

Don and Eddie stood in the living room of Colonel Adams' cottage. The cottage was two-story dwelling far removed from the compound with its simplistic buildings. Built on the side of a hill with pine trees covering three sides, the cottage overlooked a ten acre lake and miles of rolling hills blanketed with trees changing into their fall shades. The different autumn hues were interrupted only by the dark green complexion of groves of evergreens lined in the distance.

Don stood at the bay window, absorbing the beauty of God's creation while Eddie browsed through the room, looking at the war memorabilia placed around the room on various shelves and hanging on the walls. Of particular interest were the walls filled with pictures of Adams and various high-ranking officers from each branch of the armed forces. One pictured Adams and three members of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. Eddie wondered how a mere colonel gathered so much respect as he heard someone enter the room behind him.

"Be seated, men." The peculiar voice which over-enunciated each syllable was recognizably Adams'.

Don and Eddie sat on the couch facing the fireplace while Adams' sat next to it puffing on his pipe. Don made a mental note that seeing the Colonel in regular lounging clothes revealed more noticeably Adams' age of seventy-two. The deep wrinkles in his neck, usually covered by the red satin scarf, the thinness of his hair, now revealed without the distinctive red beret, all gave way to the fact that this one-time noble warrior was now nearing the end of a full and adventurous life.

"I wanted to meet with you boys separate from the others. Both of you have been in the service before. Peters, you were in the regular Army, and Branscum, you were Navy." Both men nodded.

"Having been so trained as you was, and spending these days with us, I have found the two of you to have what it takes to do the job we need. I have just received a report from a contact in Indiana that a pastor of a small church was arrested earlier today, apparently just so the Welfare Department could move against church Day Cares in that state. I am sending Captain Dalton and another experienced man down there on a reconnaissance mission to determine whether or not we should intervene in this matter. The two of you seem to be church-going men and I believe would provide good cover for the other two. Personally, I gave up on organized religion ten years ago, although I still worship God in my own way. You two on the other hand could mingle with the people there and really find out what the real purpose behind the attack is."

"Although you'll go heavily armed, I want no confrontation without my express consent and backup. Will you be able to do this?"

Don looked at his friend and gave a slight nod. Eddie nodded back and faced Adams'.

"Colonel, Don and I took our vacation time from work to come up here. We both still have two weeks left after this one. Do you believe it will take more time than this?"

"Branscum, to find out what I need to know will only take a few days. When you get as old as I am, you tend to not sit around and wait for something to happen."

"Then we'd be happy to go. We'll just need to call our wives and tell them."

"It would probably be better if you did not tell them where you were going. I believe you should let them know that you have been invited to stay here another week."

"All right...."

"You may use my telephone. There's a number on the receiver. Dial it first. If you hear a squeal after dialing that number, don't call now but try again later. If you hear ringing or a busy tone, you may go ahead and call your homes. We do these procedures to see if the phone line is tapped. You never can be too careful."

The colonel rose from his chair, shook their hands and exited through the same door he entered a few minutes earlier.

Everyone in the House Chamber watched the hands of the four senators to the left of the chairman as they lowered their hands after voting to back the nominee for the vacated Supreme Court Justice position. Steve Vorbach stared down the table at Pat Milton, who had not raised her hand to vote in the affirmative. Milton's eyes were cast on the papers in front of her as she refused to look around to her colleagues. *I wonder what has come over Pat*, he thought. He turned to whisper to the chairman.

"Roger, what's with Pat?"

No answer came as Vorbach was ignored by the chairman.

"Roger, you'll need to cast the tie-breaking vote."

Finally, the chairman acknowledged the Parliamentarian. "I'm sorry Steve. This one just was not meant to be. I'm voting against the nominee for the good of the party."

No one had heard the exchange between the two senators, but the redness of Vorbach's face revealed an intense conversation was brewing between the two.

"Roger, whose political game is this...?"

"Don't stop us, Steve. You'll only go down with him."

"You may win this one, Roger, but I'll fight anything you try to do the rest of your career." Vorbach's clenched teeth were the only give away that this was anything but a friendly conversation.

"This is the only thing I need to win, Roger."

"I can't believe you would destroy a man the stature of Randall Jones."

"Steve, he'll survive and go on. That's the type of man he is."

During this quiet exchange, Senator Winiger made his way back across the front of the House Chamber to his chair. The eyes of everyone except the two caught up in conversation were upon the old senator as he sat down. Looking around in the quietness, the white-haired man exclaimed in his gravel voice so that all could hear.

"Did I miss anything?"

Snickers came from somewhere in the chamber. Vorbach and Parrish stopped their whispers and looked over at Winiger.

"Senator Winiger," said the chairman calmly, "We were just voting on the nominee."

"Since when does a member of this austere committee not have the right to question the nominee?" The old liberal stared with steel gray eyes at the chairman.

“I ask your forgiveness in this matter. Senator, I guess we forgot you had left. Before we vote again, do you have any questions for the nominee?”

“Why no, Mr. Chairman.”

Smiles came from Snodgrass and Allen directed toward the liberal dinosaur of their party. Vorbach sat looking at the Jones’ family, shaking his head at the judge as if to tell him it was all over. Laura grabbed Lee’s hand. As he looked over at his friend, he noticed her head bowed in prayer. He joined her as he squeezed her hand to let her know.

“In that case,” said Parrish, “All those voting for the nomination, again signify by raising your hands.”

“Mr. Chairman...” The old legislator with the gravel voice spoke slowly. “I said that I have no questions, but if this committee can find it in their hearts to humor an old man, I do have a few comments to make before we vote.”

“The Chair recognizes the esteemed Senator from Vanderburgh County. You have the floor, Senator.”

“You’re so kind, Mr. Chairman.”

Allen nudged Snodgrass, rolling his eyes at having to sit through another boring speech by the man he thought invented boring speeches.

“Mr. Chairman, Senate Judiciary Committee members, Mr. Jones, distinguished guests and people of Indiana. We have all sat here for the past three hours listening to the life of this young judge, Randall Patrick Jones. I must admit that Mr. Jones and I do not see eye to eye in a few areas. I am the complete liberal who believes in making as many changes in our government system as we can until we find what works best. Mr. Jones sitting over there is the consummate conservative. ‘Make as few changes as you can; go slowly,’ says a Mr. Jones.

“However, in some ways, Randall, and I hope you’ll pardon my liberality in calling you by your first name, Mr. Jones. In some ways, Randall and I are alike. We are both men with flaws, which many of you people sitting here call sins. In spite of our flaws, we are both men of principle. Because we are men of principle, we can look each other in the eye and respect each other.

“We both despise both liberals and conservatives who display little if no character. Randall, you and I have seen those types of people we despise right here in front of us on this panel today. I believe you preachers here in this room call them hypocrites.

“Randall, according to most of my colleagues here, you have a lot going for you. You’re bright, well-rounded. You have a devoted family, and a feisty wife. In short, you have all the ingredients to be a great man; a man surpassing the influences of even the senators on this committee.

“I don’t know about the rest of you people here, but I’ve been around long enough to sense foul-play. Most people in government offices call foul-play by a different name – politics. Politics: what a word. Politics can justify about anything a politician wants to do. I found out a long time ago that poly means many and ties are just a bunch of blood-suckers. That’s us, folks: A group of many blood-suckers just waiting to suck someone else’s blood.

“Randall, let me sum up the allegations against you by one of my fine, young colleagues. First, you make phone calls, and second, you talked to a woman; about what,

no one knows, and no one cares. The third allegation I'm not even going to deal with, because I thought witch-hunts left our society three hundred years ago.

"Let me deal with the phone calls. I want everyone to know that I have done the same thing that Judge Jones has done, as I am sure most of these seated on this platform have done. We have made personal calls from our office phones. All I can say is: It's not big deal.

"Second, I wish to address Gary's accusations of you having had an affair. I want young Senator Allen to know that I just went to my office and made a long distance personal call on my phone. I did it for convenience sake, and will reimburse the state later. I called a Mrs. Hart; the same Mrs. Hart that Senator Allen brought out earlier in the hearing. After speaking with Mrs. Hart, I am convinced that Judge Jones had pure motives in talking to her. I won't go into details because I promised our conversation to remain in confidence. Just because I refuse to speak about it does not mean that I am trying to hide anything. Things said in confidence should never be brought out for all to see. People of character would rather die than divulge private, confidential conversation from another.

"I've only known two other men whom I have disagreed with to have as much character as this man seated before us here today. One was Bernard Sallenger, the man whom this nominee was chosen to replace. Ex-Justice Sallenger voted and spoke his mind, regardless of the opposition. The other's name was Vance. For many years, I called him a friend. He was the father of the young man who sits over here on my left. Randall, I hope if one of your boys ever makes a mockery of truth, it will be after you are in your grave, also.

"Mr. Chairman, you may have your vote now. I had better start raising my hand now. An old man takes longer to raise his hand, and I don't want to be so late that I may be counted with those in opposition to this nominee."

Winiger's hand raised into the air, as did the four senators seated on the other side of the chairman. The nays did not matter at this point. A clamor rose over the room. News people rushed out to report that the nominee has been favorably passed by the Senate committee. The Jones' family gathered together hugging the elder Jones. Fran nursed tears which flowed from her eyes.

In the middle of it all, as the chairman gaveled the noise to a halt, two sets of eyes gazed deeply into each other, as Laura and Lee, with hands joined in unity, realized that God had everything in control. The committee hurriedly moved to adjourn the hearing and Senator Parrish sounded the final gavel for adjournment.

The old senator was seen moving closer to Senator Allen. Only the two of them shared the exchange.

"Old man, I'll get you for this."

"Young man, if you try, I'll make sure everyone knows about the felony you committed in intercepting Judge Jones' private phone bills, and I'll expose your little behind the scenes romance between you and a certain blond Welfare woman."