadn't raised his voice to one of his own people in five years. "Yes, sir, I understand."

"And get out of here." John spoke carefully, in low tones, and the cold mechanical voice was more terrifying than the shout.

Alone he sat staring at the blank telephone, sitting at the seat of power. Now what, he thought? It wasn't generally known that Sharon was engaged to the boy, in fact hardly anyone knew it. He'd talked them out of making it formal until the banns could be announced in the National Cathedral, all the

requirements of the Church satisfied. At the time it was just something they should do, but ...

But what? He couldn't have the boy released. Not that boy. He wouldn't keep silence as the price of his own freedom. He'd be at a newscaster's booth within five minutes. And then the headlines: BERTRAM AIDE ACCUSES GOVERNMENT. DAUGHTER OF DEPUTY SECRETARY OF DEFENSE SAYS SECRET NUKE CACHE A PLANT ARRANGED BY HER FATHER.

Or something more clever. Of course Bertram's people would say it was a plant, but that didn't matter. Anyone accused of what was nearly the ultimate crime would say that. But if the daughter of the top secret policeman in the country said it . . . He punched the communicator.

Grand Senator Bronson appeared on the screen, looked up in surprise. "Oh, hello, John. Need something?" Bronson asked it nervously. Whenever John Grant called on the special scrambled circuit, interrupting all other business, cutting off all other conversations, it was likely to be unpleasant.

"Are you alone?"

"Yes."

"When's the next CD warship going outsystem? Not a colony ship, and most especially not a prison ship. A warship."

"Why . . . I don't know. I suppose anything could be arranged if you'd . . . what's on your mind, John?"

"I want—" Grant hesitated. But there was no time to be lost. None. "I want space for two very important prisoners. A ... a married couple. The crew is not to know their identities, and any crewman who comes in contact with them stays outsystem for at least five years. Got that? I want these people put down on a good colony world, something decent. Like Sparta, where they can't get back again. Nobody ever comes here from Sparta, do they?"

"But . . . yes, I suppose it can be arranged." Grant's expression discouraged debate.

"It will be arranged. And for tonight. I'll have the prisoners brought to you tonight. You have that CD ship ready. And . . . and it better not be the *Saratoga*. My son's on that one, he'll . . . he'll know one of the prisoners." Grant reached for the phone, then drew his hand back. "Make sure there's a chaplain aboard, the kids will be getting married."

Bronson frowned into the telephone lens. "John, are you sure you're all right?"

"Yes. One other thing. They're to have a good estate on Sparta, but they're not to know who arranged it. Just take care of it for me and I'll pay. You have it all?"

It was all so very simple. Direct his agents to arrest Sharon, conduct her to CD Intelligence. No, he wouldn't want to see her first. Have the Attorney General's office send young Torrey to the same place, let it out that he'd escaped, try him *in absentia*. It wasn't as neat as having all of them convicted in open court, but there'd be enough convictions.

Inside, something screamed at him, screamed again and again, this was his daughter, his pretty little girl, the only person in the world who wasn't afraid of him ... calmly, almost gently, Grant leaned back in his leather chair. What world would it be for her if the government fell?

He dictated instructions for his agents, took the flimsy order sheet from the writer. His hand didn't tremble at all as he signed it. Then, slowly, carefully, he leaned back again, tasting the blood and bile that he knew would be in his throat the rest of his life: tasting the price of peace.