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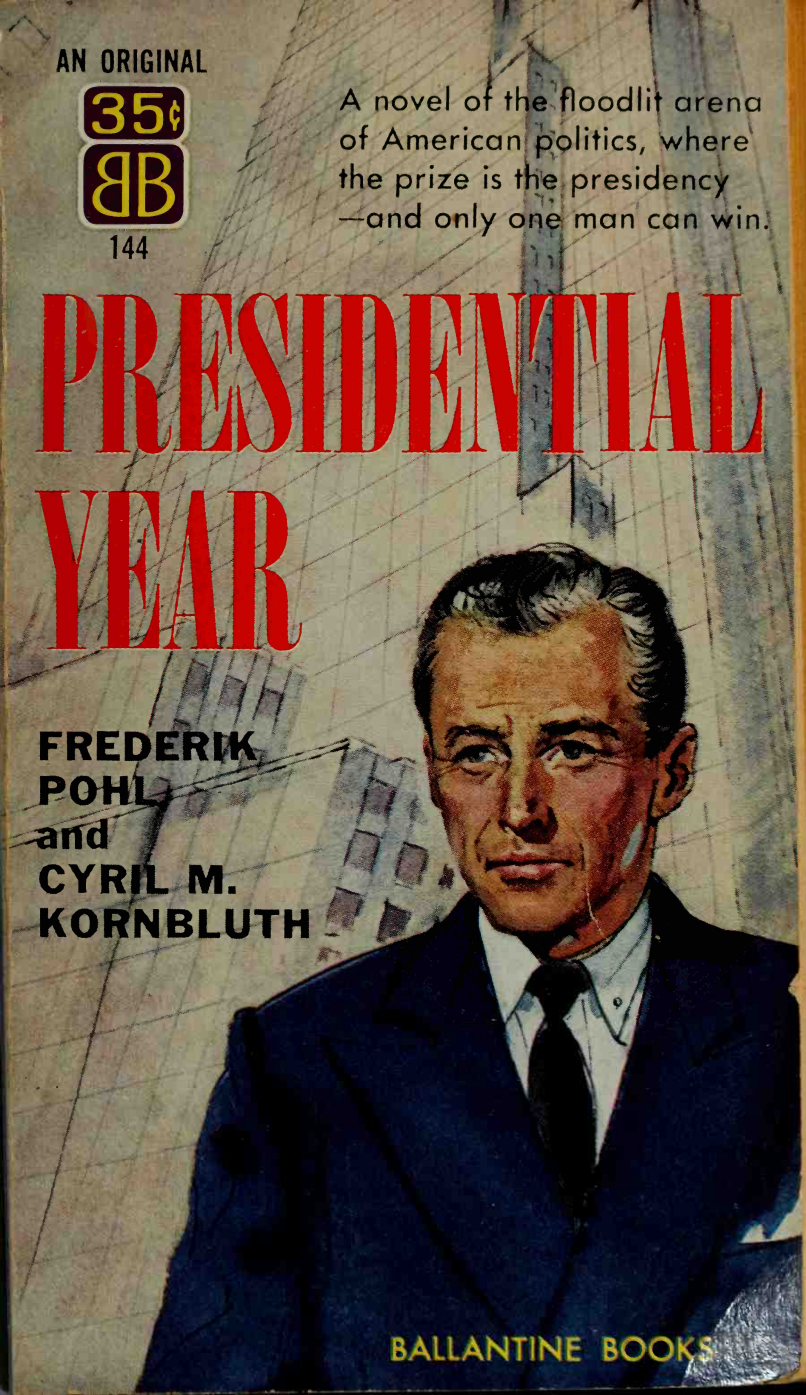
PRESIDENTIAL YEAR

FREDERIK POHL and CYRIL M. KORNBLUTH



BALLANTINE BOOKS

THE CURVE . . .

Pendleton spoke up, surprisingly. "I think Professor Houck is riding the curve and he isn't used to it."

"What curve?" demanded Houck.

"An expression you hear," said Pendleton apologetically. "In a campaign, you start off very exalted, very idealistic, you're going to bring in the Golden Age when your man gets elected. Then gradually things get complicated, you have to make deals, and you don't feel so idealistic any more. In fact, you feel lousy and you get to thinking you're a dirty crook and your man's a dirty crook and you wish to God you could get out of this stinking politics and go back to your business, whatever it is."

"You too?" asked Houck.

"Me too," Pendleton said. "But I've been through it before. I know what happens next. You fall in love with your candidate all over again. You bleed when he's hurt, you laugh when he's happy, and you work until you drop to get him elected. An awful lot of hairy-chested grown men cry like babies on election night, Professor Houck."

By

Frederik Pohl and C. M. Kornbluth

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by

FREDERIK POHL

and

C. M. KORNBLUTH

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CHAPTER 1

IT WAS the final lecture, falling two days before Christmas vacation. Professor Houck[1] had, as usual, secured a guest lecturer of impressive stature. The guest lecture in his constitutional law course was not yet institutionalized, like the Reith or the Hampton Lectures of his Rhodes Scholar days; he hoped some day that it would be, and that great public figures would come to consider the invitation a signal honor. Until that day came he would have to scrounge. Old friendships from Harvard, from Oxford, from the years on the War Policy Planning Board, from the eighteen learned, or professional, or political societies he belonged to—he drew on them all.

This year he had drawn on his lines into the world of the foundations and come up with Mahlon Stoddert[2]. Stoddert

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[1]HOUCK, Raymond Lagrange, eductr.; *b.* Worcester, Mass., Aug. 21, 1909; *s.* Charles Everett and Louise (Otis) H.; B.A., Clark Un. (Worcester) 1932, M.A., Harvard (Law) 1933, Ph.D., Oxford (Engl.) 1936; *m.* Margaret Milbourne Torney of Dedham, Mass., Nov. 26, 1940. *Clubs*: University, Scholars (New York); American Law Fedn., Phi Delta Phi, New England Nonpartisan. *Member*: War Policy Planning Board (1944-46), Connecticut Educational Alliance (1952).—*National Scholastic Directory*, 1954.

[2]STODDERT, Mahlon, public official; *b.* Titioute, Penna., May 7, 1898; *s.* Phillip and Mary Eleanor (Breckenridge) S.; B. A. Muhlenberg C. 1919; *m.* Gertrude Vandevelter of Catasauqua, Penna., Aug. 19, 1920 (*d.* April 11, 1938). Practicing attorney Oil City (Penna.) and Pittsburgh, 1920-1926. Pennsylvania State Assembly, 1926-1928. Mayor, South Pittsburgh, 1937-1939. *Service*: With R.A.F. (bombardier-radioman), 1939-1943, with U.S.A.A.F., (operations officer), 1943-45. *Decorations*: George Cross, Flying Medal (English), Air Medal, Bronze Star (U.S.). President, American Fund, 1946-51, Chairman, Peace Priorities Allocation Commission, 1951.
—*Who's Who in U.S. Politics, XIIth Edition.*

had accepted the invitation to lecture "on a topic related to constitutional law in its general aspects" with flattering promptness and Houck had not been forced to try a second or a third choice.

Stoddert was a prize. Houck sat comfortably at a side chair on the stage and watched rather than listened to the big man at the lectern. Stoddert had taken the "in its general aspects" hint. His lecture avoided more than passing case citations, which meant that, legally speaking, he was talking through his hat. But he was doing it beautifully, sincerely, and probably with good moral effect on the Law School seniors. He was telling them at length that the Bill of Rights is a good thing and that they were going out into the world—yes, he used that cliche!—in part to defend it against its foreign and domestic enemies. Domestic? You could not think of the domestic enemies of the Bill of Rights without the smooth, grim face of John R. O'S. Meehan[3], "Rosie" to his friends, flashing across the screen of your mind.

Houck sighed inaudibly and thought of pleasanter things. Of his wife, of the girls, of the Christmas vacation. Of how he would finish up the *Harper's* article in three days—he would do it, by God!—and have the rest of the vacation free for his family and not even think about the piece for *The Economist* until January 1st.

How Stoddert was running on! He was now discussing the Fifth Amendment, beautifully in the abstract, still without case citations. Maybe, thought Houck, it was because he was no longer enough of a lawyer to handle them. Stoddert had not, after all, practiced law past his twenty-eighth year and he was now in the neighborhood of fifty-five. The law had served Mahlon Stoddert as it served many men; as a springboard. "I cannot say too forcefully to you, young

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[3]MEEHAN, John Robert O'Sullivan, U.S. Senator; *b.* Carson City, Nev., Apr. 1, 1912; *s.* Thomas Calvin and Deirdre (O'Sullivan) M.; B.H.L., N. Mex. Wesleyan, 1936. Mayor, Las Cruces (Nev.) 1947-49. Representative, 17th Cong. Dist. (Nev.), 1950-52. U.S. Senator, 1952. *Service*: With U.S. Field Artillery (5th Army) 1941-1945. *Decorations*: Bronze Star; Purple Heart.

—*Who's Who in U.S. Politics, XIIth Edition.*

gentlemen, that the Bill of Rights *is* for export. I have always urged as a private citizen and as a public official that we maintain on our friends abroad a gentle but unrelenting pressure to measure the liberties of their citizens against those of our own, for in just the proportion that men are free, they will be strong. . . ."

Houck winced almost visibly. Nevertheless, he noted, Stoddert was holding the audience.

Houck got to know Stoddert during his American Fund presidency, for the Fund had underwritten his project on textual criticism of the Constitution drafts and manuscripts. They dined together a few times and by mere chance Houck was the first person Stoddert told of his appointment by the President of the United States (subject to inevitable Senate confirmation) to the chairmanship of the new and powerful Peace Priorities Allocation Commission. Houck just happened to be in the office when the call came through from Washington that ended weeks of rivalry and doubt.

Oddly, Houck's first reaction was one of profound alarm. He tried hard later to analyze it.

It wasn't jealousy. Houck had what he wanted: a busy and wonderfully interesting life among some of the brightest youngsters of his time, varied at frequent intervals by intercourse with some of the best mature minds in the country. He had done his wartime tour of duty and a bit more; the governor customarily saw him at least once a month; he sat on citizens' committees and wrote his articles, both scholarly and popular. The state attorney general, an ignorant, good-hearted political hack, called him frequently in a panic for unbiased advice, which he thought he could not get from his staff, and there was secret fun in the thought of being the power behind that dilapidated throne. He had drafted speeches for the governor when he was a candidate and had to have a rock-solid statement touching fundamental law. He was happy at home; his other activities gave him a scarcity-value in the eyes of Meg and the girls; it was a good family.

Then why, at the news that Mahlon Stoddert was to head up the P.P.A.C. did he get—*scared?*

Houck found his clue at last in Stoddert's resignation of

the mayoralty to enlist in the R.C.A.F. The city, as Stoddert must have known it would, fell back into the hands of the ring from which he had briefly rescued it. On the plus side, the R.A.F. got what was probably just one more bombardier-radioman, no doubt fudging its physical standards of admission for reasons of state. You call such a deed as Stoddert's "quixotic," which is a literary way of saying "silly" or even "crazy."

There was a little wave of applause from the students; Stoddert had just finished quoting one of the foreign policy pronouncements of Senator Braxton B. Davis[4].

Houck became aware that old Asbury was tapping him on the sleeve. He looked where Asbury pointed. An undergraduate was standing in the wings, pantomiming a telephone call.

Houck hesitated, looked at Stoddert's back, debated the question of manners that had been raised and made up his mind. Stoddert added a few remarks about Senator Davis; there was another patter of applause and Houck took advantage of it to smile apologetically at the audience and leave. No one appeared to notice; everyone was intent on Stoddert's benediction of Senator Davis.

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[4]DAVIS, Braxton Bragg, U.S. Senator; *b.* Okoma, Tenn., Oct. 17, 1884; *s.* Henry Clay and Sarah Margaret (Lackland) D.; B.Sc., Washington & Lee Un. 1901, L.H.D., Etowah Emmanuel Missionary Coll. for Women (Etowah, Tenn.) 1907 (*revoked,* Sept. 21, 1948), L.L.D., Un. of Tennessee (Memphis Campus), 1911; *m.* Dorothy Louise Bibb of Lenoir City, Tenn., July 2, 1913 (*d.* Dec. 14, 1917); *m.* Della Rutledge of Sweetwater, Tenn., April 24, 1926 (*d.* June 5, 1926). Practicing attorney with firm of Lackland, Bibb, and Fortescue 1912-1915, in Chattanooga, Tenn; with Lackland, Bibb, Hogarth and Davis (successor firm), 1915. Representative, 4th Cong. Dist. (Tenn.), 1926-28, 27th Cong. Dist. (Tenn.), 1928-32. U. S. Senator, 1932. *Service*: With A.E.F., 1917-1919. *Member*: Senate Judiciary Committee (1934-38), Senate Appropriations Committee (1936-38), Senate Foreign Affairs Committee (1938); *Chairman*: Senate Foreign Affairs Committee, 1950-52, 1954.

—*Who's Who in U.S. Politics, XIIth Edition.*

The undergraduate said, "I'm sorry, Professor, but it's Mrs. Hoke and she——"

"Houck," he corrected automatically. "That's all right. Where's the phone?"

The applause followed him. Houck felt very pleased as he slid into the seat under the phone; Stoddert was going over very well indeed. And there had been men from both the local papers there too, as well as a stringer from a wire service, according to the girl in the University's public-information office. There was a long way to go, but the day might yet come when these lectures meant something.

"Raymond? I'm sorry if I interrupted anything, dear. . . ."

"It's all right."

Meg said, "Dear, it's Molly. She's running a little temperature. Do you think I should call Dr. Eaton?"

"How much of a temperature?" Molly was eleven, and that was the fourth temperature she had run since Labor Day. It was always some sort of cold; and it had been like that every year since she was three.

"Almost a hundred and two," Meg said hesitantly.

"Call Dr. Eaton," Houck said at once. "And Meg, do you want me to come now?"

Doubtfully: "No."

"All right. But you call me after Dr. Eaton comes, will you? I'll be right here."

He hung up and wandered thoughtfully back to the wings. Too many little fevers, sometimes a little too high. It wasn't her tonsils or her adenoids; that had been Dr. Carney's guess, so she didn't have those any more. It wasn't vitamin deficiency—she swallowed a whole spectrum of vitamins every day—and it wasn't a run-down condition; she was the only eleven-year-old they knew who still took a daily nap. Still, come to think of it, she had been looking a little peaked the last few days, such few times as he had chanced to see her. There had been a lot to do, getting ready for the holidays and arranging things for the lecture. . . .

There always were a lot of things to do. Houck reminded himself again: He would finish the *Harper's* piece that very weekend, and all of Christmas would be family, nothing but family.

Stoddert was winding up: "The glorious document we call the Constitution is, after all, only paper. It is a mighty shield against tyranny and yet, without strong arms to bear it, the shield is useless and ineffective. We have the shield. When those who bear it so courageously for us now—Braxton Davis and the other Senate leaders, our splendid Supreme Court justices, all the other outstanding men I have had occasion to mention—when they must put it down, it is to you in this room, and your fellows throughout the nation that this duty will fall. May God prove you worthy of it."

He bowed slightly and gathered up his notes. The auditorium rocked with applause.

Raymond Houck, applauding, advanced to the podium to express the thanks of the gathering to their distinguished speaker. The gathering was too busy applauding to give him a chance. Stoddert was already back in his chair, looking slightly flushed and embarrassed; Houck turned to him and signaled him to rise for another bow.

They loved him. And yet, Houck demanded, what had he said? A lot of truisms about the sacredness of the spirit of the Constitution—all certifiably praiseworthy, of course, but nothing that hadn't been said ad nauseam. A few pungent but nonspecific remarks about the Constitution's enemies; clearly he had meant John R. O'S. Meehan, and Houck was willing to bet that at least twenty in the audience were devoted to Rosie Meehan. But there weren't any scowling faces. A good many puffs for Stoddert's personal heroes, such as Braxton B. Davis, the hoary and estimable senior senator from Tennessee.

But did it all add up to anything? If so, Raymond Houck, once ghostwriter to a governor, couldn't find it. He was forced to conclude that it wasn't the words in a speech that made the difference, perhaps not even the content; it was the man who delivered it. And what it took to move an audience, the head of the American Fund had.

At last the audience let Houck speak. He wound up the meeting and waited impatiently while at least two dozen undergraduates, as well as a sprinkling from the faculty, surrounded the speaker.

After ten minutes he bored into the group and stuck out

his hand. "Stoddert," he said, "thanks very much. I don't have to tell you how much we liked the talk—you heard the applause. I'd hoped we could have a drink together before your train, but one of the kids is sick and I'd better get along. Will you forgive me if I let Dr. Asbury see you to the train?"

Stoddert frowned sharply. "I'm sorry," he said after a moment. "Is there anything I can do?"

"Thanks, no. Just a cold, I suppose, but——"

Stoddert said, "Houck, if it isn't too much of an imposition, I would appreciate it very much if we could talk for a few minutes."

Houck allowed himself to raise his eyebrows. A couple of well-trained seniors caught their cue and departed. The less well-trained ones followed.

"If it's only a cold," Stoddert said, "and if I wouldn't be in the way, might I come out to your home? I won't take up much of your time, but there *is* something."

Now what, Houck wondered, could Stoddert want? It was bound to be something favorable; there was simply nothing unfavorable that could come from Stoddert. There hadn't been a request for a grant to the American Fund—Stoddert still carried weight there—that could be turned down. . . .

A grant.

Was it possible, even remotely, that the American Fund was going to *offer* a grant? That was the way Stoddert worked; he didn't wait to be asked.

Maybe the letter he'd written Stoddert, telling what he hoped the lectures might become, telling what need he was so sure they could fill, had an effect far beyond his hopes!

Houck said, "I'd be delighted to have you, Stoddert. You wouldn't be in the way. But there's your train. Perhaps a drink? There's a rather nice place near the station where I often——"

Stoddert shook his head firmly. "Not a bar. And it doesn't matter in the least about my train, there'll be another in a couple of hours." He hesitated and smiled engagingly. He had a good smile; not soft, nor superior, not humble, not hard. "I'm a pest," he admitted. "But I have a reason."

Raymond Houck said: "You're not a pest. You're very welcome. My car's right outside."

Meg was quite surprised to find they had a visitor, but she bore up well. She'd had plenty of practice in it, Houck reminded himself; she was a splendid wife for a man like him to have.

Dr. Eaton had been and gone. The cold was only a cold; and though Molly would have to stay in bed a day or two, she was resting comfortably and Meg was feeling more cheerful herself. Houck caught her in the kitchen and told her that Stoddert had something to discuss, presumably in private; she brought in ice for the Scotch-and-water and excused herself on the grounds of needing to see to the invalid.

Stoddert said sincerely, "Raymond, I appreciate your letting me barge in like this. I'll have to let you judge whether or not I'm wasting your time."

Houck smiled vaguely, too embarrassed to speak. It was obvious to him, and should have been obvious to Stoddert himself, that he had only to command. Perhaps it was another example of the great man's streak of silliness, in this case an unwarranted humility that obscured the simple relationship between them.

"This is confidential for the time being," Stoddert said. Abruptly he was an executive. "I've been conferring with Senator Davis quite a bit lately. He's made up his mind to run for the presidential nomination next year."

Houck got to his feet and digested the news. He said at last, slowly, "That's splendid. I'm really delighted to hear it, Stoddert. Really delighted. A foreign policy *expert,* a man with a quarter-century of foreign-policy continuity. A man who knows the Senate inside-out. Really. I couldn't be more pleased. But can he——?"

"be elected?" Stoddert finished for him when he paused, fearing to be rude. "Of course he can if we get in there and fight. And he wants you on the team, Houck. He asked me to bring you down so he can look you over."

"Good Heavens! I'm stunned." And Houck was. Governorships were one thing; there were forty-eight of them, big and little. Really, there was only one Big Job in the

country. An invitation to move into the arena where it was contested—it was paralyzing. He asked, "How did he ever hear of me?"

"From Charlie, up in your state house, I believe." That was the governor; not even when he had been writing his speeches had he been "Charlie" to Houck. "And somebody gave him that study you headed up for the Fund; he liked it enormously and talked about it for a couple of days and then asked me to bring you down."

"Ah—what would I do?"

Stoddert looked impassive. "Speeches . . . The Senator will tell you. Can you leave tonight?"

Another stunner. An unkind one. The man knew his child was sick—a little—and nevertheless made this demand.

Well. Perhaps that's the way things worked in the big arena. An eleven-year-old girl's four degrees of fever simply could not be allowed to have any bearing on the Presidency of the United States, not even such a minute bearing as to sway a potential speech-writer to delay a visit with a candidate by twenty-four hours.

Bragg's candidacy was, of course, *good*. There was not a particle of doubt in his mind about it. The only thing that mattered today was foreign policy; you could gripe and quibble about various aspects of the domestic scene, but the American people were the best-fed, healthiest, best-educated, best-housed, freest people who had ever been seen on the face of the earth. They needed *better* highways, *better* houses, *better* medicine, *better* schools, and there were certain dark areas of American life, not small but not huge, which stood in tragic contrast against the rosy, almost-millennial picture. None of this was overwhelmingly important as against the facts that the Russian Empire was on the prowl again and armed to the teeth; that the old-style colonial systems were breaking up into brand-new nations for the most part groping and baffled by the unexpected problems of responsibility and tempted to dangerous solutions; that there were new weapons whose use meant the suicide of the human race.

Houck's opinion was that the crises might end in about fifty years if everybody remained calm and firm, meeting

local force with local force, maneuvering for alliances, putting out the brushfires fast, never losing sight of the goal that was stability. It was a job for technicians rather than heroes, he thought. And incomparably the best foreign-policy technician in the country was Braxton B. Davis. He knew the chiefs of state and—often more important—their advisers. His twenty-five years had given him an ear for the fundamental tune a given nation played over the years while persons of shorter service mistook trills and embellishments for the melody. The election of Braxton B. Davis to the Presidency would mean four and possibly eight years of the long road back to a world truly at peace.

Houck turned to Stoddert and said, "Of course I can leave tonight if he wants to see me. I'll be coming back tomorrow, I suppose?"

Stoddert's look said without words, "You ought to know better than that."

Houck answered himself, "Or not, as the case may be. I'll have a talk with Mrs. Houck. There are the papers. Would you like another drink?"

"No, thank you."

Houck found Meg in Molly's room; the child was dozing. He beckoned her out and said in the hall, "Stoddert wants me to go with him to see a man tonight. In Tennessee."

"*Tennessee?* Is he mad?"

"I'm going. It's quite fantastically important, dear."

"Oh-ho. Would the man by any chance be the president of the *University* of Tennessee?"

"No; it's not a job. I'm going to see Senator Davis. It's blood, sweat and tears." That was their family name for his politicking. "Keep it under your hat, love."

At the head of the stairs, she scowled and said, "I'll try. Do you really have to go?"

"I think so."

"Back very soon?"

"Blood, sweat and tears. You know how it goes. One thing leads to another. There's this guy you really got to meet, prof, he's gonna be here on the 7:04 unless he got his wires crossed. I suppose it'll be like that; it always has been. I'll try like hell to get back the minute I can."

"Instead of trying so hard to get back why not just not

go? After all, Molly . . ." Her voice trailed off. "I'm sorry," she said. "I'll pack your bag."

He kissed her and she went to their bedroom. He rejoined Stoddert and said, "Mrs. Houck is packing for me."

Stoddert said, "You'd better call a taxi. She won't want to drive us to the station with a sick child in the house."

It was at the station, when Stoddert bought his ticket, that Houck found out they were going not to Tennessee or Washington but to New York City. "The Senator's there on a special job," Stoddert told him with a broad grin, and refused jovially to elaborate. He read reports and Houck worked on the *Harper's* article during the three-hour train ride.

CHAPTER 2

THE SENATOR was on a special job.

When a man, any man, decides or is prevailed upon to run for the Presidency, he immediately assumes a very special job. That is, to get himself elected if he possibly can. In order to do this he must make sure that his name is before the public early and often, and he must at once begin doing the sort of things that will put it there.

There is a political riddle to illustrate the point, which goes like this: "Question: A voter is offered three candidates for a given office. Candidate A has an impressive war record but is young and untried. Candidate B has held office for many years but has been linked with political scandals. Candidate C is endorsed by the trade unions, the National Association of Manufacturers, the League of Women Voters and the PTA, but is in poor health. For which candidate will the voter cast his ballot?"

The answer is: "For the one whose name he has heard the most often."

Publicity is the *sine qua non* of politics. "They don't vote for who they never heard of." It is easy enough to get. Fortunately for the democratic process, a candidate is automatically news. If he makes a speech, it is reported in all the papers, whether they are for him or against him. *How* it is reported is another matter. A candidate's publicity

problem usually runs in the other direction, in fact—how do you get *away* from the three-to-thirty newsmen, photographers, TV-radio-and-newsreel men, article writers, columnists and commentators who hound your every step?

But there is a time in the life of every candidate when he is not yet a candidate, officially; when he cannot openly campaign, officially; when the etiquette of political life denies him the candidates' publicity channels—officially.

That is the time when he needs friends. Friends to invite him to contribute a "nonpolitical" article on the state of the country to their magazine. Friends to see that he addresses the "nonpolitical" testimonial dinners which precede the campaigns. Friends to get his name before the public "nonpolitically," and to keep it there.

If he is a senator, a governor, or the head of a powerful committee, it helps; the pre-candidate has his news outlets ready-made. But no matter what outlets he may have, the thoughtful pre-candidate will look for more; there are tens of millions of eligible Americans for every one who becomes President, and bucking odds like that a pre-candidate needs every break he can get.

So he will look for more publicity outlets.

And he may find it necessary to take on a "special job."

Mahlon Stoddert escorted Houck out of the cab. They were in Rockefeller Center.

Houck looked around him curiously as he followed Stoddert through the big bright lobby to the elevators. "Radio? Television? Oh, is Senator Davis making a speech tonight?"

"Ssh!" Stoddert grinned. "Wait and see. I don't want you to miss the impact of this."

They got out on the fourth floor, with nearly the whole carful of people. Stoddert nimbly sidestepped the crowd, who seemed to be on their way to become studio audiences, and led Houck through a door marked in red letters: *Control Booth—No Admittance.*

It wasn't a "booth"; it was a large room, heavily carpeted, on two levels divided by a three-step rise. The lower level had a glass wall, which overlooked the auditorium and stage. Against the glass wall were banks of equipment, switches and dials and the faces of picture

tubes. Shirt-sleeved men wearing headphones sat at the banks and turned the switches as views of the bare stage or the audience filing in appeared and disappeared on their tubes. There was a man who seemed to be in charge; he had a microphone on his chest and talked into it in a low, confident voice, peering through the glass wall at the two huge cameras flanking the stage and the third in the center aisle. The second level of the room was furnished only with easy chairs, smoking stands and two large console television sets. Six or eight people, a couple of them women, were sitting and chatting; a uniformed page was moving a chair for one of the women.

One of the men, a young one, glanced at them as they stood in the door, excused himself to his neighbor and walked over.

"Raymond Houck, Perry Sutherland," Stoddert said briskly.

Perry Sutherland stuck out his hand. He wasn't quite as young as he had appeared at first, Houck realized; maybe in his thirties. But the crew-cut, the white-on-white shirt and the narrow bow tie created an illusion, not exactly of youth but of immaturity.

"Let's sit over here," Sutherland said, drawing them to a grouping of easy chairs that left a pointed blank between them and the rest of the upper-level denizens.

"So you landed him," Sutherland said to Stoddert. "Congratulations."

Stoddert said, "That remains to be seen, but at least he's receptive. As you've guessed, Raymond, Perry Sutherland is a member of——" He glanced at the others and paused ——"of the same little group we've invited you to join. You'll be working fairly closely together—if you decide to join, that is. Perry's public relations."

Houck got his hand away from Perry Sutherland and said politely, "Newspaper background, I suppose?"

"Not exactly. I came up through radio, myself—assistant producer on the old *Meet the Public* show a couple of years ago. But I've kept my wires open, and most of the radio people I worked with are in television now."

"That's nice," Houck said absently. He was craning his neck to see what was going on outside the control booth.

The audience had filtered in and been seated, and an announcer was making them laugh—the "warm-up," as Houck remembered from his own panel-show guest shots. There were four desks ranged along one side of the stage, a larger moderator's table in the center, and at the other side a white-screened enclosure whose purpose was obscure. Over the stage, visible to the audience but not to the panel, were two electric signs, both turned off; and above them a larger electric sign, lighted, that read: *Who's Shadowing Who?*

"Whom," Houck said automatically.

Perry Sutherland told him: "I can see you're going to be a real asset. You've seen the show, haven't you?"

"I'm afraid not. We keep the television mostly for the kids."

"*Sure* you do."

Slightly annoyed, Houck said, "I have nothing against television, Mr. Sutherland. I just don't have much time. I don't suppose I see five programs a month."

Sutherland looked at him and grinned. "You miss some pretty good stuff," he offered. "I think you'd like a lot of it. There's the culture-vulture stuff on Sunday afternoons —*Omnibus,* and so on. And there's *Medic,* and some of the comedians—Sid Caesar, Georgie Gobel, that sort. This Gobel has a girl singer who's pretty cute, too, Penny King. She isn't very big, but——"

"Peggy King," Houck corrected. "She ——" He stopped, puzzled; then he realized why Sutherland was laughing. He said, "I have already admitted, Mr. Sutherland, that I do see an occasional program——"

"Oh, no offense," Sutherland said amiably. "I just wanted to prove a point. You may not think you watch television much, but you've got it in your house and you don't kick the television habit. It's insidious."

"And it is important," Stoddert cut in. "That's one reason why I asked you to come down tonight, Raymond. But let's watch the show now and talk over the merits of the case afterward."

The weekly performance of that most popular of panel shows, *Who's Shadowing Who,* was on the air. The panel

came in, two boys and two girls, came in and introduced themselves and their moderator. The moderator expressed his gratitude to the panel for showing up, to the audience for being an audience, and to the sponsor for making the whole thing possible, and then the sponsor took ninety seconds to peddle his pills. Most of the commercial was a pretty girl urging over and over again, cooing and insistently: "Be *morning-happy* . . . and the world will . . . love . . . you *all* . . . *day* . . . *long.*" What this had to do with aspirin Houck could not see, and he ventured to ask Sutherland about it.

"Some M.R. stuff they came up with," Sutherland grunted. "We're going to try it ourselves later on, maybe."

Houck filed the mystery for reference; the show was on—in the flesh before them and on the two big television sets if they glanced aside.

Houck had heard that if you show a Bedouin a photograph for the first time he will look at it blankly, turn it upside-down in an effort to understand, and finally confess that it means nothing to him. He had also heard of an elderly monk who saw his first movie and was completely baffled by the conventions of close-ups, off-screen voices, intercutting, and lap dissolves. Apparently the "realistic" movie had affected him very much as the experimental surrealist films of the twenties affected an average audience. Houck as he watched *Who's Shadowing Who* felt like the Bedouin, like the monk, like the lowest lowbrow at a screening of a Dali-Bunuel nightmare on film.

There were, for instance, two silhouettes on the screen, one male and one female. It seemed that there were real people behind the screen, but at first he was not certain even of that. Their names were flashed on the signboards above the screen, but the panel couldn't see them. The panel asked questions, which were answered through a raspy loudspeaker. Houck didn't have the faintest clue as to who did the answering; he thought at first it was one, or both, of the people behind the screen, but a reference to "the mystery expert" threw doubt on that theory. As the names flashed on and off—without the panel knowing which, if either, of the names was lit up—points were added and deducted to scores, for the panel consisted of two

teams. And there seemed to be a sort of drone-bass contest to guess who the mystery expert was; he seemed to have been on and unidentified for six weeks, a record. And at one point somebody asked "the mystery question" and a pretty girl in an abbreviated Satan suit exploded onstage through a trapdoor in smoke and flames and presented one of the panelists with one hundred dollars and a chaste kiss "for being such a little devil" and everybody laughed and applauded and the band played wildly.

Through all this the silhouettes on the screen were doing something mysterious with bowls and crescent-shaped instruments. Their names, which were Lefevre and Macklin, meant nothing to the professor and he abstained from asking his neighbors. In a way, watching the show was a little like being drunk with none of the penalties.

The fifteen-minute mark was coming up when one of the panelists finally guessed that the two shadow-figures were chopping chicken livers and that this had something to do with their profession. It rapidly developed that the crescent-shaped instruments were special knives for chicken-liver chopping called "hockmessers" and that their profession was not messing around so they were therefore hockey players; to be exact, Lefevre and Macklin of the Montreal Bats. And Lefevre and Macklin were revealed as the screen drew upward and everybody cheered them and in accented English Lefevre donated their winnings of $6,-483 to "zat wondairful chairitee" the Montreal Catholic Orphans' Home where he himself had been raised and where he had learned the wonderful, clean, manly sport of ice hockey. Macklin stood by and grinned. The great burst of applause came to an end exactly as the minute hand touched three and the second hand touched twelve.

Commercial.

Sutherland leaned over and called to one of the men across the room, "Terrific, Jock! It tore my heart out." The man said, "Thanks."

After the commercial Houck was not at all surprised when one of the name signs lit up with: SEN. BRAXTON B. DAVIS. He was very much surprised when the other lit up with: SEN. J.R.O'S. MEEHAN. The quality of the applause that the two names pulled differed in an interesting way.

Davis's was swelling and spontaneous, yes, in spite of the big sign a man held up off camera. It was warm. Meehan's was darker and grimmer; palms beat more violently. There were fewer people making more noise than Davis drew.

The silhouettes on the screen could have been anybody's. Davis was a big man with a famous shock of hair; evidently he had plastered it down and was standing closer to the screen to size up with Meehan, who was of average height. Both were swinging golf clubs. Houck got it instantly: club, "world's most exclusive club," United States Senate.

Apparently the rules changed completely for the second half of the show; for one thing, the mystery expert was gone and the shadow figures answered the questions themselves, over the same raspy loudspeaker to disguise their voices. For a moment Houck gave himself up to wondering that millions of viewers could master *two* sets of rules with seeming ease and enjoy themselves in the process. As a professional teacher he wondered how long it would take to pound them through the heads of an average college class if they were simply printed in a textbook instead of being embodied in a popular television show. About a semester, he estimated.

Maybe the show wasn't crooked, but the panelists had certainly been tipped off to handle these guests with kid gloves. There were no questions touching anatomy—"Do you carry on this activity with a certain part of the body?" —even when the previous reply begged for them. It was all very respectful and suddenly quite dull as profiles of the two senators began to emerge in questions and answers. Davis's answers were sometimes witty, but earnest young Meehan's contributions were dragging the session down into mediocrity. He frequently sank to "yes" or "no," which clearly was not playing the game.

And really, what the devil were those two doing together? No doubt Davis would have had veto power over the choice of a companion; why let them choose Rosie Meehan?

There was only one answer, and Houck was not naive enough to let it dismay him. Davis was allowing some of Meehan's following to rub off on him. A vote's a vote, even if it's the vote of a fathead. Especially if it's the vote

of a fathead who applauds grimly and conscientiously, making the maximum amount of noise.

Suddenly it was over; the band played and the screen lifted and the senators were applauded. Davis, grinning, ran his hand through his plastered hair, ruffling it up in the cockatoo crest dear to the political cartoonists. He was a fine-looking man; Meehan was completely overshadowed by his presence. Meehan spoke first; with his faintly tinny sincerity he thanked everybody and donated his check for $3,240 dollars to the National Foundation for Crippled Children. Houck wondered how Davis would top *that,* and soon found out.

Braxton B. Davis played Meehan off the boards in exactly forty-five seconds. He referred to his wonderful old mother, Sarah Lackland Davis, his beloved farm, Bluegrass, "where we had a pretty good year. I don't think I can do better than emulate my friend and fellow-member in 'the world's most exclusive club'——" It got a good laugh—— "so I wish to donate my winnings to the same wonderful charity he selected. And I should like to match my winnings with my own check for an equal amount. As I said, we had a pretty good year down at Bluegrass. Thank you all, and God bless you."

He shook hands with the panelists and M.C., a striding, vigorous figure, with Meehan trailing behind him being determinedly manly and frank. The applause was volcanic as the two senators stepped through the door from the stage and there was no doubt who it was for.

Commercial.

The three men leaned back in their easy chairs; across the room the others, sponsors and producers, were watching the commercial intently on the monitor set. For them the show was not yet over.

"This way," Sutherland said, He led Stoddert and Houck out of the control booth, stopping only to say, "Great show, Jock. A Hopper breaker, if you want my opinion. And thanks." Jock nodded proudly.

The dressing rooms of Studio 14-K had been designed to accommodate a dozen dramatic actors and actresses.

The facilities were equal to the task of costuming them from the skin up in any style or period.

As a place to hang his coat Senator Braxton B. Davis found his dressing room a trifle overwhelming. He sat down before the triple mirror—he had refused make-up, but the lights had made him sweat—and carefully wiped his face while he waited for Stoddert and that young fellow, Houck.

There was a rap on the door. "Come in," he bawled lustily. "See if you can find a chair in this French bordello they gave me while I— Oh."

It wasn't Stoddert and the young fellow. It was the moderator of the show, Doctor Dilemma as he was known in the trade, and he was carrying a silver decanter. Davis courteously rose.

"No, no, Senator," the moderator said, in the crisply articulated middle-American baritone that had launched him as a baseball announcer and carried him to his present heights. "Don't get up. I thought you might enjoy a small refresher after your ordeal. It's bourbon." He swirled the decanter.

Senator Davis drew down the wild eyebrows humorously. "I wouldn't enjoy a *small* one," he said. The moderator laughed and disappeared into the pink tile bath for glasses. The Senator carefully reknotted his tie. It was true, he wouldn't enjoy a small bourbon; he would enjoy a large one even less; but one of the penalties of being seventy-one years old was that you had to out-perform the youngsters. Davis drank six ounces of bourbon a day—never more and, except when he was safe at home in Bluegrass, seldom less. At the task of showing a great but controllable fondness for alcohol he was fully the equal of a Madison Avenue executive and the master of any asphalt-tile salesman on the road. It was part of the legend of Braxton B. Davis, the Grand Old Man of the Senate, lawmaker, horseman, American ambassador to the world and two-fisted drinker. Like most legends, it clothed the living body only approximately and rubbed sore spots where it touched.

The door again. "Come in, come in," Davis called. Stoddert brought his captive into the room.

"Senator," he said, "I'd like to present Professor Raymond Houck. Senator Davis."

Houck put out his hand. It was the first time he had touched the flesh of the Grand Old Man of the Senate. He looked just like his pictures, just like his own face in the newsreels, on the television screen, at the rallies during the gubernatorial campaign when Houck had beheld him at a distance. He was a big man, and the hair was frantic.

Houck cleared his throat. He said: "Senator, I want you to know that I appreciate——"

"We'll have to have a talk, Professor," the Senator cut in. "Our friend from the show is getting some glasses. Maybe you'd like a drink?"

"Thanks," Houck said shortly. He retired to a white chaise lounge. Evidently the Senator thought he had been about to say something indiscreet about his presidential ambitions, with an interloper from the network within earshot in the bathroom. He wasn't *that* ignorant; hadn't he worked for the governor?

Houck wasn't a bit sure he liked the atmosphere. He knew about the talks before the Poultry-Growers' Conference and the dedications of the memorial drives; he knew how important it was for a prospective candidate to keep his name in front of the voters. But this way? By being a clown on a clownish show in front of forty million viewers?

The chief clown of the show came out of the bathroom with glasses, did a double-take and went back for more. Perry Sutherland trotted over to help him and Houck could hear Sutherland's fulsome expressions of thanks for the privilege of letting the Grand Old Man of the Senate become a television clown. "Oh, and Senator," he called as he came out with the moderator. "That reminds me. The CBS thing is all set for Christmas Day." He patted the moderator jovially on the shoulder. "Excuse the expression," he said.

"CBS has a right to live too," the moderator told him solemnly, taking the stopper out of the decanter. "Bourbon for everybody? I'm sorry about the ice, but the page I sent out said——"

"That's quite all right," Stoddert told him. "You ought to hear Senator Davis's views on ice in bourbon some day."

Houck accepted a drink. He watched the Senator take a long pull at the lukewarm whiskey-and-water combination.

For this, he told himself, he had run out on a worried wife and a sick child; good Lord, they might be sitting here gabbing and drinking for hours.

It got worse before it got better. The door again, and three members of the panel came in to express their deep gratitude to Davis. The moderator, looking faintly worried, rang for a page and more glasses, more bourbon. A network vice-president and two advertising-agency men turned up with the producer of the show—just for a minute, they were on their way somewhere, they said; but they sat down and accepted drinks. Houck, retreating toward the head of the chaise longue to make room for one of the girls on the panel, wondered if this was part of the paycheck for television's guest stars, or if all these people really, sincerely, wanted to pay their respects to the Senator.

He was holding them, that was sure. He was off on a reminiscence of one of Churchill's visits to Washington in World War II—"that kindly and knightly Solon," Churchill had called him in a book—and even the fantastically bosomed blonde next to Houck was listening intently.

Houck admired Braxton Davis's drawing power. He admired it even more a moment later when the door, half-ajar, was pushed open.

Senator John R. O'S. Meehan, the junior senator from Nevada, was making his pilgrimage to the mountain.

The moderator, the panelists, the network men and the sponsors' representatives were immediately and individually ripped in half. They managed, each in his or her own way, to convey both their fascination with Davis's anecdote and their delight that Meehan had arrived. Houck was fascinated and slightly worried that they would go into convulsions with the effort; but the two senators had been in situations like this often enough before; like a smooth team, they got the bystanders off the hook.

Braxton Davis interrupted himself to boom, "Come in, Rosie, come in. Glad you didn't run off before I could tell you you missed your calling. You should have been an actor."

Rosie Meehan said properly, "Thank you very much, Senator." He had a limpid, almost an occult smile; it was

sad and sweet and it had got him the votes of nearly every female Nevadan past thirty-five. The dreamy eyes matched the colorless voice; they were sober and always very polite. Always, except in the heat of political oration or when his Committee on Government Affairs had pinned down a frightened post-office clerk. He had been seen on television to drool at the mouth during the session when he uncovered two members of the Socialist Labor Party working in the PX at Jefferson Barracks; but outside of things like that he was deeply respectful to his elders.

"Don't let me interrupt, Senator," he begged, and looked around for a place to sit. Half the people in the room were standing, offering their places. To Houck's dismay, Meehan took the one vacated by the blond bosom at the end of the chaise longue, next to him.

The blond bosom pulled over a hassock and managed to smile at Meehan while she listened to Davis. Fortunately she didn't have to keep it up very long, because Davis cut his story short and allowed one of the network men to run with the ball. And the network man, who had his own ax to grind, dropped in a question about the forthcoming amendments to the Federal Communications Commission laws on ultra-high-frequency television channel allotments, and that took care of the conversation for a while.

While the network man was running on, Houck became aware that Senator Davis was beckoning to him. He crossed the room and stooped to listen. In a preoccupied voice the Senator said: "Call Newark Airport, please, and ask my pilot whether we can take off in one hour. If so, tell him to warm up the plane." Then he turned to Doctor Dilemma and resumed a conversation.

Well, he had said "please." Houck found the phone in a corner and asked the network switchboard to put through a person-to-person to Senator Davis's pilot at Newark Airport. The man must have been waiting by the airport switchboard; he told Houck he *could* take off in one hour, the strip at Bluegrass was O.K. weatherwise, and he would be gassed up and waiting.

Houck relayed the information to the Senator, who thanked him courteously, finished his bourbon and stood

up. "It's been wonderful meeting all you people from this new world of television," he said. "And now I've got to go, but I hope to meet you again with more time at my disposal."

He beckoned Houck, Stoddert and Sutherland with him. He had a special handshake for Meehan and said: "Like to have you come down with us, Rosie, but it's only a small plane."

"I understand," Meehan said.

CHAPTER 3

A CHAUFFEURED LIMOUSINE whisked them to Newark while the Senator and Stoddert conversed quietly about "the picture in the far West." It was mostly names unknown to Houck and what the persons with the names had said to Stoddert during his trip last month. What they had said added up to a situation conducive to quiet optimism about Davis's chances in the convention.

The plane turned out to be not small at all. There would have been room to take two Rosie Meehans along. It was a twin-engine cabin job for five. The pilot was uniformed, and he saluted the Senator and sirred him.

When they were airborne Davis said a little uncomfortably to Houck: "I've asked that young man not to be so formal, but he goes by the rule book. My law firm rents this plane from some company or other, and they seem to do business with folks who like bowing and scraping."

"I expect it's the chartered-yacht tradition," Houck said.

"Perhaps that's it. If so, it's unrealistic. By the way, what's your pleasure—Professor, Doctor or Mister?"

"We don't go in much for the titles any more," Houck said, laughing. "Anything you like."

"I'd like to call you Raymond."

"I'd be honored."

"Then, Raymond, let's talk. I was impressed by the study you did for Mahlon's old outfit. I made myself a bit of a bore about it for a couple of days and then it occurred to me that you might want to take a busman's holiday and

work for me for a while. What do you think of my intention to try for the nomination?"

"I'm for it, enthusiastically and without qualifications. I feel a little foolish saying this, Senator, but you happen to be the nation's—the world's—best hope for peace."

"Uncomfortable, isn't it?" the Senator asked humorlessly. "You're just *talking* to me. I *am* me, and it's mighty damned uneasy sometimes." It was not self-pity; just a cold assessment of relevant facts. Houck loved him for it.

"You wouldn't concern yourself with my foreign-policy addresses," Davis said. "For them I'll have Mahlon's very able assistance. Your specialty, of course, touches foreign policy on the question of treaty-making powers. On that very limited phase of constitutional law I think I may claim to be my own expert."

It was not an idle claim; he had proved it over the years by stamping down the perennial pseudo-Jeffersonian attempts to limit the Executive treaty-making power.

"The country's boiling, Raymond," he said abruptly. "Our colored citizens, one American in ten, are fighting for what they consider their birthright. The armed forces are integrated; the Supreme Court says the South must change her ways of schooling, of transportation, of God knows what next. There is such a thing as the internal Communist conspiracy and there is also the Bill of Rights, and at times it seems sheer folly not to limit the Bill of Rights when some slimy traitor shelters himself behind it from the punishment he deserves. Natural gas from Oklahoma is heating homes in Chicago, and how are we to consider this in the light of a document written in the eighteenth century when there was no Chicago, no Oklahoma, no natural gas? There's a new thing in the land called corporate diversification; it promises to put fabulous economic power into the hands of a few men who were never chosen by anybody except themselves to hold such power. What can be done about it without resort to tyrannical measures?

"I was raised in a time and place which had no such problems, and during my public service I've concentrated on the nation's intercourse with other powers, leaving the domestic questions to my colleagues. In my campaign I

want to stand on the rock of the Constitution. Will you help me?"

Houck said again, "I'd be honored." He had not dreamed that the old man was broad-gauged enough to have been troubled by such things. But twenty-five years in the Senate undoubtedly was the world's best educational curriculum if you had the mind to start with.

The Senator grinned impishly. "I should warn you. I frequently depart from my prepared text for a topical or local allusion—but I'll never double-cross you. If you can stand for me tampering with your prose, is it a deal?" His hand was out and Houck took it warmly.

For the rest of the trip the Senator simply chatted with him, though Perry Sutherland tried a couple of times to break in. He talked about horses and Bluegrass and his mother and people and places and books and music. Houck was startled to find out that Braxton B. Davis was a warm Handel fan.

The plane landed smoothly at the light-dotted Bluegrass strip and a car drove up for them; the Senator told the pilot to take the plane on to Nashville and stand by for a call.

Houck was bedded down in a large guest room on the third floor of the Main House after meeting Mother—Sarah Lackland Davis, 91, clear-headed and sharp-tongued in her affection for Braxton. She scolded him for flying down at night and said radar was a lot of pish-posh. There was a man with her introduced as Dr. Dean, apparently her full-time physician.

Exactly how much money did Braxton B. Davis have, Houck wondered in bed, and exactly where did it come from? What was definite was that he had a great deal more money than most people realized. There was no deceit involved, of course. There was simply a public image of a gentleman-farmer sort of life. The image did not quite have Bluegrass in scale, complete with a twenty-four-hour landing strip and a full-time attendant physician. The plane of course was rented by the law firm with which the Senator was associated, but even assuming there was a tax

angle to it, five-place radar-equipped cabin planes cost money. . . . Houck slept.

He woke to more wonders. A soft-voiced colored man ran his bath and laid out brand-new body linen—his correct size—from what must have been Davis's private haberdashery. A light colored maid met him at the foot of the stairs and inquired about his preference for breakfast. On request, she led him to a little telephone chamber off the billiard room, equipped with chair, desk, reading light, notepaper and—oh, yes—phone. He called Meg, after a little difficulty with the local operator—"Collect, suh? You callin' from *Bluegrass,* and you want to call *collect?"*

Molly was fine; Meg was cheerful; and Houck went out to breakfast in good spirits.

Sarah Lackland Davis was presiding at the breakfast table—out of courtesy. She explained briskly that her boy Braxton was down at the horse barn along with some of the other men, but they'd let Houck sleep a little late because they knew he'd be tired after that long trip. Houck put cube sugar into his coffee with silver tongs and sneaked a look at his watch; it was not quite eight-fifteen. Mrs. Davis joined him in coffee and urged him to eat his eggs while they were hot, not to bother about talking, she could do enough talking for both of them. She was small, and she looked nowhere near ninety-one years old. Her complexion was gray leather with apple-red stenciled on the cheeks, but her eyes were large and bright.

He finished his eggs and was sipping his second cup of coffee between responses of "Yes, Mrs. Davis," and "I see, Mrs. Davis," when Mahlon Stoddert came in. "Good morning," Houck said.

Stoddert laughed. "Morning? Yes, I suppose it still is. One forgets how long a morning really is until one comes back to Bluegrass."

Mrs. Davis said clearly, "As you gentlemen have political affairs to discuss, I will leave you to them." She bowed and walked quickly out of the room.

Houck said, "That's a wonderful woman."

"Of course," Stoddert said. "Raymond, would you like to bring your coffee onto the sun porch? There's someone else I'd like you to meet."

The light-tan maid appeared and relieved Houck of the coffee pot. She carried cup, coffee and accessories on a tray after them as they walked through the dining hall and the music room into the glassed-in, flower-planted porch that faced south toward the neat rectangles around the horse barns.

A stocky, dark man took his face out of the morning paper and stood up.

"You must be Houck," he said.

Mahlon Stoddert said, "That's right. Raymond, this is Homer Nowak[5]."

Raymond Houck touched the flesh of another hero. Nowak was the Steelworkers' Nowak, who had stepped down voluntarily in the wave of resignations that made the AFL-CIO merger possible. He was administering some kind of pension plan, Houck knew, and he had wondered why a man like that let himself be dead-ended.

It didn't take him five minutes of conversation to find out. Homer Nowak was a horny-handed idealist. He didn't ask Houck's views; he didn't wait to find out what had impelled the professor to come down to Bluegrass; he charged right in as he had in a hundred bargaining sessions. *This* is so and *that* therefore follows; accordingly *these* are the things that have to be done—right now!

"Two years," he said, "two years I've been after Braxton to make his play for the nomination and, I swear to God, I did everything but pull a gun on him. Why? Because he's the only one who can stand up against the wild men."

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[5]NOWAK, Homer. Local 863, S&FW, bids good-by to its beloved Business Manager and Founding Organizer, Homer Nowak. The world knows him as Past President of Steel & Foundry, but to us he is always the Brother who pulled the fires at Bethlehem Steel in 1933, who kicked the Commies out of the District Council in 1940, who got us every break we have in wages, hours and the Nowak Pension Plan. "He Will Be Missed." Good luck and good wishes! Published by order of Executive Committee, Local 863, S&FW, Adam Huniak, Recorder.

—*Paid Advertisement, "The CIO Organizer," July,* 1954.

Houck said: "I agree ab——"

"That bastard Meehan," Nowak went on judgmatically, "has his sights set on the Number One spot, and he isn't going to settle for Number Two. And look what he's got to work with! The southwest—solid. The Irish vote in the northeast. The Poles in Pennsylvania and Detroit, God forgive them. The veterans' groups—unless Mahlon here can do something about it. And the lunatics all over the country."

Houck agreed: "I've felt the same way about——"

"Who else is there?" Nowak demanded. "Nobody like Braxton. If we can put it over—if we can get them to forget he's seventy-one now, be seventy-three by the time he's inaugurated—he can stop Meehan cold, and he won't have to throw him the vice-presidency to pay off. Maybe a couple of others would have a chance—Stouffer, maybe; maybe Kellert or Fogleson—but not without making deals. So it's got to be Braxton, you see? I spent two years getting out from under the SFW so I could help, and I'm not going to waste those two years. Do you agree with me?"

Houck blinked. "Why—yes," he said. "Yes, I certainly do."

Nine o'clock. Braxton B. Davis came back from the horse barns, glowing and cheerful, and plunged right into the group. Sutherland was with him, and two or three other men. Before lunch one of the Bluegrass station wagons went to the train and brought back two more men. There were Stoddert and Houck, Nowak and Sutherland; there was the candidate himself, quick to ask questions, quick to understand. There was a congressman from Oregon, en route home for the holidays, and a lieutenant governor from much deeper in the South.

They talked; and Houck listened. There was talk about selecting states for primaries, and talk about catching the papers on a good day. There was a lot of talk about why Braxton Davis had to run at first, and then not so much of that kind of talk—having come to agreement, the group no longer found it necessary to convince itself. There was speculation on what Rosie Meehan might be up to, and a general agreement that, at least for the moment, Meehan

was likely to be waiting to see what *they* would do. The discussion came down to the exact day, hour and moment when Senator Braxton B. Davis should take his hat by the brim and sail it into the political arena.

Twelve o'clock. Lunch was served, and the conversation raced right along. Sarah Lackland Davis sat at the end of the long table, followed every word, and kept her mouth shut. By the time the salad and omelette were off the table and Sarah Lackland Davis was cutting the pecan pie, the meeting had come to agreement. The announcement of Davis's candidacy would be made during Christmas week. "The 27th," Perry Sutherland insisted, "not so close that people will be thinking about Santa Claus, but during the dead week so we'll get a big play." It would bear heavily on the foreign-affairs responsibilities of the United States, since that was Braxton B. Davis's forte; but it would at least by indirection slap the teeth out of Rosie Meehan's obsession with "security" and jungle law. A hint would be dropped on the special Christmas Day remote telecast from Bluegrass that Sutherland had painstakingly arranged with CBS; and a press conference would be called for the afternoon of the 27th.

Mahlon Stoddert put down his coffee cup. "We'll keep it short, I think," he said. "Try to get them to run the whole thing on the air, instead of excerpts. Maybe a hundred words? Not much more than that." He turned to Houck, who had been listening, silent and absorbed. "There's everything you'll need to work with in the study next to your room, Raymond."

Houck jumped. For a second he wondered why everyone was looking at *him*.

Stoddert laughed. "The announcement," he reminded Houck. "You're the one who has to write it."

CHAPTER 4

IT WAS Christmas Eve, and in the Houck household that meant Daddy read *A Christmas Carol* aloud after dinner. The tradition was synthetic and a little self-conscious and Houck sometimes had an impulse to gag it up. The kids

might have enjoyed that, but Meg would have been quietly heartbroken. Her own parents had been divorced when she was six, and they had done it the hard way. He repressed the impulse without difficulty. The fire was lit, as it was only for parties and Christmas Eve, Daddy read the *Carol,* God was in his heaven and all was well with Meg's world.

Until the phone rang.

It had happened on other Christmas Eves, though all their friends knew better than to call. One of Houck's students, loaded at a party, perhaps, phoning to offer season's greetings. Meg grimaced a little, glided from the sofa to the phone and said softly, "Mrs. Houck."

An operator with a Southern accent: "Here's youah party, sir."

A strange voice: "I'd like to speak to Professor Houck."

"I'm sorry," Meg said. "he can't be called to the phone now."

Houck continued to read over her low voice.

"This is very important, Mrs. Houck."

"Can you call again in an hour? Or have Dr. Houck call you?"

"Is he *there?* Tell him this is Sutherland, at Bluegrass."

"I'm very sorry, Mr. Sutherland, but——"

"Tell him it's a matter of life or death."

"Really, Mr. Sutherland, my husband isn't a medical doctor. I wish you'd call back in an hour. Good-by." With her nostrils flaring a little, she hung up the phone quietly and resumed her place in the small firelit circle again. The phone rang immediately.

It was Sutherland. He said: "We seem to have been cut off."

She said angrily: "You know very well we weren't. Hold the line, please. I'll get Dr. Houck for you." She said over Houck's voice, interrupting, "Raymond, a Mr. Sutherland from Bluegrass wants to talk to you."

Houck, startled, said, "Ask him to call back."

She told him: "He says it's—very important." "Life or death" was not to be quoted before the children.

"Foop," said one of the girls, and "Double-foop" said the other as he laid down the book and went to the phone.

"Houck speaking."

"Perry Sutherland, Houck. I'm at Bluegrass. Can you come down immediately?"

"No. I'll be there on the 27th, Sutherland and not a minute sooner."

"Yeah?" Sutherland's voice was savage. "Listen, summer soldier and sunshine patriot. The old man's gone and broken his goddam leg. This calls for a strategy meeting, and you're a member of the board, recollect? Get down here. The announcement's going to need rewriting, you just don't ignore it when a man of seventy-one breaks his leg. We're going to have to grind out statements and releases when it gets to the newsmen. There's work to be done."

"Is it a bad break?" Houck asked.

"God, man, do you know of any good ones? Him and his horses. He won't be crippled, hell no. And what if he is? Didn't F.D.R. campaign? Houck, why are we wasting time like this? Come on down."

"All right," Houck said, and slowly hung up.

He said to his wife and children, "I've got to go down to Tennessee. Now."

"Oh foop, Daddy!" said the older, and the younger thought it might be a good time to try crying, worked up a couple of real tears, got carried away and began to bawl in earnest, "Don't go away, Daddy, I love you, I really do!"

Meg yanked her to her feet, smacked her twice, soundly on the bottom, startling her into temporary silence, and said, "We'll have no nonsense out of you two children. You're old enough to realize that your father's not just an ordinary person. He's a very intelligent and important man. A lot of people need his help and advice. It's his responsibility to give it. You should be proud of him instead of acting like babies."

"I'm proud of you, Daddy," the younger said obediently, and resumed crying. He picked her up and she nestled into his neck, simmering down.

"I'm proud of your mother," he told them.

"I'll go upstairs and pack," Meg said, giving him a forced smile. "Skip to the end and finish the *Carol*."

He riffled the pages and began to read the last few paragraphs as she went upstairs. He knew she'd cry that night.

The train ride was hellish, as could be expected on December 24th and the early hours of the 25th. Everything reservable had been reserved. He rode a coach to New York, sitting on his suitcase in the aisle until Crotburg, where a dozen seminary students got off and he snagged a seat before two dozen sailors got on. There was a good deal of drinking and disorderly conduct. At Penn Station he got a no-show drawing room through to Nashville; he phoned Bluegrass and was told a car would pick him up at the station.

He didn't bother to undress, but he did sleep a little. Mostly, he thought. About damfool accidents that can change the course of empires. About ideas to plant in the public mind that would minimize a broken leg. About that baffling little phrase in Article II, Section I, number 5: "In case of the removal of the President from office, or of his death, resignation, *or inability to discharge the powers and duties of the said office . . .*" The italics were his. That phrase had to be considered every time a President had a bad cold—or a would-be presidential candidate broke his leg. Nobody knew exactly what it meant. What is inability to discharge the powers and duties of the Presidency; who determines it and how? Woodrow Wilson, after his cerebral hemorrhage, had unquestionably been unable, but there was nobody to make an official determination of the fact and hand the executive power over to Thomas Marshall. Marshall appeared to have been an undistinguished gentleman from Indiana, but he would have been better than the vacuum in which Lodge had perfect freedom to move. Men sometimes rose to the Presidency in an astounding manner. . . .

The clan had gathered. Sutherland, Nowak and Stoddert greeted him in the breakfast room when he arrived. It was seven in the morning and he gratefully swallowed two cups of scalding coffee before he began to help himself to scrambled eggs from the sideboard. Mrs. Davis was not present.

"How is he?" he asked.

"Sleeping," Stoddert said. "I'll fill you in. He took a jump

yesterday afternoon while he was riding and got thrown, not hard. He could walk at first, and then it got painful and there was discoloration. Dr. Dean X-rayed him around nine and found a crack in the shin bone. It needed a little traction to set and by then was *very* painful. The doctor gave him ether, set it and put on a cast. He's in his own bedroom now, sleeping it off. Dr. Dean says the cast can come off in maybe two weeks. He says the Senator's bones are remarkable; they might belong to a man of forty."

Sutherland said fiercely, "You never know, this thing may be an asset. I was counting on his mother to answer the age problem, but this may be even better. How many men of *fifty* fall off a horse? Let alone seventy-one. And the doctor said his bones——"

"So the problem is the statement. We'll have to get something in about this. Shrug it off, I suppose, but mention it. Do you see the importance of it, Raymond?"

"Of course, Stoddert," Raymond Houck said absently. He was squinting out the window, where four large trucks were arranging themselves neatly on the black-top parking area.

Sutherland followed his eyes, cried "They're here!" and hurried out. Houck looked inquiringly at Stoddert.

Stoddert made a wry face. "The Christmas television remote," he explained. "A five-minute visit into the home of a celebrated American celebrating the greatest of all holidays. It was quite a coup for Perry Sutherland to arrange it, but of course we didn't know about the broken leg."

"Oh. Will that affect it?"

"Not seriously, I hope. I saw Braxton for a minute today —still a little shaken up, of course. But he's in good spirits and the doctor says he'll be perfectly able to sit in a chair and wish the country Merry Christmas."

But there was work to be done even on the "Merry Christmas," of course. Houck found he had the same room as before, with the same quietly whirring electric typewriter in the same crisply functional study beside his bedroom. He repaired to it with the five triple-spaced pages that represented Senator Braxton B. Davis's impromptu comments before the TV audience on the occasion of Christmas.

It wasn't much of a job. He lit a cigarette and read the five pages over. Davis wouldn't stick to the text; his sense of pace and timing was better than most professional actors'; he had a gift for the ad lib. The script was a form of television insurance; his interviewer would be seated in a studio in New York, four hundred miles away, and the prepared script was merely to make sure they both had something to talk about.

All the same, the script had to be corrected.

Houck slipped a sheet of paper into the typewriter, remembered, frowned, took it out and stacked up five sheets with carbons to replace it. He typed expertly, using the approved touch system he had spent a month learning while still in law school:

SEN. DAVIS:
THANK YOU, JOHN, AND A VERY MERRY CHRISTMAS TO YOU.
JOHN S.:
I UNDERSTAND, SENATOR, THAT YOU'VE HAD A LITTLE ACCIDENT THAT MAY MAKE THIS CHRISTMAS A LITTLE LESS MERRY. IT'S NOTHING SERIOUS, I HOPE?
SEN. DAVIS:
(LAUGHS)
JUST TOO MUCH CHRISTMAS SPIRIT, JOHN. I TRIED TO TAKE A SIX-BAR GATE WITH A FIVE-BAR HORSE YESTERDAY. (CAMERA DOWN TO LEG IN CAST PROPPED ON CUSHION) BUT NOTHING CAN MAKE CHRISTMAS LESS MERRY AROUND HERE, JOHN. WE REJOICE IN THE PRESENCE OF MY DEAR MOTHER. WOULD YOU LIKE TO MEET HER?
JOHN S.:
I'D LIKE THAT VERY MUCH.
(CAMERA ON MRS. DAVIS)
JOHN S.:
MERRY CHRISTMAS, MRS. DAVIS.

Houck read it over, nodded, struck out the lines the new copy replaced and clipped the insert in where it belonged. He turned through to the end of the copy, put in fresh paper, thought for a moment and typed:

JOHN S.:

THANK YOU AGAIN, SENATOR BRAXTON B. DAVIS, FOR PERMITTING US TO COME TO YOUR HOME THIS CHRISTMAS. WE ALL WISH YOU THE MERRIEST OF CHRISTMASES. AND WE HOPE YOU'LL BE UP AND ABOUT VERY SOON.

SEN. DAVIS:

THANK YOU, JOHN. THE DOCTOR SAYS I'LL BE WALKING AGAIN IN A WEEK. I MAY EVEN BE RUNNING.

That was good, Houck thought contentedly; maybe Davis would find a crisper way to say it, but it would get the idea across. He clipped in the new corrections, put out his smoldering cigarette—he was always lighting them, seldom remembering to smoke them when he worked—and headed downstairs.

He found Perry Sutherland in the enormous living room; it was his province. He handed the revisions over and watched the television engineers stringing their cables around the twelve-foot Christmas tree.

"Great," said Perry Sutherland unenthusiastically. "Stoddert was looking for you a while ago. He's up with Dr. Dean."

Houck said, immediately worried, "There's nothing——"

"Nah. Nothing wrong. Christ, but the old man looks lousy, though. I don't care what the hell kind of argument he gives us this time, he's going to get made up for this thing or I'm going to take a knife and cut those wires." He frowned and mumbled to himself, then glanced at Houck. "Oh, yeah. Better go see Stoddert and Dr. Dean. They've got a press statement I did, and they want you to look at it—on the accident, you know."

Houck found Mahlon Stoddert and the doctor smoking and talking, apparently relaxed, in Senator Davis's private sitting room. The door to his bedroom was closed but Houck could hear faint voices behind it—the Senator's mother was with him, it seemed.

Houck handed over the revised script and took the statement in return. He read it swiftly; it stated the facts, carried a short and conclusive quote from Dr. Dean to the effect that the injury was so slight it might not have been noticed

for several days in a less active man—all good, all grist for their mill—and referred to the Senator's twenty-four-year record of never having missed a day's session through ill health. "Fine," he said, handing it back.

"So's the script," said Mahlon Stoddert. "Oh, excuse me. I don't know if you've met Raymond Houck, Dr. Dean?"

The two men shook hands. The doctor was rather young, and Houck remembered vaguely having heard that he was the grandson of the famous surgeon who had brought Senator Braxton B. Davis into the world and attended Mrs. Davis throughout his life. Dean wasn't over forty, a dignified, rather heavy man with a soft handshake.

Houck said, "Perry Sutherland said the Senator wasn't looking well."

Dr. Dean performed a medical shrug. "He's been through a painful time, Mr. Houck. Setting a leg is an ordeal for even a teen-ager; I had to give Braxton a general anesthetic, and naturally he looks a little tired. But I assure you, I gave him a complete examination. There is no damage whatsoever of his circulatory apparatus and no other injury. If we'd been able to keep him still we might not even have had to splint this."

"That's right, Raymond," Stoddert agreed. "We just left him. Would you like to see him yourself?"

"Oh, that's not necessary." Houck felt considerably relieved; he hadn't realized it, but he had been worried, deep inside, about the old man. He said slowly, "You know, now that the danger is over—rather, now that I know there never was any real danger—I begin to get worried about what might have happened. Suppose he'd broken his neck instead of his leg?"

"Then," said Stoddert, nodding, "Rosie Meehan would have swept the convention next summer, and Rosie Meehan would have at least a sixty-forty chance of becoming the next President of the United States. I know, Raymond. What do you think I felt all the way down here on the plane?"

Dr. Dean said, "If you'll excuse me, I think I'll let the nurse go. The servants can handle things now."

"What about Dr. Bayle?" Stoddert asked.

"He'll be here this afternoon, just to double-check." Dr.

Dean explained to Houck, "Dr. Bayle's the resident internist at Lexington General."

Houck said, "I'm glad you're leaving nothing to chance."

Down in the living room, among the tangles of cable and cameras, a young man buttonholed him. "I'm Ed Steuben, Dr. Houck," he said. "The remote unit director. How is the Senator?"

"I suppose I ought to refer you to Mr. Sutherland," Houck said, "But I understand he's fine."

"And what about the rehearsal?"

"Now I will refer you to Mr. Sutherland. I don't know anything about the rehearsal; I'm just a guest here."

Ed Steuben said with an unconvinced smile, "I understand that. But just—for my private guidance, say—is there any chance the Senator might announce tonight?"

"Certainly not," Houck said, and walked away almost fuming. The young man should not have been so confident that Senator Davis *would* announce his candidacy for the nomination. The usual tripe had appeared in the inside-dope columns that Davis would or would not announce. They had canceled each other out. Only a handful of authentic insiders, not even including Mrs. Houck, knew that the announcement was definite, even timed. The young man should also have known that Senator Braxton B. Davis would not double-cross the network by using its entertainment facilities to slip over a major political maneuver. There was a right and honorable time and place to do such things.

"Authentic insiders," he suddenly marveled. Including him.

Mrs. Davis presided over the luncheon table. It was huge; she insisted that all twenty-odd cameramen, directors, electricians and stagehands be served. It did not strain the larder or the staff of Bluegrass. The Senator was having his lunch from a tray in his room.

The balloon went up at 2:15.

That was when Stoddert collected Nowak, Sutherland and Houck in the Senator's sitting room. Dr. Dean was there, and so was a mussy gentleman in his sixties. "Dr.

Bayle, gentlemen," said Stoddert curtly. "Dr. Bayle, will you please tell these gentlemen what you told me?"

The internist was baffled. "Very well; if you wish. I simply stated my opinion that the Senator might be well advised to curtail his activities somewhat and that due to the action of a general anesthetic there might appear a certain slowing-down of mental vigor." Without looking at Dr. Dean, indeed giving the impression that he was *pointedly* not looking at Dr. Dean, he went on: "You see, gentlemen, it's recently been suspected that wherever possible, general anesthetics should be avoided for the elderly patient. The diminution of oxygen supply to the brain for even a brief period seems to have lasting effects which do not occur in the younger patient."

They looked at each other, and Sutherland was the one who said it: "You sure? This happens every time? How bad is it?"

"I'm sure of the experimental findings," Dr. Bayle said, puzzled. "It doesn't seem to happen every time, no. And as for 'how bad'—why, I'll try to explain that it isn't bad at all. You gentlemen must know from your experience about 'operative morbidity'—those cases where the patient, particularly the elderly patient, just doesn't rally, experiences a permanent loss of vigor and interest. This has been immensely reduced by advances in anesthesiology and surgical technique, smaller incisions, capillary drainage, instead of 'packing.' But gentlemen, you still don't get something for nothing. You get relief from your specific ailment and you may pay for it in generally lowered vigor. You are—I gather—Senator Davis's close friends and associates. I ask you, what is 'bad' about his closing his long and honorable career at this point?" The pause dragged on, and on, and on. Dr. Bayle asked, "Is there anything else I can tell you?"

"Thanks, doctor," said Stoddert. "You've been very patient with us laymen." Dr. Bayle put on his hat and left. Stoddert turned a gaze like a burning-glass on Dr. Dean. Dean got up abruptly and went out.

" 'It doesn't seem to happen every time,' " Houck quoted. And added: "Rosie Meehan. Oh, my God!"

"Let's go in and see him," Sutherland said, and knocked.

"Come in," the Senator roared, and they did. He surveyed them cheerfully from his bed, which was littered with typed reports and documents. "What did the sawbones tell you? To me he said 'hum' and 'hah' and 'thank you.' "

Stoddert said, "He thinks the anesthetic didn't do you any good. I'm leveling with you, Braxton. He thinks your mind won't be as agile as formerly."

"So that's why he was asking those damfool questions," Davis said thoughtfully. "I'm sure I don't know how he can judge that I'm slipping, since he's never set eyes on me before. What do *you* think, Mahlon?"

"I think," Stoddert said explosively, "that he was talking through his hat. You're the same old fighter you always were. We're going to sweep the convention and smear the opposition. You're going to be President and restore the balance of power in Eurasia. And then, please God, there'll be a good century without war or the fear of war so men can build themselves decent, unterrified lives again!"

"Thanks, Mahlon," the Senator said. "And now——"

There was a knock on the door and a man walked right in.

"Charlie!" the Senator yelled delightedly. "You old ward-heeling son of a bitch, did you bring us a million dollars in small, unmarked bills? Put it right on the bed; I'd get up and hug you but you see how it is."

The man blushed and grinned. He was small and innocent-looking, a cherubic fifty. "Hullo, Senator," he said. "Mr. Commissioner. Mr. Nowak. Mr. Sutherland. Professor Houck." Houck remembered him then from the gubernatorial campaign. He was the Hon. Charles Lockworth, and had been national committee liaison man for the state. He had got fatter in two years. He was a man up from the precinct ranks of an Ohio city. His detractors said that, properly approached, he could do anything from fixing a parking ticket to getting you a surplus oil tanker at a truly amazing bargain price. His friends said he was the best fund raiser in the Party and a sweet guy to boot.

"The finance committee will come to order," said the Senator.

"Yeah," said Lockworth. "Well, what'll you need for the pre-convention things, Senator?"

"Seven hundred and fifty thousand," said the Senator, and that was the kickoff. The meeting turned into an intricate discussion of Republicans for Davis, Democrats for Davis, Independents for Davis, Citizens for Davis, how they were to be seeded through the country, where only a token representation would be required and where an effort must be made to build a big aggressive organization. Nowak was given a sum to raise in his field and nodded grimly; Sutherland juggled the advantages of billboards versus spot-radio versus spot-TV; Stoddert listed the contributors, few but big, who were his contacts, and they were, in that bedroom of a Southern mansion, assessed for their contribution to the pre-convention war chest. Houck was assigned Nonpartisan Professionals for Davis and students for Davis. "No money in that," Lockworth comforted him, "but you're working for the future there. But you'll try to keep the students thing from being a *losing* operation, won't you, Professor?" Houck said he'd try.

After about an hour Lockworth read off a scribbled summary and they agreed that it was pretty much the way they all saw things. "We'll have to start hiring help and getting some space in Washington soon," Lockworth said. "Well, Senator, I'm sorry to see you looking poorly, but when the fight starts I know you'll be in there with the old sparkle again."

"I'm a little tired," the Senator said absently.

"Sure," said Charlie, and looked curiously at the expressions on the faces of the others.

Stoddert tugged Houck aside. "In here." They turned away from the dining room with its murmuring TV crews into a butler's pantry. Stoddert sought and found bourbon, glasses, water. They didn't bother about ice.

"That incompetent son of——" Houck started to say after a moment and Stoddert said:

"I know. But it isn't all his fault. This is new stuff, this thing about anesthesia and old men, Raymond."

"How new? He's a doctor. He's *supposed* to keep up on the new stuff, isn't he?"

Stoddert said, "He's a country doctor—with one patient, remember? And that patient a fussy, bustling, hyper-active old lady who won't let him out of her sight. How is he supposed to know what the best hospitals in the world didn't know until a few months ago? It's a matter of oxygen in the brain. Ether knocks you out by cutting off the oxygen; it kills the cells, a little bit, you might say. Young brain cells get over it. Old ones sometimes don't."

Houck looked at him suspiciously. "You sound like an authority."

"That's right." Stoddert took a drink. "I've checked Bayle out. I have a friend at Johns Hopkins."

Houck said, "Well? Is there any chance?"

"If his brain is damaged?" Stoddert shook his head. "Not a chance in the world, Raymond," he said, finishing the glass. "Not a chance in the world."

But he *looked* pretty good.

Houck stared at Davis with critical eyes, and he had to admit there was nothing bad to see. They had helped him down the stairs, and now he was propped in a big wing chair next the fireplace, chattering away with the unit director while a makeup man carefully wiped away the shadows under his eyes and the new strain lines on his face. Sutherland had won his point about the makeup; the Senator had been a little surprised at the violence with which his friends and advisors had insisted, and he had given in.

The house had begun to fill up with nephews and nieces and cousins for the Bluegrass Christmas feast. The television crews had preempted one of the phone lines into the house and kept it open as a direct wire to New York, until they got their own relays and communications setup working. Then *all* the wires were tied up by frantic calls to the electric utility company to replace the circuit breakers in the Bluegrass feeder lines, to the local network outlet, to the phone company for permission to interfere with their circuits, to the county building-code officer for permission for the utility company to replace the circuit breakers.

They got it done, with what looked like frantic confusion but was actually smooth speed.

They had a rehearsal. The "personality" who was to interview the Senator from New York appeared on the monitor the crews had installed, and he and the Senator ran through their lines. Houck, watching critically, could see nothing wrong in the Davis's spirits or delivery.

The nephews and nieces and camera crews and sound men began to get too thick for Raymond Houck. He tried again to get into the telephone booth, but a man in blue coveralls was shouting angrily at someone on the other end of the phone line; Meg would be unhappy, Meg might even be angry; but he couldn't call her. He thought briefly of driving into town and phoning from there, but only very briefly.

He didn't want to leave Bluegrass. He was, frankly, worried.

He was, in fact, scared witless.

He admitted it to himself.

It was not, he told himself, just that he loved and respected Braxton B. Davis. Davis would have made—*might yet make,* he corrected himself, a great president, not just a good, honest, sincere president but a great one.

It would be a pity for the country to lose Braxton B. Davis. But what was worse was that there was going to be an election regardless; if Davis didn't run, someone else from Davis's party would have to.

And the way things looked, that someone else was going to be Senator John R. O'S. Meehan.

Rosie Meehan: dreamer and bigot, the saintly demagogue. He would go into the convention with a dozen delegations pledged to him, at the very least. And there would be no delegation anywhere that was not aware of the Meehan sentiment back in their own precincts. You could say the grass-roots backers of Meehan were few, you could say they were lunatic-fringe; but you couldn't help saying they were loud.

The program was on the air. Sitting on the edge of a sideboard behind the cameras, Houck could see the Senator in his wing chair before him; he could see the Senator

again in the monitor the unit director was using; and in the 27-inch television set at the side of the fireplace he could see, framed, the interviewer in New York, seated before another monitor in which the Senator's every move was again reflected. He had seemed a little irritable at one point, Houck thought anxiously, but nothing worse than that. Maybe his leg was hurting him? There was no way to tell. But he followed his lines well enough, though it was true there hadn't been much of the ad-lib sparkle one expected.

But it had gone generally well, and it was almost over. The housekeeper smiled grimly at the monstrous three-eyed machine and carried her dark bulk back toward the belowstairs area from which she had come. The last "re-mote-remote" from the horse barns was over; the Senator's mother made a last tart comment to the microphone she wore pinned to her undervest. ("I have never *seen* a 'bra,' young man!" she had snapped to the sound engineer when he suggested that as a place to moor it.)

"Well," said the wireborne voice of the interviewer in New York, "thank you again, Senator Braxton B. Davis, for letting us come to your home this Christmas. We all wish you the merriest of Christmases, and we hope you'll be up and about very soon."

Senator Davis shifted position on the chair and smiled vacantly at the television camera. He kept smiling vacantly for five interminable seconds. "Oh," he said at last. "Oh, thank you, uh, John. The doctor says—says I'll be running around in a couple of weeks." He hesitated. "Merry Christ-mas!" he boomed cordially.

The monitor went to black.

Beside Houck, Mahlon Stoddert exhaled slowly. They looked at each other.

"That's right," Stoddert said softly. "Now we know."

CHAPTER 5

STODDERT, Sutherland, Houck, Nowak, Lockworth assembled in plenary session at midnight after the TV teams and relatives had cleared out. The big fire was dying in

the hearth; their faces were bitter and twisted from the effort of two hours of conviviality. The Senator had been put to bed in a cheerful mood; he thought his performance had been a good one.

Nowak said bluntly, "He's out. I won't stand for him. I'll bolt if he's put up; even across the party line if I have to. What if that happened to him while he was talking atomic control with Khrushchev? Maybe you people don't know as much about bargaining as I do, so I'll tell you. You don't smoke, you don't drink, you don't chew gum—not if you're smart. You don't let anything distract you. It's fencing; it's fast. You get feints and lunges to parry. Every man has a different strategy and you have to know them all, offensive and defensive."

"Take it easy, Homer," Sutherland said.

"I will *not* take it easy," Nowak roared. "This isn't a fall campaign to sell more girdles. This is the big one. This is the hope of the world."

"He right, Sutherland," Houck said. "Do you have any doubts about it?"

The publicity man sipped his highball and shifted restlessly in his chair. "Hell, I guess I don't. But who've we *got?*"

"Me," said Stoddert.

They turned and studied him thoughtfully, as though they had never seen him before in their lives.

"I dunno," Nowak muttered. "Stouffer? Kellert? Fogleson? You? Maybe it's a toss-up."

Abstractedly Lockworth said: "Be better if you'd taken that senatorship back in '46. But you were mayor. And the P.P.A.C.'s a good big job. They like you at the National Committee, but do they like you *that* much? To tell you the truth, I think this makes sense. Stouffer, Kellert and Fogleson think they're hot spit because every paper they see is full of this and that about them; they don't realize that you cross their state line, the papers over there are full of this and that about some other jerk who happens to be governor or senator over here. It's a big country. I guess maybe you're a national figure at that, Mr. Commissioner."

"That American Fund," said Sutherland. "It worries me.

But—well, I'll lay my cards on the table. It doesn't worry me too much. I knew Rosie's P.R. boy Slidell would try to get at the Senator through Mahlon here, about the time that college got the grant and then the professors took the Fifth. I'm all ready for Slidell when he pulls that. I've got a sweet little bunch of photostats tucked away. They link Rosie six ways to people who took the Fifth, including an old law-school professor he wrote some real friendly letters to. If Slidell knows what's good for him—" He stopped talking *about* Mahlon Stoddert and for the first time talked *to* him. "Is there anything else I don't know about?" he asked sharply. "Any kid stuff?"

"Nothing," said Stoddert.

Houck nodded. "The Senate confirmation hearing proved that. The opposition didn't even find any crackpots willing to perjure themselves; it would have been ridiculous for them to try. Stoddert's clean." He realized that this was very important. To reestablish the balance of power in Eurasia and thereby prevent the suicide of the human race, you had first to find a man who had never joined a campus radical club in his student days.

"And he comes from a good state," said Lockworth. This too was important, though you will not find it in Article II, Section 1 of the Constitution, which defines the qualifications of the President. "They don't have anybody who'd pass for a favorite son except the Commissioner."

"That war record," Sutherland muttered. "Ooh, what I can do with that war record! But *why* the R.A.F.?"

"The hell with that," grunted Nowak. "Any Irish who'd be swayed by that kind of foolishness are already for Rosie, lost to us for good."

"With an endorsement from the Senator," said Lockworth, "the whole thing looks feasible to me."

Stoddert asked, "Are you for me, Raymond?"

Houck wondered if he had ever betrayed his nagging suspicion of Stoddert's common sense. If not, the question seemed uncalled for. "I am," he said. "I don't know how many other groups like us have been sitting somewhere deciding that they have a presidential possibility; hundreds, no doubt. Luckily we have a man who happens not only

to be eligible but who happens to be the one who'll do the job better than anybody else in the United States could."

And, he coldly told himself, perhaps he was saying no less than the truth. Stoddert was sound on peace; he had behind him ten vital years of experience in foreign relations, economic and political. And at all costs Meehan had to be stopped and Stouffer, Kellert or Fogleson could not stop him.

"Are you for me, Homer?" asked Stoddert.

The big man scowled and said bluntly, "You had some damned funny friends back in the Fund. I've got nothing against business or big business, but some of your friends seemed to believe that superbig business was the wave of the future. I don't. I think it's got to be stopped somehow. This country isn't going to be turned into an economic dictatorship with my help. I was willing to work with you to put in the Senator. I don't know how willing I am to work *for* you."

Stoddert said, "I knew exactly what I was doing, Homer. I see no essential virtue in bigness and diversification. I see a hell of a lot of usefulness in, for example, the General Dynamics Corporation at this particular point in the cold war. Superbig business is creating an atomic submarine fleet years ahead of schedule. We have to keep our eye on the ball, Homer. I knew exactly what I was doing and when it's time to change my line I'll know that too. I haven't been captured by anybody."

Nowak grunted, "My eye's on the ball, all right. The one you've got me by. You're Braxton's heir, you've got the know-how to do the job—and there's Rosie. Hell, count me in, Mahlon. Just be sure you double-cross the monopolists when the time comes and not the workingman."

"Who's going to tell the old man?" asked Sutherland.

"I will," said Stoddert.

They had all the papers by 10 A.M.; they brought them up to the Senator's room.

"Morning, boys," he boomed, throwing a stack of letters to the floor. "How'd I go over?" He reached for the papers.

Stoddert deliberately handed him the Washington *Shield,* opened to the editorial page. His finger was on the heading

of a syndicated inside-dope column. "That lying s.o.b.," the Senator commented jovially. "Well, let's see what he said."

What he said was: "It will be denied, but the Senate's grand old man of foreign policy is meditating retirement to his beloved farm Bluegrass. As predicted in this space three weeks ago, those who have been waiting for Senator Braxton Davis to announce candidacy for his party's presidential nomination have been waiting in vain. The Senator's decision is based on reasons of health."

"Haw!" Braxton Davis tossed the paper to the floor, grinning. "Shows what's wrong with *his* crystal ball. Anything else?"

"Here." Perry Sutherland had the *Times-Democrat* already open to the television page. Their reviewer said:

"The network's idea of Christmas entertainment left this viewer, at least, stone-cold in the market. John Sealy's *Christmas Panorama* was probably the worst of the lot. The tree-trimming in Macy's window was in the worst crassly commercial Christmas tradition; the interview with Senator Braxton Davis was marred by the Senator's obvious ill health (was it necessary to drag the poor man out of a hospital bed on Christmas?), and while the failure of the relay connections to the Salt Lake City Tabernacle probably could not be blamed——"

"Policy, I guess," Davis said after a pause. He looked around at the boys. "They've always opposed me since the China-Aid debate."

"Here's another, Braxton," said Stoddert heavily.

There were more. There was something in nearly every paper, and they had more than a dozen papers from seven cities.

Senator Braxton Davis read everything they had found —slowly and, toward the end, without comment.

He put the last one down, hesitated, turned back to it, sighed and put it down again.

He took off his glasses. And waited. Houck was torn to see how old and tired he looked.

Mahlon Stoddert broke the silence. "Braxton," he said gently, "there's something you have to know. When you hurt your leg, and Dr. Dean had to put you under to set it, there were after-effects. Not from the leg but from the

anesthetic." He went on to explain, carefully documenting every word, just what Dr. Bayle and the Johns Hopkins man had told him. "You forgot your lines on the program, didn't you, Braxton?" he prodded gently. "You had to lean forward, cock your head, you even cupped your ear. It wasn't because you were getting deaf or nearsighted; it isn't a physical thing at all. It's the brain. It—simply doesn't work fast."

Senator Davis listened closely and without expression. He wasn't cupping his ear now; but his face was a ruin.

Homer Nowak said: "Braxton, I threw away the S&FW presidency to work for you. I hope to God you get over this thing—but the doctors say you won't. That's the size of it."

Senator Davis pushed himself up in the bed. He glanced at his hand, flexed the fingers absently and seemed surprised when they obeyed his will.

He said at last, "Boys, was I as bad as all that?"

"It isn't a question of how bad you were," Stoddert insisted. "It's—it's——" He took a deep breath and said brutally, "Your brain is damaged. Sometimes it will work, sometimes it won't. Maybe twenty-three hours a day it will work fine, maybe for another twenty years. Look at your mother! You might reach a hundred and only have occasional spells when you just don't remember things, just can't take things in. But can a *President* afford spells like that?"

Nowak said flatly, "What would Rosie Meehan's boys do with that?"

Senator Davis nodded. "I see, I see," he said testily. "You made your point." He looked around the room thoughtfully, then frowned and beckoned to Houck.

Houck looked instinctively to Mahlon Stoddert.

Davis saw and said irritably, "Just come here a minute, Houck. I want you to give me a hand." Houck went to the bed and the old man caught him by the arm, pulled himself to his feet. He lowered the cast, "lightweight" by surgical standards but still a good several pounds, to the floor tenderly. Without putting weight on it, one arm around Houck's neck, he hobbled to the door.

"Hold it a minute," he ordered Houck and glanced up

at the drapery rod over the door. Before Houck knew what was going on, Davis let go of his shoulder, balanced on one foot and reached up to catch the rod.

"Braxton!" Stoddert yelled, but Homer Nowak cut in raspingly: *"Leave him alone!"*

Senator Braxton B. Davis, Chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, slowly chinned himself six times. Cast and all.

After the sixth time he let himself down smoothly and relaxed against Raymond Houck. He was puffing faintly, but his arm over Houck's shoulder was not trembling, and he smiled.

"Any of you young fellows want to try it?" he asked. "No? Thought not. Houck, give me a hand back to the bed."

Everyone waited for someone else to speak while the Senator propped himself up on the pillows. Finally Stoddert said, "Braxton, it isn't a matter of—"

"I know what it's a matter of," Davis said clearly. He wore an expression of mild regret, like a man who has missed a bus. "You're right. It doesn't matter what happens now, the word is out that I'm a doddering old wreck, and we'd never convince the voters different. Right?"

"Right," said Mahlon Stoddert.

"And besides," Davis went on calmly, "it isn't up to me any more, is it? You've already made your plans. Who's it going to be, Mahlon? You?"

"That's right, Braxton," said Mahlon Stoddert.

Braxton Davis said: "Congratulations, Mahlon. Naturally, I'll work for you—anything you want me to do."

"Thank you, Braxton," Stoddert said, almost inaudibly.

Senator Davis said, "Would you mind if I asked you all to let me rest for a while? And ask my mother to stop in for a moment if you see her, please," he added politely. "I'd better talk to her. She's not so young as she used to be, and she might be upset."

"I'll do that, Braxton," Stoddert said, and averted his face. He walked stiffly out the door without looking at the others. At the doorway Houck collided forcibly with

Homer Nowak; he glanced at the union man, started to mumble an apology, then looked away in embarrassment.

Nowak's eyes were blind with tears.

CHAPTER 6

BETWEEN CHRISTMAS and March Houck managed to get in six visits to his family. The first was largely spent arranging an elastic leave of absence from the University. The Chancellor was highly willing: "Heavens yes, Doctor Houck! We want our faculty to be citizens too, you know!" The later visits became shorter and shorter. Between them he spent time on the road and in the Washington office suite of the National Headquarters, Citizens for Mahlon Stoddert, Inc. He acquired one secretary for his Nonpartisan Professionals for Stoddert, another for his Students for Stoddert, a third—male—for traveling and speeches. He and his secretaries managed to keep six girls from the typist pool at work eight or more hours a day.

His visit home in March was possible only because his home lay on a line between Washington and Montpelier, Vermont.

Vermont ranks 42nd among the forty-eight states as to area and 45th as to population. It cannot even claim to be one of the original thirteen colonies; it is an also-ran fourteenth. But in one thing Vermont stands first, and that is in its presidential primary election, which falls in March, earlier than any other in the nation. The Vermont primaries are the kickoff; everything before them is pre-game ceremonies; everything after them goes up on the scoreboard. There are 14 colleges and universities in Vermont, and Houck had set up Students for Stoddert in twelve of them, Professionals in eight. There were Professionals groups in every one of the fourteen county seats as well except North Hero, population 3,000, county seat of Grand Isle county, area 77 square miles.

He had only twelve hours to spend at home before pushing on to Montpelier.

The older girl had a black eye to show him with pride; it had been acquired when a neighbor's girl said *her* daddy

said Professor Houck was turning into a ward-heeler. The younger girl was querulous and wanted him home oftener. Friends and neighbors dropped in to say hello when it became noised around that he was back, and their awe was pleasant to contemplate. They told him it was said in town he'd be named Attorney General if Stoddert was elected, which was asinine. "I don't rate the job and I don't want it," he snapped, astonished by their ignorance. There were at least twenty good but intricate reasons why he could not become Attorney General. In private he told Meg one of them. This was that a tacit understanding existed that he'd get a good Federal judgeship if Stoddert became President.

She was jubilant. "That's fifteen thousand a year, isn't it? And lifetime appointment?"

"Simmer down," he said. "If, if, if, *if*. And fifteen thousand is for a U.S. District. I imagine I'd rate C.C.A., the Court of Appeals. That's seventeen thousand, five hundred. I wouldn't have to grab the first vacancy, either; I could wait for an opening in the D.C. Circuit, or the Second Circuit—that's New York, where the big monopoly cases are going to be coming up for the foreseeable future." He drifted frankly into daydreaming. "And I'll still be young, Meg. Some day, maybe . . ." He shut up, but she could read his mind.

"The Supreme Court of the United States," she said softly.

He smiled shamefacedly and said, "If. Let's have some of that cold turkey in the icebox and go to bed."

"I hope nobody phones," she said.

He was surprised, and then remembered. "I forgot to tell you. Pendleton arranged with the phone people to have calls to this number switched to him in the hotel. He won't bother us unless it's absolutely necessary."

"I didn't know you could do that," she said in wonder.

He grinned. "Not quite everybody can," he said.

Pendleton didn't call and Houck kissed his wife good-by at 7:00 A.M., greatly refreshed.

The meeting in Montpelier was technically a Party Unity Rally staged by the state committee.

Houck chuckled dutifully as the hundredth, or thou-

sandth, withered Vermonter he was introduced to referred to him with dead-pan humor as a Southerner, and then his eyes lit up at the next introduction, to a young man who was identified as David Gonzales, M. D.

"It's about time we ran into each other, Doctor," said Gonzales. A few of the more naive county committee members within earshot thought this had something to do with Party Unity, but the state chairman who had introduced them cracked a wintry smile. Gonzales was Houck's opposite number on the staff of John R. O'S. Meehan.

Gonzales was a doctor who did not practice. He sprang from a wealthy Spanish family dating back to the original California settlement; apparently he had taken his M.D. to humor his parents, though there was a story that he had put in the grinding eight years only to prove that he could if he wanted to. He raced speedboats; he'd founded a small publishing house in Chicago that specialized in translated works on economics. He had married two beautiful movie starlets, almost but not quite at the same time, and was now unmarried again. His family had contributed heavily to Rosy Meehan's career, but everybody agreed that their biggest contribution was David Gonzales. He could write a savage speech or a cooing-dove prose poem for the ladies; his mere name was big medicine in the Southwest, where sparsely settled states still elected two senators apiece; his M.D. had incalculable appeal in a doctor-worshiping land.

Physically, Houck found him a blond type apparently in his thirties, of average height and superb build.

"A pleasure, Doctor," said Houck. Both of them knew they'd let down their hair after the meeting and the post-meeting conferences were disposed of. It was difficult to arrange a neutral ground; if one went to the other's hotel suite the fact would be noticed and the caller automatically assigned lower status than the host. Gonzales smilingly suggested a club to which he had a card, but Houck avoided the trap of being his guest. A tea room, hopefully staying open for some after-the-movies trade, was finally agreed on.

"It's awkward, isn't it?" Gonzales smiled over the dainty tablecloth and the teacups. "Your man won't meet my man, so we don't really know the person we're supposed to

cover. Tell me, doctor, why won't the Commissioner listen to reason and take the Number Two spot?"

"Why don't you ask him?" Houck suggested, sipping tea.

"Is he sincere?"

"Is Senator Meehan?"

"Utterly. Perhaps a little too much so in his public manner. People have no idea what a cheerful fellow he really is. They like a bit of a scoundrel, like poor Senator Davis."

"The scoundrel Davis had a quarter-century of constructive work behind him, Dr. Gonzales. Your sincere Senator Meehan has, as far as I can see, two years of fumbling in the House of Representatives, followed by the masterful knifing of Senator Milledge who treated him like a son, followed by five years of wild smashing about. He reminds me of nothing so much as the loose cannon on the deck of the sailing ship in that Victor Hugo story."

"Perhaps," said Dr. Gonzales, "the cannon was loose only in a superficial sense. It followed the laws of wind and wave, after all. Perhaps the men it smashed were meant by Someone to be smashed."

"I have no patience with mysticism. The world is in a very trying era, and only great skill and high purpose can bring it through safely. I wouldn't trust your Senator Meehan with a pushcart, let alone the United States of America. If he's sincere, let him be. He's also a brash, intemperate person who enjoys his rages. An adrenalin addict, Aldous Huxley called such people."

"Your conversation is spiced with literary allusions tonight, Dr. Houck. You'd better not give that stuff to the voters."

"We'll give the voters sanity, Dr. Gonzales, a commodity which seems to be in short supply over on your side. It's been very nice meeting you, but I have to get back to the hotel now."

After clearing the next day's itinerary of speeches and meetings with Professionals and Students groups through the southeastern quarter of the state, Houck tried to sleep. Pendleton snored lightly in the next room, ready to awaken

and take memoranda at a moment's notice. He no longer even apologized to Pendleton for waking him, and Pendleton understood. For ten years he had been secretary to Senator Braxton B. Davis; he was on loan to Citizens for Stoddert as an unimpeachable, rumor-proof confidential helper. He didn't seem to have any private life or any ambitions.

It was a quality Raymond Houck appreciated very much, because you couldn't reasonably ask for such devotion and he would have been utterly lost without it. Houck had been signed aboard, after all, as a speech-writer, not a party hack. These spot assignments of rushing to Vermont to break ground for a primary swing, speeding to Chicago to bolster up the sagging Students-for-Stoddert group at the University, swinging through the South, touring the border states—they were out of his line, as remote from anything he had done in the governorship race as dogs from dahlias. But they weren't out of Pendleton's line.

Pendleton was the one who knew The Ropes. Pendleton knew about switching phone calls and about calling the press; he knew how to reward your enemies (because they might be won over) and how to slight your friends (because they were on your side anyhow). He knew how to tell one from the other; he could spot the Meehanite gleam in the gladdest county chairman's eye. He remembered names, childrens' names and wives' grandfathers' second cousins' names. He knew about political protocol, the probable accuracy of timetables and the kind of clothes you would need for Vermont in March. And he knew one more thing that made him indispensable: He knew that Raymond Houck was the boss. He was an extra brain for Houck, ready to give information when asked, supply suggestions when needed, but never to argue or complain.

How many Pendletons make a party, Houck asked himself, throwing an arm across his eyes to shut out the gleam from the neon lights outside the hotel. Never mind the candidates. Never mind the voters. Never mind the county people, who have their jobs and their rewards; never mind the national people, who get their names in the papers. How could you run a party without Pendletons? They stay

in the background and they do the work; they ask for nothing, and that's what they get.

Might make him a postmaster somewhere, Houck thought drowsily, or anyway a route mailman. He tried to picture Pendleton in a post-office uniform; failed because he couldn't remember what the man he had spent most of three months with looked like; rolled over; and went to sleep.

Mahlon Stoddert arrived in a chartered DC-3 three days before the Vermont primary. Raymond Houck trotted up the steps as soon as the door opened; inside, Stoddert and Sutherland and four or five others were stretching and getting ready to leave. "Hello, Raymond," Stoddert said, "good to see you. We got a break on the weather, anyway. I was afraid we wouldn't be able to fly."

"Pendleton arranged it that way," Houck said. Stoddert nodded absently, ran his hand over his hair and stepped to the door of the plane.

Flashbulbs popped and a man held a microphone for the candidate to make a statement about the Vermont primaries. Perry Sutherland clapped Houck's shoulder in passing and hurried to the door, standing just out of sight, just in earshot, to monitor the prepared statement. Houck took advantage of the time to shake hands with the rest of the party. There was Jesperson, Fein, Wollmer and Coughlan; one was a secretary, one from the national committee, one a local congressman and one a retired naval officer. Houck hadn't quite sorted out which was which until the small, dry-faced one hurried out to get into the pictures with Stoddert, thus revealing himself to be Jesperson, the local congressman, who was facing a fight for re-election in November.

Houck squeezed into the lead car in the waiting group of limousines along with the candidate; but four county officials and the congressman named Jesperson got into the same car so there wasn't much chance to talk. About all there was a chance to do, in fact, was to look Stoddert over. The candidate had been on the go now for seventy days—Houck's own schedule was a vacation with pay by comparison—but he didn't look tired or strained; he looked

as though he was enjoying it. He was shaping up, in fact, quite well. There had been a few bad times during the first week or two of his big push—the day he announced his candidacy, and his rage when some of the opposition columnists hinted that he had knifed the grand, the unforgettable, the heroic (and the no longer a possible presidential candidate) Senator Davis. He got off to a bad start in his press conference the next day, mulishly insisting that the reporters from the "unfriendly" press be excluded from the room. Sutherland heard about it and came flying; but by the time he yelled the candidate down the damage was done, and the roasting Stoddert got from the press because of it (friend and foe alike; reporters stick together) put lines on his face. But he had made up for it. And he was at ease now, Houck thought, staring at him carefully.

Sutherland captured Houck when the procession arrived at the hotel, and bore him off to a corner of the lobby. "Stoddert and the congressmen have to talk to a couple of men in the suite, so there's nothing for us to do. And I've got some work for you."

"Nothing to do? You've got some work? Sutherland, do you know there's fifteen speeches today and tomorrow that—"

"I know, I know," Sutherland said pacifically. "But I need help. First off, there's an article for *Air Force Magazine* on why America needs a new all-weather jet fighter; we have to get it in next week if they're going to print it before the convention, so—"

Houck took a deep breath. "Sutherland," he said, "listen, Sutherland. I don't know airplanes from eggbeaters, and besides I just don't have time."

"It's important, Ray."

"The Vermont primary is important too!" Houck yelled.

"Calm down, will you? It won't take you much time, you know. I've got an article Mahlon wrote for the *Sunday Times* about the RAF fighters ten years ago, personal-experience stuff; you can crib from that. And there's his speech before the Billy Mitchell dinner last summer; and a letter he wrote on behalf of the Commission when the Air Force appropriation was being debated. The letter isn't all cleared, but I've marked it."

"Hell," said Houck. He scratched his ear irritably. "It's important?"

"Sure it's important."

Houck said again, "Hell." There had been the slimmest of chances that he might have the weekend free. He had almost promised Meg—but it wasn't the first time he had almost promised, after all.

"Then," said Sutherland, ticking off his fingers, "there's the speech for the Foreign Policy Association next week——"

"Next *week?* But I can't——"

"—the talk before the Vermont state party dinner the night before the primaries——"

"Got it!" said Houck triumphantly. "I sent Stoddert a copy last week. It's in my room."

"But you probably didn't know Stoddert had to use it in Delaware yesterday, so we'll need a new one for Vermont. And there's a greeting to be sent to the textile workers' convention in New York next week, and a filmed three-minute spot that's going on the Motion Picture Anniversary Dinner telecast in April that you'll have to write."

Houck took a deep breath. "Now, look here," he said belligerently, "I only have one pair of hands. I can't, repeat *can't*, handle any more than I've been handling without help. If you want more out of me, you're going to have to get me somebody to help out."

Sutherland grinned. "That's the other thing you have to do," he said cheerfully. "There's a kid coming up from Boston on the train; Nowak found him, and he says you can trust him. You'll have to look him over, try him out, see if he can handle some of the easier jobs—you know, take the standard how-glad-I-am-to-be-in-the-great-city-of-Whatsis speech and put in the local variations. No sense wasting you on that, Ray. Hope he works out; because from here on in, we start to get *busy.*"

CHAPTER 7

THEY WAITED for the Vermont returns in the National Headquarters, Citizens for Mahlon Stoddert, Inc. Stoddert

and what was not so jokingly called "the high command" assembled at poll-closing time in the office of the national director, who for once was present. He was Lawrence Macmillan, the venerable Sage of the Middle Border, old and ill now, but once a trumpet of liberty to the Midwest. Like a good soldier, at the command of his old comrade Braxton Davis he had left his editorial sinecure on the greatest daily paper in the nation's heartland to lend his name and occasional presence to the cause.

There was some cause for alarm. Vermont's leading opposition paper had made a truly wild last-minute charge that Stoddert's candidacy in the primary was illegal under the Hatch Act, which prohibits government employees below a certain grade from engaging in politics. Oddly enough, the thing was traced not to Meehan but to Stouffer, the Northwest's favorite son, who wasn't even entered in the primary. It was abysmal folly to invite the Opposition in on the Party's family quarrels, and it would be long remembered against Stouffer. Some day he would be a governor no longer and would go to Washington for this judgeship or that commission seat, and he would find closed doors everywhere he turned. . . .

The reporters were permitted to mill around in the general office; there was coffee for those who wanted coffee and liquor for the aging few who drank on the job. Two television cameras with rival brands on them were set up; they fed to trucks parked below. Two sound newsreel crews, a man with a hand-held Eyemo and a few assorted still cameramen completed the audio-visual roster. The news-agency people and the network people had open phone lines to their bureaus; their job was to feed *all* the news. The men from the papers and magazines were chatting and waiting. The whole setup was duplicated blocks away at Meehan's headquarters, and at the headquarters of the three Opposition candidates who had entered the primaries. Houck was studying five statements which were slugged: BAD DEFEAT, CLOSE DEFEAT, FEW HUNDRED EITHER WAY, CLOSE WIN, LANDSLIDE. It was a small, compact state; complete returns were expected quite shortly. They had a phone line open to state headquarters in Montpelier. Pendleton covered it, the phone

at his ear, a large pad before him and a crayon in his hand.

Chittenden County came through first with a total. Pendleton printed the numerals swiftly; the page was ripped from his pad by other hands as soon as he stopped. Chittenden Party members had declared their preference for Meehan, 5,026 as against Stoddert, 4,983.

"That s.o.b. Stouffer," said Sutherland clinically.

There was a brief avalanche of figures over the phone; Windham, Rutland and Lamoille Counties. Houck punched the figures and cranked the adding machine. Totals: Stoddert, 13,280; Meehan, 11,845.

They cheered like kids at a basketball game, except Lawrence Macmillan from the depths of his wing chair. He was very tired and his back ached; he had never really rallied from his operation. Reporters thudded on the door and Sutherland opened it a crack, bracing his foot against it. Grinning broadly he said, "Nothing yet, boys. Couple of minutes."

Caledonia, Essex, Windsor, Orleans, the lot of them down to Grand Isle, whose 438 Party voters went 250 for Stoddert, 188 for Meehan.

Totals: Stoddert, 25,926; Meehan, 20,557.

The knocking on the door had risen to thunder. Houck unhesitatingly whipped the LANDSLIDE statement out of the sheaf in his hand and passed it to Stoddert. He ripped the rest in two and dove into his briefcase for the LANDSLIDE press copies. His heart was pounding and exultant; the room was filled with laughing, backslapping men who wanted to throw open the windows and yell to the world that they had fought the good fight and they had licked the bastard. They said it over and over.

That was what it had come down to. To restore the balance of power in Eurasia, you have to lick the enemy by persuading 5,369 Vermonters to vote your way instead of his. . . .

Stoddert lifted his hand and slowly silence fell on the room. He nodded to Sutherland, who opened the doors. Flash bulbs winked and the agency and network reporters streamed in, making an instinctive beeline for Houck. They snatched mimeographed copies of the LANDSLIDE statement from his hand and dashed back to their phones.

The newspaper and magazine men duly entered and began pitching questions. Perry Sutherland begged, "Please, boys, in a minute. Let the Commissioner say it for the cameras and then we'll have a conference."

Stoddert went through the door into the general office; they parted before him. He went straight to the chalked spot on the floor in front of the neutral drapes; the red lights of the two television cameras were already on and the film cameras turning; the mikes were live.

"I am deeply grateful for the confidence . . ." he began.

Houck listened, leaning in the doorway between the offices. It was a good little speech. He was exhausted.

Now they were airborne. Many are called; he had once said that no doubt hundreds of men made presidential plans in December, but now it was March and the hundreds had dwindled to scores and now they were perhaps a dozen. Stoddert was one of the dozen still in the running. Now contributions would start streaming in where they had trickled before; the energy and enthusiasm formerly diffused over a field of hundreds and then scores now would be channeled through only a dozen conduits and would be correspondingly more fierce.

One thought of dim figures from the past. Rufus King, who had lost to Monroe. Somebody named William H. Crawford, who had been nosed out by John Quincy Adams when it had to be a sudden-death playoff for the Presidency in the House of Representatives. Horatio Seymour, defeated by Grant. James M. Cox, steamrollered almost two to one by poor Warren Harding. Alf Landon, honorable and kind and licked from the start. King, Crawford, Seymour, Cox, Landon—once they had their passionate partisans, men of brains and learning who declared and believed that on their election to office depended the future of the nation, that their defeat would be a disaster from which America might never recover.

That was what they'd have to face and fight. The fact that Stouffer, Kellert and Fogleson, for instance, had not dared enter the primary meant that they were no longer serious candidates; they were merely using their announcements as levers to pry personal and regional advantage out of the situation. Their following would move, at an ac-

celerating pace, toward Meehan or Stoddert or Cowlett. Cowlett had not entered the primary either, but for respectable reasons; he was waiting to be drafted, and thank God the draft had not come before the primary to split the anti-Meehan vote. . . .

The news conference was in full swing, and Stoddert was master of it. He was a big man and he had grown bigger in the last hour. A rabid-opposition reporter who seemed to believe his own chain's editorials asked sneeringly how much a head he figured the winning margin of 5,369 Vermonters had come to. That, plus "local-issues election," would be their line to discredit the results.

Stoddert said calmly, "I consider that a stupid and impertinent question," and turned to the next reporter's question with grave sincerity.

A week ago he might not have got away with it. The reporters might have frozen and begun to bait him. Tonight it was the rabid-opposition man who got the disgusted looks. It was an enormously significant difference.

In the week that followed what they had come to call simply "Vermont," Houck realized that things had changed profoundly. Formerly what time he had which was not preempted by speech writing had gone into an effort to form and keep alive the grass-roots organizations assigned to him. Now he could hardly keep up with the applications. Students everywhere, professionals everywhere, wrote in and asked how they could affiliate with the parent groups, whether they could get some literature immediately.

He made the mistake of bragging to Lawrence Macmillan during one of the old man's rare visits to the office. Macmillan smiled painfully and told him, "Analyze your figures. Then come back and tell me whether you have one-tenth of one per cent of the electorate on your side."

Houck, startled, set Pendleton to work with an adding machine. A couple of hours later he knocked on the old man's door to tell him that they did not, but the Sage of the Middle Border had gone home, not to appear again for three days. Houck sighed and went back to his own office where he dictated a heart-wrenching letter to the chairmen of Students For and Professionals For, castigating them

for the letdown in activity since the first ephemeral triumph in Vermont. He signed it Lawrence Macmillan.

The subject of the meeting was Money.

Lockworth said, "Nonpartisan Businessmen For Stoddert has collected twenty-five thousand dollars, more or less, since Vermont. I don't mind saying I'm a little proud of that performance. Houck?"

Houck was about to make a very sad report, when Stoddert interrupted. "Give it back," he said to Lockworth.

The smiling little man stopped smiling. "Why, Mahlon?" he asked at last.

"How many contributors made up that sum?" Stoddert asked flatly. Lockworth hesitated. Stoddert went on, "I'll tell you. Twenty-five. Your people have been going around shaking down small manufacturers in the Midwest with defense contracts. One of them wrote to me; thank God the letter got through." He produced a letter and read from it: " 'I like you, Mr. Stoddert, but I don't like your friends' tactics. I am doing as good a job as I can of producing electronic components for the Air Force at a fair price and I resent any suggestion that I have to grease my way with political contributions. The day I have to . . .' Well, that's it." He passed the letter to Lockworth and said absently, "You'll take care of it, Charlie. And fire the man who saw this fellow. Evidently he hasn't got enough tact to be of use to us."

"Give it *all* back?" asked Lockworth, jotting a note on the letter.

"Every dime," said Stoddert calmly, "and then start all over again with the clear understanding that contributions will not buy anybody anything except the satisfaction of helping to elect Hon. Mahlon Stoddert."

"Sure, Mahlon," said Lockworth, biting the bullet.

And yet the next day Houck got a call in his office to come downstairs and join Mr. Stoddert in his car. He went. The car, for delicacy's sake, was not the official car of the Chairman of the Peace Priorities Allocation Commission but a hired limousine with a hired chauffeur. Stoddert was dictating to a nameless girl secretary who sat beside the

chauffeur, he only nodded to Houck when he got in and went on with the dictation. It was a long memorandum about lumber requirements to the Secretary of the Interior. The car moved off as he talked away; he finished the memo in five more minutes and told the girl, "Get back to the office."

She got out nimbly at the next traffic light and they saw her wave down a cab. Stoddert pushed a button and a heavy glass sheet rolled up from the back-rest of the front seat, cutting them off from the chauffeur. He thumbed the button of the mike to the chauffeur to make sure it was off and said, "Too many hats, Raymond. I get tired. I see by the New York *Dispatch* that I'm a superman. I only need five hours of sleep a night, I can read a page a second, I never have to refer to notes, I remember everybody's name and face, no matter how fleeting the contact was. Who feeds them that nonsense? *Are* there people like that? I've never met one."

Houck knew him well enough by now to be sure that he wanted an argument, that he was refreshing himself by baiting Houck with the pretense of being a tired and querulous man. "Mr. Commissioner," he said, "you don't scare me worth a damn. Where are we going?"

Stoddert grinned. "You won't let me be mediocre for a minute, will you? We're going to see a man named Edgerton; he's at the Carlyle, probably in a very fancy company suite. Edgerton Frame and Picture Corporation, Youngstown." He proceeded to a rundown of the Edgerton Frame and Picture Corporation. Houck was not particularly surprised to learn that the firm not only made most of the inexpensive picture frames sold in the United States but published a farm magazine, turned out thermometers in a Wisconsin plant, had the midwest franchise for bottling a famous English brand of ginger beer, and marketed a line of do-it-yourself power tools. "Maybe," said Stoddert, "they've taken over Trefflich's wild-animal business in Brooklin since I last heard, but as far as I know that's the list to date."

"Are we interested in their farm magazine?" asked Houck, puzzled.

"Of course not. They're hopelessly committed to the Opposition. All we want from the Edgertons is money."

In ten painless minutes they got fifty thousand dollars. It was in the form of fifty checks signed by fifty Edgertons or trustees for Edgertons. The Edgerton they saw was a dapper, slate-eyed, young-old man with a law degree. He chatted with Houck for a while about the recent Supreme Court decisions and with Stoddert about the chances for world peace. Evidently they were well acquainted from Stoddert's foundation days. They mentioned great names of industry and education familiarly.

And then, as they were about to leave, a little smile formed on Edgerton's face. He said, "I haven't got the guts after all, Commissioner. The family told me to feel my way and do as I thought best. Well—I think it best to advise you that we're also giving fifty thousand apiece to Meehan and Cowlett. You'd surely have found out anyway, wouldn't you?"

Stoddert stood quite still for a moment and then said, "I suppose so, Herb. It's been pleasant seeing you again."

"For me too. And I'm glad you could come, Professor Houck."

They were in the limousine again. Stoddert snapped his office address over the microphone to the chauffeur and sat with his lips compressed and his nostrils flaring.

Houck said, "I'm no court jester, Mahlon. My job isn't to cheer you up when you're blue. I just want to know whether you think it's sensible to waste your energy over this business of the Edgerton family coppering their bets."

Mahlon Stoddert said coldly, "Shut up, Raymond."

Houck bit down, hard. He said firmly, fighting down his temper, "Mahlon, I am only trying to point out the essential unimportance of—"

"Shut up, Raymond!" Stoddert turned on him violently. "Who are you to tell me how I should feel about accepting corrupt money from a venal and power-seeking tribe of corn-state autocrats? They hate me, Houck! They hate everything I stand for; if they had their way, the world would be plunged into another blood-bath tomorrow. Their filthy gutter journal has lied, twisted, distorted, perverted for a hundred years. They've bribed governors,

they've elected nincompoop senators. And now they want to own me. Me, Raymond! Not somebody in a newspaper headline, but me! It comes close to home and it hurts!"

Houck said, "Surely, Mahlon, you gave them no reason to think their contribution would buy them any favors——"

Stoddert stared at him incredulously. "What?"

"I said, surely you——"

Stoddert shook his head unbelievingly. "I heard what you said. But did you mean it? Are you that—inexperienced, Raymond?"

He leaned forward, tapping Houck on the knee. "Think it through," he ordered. "The Edgertons give me fifty thousand dollars. Let us suppose that I win the nomination. Let's suppose that I win the election, and I become President. I needed the money, or believe me, Raymond, I should never have humiliated myself by coming to this place and asking for it. Therefore, to that extent, whatever it is, I am indebted to the Edgertons; without their help I might not have won. Do you see that?"

Houck said stiffly, "Of course. But that is certainly no justification for passing out political favors."

"And I wouldn't do it if it were! But if I'm President, Raymond, I've got a hundred and seventy-five million Americans to think about. Nobody can do that. No human being can cope with a fraction of that many persons, each with a problem, some with hundreds. So I delegate authority. Let's say there's a paper shortage and the Edgertons want to increase their allocation. They go to a local board —the chairman of which is appointed by a man who was appointed by me. Let's say there's a tax problem, or a government order for power tools; let's say anything at all happens, anything that concerns the government in any way. And believe me, Raymond, there is very little that happens to any large enterprise these days that does not directly and immediately concern the government. So an Edgerton lawyer takes an Edgerton problem to a government official. And he mentions—if he has to; probably he doesn't have to, because all these things are known without being mentioned—he mentions, let's say, that his bosses gave fifty thousand dollars to help out the government man's boss—me—at a time when that fifty thousand dol-

lars looked enormous. Think it through, Raymond, and remember that there is always a margin for debate in these things, always some little paragraph of the law that can be interpreted one way or another. Do the Edgertons get their money's worth?" He glared at Houck. "You bet your sweet life they do!"

Houck thought for a moment. "Can't you send out a directive that all cases should be decided on their merits, regardless of any——"

He stopped. Mahlon Stoddert was laughing at him.

"I see," said Houck. "That's just the kind of a directive that automatically becomes a dead letter. It doesn't mean anything. And if you mentioned the Edgertons by name, say, that would be discriminating against them. Which would be just as bad as favoring them."

Stoddert was no longer laughing. "That's the way it is," he said, looking suddenly weary.

They were arriving at Stoddert's office. The candidate said slowly, "I'm sorry if I took it out on you, Raymond."

"That's all right, Mahlon. This whole question of the propriety of soliciting political contributions is——"

"Is out of our hands," said Stoddert with finality. "Don't let it throw you. That's the way these things are done, and that's the way I have to do them."

He leaned forward, watching the chauffeur jump out to open the door. He said, "But I don't have to like it."

CHAPTER 8

VERMONT FOR STODDERT.

A breather to build up their finances and capitalize on their gains, and then the next four primaries. Minnesota went for Stoddert—no contest; Meehan didn't even file. South Carolina and Delaware went for Stoddert in close contests. And then they went to Oklahoma.

The name of the town was Enid. Houck and Mahlon Stoddert got off the Rocket at the station, and the first thing they noticed was that somebody had goofed.

There were three schools in Enid. Three chapters of Students for Stoddert—on paper; one triple-sized chapter

of Nonpartisan Professionals for Stoddert—on paper. And a rousing crowd to receive the candidate.

But also only on paper. There were three reporters, a cameraman and a couple of worried-looking faculty members from the teachers' college. "Mr. Stoddert?" said the older one. "And—Professor Houck, I suppose? I'm Lyman, and this is Dr. Steinbrunner. We're delighted that you did show up, but—"

Perry Sutherland wormed past the candidate. "What happened?"

Lyman croaked dismally, "We got this telegram."

Houck grabbed the paper out of his hand. Sutherland muttered despairingly, "Christ!" and confronted the newspapermen. "Mr. Stoddert has laryngitis, boys. Thanks for coming. Sorry, but you see how it is."

Houck was trying to read the telegram. STODDERT UNABLE KEEP SPEAKING ENGAGEMENT TONIGHT BECAUSE DIGESTIVE UPSET. ARRIVE TOMORROW PM. SUGGEST POSTPONE MEETING 24 HOURS. And it was signed with the name of Augustus Branderman, the Citizens-for-Stoddert chairman in Wichita, whom they had left two and a half hours before.

Houck handed it to Mahlon Stoddert, who was looking uncertain and annoyed. Stoddert barely glanced at it; his attention was mostly on Sutherland, who was trying to get rid of the newspapermen. "What's that?" he said sharply. "Cancel the meeting because of this—this stupid trick?"

Sutherland looked at him imploringly, but the candidate rolled right on. "You may say," he told the press, "that someone has attempted to play a childish and malevolent prank. The meeting for tonight will proceed as planned; I shall speak. I cannot believe that any candidate has sanctioned this bit of hoodlumism, but in any event it will not interfere with the scheduled talk at Youngblood Hall."

Dr. Steinbrunner cleared his throat. "It will, though," he said faintly.

Stoddert looked at him frostily. "I beg your pardon?"

Steinbrunner swallowed. "We—we canceled the hall. The Meehan group grabbed it up."

They sat in the suite in the Youngblood Hotel, a coun-

cil of anger. Professor Lyman, chairman of the Nonpartisan Professionals for Stoddert, went through the story again.

Houck listened, and though he couldn't doubt the man's word, he also could not believe. Phoney telegrams? Plots and conspiracies? Lincoln had done as much, no doubt, when he cooked up an Ohio caucus behind the back of Salmon P. Chase, destroying Chase's candidacy and insuring his own nomination for a second term—but that was a century ago, in the first place, and in the middle of a war, in the second. Houck marveled.

It was all perfectly clear in retrospect.

They had been in Wichita, giving a boost to Branderman's struggling group. Stoddert had refused to fly to Enid because the only field available was the Air Force base, and there was a delicacy about using government property for campaigning purposes, even to the extent of touching a plane's wheels to the said property. And someone had sent four telegrams to Enid, signing Branderman's name.

Sutherland said, "Catch that part—four telegrams. One to each of the student-group chairmen, one to Professor Lyman for the Professionals. They didn't wire the papers, see, because they knew damn well the papers would have sense enough to call Wichita right away to check . . . not like the eggheads on the Professionals for—oh. Excuse me, Professor Lyman."

The professor and Sutherland wrangled briefly, but Houck wasn't listening. He was tired; they were all tired. Whatever else this silly prank—he kept on thinking of it as a silly prank—accomplished, it had got them bickering among themselves. Even Stoddert had laced into Sutherland rather completely for the press-agent's instinctive lies to the newspapermen; Sutherland had sullenly excused himself by saying that the opposition press would have a splendid time laughing at them, which was true enough, but the opposition press would find some stick to beat them with in any case whatsoever, so that argument hardly applied. But Sutherland had been right, Houck thought, wearily slumped back in a wing chair while the arguments continued around him. They couldn't *prove* Meehan's backers had sent the telegrams. It wouldn't look well to have them accusing Meehan of dirty pool; it might back-

fire seriously, if it turned out that there was some other explanation. And at best they would seem—unsporting.

Houck stood up. "Mahlon," he said, "let's look at the bright side. Here we've got an evening off that we didn't expect. Do you have any objections if I devote it to loafing?"

The candidate looked annoyed, then surprised, then grinned. He said, "You're brilliant, Raymond. Go right ahead. Perhaps I'll catch up on my own sleep."

Houck sat on the edge of the bed in his own room and tried to decide what to do with his evening.

The first thing, of course, was to phone home; but he tried that and it didn't work out. All he got was the sitter, telling him that Mrs. Houck had gone to the movies with the wife of Dr. Asbury; the children were fine, Mrs. Houck was fine, yes, she would tell Mrs. Houck that he had called and that he was also fine.

The second idea was to have a drink. On the phone to the desk he discovered with a shock that Oklahoma was a dry state. Houck was wise in the ways of bellboys, but that was a little risky under the circumstances; if the Meehan faction was going to play dirty it seemed a good time to avoid even the appearance of evil. And besides, he had had an alarming thought. He unzipped his bag and found the carbons of all the speeches he had prepared for Stoddert for the Oklahoma campaign; was there, by any horrid chance, anything about liquor in any of them?

There wasn't; but it took him an hour to find that out, and by then it was too late to think of going to a movie, which had been his third idea.

He looked around the room, considered briefly going to bed, wondered what attractions Enid might have for a transient with an evening to kill. . . .

And then he got up and put his coat on and faced the fact that he *knew* what attraction interested him.

In that very hotel, in the room that had been reserved for Stoddert's speech, the Meehan faction was holding a rally.

Houck had never attended a Meehan rally. He didn't

know what went on, or what was said, or what sort of people attended.

And this was his chance to see the face of the enemy.

The first glimpse was a disappointment.

He got out of the elevator in the lobby, and there was the flight of steps to the ballroom on the mezzanine floor. At the foot of the marble steps was a wooden table, where a young girl with red hair and a consecrated expression was standing guard over a registry book, a lock-box—standing open and half full of silver and bills—and a small American flag on a pedestal. A cardboard poster behind her said:

MEEHAN FOR PRESIDENT
Hear DR. DAVID GONZALES Speak
"The Bipartisan Betrayal"

It was in five colors; it gave the date, place and time; and if it had been prepared and posted in the three hours since the Students for Stoddert committee had agreed to give up the hall, Houck was willing to eat it, including all five colors.

The name Gonzales, though, was something he hadn't counted on.

He stalled by walking over to the cigar counter and staring opaquely at the magazines on display. Gonzales, he was sure, would recognize him; it had been only a couple of weeks, after all, since they had had their little talk in Vermont. And what Houck had counted on was a quiet seat in the back of the hall, where he could watch without interference—even applaud, if that seemed like good protective coloration—certainly not be marked and stared at.

Still . . .

Gonzales would be up on a platform. Houck by this time had faced enough small-town auditorium lights to be pretty sure that all Gonzales would see would be a glare. And there was almost no chance that anyone else would recognize him.

Before he could change his mind, he turned and walked over to the stairs.

"Mister!"

He stopped, startled. The girl was leaning toward him, hand out to catch his arm, the consecrated face indignant. "Mister, you forgot something! We have to pay for this hall, you know. And you have to sign the book."

In for a penny, in for a pound. Houck wrote his name in a quick illegible smear and fished in his pocket for change. The girl stopped him with a quick scowl. "Two bits special rate for students only, Mister. The minimum contribution's a dollar for anybody else."

He found a five, waited doggedly for change, and climbed the steps to the entrance.

The hall was full—a turnout of perhaps five hundred. He had made it in plenty of time. Somebody was droning from the platform and the audience was ignoring him; he was local talent, and not much of it. Houck slipped into a rear seat after squeezing past five sets of knees. On his right was a podgy lady with a cowed husband; on his left a young man with whom he immediately felt at home. The boy was university, obviously. Everybody was chatting. Houck felt no shyness about opening a conversation. He said to the boy, "Things pretty active for Meehan around here?"

The boy seemed to suspect a rib. "Don't you read the papers, mister?" he asked coldly.

"Not the Enid papers," Houck said. "I'm a traveling man. I just stopped in here because there wasn't much else to do."

"I see. You could have done worse, mister. Too bad you won't be around on the 23rd. Meehan's going to be here himself."

"Maybe I'll catch up with him in some other town. You at the university?"

"Yep. Sophomore engineering."

"How's the university feel about Meehan?"

"Those marbleheads? The Dean of Engineering's a Stoddert man, right out in the open."

When I was a boy, Houck felt like saying, it wasn't considered unmanly to state your political preferences right

out in the open, or in Macy's window at high noon. It was an irritating way for the boy to put an irritating concept. But what he said next wasn't irritating; it was scary.

"He'll crawl after Meehan's in, I suppose," the boy said calmly, "but by then it'll be too late."

File it for reference, handling it with tongs. "The students pretty active?"

"Damn right. Think they want to go to war?"

Houck tried to field that one, but it dropped through his hands. He asked helplessly, "How's Meehan going to keep them from going to war?"

"By bombing the——out of the—— ——, that's how," said the boy. He didn't seem embarrassed to use such language, thought Houck. It appeared to suit him. "He'll do it and the Russians know he'll do it, so—no war. That gutless bastard Stoddert'll talk and make speeches and let us be nibbled to death."

Another boy in university uniform of sport coat and slacks was sitting on the far side of Houck's young friend, leaning forward and listening. He tapped the lecturer on the knee and said, "Change places with me, Brad; I'd like to talk to the gentleman."

"Sure, Arnold," said Brad, and they shifted.

"I'm Arnold Norris," the new boy said, sticking out his hand and turning on a personality smile.

"Doc Houck," said Houck.

"Like that professor of Stoddert's?" Norris asked with a disarming smile.

Houck grinned. "I've heard that before, but I think he pronounces it Hoke."

"I know. I was only kidding. I'm president of the student's group for Senator Meehan at the University, and I'll be glad to fill you in if you want any answers." He winked, his face turned from poor Brad. We need those oafs, his wink seemed to say, but we don't let them usurp the job of thinking for us.

"Well, what are you people after?"

"That's a fair question," said handsome, serious young Arnold Norris. "What we are after is—a return to fundamentals. Since, say, 1914 America has been led by men who have forgotten the fundamentals. That a debt must

be paid. That the object of fighting a war is to win it. That the government is best which governs least. That merit must be rewarded and lack of it punished."

Very fundamental. Very simple. Very wrong, thought Houck. Must a debt be paid if it means the ruin of a man who, otherwise, will be your friend and customer? Must a war be won if it means slaughtering defenseless, possibly innocent, thousands and touching off a greater war which would mean the slaughter of everybody? Is he a good referee who stands by with his thumb in his mouth while the team with the 230-pound line fouls and massacres the gallant 175-pounders? With every man alive affected by a thousand times a thousand variables of birth, location, training and luck, what godlike person is to say that this man has overwhelming merit and that man an overwhelming lack of it?

But there was another speaker on the platform now, and he was applauded warmly. He wore the cap of one of the fraternal veterans' organizations. "Commander Tracey," Arnold Norris told Houck, beating his palms together. "Big lawyer here. Former FBI man." He said it with awe.

The commander glared at them until they were silent. He said, "We will rise and sing the National Anthem." A pianist boomed out chords and as the audience got up the commander did a sharp right-face to the platform flag and saluted. They sang and sat down. The commander cut his salute sharply, faced left and glared at them again.

"My fellow Americans," he said softly. It was the old oratorical trick to make everybody strain to hear; it shuts up an audience like no amount of bawling-out. After you have their attention you can let your voice rise. Houck had used it often in restless lecture rooms.

"My fellow Americans. We've gathered tonight like an army ready to form its line of march for a great offensive on a savage foe. Among us there are rear-rank privates, noncoms, the backbone of any army, and a few commissioned officers. You privates, you foot soldiers, have the hard and dirty work as always. And like real soldiers I know you glory in it. The tougher the objective, the greater the glory! You're the ones in this army of ours who have to tramp from door to door soliciting names on petitions, or-

ganizing coffee parties for your neighbors who haven't yet awakened to our rallying cry, driving friends in your cars to our meetings, collecting every last nickel you can dig up for our war chest, addressing envelopes to every last name you can find in the phone book and the city directory, deluging the editors of the papers and the managers of the broadcasting stations with applause when they present our case faithfully and with scorn when they lie about us.

"You noncommissioned officers!" Houck noticed the podgy woman at his right stiffen and look military. "You committee chairmen and chair*ladies,* you block captains, you correspondence organizers, you secretaries and finance committee members! We have as yet no medals to bestow or service stripes to award in this army of ours, but I say you've earned some. And I'm calling on you—*now*—to earn more. Your achievements have been splendid. We have mailed eighty thousand pieces in the past three weeks alone. We have contacted in personal interviews more than three thousand, eight hundred men and women. We have organized twelve hundred coffee parties with an average attendance of eight persons apiece. We have collected *nine thousand, seven hundred and forty-two dollars* to date!"

Somebody started applauding and it swept the auditorium.

Arnold Norris hissed in Houck's ear: "And that's without the money from the air base!"

There was, Houck remembered, an Air Force installation just outside the town. He said, "Isn't that tabu, collecting from service people?"

Arnold Norris blinked, then gave Houck a long, thoughtful look.

"Of course," he said, and pointedly turned away.

Houck was beginning to wish he hadn't come.

After the former FBI man, there was a young girl from one of the schools, full of enthusiasm and vitality, as consecrated as the redhead at the admission table outside, and incapable of holding her audience. She got a scattered hand when she made a reference, incomprehensible to Houck, to "those Indian-lovers in Oklahoma City." That was the

only hand she got. She retired, looking baffled and angry; and the chairman got up to introduce the feature speaker of the evening.

Dr. David Gonzales was as charming behind a lectern as he had been across a tea-room table. He got a three-minute ovation, steady and determined; it started like the break of racehorses from the barrier, and stopped like the turning of a switch. Clearly, they loved him. Houck glanced at the woman at his right: she was leaning forward yearningly, on her face the look of Hero beholding Leander rising from the sea. He glanced to his left: Young Norris was gone, but the one named Brad sat erect and thrilled as a young warrior. There wasn't any doubt that Gonzales was the man the meeting had come to hear. There was rustling of movement all about Houck and behind. A skinny youth with glasses and a hard-worn Speed Graphic squeezed into the row ahead of him, staring intently toward the speakers' platform and fiddling with his view finder.

Gonzales opened with a few literary pleasantries; it was, after all, a college crowd. They loved him, indeed. He paused three times for chuckles, and the chuckles came. He pulled a mock-sorrowful face and expressed sympathy with the plight of poor candidate Stoddert, unfortunately unable to attend his meeting in this hall this night; and he got a full roll of laughter. And then he got down to serious business. "Fun aside," he said, "it's no surprise to any of us that Candidate Mahlon Stoddert is ill. I speak to you as a doctor—not only of the body, but of the soul and the spirit of our nation. And I say this to you, that Mahlon Stoddert is sick. Sick with the corruption of his so-called liberal wing of Our Party. Sick with the poisonous sickness of a lifelong career of plunder and blunder and spend. Sick with the vicious creeping socialist disease that has infected great segments of our country, that has weakened the American will to live, dragged down the American courage to resist alien ideologies, that, if Mahlon Stoddert and his partisan pinks had their way, would waste our substance and our spirit on a fog-brained, egg-headed, spineless policy of surrender and ruin!"

Good heavens, thought Houck, unbelieving, he's intel-

lectual-baiting! He's telling five hundred students and professors that idealism and intellect equate with cowardice and treason!

And the five hundred students and professors were eating it up. They clapped and stamped; and Dr. Gonzales, flinging his hands up to stem the applause, rode over it to his next climax:

"Do we want a sick man in the White House? I tell you *no,* ladies and gentlemen, *no!* Our country is a *strong* country, my friends. Young, and healthy, and glowing with hope. And if there is a sickness, if some creeping pestilence crawls in upon us, masquerading as a so-called liberal reform movement, I know—we all know—what medicine to prescribe! For the health of America, for the strength and spiritual supremacy of our country, to insure its victory over the illiterate and backward areas of the world, I give you that greatest of living Americans, our candidate, our friend and our next President . . . Senator John Meehan!"

The audience went wild. Applause was not enough; they stamped and cheered and shouted the name of Rosie Meehan; and in a moment they were on their feet. Gonzales stood on the platform with his hands in the air, accepting the storm. Flashbulbs popped. Houck, standing up to see, saw the skinny boy with the Speed Graphic climb onto his seat for a better view; the kid stumbled, caught himself, braced himself against the back of the seat, and turned toward Houck.

Houck stared at him curiously. It was almost, he thought, dazed by the storm of noise around him, it was almost as though the boy were going to—were going to——

The flashbulb struck blindingly at his eyes.

Houck shook his head instinctively, blinking. There must have been something behind him, reason told him; he turned to look . . .

There was.

There was that young fellow, Arnold Norris, looking angry and triumphant, and a little bit scared. He was holding the poster that had been behind the desk at the foot of the table: MEEHAN FOR PRESIDENT, it blazed. Next to him was the red-headed girl who had been beside the poster; she carried a signboard of her own, one Houck had

not noticed before: it was a vicious caricature of Mahlon Stoddert, handing over something that might have been either money or a secret document, to someone who might have been either Khrushchev or Satan himself.

Houck realized what had happened—a bit too late.

He had been photographed, at a Meehan rally, before a background of Meehan slogans, standing and—for all anyone might know—cheering a Meehan political speaker.

CHAPTER 9

He went immediately to Sutherland's room in the hotel and told him the story. "Is it very bad?" he asked in conclusion.

Sutherland grimaced. "It's not good. Not with Rosie's smart boy Slidell to handle it." Slidell was Sutherland's opposite number on the Meehan side.

"But it doesn't *mean* anything, Perry. I honestly don't get it. I honestly don't know why they bothered to do it. So I attended a Meehan meeting in Oklahoma. So what?"

"Doesn't matter whether it means anything or not, Ray. It's Documentary Evidence." His voice had sunk to a sinister croak. "Documen-tary Ev-idence of any timely charge they care to bring. Before the next primary the Meehan papers suddenly front-page the picture to prove that Stoddert and Meehan have come to terms, that a vote for Meehan is just as good as a vote for Stoddert. Or at the convention they spread it to prove that Stoddert isn't master in his own house, that one of his trusted aids is dealing behind his back. They can say anything." There was a long pause. "We may have to dump you," he said quietly.

A physical pang went through Houck. "I wasn't very shrewd, was I?" he asked.

"Not very. As dirty as they play, you should have been more careful. Let's see Mahlon about this." He picked up the phone and gave the operator Stoddert's room number and his own name. He was one of a very small list of people who were not to be informed by the hotel switchboard that Mr. Stoddert's phone did not answer. Houck was another on the list, and he wondered if he'd still be on it to-

morrow. If he got stricken from the list tomorrow, the chances were that he'd never speak to Stoddert again or see him except from a distance. The splendid isolation that surrounds the President starts early.

Sutherland after a few quiet words put down the phone and told Houck: "He's busy but he can see us."

They walked silently down the corridor to the elevator bank.

Stoddert's secretary, a middle-aged, unshockable lady, let them into the suite. The living room was littered with papers; where they were thickest Stoddert could be discerned pounding a portable typewriter and scowling at a copy of the *Congressional Record* beside it on the table.

"Hello," he growled at them, and slammed down the lid of the portable. "There are times when I feel like resigning from the damn Commission. Should have taken a university presidency when I had the chance. What's on your mind, Perry?"

"Ray here went to the Meehan meeting downstairs to kill some time and know the enemy," said Sutherland. "They recognized him and framed him. Stuck up an anti-Stoddert poster behind him and took his picture. I told Ray we might have to dump him. Of course, it's up to you."

Stoddert took off his glasses, went to an easy chair and stretched out his long legs. He looked very tired. "We can't do that," he said quietly.

Houck's heart leaped at the words.

"We can't do that," said Stoddert, "because they'd just exploit it and claim Houck was a spy in our camp. The minds of their supporters run that way. Just get something on them to keep in the files, Perry. What about those two wives of Gonzales'? Isn't there a possibility that with that waiting period they have in California the marriages overlapped? Find somebody out there who's willing to make an affidavit. They spring theirs, we spring ours, we're even—or maybe a little better than even. I have spoken. Now let me get back to work, fellows." His secretary passed him a sheaf of papers and he began to read.

Outside in the corridor again Sutherland said to Houck, "What's the matter with *you,* Ray? Didn't you hear the man? You've been reprieved, you should be happy."

"Yeah," said Houck. "I think I'll turn in. Good night, Perry."

"Good night," said Sutherland, wonderingly.

What, Houck bitterly asked himself as he lay sleepless, did you expect from the man? A ringing defense based firmly on the Bill of Rights? What you got was what the situation called for: a practical political answer to a practical political problem. But did he *have* to be so revoltingly specific about recommending a countermeasure?

Find somebody to attest that maybe Gonzales had once been briefly guilty of technical bigamy!

He thought of Edgerton and then tonight. I guess, he told himself, this is disenchantment. Stoddert sure told Edgerton off—in the limousine, with the fifty thousand safely in his pocket.

He tried to be judicial and failed. He tried to assess Stoddert as a whole man, with good and bad in him, and the good things wouldn't come to mind. He found that he was thinking of Mahlon Stoddert as a self-seeking empire builder who could glibly camouflage his motivation with idealistic words. It was unfair, it was childish—"Miss Timothey in 4A is a Stinker," total and complete, because she bawled him out when he deserved it—and it was the way he felt clean through.

Sutherland? An unspeakable gab-merchant.

Lockworth? A ward-heeler.

Nowak? A labor thug who wanted In.

Braxton Davis? A phoney exploiting a synthetic character bearing his name.

And Professor Raymond Houck, what exactly are you up to yourself? You're middle-aged, you have a family you started a little late, you have duties to your students and the University, and tonight you're stewing in an Oklahoma hotel room. Why?

He thought of the hope he had tremulously revealed to his wife, that his share of the fruits of victory would be a good judgeship in the Circuit Court of Appeals. He had even made up his mind that he wouldn't take some dreary circuit out in the tall corn, there to spend his days denying *certiorari* to writs of *error coram nobis* drawn up by stir

lawyers. No siree; that wasn't good enough for the eminent Professor Raymond Houck. He would bide his time until a *suitable* appointment was available in the District of Columbia or New York City, where his profundity and rapier-like intelligence would have ample scope. And then, in due course, a grateful nation would summon him to the Supreme Court of the United States, where he would dispense eternal wisdom in crystalline prose, become a living legend, possibly grow a distinguished white beard, and be idolized by all right-thinking lovers of liberty.

Horsefeathers. He had been seduced by a daydream. Here he was, far from his job and family, up to his neck in muck, entrapped by Meehan's lunatics and hotly defended, for all the wrong reasons, by a man named Stoddert for whom there was, after all, very little to be said.

He could *not* get to sleep.

He got up and turned on the light at his writing table and shuffled through the speech Stoddert would deliver to the Air Reserve Association. There was a pencil in his hand and he mechanically began to mark up the address, sharpening a verb here, low-browing an allusion there. It took him a quarter of an hour, and by the end of it the speech was very much improved.

So, evidently, sincerity didn't have much to do with your performance. He wondered whether he ought to tender his resignation in the morning and get to hell back where he belonged. He rather doubted that he would. He had lost faith, but there was no sense in chucking everything else away after it. There were many material advantages accruing from the very hard work he was putting in. Win, lose or draw, his association with big-time politics raised the price-tag on him in the academic marketplace. He'd be able to tell his literary agent to up the prices on his articles about twenty per cent too. The magazines weren't just getting a law professor with a good style now; they were getting a man who rubbed elbows with the great. There ought to be a book in it, too. That fellow out at the University of Chicago must have done nicely with his inside story of the Stevenson draft.

And of course it was perfectly possible that Stoddert *was* the man who could pull America through the next four

years with the least cost to its traditions and its pride, with the lowest burden of taxation and the smallest risk of catastrophe.

Houck switched off the light and climbed grimly back into bed. It was possible, he thought. But it wasn't the way to bet it.

Nowak flew in to meet them the next morning in Oklahoma City, and it was very bad. He took Houck to pieces in five minutes of analysis and invective. He disposed of the hapless eggheads in Enid in fifty acid words. And he said:

"Thank God for one thing, boys. It happened in Oklahoma. I wanted us to take the primary in Oklahoma—if we took it, we'd walk into the convention with the nomination sewed up—but the odds were on Meehan. So—scratch Oklahoma."

Mahlon Stoddert's head came up. "Homer, I scarcely see why a couple of stupid tricks should make us give up——"

"You will," promised Homer Nowak.

They had allotted five days to the state of Oklahoma. Houck went through the five days in a dream. He saw the oil wells chugging away in the yard of the state house, caught a glimpse of a red clay ravine outside of Tulsa that was queerly called a "river," beheld from the window of a car his first tumbleweeds (they really were weeds, and they really did roll along). He made the spot changes that were necessary in the speeches already prepared. He began drafting the big important ones to come—the statewide convention of the Oil & Refinery Workers, where Nowak and Stoddert shared the billing; the closed-circuit television address to the Party workers on the eve of the primary. He listened on the radio one night to the voice of John R. O'S. Meehan, sweetly and sincerely assaulting such devil's machinations as freedom of thought, civil liberties and the right of soldiers to join organizations of their choosing. He sat in the audience in Oklahoma City's big Municipal Auditorium when Nowak and Dr. Gonzales and somebody named Winterholzer, an aide to the governor who held dreams of going to the convention as a favorite son, engaged in a three-cornered debate on the issues be-

fore the Party and the land. Nowak was very good. He got the laughs and the sympathy of the audience; Winterholzer got the applause, being a native son. And the next day, John R. O'S. Meehan got the votes.

It wasn't even close. It was a clear majority for Rosie Meehan.

The next big thing was the Party Day dinner—fifty dollars a plate, closed-circuit television, eighty-nine of them going on simultaneously across the country—and that was a week off, and Houck's part in it in Philadelphia besides. And that meant—three days at home.

He arrived late at night. Meg was asleep on the couch in the living room, waiting for him; she woke up, made coffee; they sat and talked for a while; but they were both tired, and a little ill at ease. It was only because they were tired, Houck promised himself, it would be better in the morning.

In the morning the children woke him, and that was very good. They came in early and bounced on his bed like little kids, instead of the eleven- and nine-year-olds they respectively were. They raced out of the room when their mother called them. Houck, shaving, bathing, dressing, felt pretty good; but by the time he got downstairs they were already off to school, and Meg was not in sight. A large black woman, a total stranger to Houck, poured orange juice for him and said, "I'm Ellen, Mr. Houck. Mrs. Houck took the children to school in the car." She didn't say, "car," though; she said "ca" with a flat Connecticut snap.

"Thank you," said Houck, looking at the orange juice, the buttered toast (Meg knew better than to put butter on his toast), the eggs (not scrambled, not even turned over). He sat down and drank the juice. "Ellen. Do you know what became of ——" For a minute he couldn't remember the last maid's name—— "of Miriam?"

"No, Mr. Houck. I've been here since the first of Match." She took the empty juice glass away and waited. "You want your coffee now, Mr. Houck?"

He ate the tasteless breakfast (the eggs were cold, of course), and wandered into the living room to wait for Meg. She seemed to be taking a terribly long time, he thought. God knew it wasn't as if he were home, loafing

around and waiting for her, every day of the year. He certainly wasn't the kind of man who expected his wife to dance attendance on him every minute. But, just to be reasonable about it, was it too much to ask that she on this one day manage to be *home?*

There was a ring at the doorbell, and he flung it open, ready to accuse her not only of absenteeism but of having forgotten her keys.

The woman was not Meg. "Mr. Houck?" she said. "I'm from the *Post-Standard.* We tried to call you, but your phone's being interrupted and the calls switched and—frankly, the man who took the call seemed to be stalling us." She smiled engagingly.

Houck said, "I'm sorry, but I can't give interviews without an appointment. You see how it is."

The woman waved a magazine at him. "Have you seen this?"

It was a copy of *News, The American Weekly Journal,* open to the department headed "Politics." Standing in the cold draft of the open door, Houck glanced at it, saw his picture, the picture that had been taken in Enid with the Meehan posters behind him and a vacuously placating smile on his face.

He said shortly, "I have no comment, Miss—Miss. I haven't seen this and I don't know what it says."

"Read it," she urged. "I'll wait."

He started to refuse, glanced again at the page and was caught. "Oh, come on in," he growled, and closed the door. The story was mostly about the Meehanite victory in Oklahoma, but the last paragraph justified the picture.

> Meanwhile in Enid, home of New York's Sherman Billingsley and birthplace of the professional K.P., a Stoddert rooter was Caught in the Act. Giving aid and comfort to the political enemy was pro-eggheadite Raymond L. (for Lagrange) Houck, part-time professor of constitutional law and dilettante Stoddert speechwriter. At week's end, behind-the-scenes Washington contemplated Mahlon Stoddert's bleeding primary wounds and asked: How did Houck stab Stoddert?

Houck handed the magazine back to the girl. "Thank you for showing me this. I'm sorry, but I still don't have any comment."

"Oh, go on," she said persuasively. "Tell me what I can print about it. That's quite a picture, Mr. Houck. It'll go down in history like the hole in Adlai Stevenson's shoe and the tomato on Willkie's face. If you won't give me a statement, there'll just be half a dozen others here; the wire services were on our necks starting at six o'clock this morning."

He said: *"No.* I'm really sorry, but *no."*

He got rid of her, but he knew she was right. When Meg came in a few minutes later Houck was on the phone to the hotel where his secretary had already reached Sutherland, already made arrangements for a press conference in the hotel that afternoon. "Sutherland will be here at two, Mr. Houck," said the secretary; "I've set up the conference for half-past three."

He hung up. At least, he thought, that might keep the reporters away from the house. He was raging inside—at the reporters, at *News, The American Weekly Journal,* at that pleasant and treacherous boy in Enid, at Meehan, at Stoddert and Sutherland and Nowak . . .

At everybody except, he realized, the one who was really to blame: himself.

Meg read disaster in his face and said carefully, "Is there anything I can help with?"

He picked up the copy of *News* from the floor where he had thrown it and handed it to her. She read it with concentration and, he saw, complete lack of understanding. She looked up, frowning. "Surely they don't think you really intended to betray Stoddert?"

"That's not the point! They've made us look like fatheaded incompetents, people who don't know what they stand for. In short, people who can't be trusted to sweep a floor, let alone run the United States of America."

When he went over to the hotel in the afternoon and met Sutherland he was surprised to find the man jubilant. Sutherland crowed, "Slidell slipped that time, Ray. Sneaked it to them as an exclusive instead of handing it to the picture services and getting real coverage. I guess they told him

they'd make it Picture of the Week and it got countermanded somewhere up the line. So it's a lousy little one-column cut and it'll be stale in a couple of days. We've got nothing to worry about, but nothing. But I shudder when I think of the sock it would have had full-page, bled off the edges . . . Well, it wasn't, thank God."

" 'Part-time professor,' " Houck quoted sourly.

Sutherland grinned. "That's the game. You've got to be either a hero or a villain for their purposes. If they decide they like you they put your face on the cover and get a good man to write three thousand glowing words about you. They omit all your fumbles and glorify all your successes and you emerge as the greatest thing since the invention of the wheel. And then next week they've got somebody else on the cover. Contrariwise, when you aren't a hero you've got to be a villain. Keeps things nice and clear-cut for the lip-readers. Well, the news conference. We serve drinks, we're amused by the fuss, we keep calling it a student's prank. Got it? A student's prank."

Houck called it a student's prank six times in the first two minutes of the conference, and averaged once per minute for the remaining quarter-hour. The three wire-service men and the man from the *Times* eventually got bored and went away.

The next day the headlines, only one of them a two-column head, pretty much agreed: HOUCK CALLS MEEHAN-RALLY PICTURE STUDENT PRANK. The *Times* headline called him PROF. HOUCK and he felt good about that; in a way it was a rebuke to the "part-time" sneer. The incident was closed, except for having to explain it all over again to Meg when he got home. She said, shocked:

"But that's horrible! They deliberately trapped you, Raymond! And—and what about those fake telegrams? Isn't there some kind of a law?"

He said patiently, "Of course. Who should we arrest, Meg? Some Oklahoma freshman who can't stand his father and hates Indians and foreigners and thinks Rosie Meehan's the Second Coming of Christ? Meehan didn't stick his own neck out. He didn't stick out Gonzales' neck either.

The only neck we could ever lop off would be some simon-pure expendable kid, and what would that make us?"

She said firmly, "It isn't fair. Surely if you hadn't hushed this thing up, it would have backfired. That was a mistake, Raymond."

Houck found himself growing angry. His wife's whole attitude was critical and snappish and—and what about the toast with butter and the cold eggs? He said sharply, "Meg, maybe we know more about this than you do. What Meehan's supporters do can't backfire on him. If there's any trouble, he smiles like a saint and says, 'Poor kids, they love me so, they're not to blame for their excesses.' Our side doesn't play that way. Maybe we should, but we don't, and we never will."

Meg said, with irrelevant dignity, "Don't shout at me, Raymond."

He shouted, "I was *not* shouting!"

She said tearfully, "I think I'll go up to my room."

Houck stood in the middle of the living room after she had gone, wondering what that had been all about. The maid, Ellen, peered in the door, frowned reprovingly at him, and went away.

Houck scowled after her, and then he put the whole thing out of his mind. He was too proud to go after Meg. Besides, what could he say? Essentially, she had started the fight, if that was what it was. He had been a little irritable, a little tired. He had a right, didn't he? But she had picked on him. . . . He put the whole thing out of his mind again. It wasn't, after all, his fault if he was on edge. This kind of living could put anybody on edge. They had been married sixteen years; she ought to know by now that he needed a little sympathy, a little understanding, once in a great while. Instead, she had deliberately snapped at him. He was certainly too proud to go after her. . . .

He started to put the whole thing out of his mind again, changed his mind and loped up the steps.

After they had made up, they sat on the edge of the bed and he said, "I'm sorry I'm edgy, Meg. But we bitched it in Oklahoma. Not just that stupid business in Enid—that didn't affect it much; we bitched the whole thing. Overconfident, maybe."

She said, "Don't worry about it, dear. Dear . . ."

He looked at her.

"Dear, I'm sorry I was edgy too. But I had a reason." She swallowed, and half-smiled, and succeeded in looking fifteen years younger and rather embarrassed. "Well, the thing is, I'm pregnant."

He stared. Swallowing, he said, "Wh-when?"

"Well—you remember when you were home, the beginning of February? So last week I went to the doctor, and he said . . ." She tried to laugh. "I checked it on the calendar, and it comes out to be the Tuesday after the first Monday in November."

CHAPTER 10

TWO THOUSAND five hundred people attended the Philadelphia Party Day dinner at fifty dollars a head and no free list. It was held in the gigantic ballroom of a gigantic hotel, and the food was wretched. Only a few rubes from the farm country had failed to eat before the dinner; everybody else picked politely at his quarter of a broiled chicken and played with the arsenic-green peas and talked and waited for the speeches.

Stoddert was right up there on the platform with the mayor, several congressmen and the junior senator. The senior senatorship and the governorship were in Opposition hands, but it was a good showing. The state chairman of the regular party organization was toastmaster, and a good one. There were volunteer entertainers of the first rank; a Metropolitan Opera soprano had sung, "The Star Spangled Banner," and a famous choral group did, "The Battle Hymn of the Republic." There was a great deal of circulating through the ballroom; you'd glimpse the Hon. Joe Whoozis whom you hadn't seen since the last national convention and you'd go visit him for a couple of minutes at his table for a chat, and on the way back you'd see another veteran of the rundowns and chat with him. The waiters walked around the visitors and cursed.

Houck had been relegated to a table in the middle distance which he shared with seven strangers from Potts-

town. He introduced himself over the consommé and they recognized him as The Professor With The Picture.

"Student prank," he smiled, and they said yah, that's the way they had it figgered. They said a few polite things about Stoddert and they regretted that he didn't have the real grass-roots appeal like Senator Meehan, though they hated to say it about a native son.

"After all," explained the county chairman from Pottstown, "the first thing is to get elected, ain't?" He attacked his quarter chicken vigorously.

The vice-chairman disagreed. "You gotta think of bigger things than that," he protested. "This Rosie Meehan, he's from the Southwest, what does he know or care about us? Silver mining, sheep ranchers, reclamation—that he knows. You put in a man from Pennsylvania, he knows about Pennsylvania. He gives us highways and harbor improvements and the Southwest can go to hell. You gotta think big. Me, I'm gonna vote for Mr. Stoddert."

The county chairman glared at him over the chicken.

"On the first rundown," the vice-chairman said uneasily.

The chairman continued to glare.

"If we ain't pledged," added the vice-chairman, shifting unhappily in his seat.

"If you get to the convention at all, you mean," said the chairman grimly. "I know we're gonna split two to one like last time, a double delegation with half votes, but that still don't mean there's gonna be room for *everybody.*"

"That's what I mean," said the vice-chairman vaguely, and busied himself with the dreadful platter before him.

The three-colored ice cream arrived while an Irish thrush sang a medly of Hibernian favorites and the deathly black coffee came in to the tune of "Harrigan." It was almost nine o'clock and a thing that looked more like a howitzer than a projection camera was wheeled down the center aisle. As the state chairman called for order a huge screen descended silently behind him on the platform and the lights began to dim. A pair of ordinary television cameras was unveiled on the platform as he spoke and cameramen began to test them.

The state chairman, looking at his watch, told them they were grand people and it was a grand turnout and a sign

of the harmony that should prevail in the great cause they were all dedicated to with heartwarming unanimity. And now it was his great pleasure to introduce that great man Farnsworth Clay[6], the Titular Leader of their great party who, by the magic of television, would appear before them direct from his home-in-retirement near Muncie, Indiana.

The lined face of the Titular Leader appeared on the screen, twenty-six feet wide and composed of a shifting mass of three-inch blobs of light and dark. There was a thunder of applause, which the state chairman yelled himself to apoplexy to quiet. Nobody paid any attention to the chairman, but by and by as the lips of the face on the screen continued to move many of the brighter members of the audience realized that he couldn't hear them and wasn't waiting for the handclaps to die down to begin his speech.

Houck strained to hear—silly, he admitted to himself, knowing what he knew about political speeches from the other end of the typewriter. But the face on the screen was something special to him. There was a majesty about the Presidency that clung on, even after a new administration came in and The President became that very different thing, a former president. This one had been a fighter—fighting Hoosier farm leader in the early days, fighting soldier when his country called him to war, fighting governor and fighting president through eight years of strain and greatness. He was old and sick now, but a fighter still. He spoke for not more than ten minutes, and all he said was that their party was destined to triumph and that no

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[6]CLAY, Farnsworth Winton, former U.S. president; *b.* Bicknell, Indiana, Sept. 3, 1869; *s.* Franklin and Alicia (Holtzer) C.; B.A., Indiana Un. (Bloomington) 1888., L.L.D., Indiana Un. 1942, Ph.D., Brown Un. (Providence, R.I.) 1943, L.H.D., Un. of California (Berkeley), 1944; *m.* Anna Eleanor DuBridge of Edinburg, Ind., Sept. 3, 1890 (*d.* Aug. 4, 1943). Proprietor, Clay & Sons Livery & Implement Co., 1894-1901. Member, Indiana State Legislature, 1901-1908. Lt. Governor, 1908-12. Representative, 22d Cong. Dist. (Indiana), 1912-22. U.S. Senator, 1922-28. President of the United States, 1928-36.

—*Who's Who in U.S. Politics, XIIth Edition.*

other party whatever had a shred of right or reason; and Houck, swearing softly to himself, saw the difference between the lines he composed for Stoddert and the words that came unrehearsed from this man's lips.

The Party Day crowd applauded itself silly when he had finished.

The county chairman, beating calluses onto his palms, looked misty-eyed around the table at his colleagues and at Raymond Houck. He said, choked up: "Old Clay. What grass-roots appeal! If he only had his health——"

The vice-chairman said sentimentally: "And don't forget his Schuylkill Valley plan!"

The next speaker was Mahlon Stoddert, tiny and bright-lit under his own enormous, shadowy projection on the screen. Houck listened with cold attention to his own words coming out of Stoddert's mouth, gauging the reaction of the Pottstown contingent. They were polite and affable, and when Stoddert had finished they clapped and cheered with moderate violence. The contrast was unmistakable. It was a lousy unfair trick to put him on right after Old Clay; Meehan influence in the national committee, beyond the shadow of a doubt.

Only it wasn't. First, last or way up in the middle of the air, Mahlon Stoddert was going to sound like a severe, fair, intelligent and disciplined professional. Nothing in the world could make him seem—as Old Clay so effortlessly seemed—both strong and humble, both smart and simple. Grass roots.

The next speaker was Cowlett, a fact which had given Houck a mild surprise when he got his advance copy of the lineup for the evening. Cowlett was a big man on the West Coast, but by no means national; he hadn't entered any of the primaries, he wasn't linked with any of the factions. Probably, Houck conjectured, he was on to keep Party Day from looking like a Stoddert-Meehan debate, with the Titular Leader as moderator. His talk was pretty much Pacific Coast, too. He dwelt on how big his state was and how much bigger it was getting; how the peculiar and new political patterns it had developed—cross-filing in the primaries, a working bipartisan nominations system for

some offices—were not in any sense to be construed as meaning that the Party members from his home state were any less loyal and devoted than Party members anywhere. He was not one whit more effective than Stoddert, Houck told himself with a touch of satisfaction—and was amazed at the intensity of the applause when he had finished. The Pottstown chairman leaned across and tapped Houck's sleeve. "That Cowlett," he said, nodding meaningfully. "Four years from now—watch him. Grass roots!"

Houck could only wonder. Grass roots. Well, sure—Cowlett was for the Pacific Coast, that was perfectly obvious. To the extent that the term meant anything at all, it meant support in the home districts, and he had that. But what would something like that mean, for instance, to Party workers in Pottstown or Biloxi? Wouldn't it work *against* the man?

Or was it, thought Houck, that it seemed right and natural and proper for a man to put his home area first? After all, Truman's confidential cabinet had seemed to come from about six square miles in Missouri, and Roosevelt had moved the seat of government itself to Hyde Park at will, and in neither case had the voters been exactly repelled. It was a foible, but a human foible.

And then on the screen appeared the face of Senator Braxton B. Davis, speaking from the Party Day dinner at Nashville. "Marvelous," the chairman from Pottstown said in a choked whisper. "The courage! You'd never know he's a dying man."

"Speaking to our great Party," said Davis, "and speaking for the South—as I believe I have every right to do—I greet you all in the name of our millions of loyal and dedicated members. Ladies and gentlemen, this will be the year of victory!"

He continued in that prophetic vein, added a strong note of caution about the need for hard and unrelenting work, and did some pleading for his sectional interests. "We are building a new industrial land down here, a mighty link in the chain of American strength. Do not weaken that link, ladies and gentlemen, lest you destroy the chain." He did some old-fashioned word painting about phoenixes and the Old Dominion, Mother of Presidents,

and about then Houck let go of the thread of his discourse and watched his face and wondered. Davis seemed perfectly vigorous. Perhaps he had been heavily made up; perhaps he had rested up a week for this appearance. Perhaps the snap judgment in the room at Bluegrass had been dead wrong.

And that way lay madness. He had triple-checked on brain anoxia since then and learned a few things. The principal one was that a steady wash of oxygen molecules against the gray matter from before birth to the moment of death is essential for mental strength and vigor. During the paroxysm of birth, he had learned, oxygen may be cut off from the infant brain for a few seconds. Result, a retarded child. During a spasm of whooping cough, oxygen may be cut off from the child or adult brain for a few seconds. Result, "undesirable personality changes"—for instance, a bright hard-working young man turning into a lazy incompetent.

Braxton Davis then obligingly proved his point by faltering badly and stumbling through a sentence before picking up the thread again. For several seconds he had obviously been quite lost and out of control, going on inertia.

"The courage!" muttered the Pottstown chairman, shaking his head admiringly. "With cancer he keeps going!"

The Senator swung into foreign policy. "Our historic stand for firmness and justice in our intercourse with the nations of the world . . ." His conclusion, though a bit of a dirty trick, could not have pleased Houck more. "—under the inspired and inspiring leadership of such great men as our Titular Leader, Governor Cowlett and Commissioner Mahlon Stoddert!"

The Pottstown chairman applauded thoughtfully and said: "Mein Gott. On the line he laid it, ain't?"

Elsewhere there was thunderous cheering. Perhaps the canny, inveterately humble farm-county people couldn't believe that their local boy had a chance, but the delegates from the cities were wild with joy over the tribute to one of their own from a great and well-loved man. Stoddert was forced to rise, grin boyishly and clasp his hands above his head. Their cameras picked it up and he ap-

peared on the screen—on all the screens across the country—with a slide at the bottom of the picture identifying the scene as the Philadelphia dinner. There was one hell of an alert director somewhere, and it was not inconceivable that Perry Sutherland stood at his elbow. On the giant screen the state chairman was seen to hesitate, rise and grip Stoddert's hand warmly. Then the picture on the screen panned the cheering Philadelphia crowd, cut to the cheering Nashville crowd and cut finally to a hall which the slide identified as Tucson, Arizona.

A nobody gripped a lectern and said, "Ladies and Gentlemen, I have the honor to introduce Senator John Meehan."

The picture cut to Meehan who stood there looking like the Man of Sorrows. Had Senator Braxton Davis pulled a dirty trick in winding up with a plug for Stoddert? Rosie Meehan topped the trick with a redoubled seven-no-trump bid of his own. While Houck stared in unbelieving horror, Meehan bowed his head and began softly: "Our Father Which art in Heaven, hallowed by Thy Name, Thy Kingdom come, Thy will be done . . ."

Throughout the hall there were two thousand, five hundred double-takes and then two thousand, five hundred bowed heads while the soft manly voice recited the prayer. A few people in the audience began to murmur along with him and it grew exponentially, hopping from table to table. By "Deliver us from evil" everybody in the hall was saying the prayer, including Houck. To have remained silent would have been to make himself conspicuous. The word would have sped through Pottstown at first and then elsewhere that Stoddert's Professor Fella With The Picture was some kind of atheist or something.

After the rumbling "Amen" there was a long pause, and then Meehan looked into the camera, his eyes glistening. "I like to pray," he confided to them artlessly. "I know lots of people who do too. When you have an odd moment or when you're heavy with care or even when you're feeling fine and think you're a mighty good fellow—that's the time for a little talk with The Man Upstairs."

The Man Upstairs. He said it perfectly. There was the right pause before, the slight *ritard* on the words themselves, and the right quirked eyebrow to indicate that he

used the pally phrase in self-deprecation, that he was plain folks, not a theologian, just a wonderful sincere guy who happened to know God by his nickname.

"I'm thankful for a lot of things," said Meehan boyishly. "Right now I'm thankful for the chance to talk to you wonderful men and girls of our great party."

Not ladies and gentlemen or men and women, of course, but men and girls. One of the girls at the table next to Houck's, a girl of maybe fifty-five in a 44 Stout flowered silk dress, was staring at the screen in something approaching ecstacy.

"I'm thankful that it's been my lot to fight the front line against our dear country's hidden enemies as I fought against them a few years ago when they were out in the open. Back then they called themselves Nazis, today they call themselves Communists." He shrugged. "We aren't fooled by the change of name, are we?"

All through the big room heads jerked negatively.

Obscurantism, thy name is Meehan, thought Houck. The Enemy is the Enemy, whether he's a Nazi or a Communist or by easy steps down a Norman Thomas Socialist or a Square Dealer or a T.V.A. career man or a reader of books or anybody who has ever disagreed briefly with Rosie Meehan. For the Enemy is the Enemy.

But he *had* them, on the two necessary levels. He had convinced them that they liked him and that the voters would like him too in November. The Pottstown chairman loved old Braxton Davis, but he wouldn't vote for him because he couldn't be elected. It had to be both levels, and Rosie Meehan had them.

The speech was a virtuoso performance. Technically an appeal to the Party for unity and rededication, it also managed to be a summary of Rosie Meehan's achievements and personality. He made them laugh and he made them cry; he made them love him as the son they should have had, the husband they never had, and in one of his major personae the avenging father who righted all the wrongs done by the bad people to poor little you. He was limp and exhausted after his fifteen minutes of dynamic outpour and they cheered him insanely.

"We got it a winner!" screamed the Pottstown chairman,

pounding Houck on the back amid the crazy tumult. "This time we got it a real winner!"

Three other speakers appeared on the screen after that, but who noticed?

Houck clawed his way into the car with Mahlon Stoddert after the dinner. Approximately one out of three of the 2500 guests had the same general idea, but the police cordon took their orders from the candidate and Houck got in. He waited for Stoddert to say something—anything—just comment on the spectacle they had watched. But the candidate seemed perfectly happy to lean back, nodding companionably to the thin rain of drivel from the Pennsylvania state committeeman who had squeezed into the jump seat with them.

Houck cleared his throat and said, "That was quite a performance."

In the shadows, Mahlon Stoddert glanced at him and smiled. The state committeeman chattered: "—know what's hit them we'll beat their ears off. Thirty-three Senate seats! I don't know who the candidate's gonna be, Mr. Stoddert—" He leered— "but it don't *matter* who the candidate's gonna be, we'll pick up twenty-two of those seats or I'm a—"

Houck thought how nice it would be if the man in the jump seat were dead. But Stoddert didn't seem to mind. Maybe, thought Houck, he didn't know what Meehan had done to him. Maybe he hadn't seen how Meehan had come up off the floor after the knockout punch from Braxton B. Davis. Maybe he didn't see that the essential unkillable strength of Rosie Meehan was that he hadn't quit, that he didn't know he was licked. He had come back fighting and —at least for the purposes of this dinner, and its effects on the minds of practically every Party member above the rank of poll-watcher—won a clear decision. How could you beat a man who didn't know when he was licked?

The state committeeman babbled away, embroidering his dreams: "—and the House, Mr. Stoddert—you listen to what I say—the House, that's where we'll really slip it to them! What've they got? A hundred seats, maybe, that there's a lock on and we could put up Hopalong Cassidy

with a million bucks to blow on beer parties and we couldn't take 'em. But we've got just as many! We've got *just* as many! And the other seats, why, honest to God, Mr. Stoddert, if we lose *fifty* I'll be——"

Houck said in Stoddert's ear, "How do you think this affects our chances?"

Stoddert said, in a contented undertone, "He's a wonderful man, Raymond. When I think of how some men in his position might have reacted after what happened——" He shook his head.

Houck did a violent double-take. "Wonderful? *Who?*"

"Braxton," said Stoddert, surprised. "Isn't that what you were talking about?" He glanced at the state committeeman, still obliviously yammering, and lowered his voice. "I only hope it doesn't make bad feeling," he said cautiously. "I'm sure Braxton Davis put in that plug for me on his own. Some of the Meehan people are sure to complain."

Houck slumped back in his seat, wordless.

"And what about the governors?" demanded the state committeeman. "Sixteen of them, Mr. Stoddert, and I swear to——"

Meehan had taken a knockout punch, come up off the floor and swung straight into Stoddert's chin; and all Stoddert had got out of it was that Braxton B. Davis had done him a favor.

Fantastic, thought Houck drearily; what kind of a man is this Stoddert and how can he hope to win the nomination? Why—why, he didn't even know when he was licked!

CHAPTER 11

IT WAS blazing hot in Washington—hot and practically empty. The Capitol lay vacant under its hundred-year-old dome; the senators and congressmen had hurried back to their home districts; the Administration leaders and party workers on both sides were out corraling delegates; the city was abandoned to clerks, tourists, and Mahlon Stoddert's personal train.

It was the time of year when the elected representatives of the people, three years out of four, find urgent business anywhere outside the United States from Moscow to Paraguay. But this was the fourth year, and no year for congressional junketing. It was within a week of the opening of the Party convention in Chicago. The Opposition had already met and selected their nominee. The last enemy delegate had been fished out of the last Loop cocktail lounge and put on a train for home, and already the Party's advance agents were swarming into Chicago to set up their arrangements and their caucuses.

"And we," said Raymond Houck grumpily, "are sitting around sweating our armpits out, waiting for Mahlon to get off the dime."

Homer Nowak said sunnily, "It's just as hot in Chicago."

Houck swallowed the last of his ice water from the cooler, cursed and rubbed at the drip spots on his linen pants, flung the crumpled rag of the cup at a wastebasket and sat down. There wasn't even anything to *do*. It was insane that at this moment, with this enormous prize at stake for Mahlon Stoddert, half a dozen of his best and most loyal lieutenants should be sitting around Washington, waiting for Stoddert to finish his "Report on the Proceedings of Peace Priorities Allocation Commission." But it was the end of the fiscal year, and Stoddert did not believe in loose ends.

Nowak said consolingly, "The plane'll be ready at nine o'clock. Calm down." He watched Houck pacing up and down the floor and said appraisingly, "You know, Ray, there's nothing for us to do right now. The best thing we can do for the boys in Chicago is stay out of the way till they get things set up. We've got Mahlon's schedule all lined up till Thursday. There isn't a damn thing we can figure on beyond Thursday, because from then on it's up to the convention."

"I know that."

"Sure you do. So what's bothering you?"

Houck sat down morosely. What was bothering him mostly, he admitted to himself, was that for three days he had been here in Washington, a bare few hundred miles from his pregnant wife at home, and every hour it had

been maybe-we-leave-this-evening and he hadn't been able to get up to see her or she to see him. He said:

"Couldn't they have air-conditioned this damn place?"

Nowak told him, "Wait for the nomination, pal. Then we'll have air conditioning if we want it. That's when the money starts rolling in."

"And out," said Houck.

"You're being a wet blanket," said Nowak, a little angry. "You've been bitching for a week now. I know your wife's pregnant and you want to see her, but if you had any guts you'd keep it to yourself instead of being a drag. You'd better cheer up, Houck. We all have enough on our minds."

Pendleton spoke up, surprisingly. "I don't think it's that, Homer. I think Professor Houck is just riding the curve and he isn't used to it."

"Yeah," said Nowak thoughtfully. "It can be rough."

"What curve?" demanded Houck.

"An expression you hear," said Pendleton apologetically. "In a campaign, you start off very exalted, very idealistic, you're going to bring in the Golden Age when your man gets elected. Then gradually things get complicated, you have to make deals, the Opposition looks tougher and tougher and you don't feel so idealistic any more. In fact, you feel lousy and you get to thinking you're a dirty crook and your man's a dirty crook and you wish to God you could get out of this stinking politics thing and go back to your business, whatever it is."

"You too?" asked Houck.

"Me too," said Pendleton, still apologetic. "But I've been through it before, of course. I know what happens next. Next you fall in love with your candidate all over again. You bleed when he's hurt, you laugh when he's happy, and you work until you drop to get him elected. An awful lot of hairy-chested grown men cry like babies on election night, Professor Houck."

"Not me," said Houck disdainfully. "I realize, of course, that there are bound to be some emotional ups and downs in an operation like this, and I've probably been affected by them, but . . ." He shrugged. "Homer, I'll try to be a good boy." He cast about for a safe topic. Nowak was fresh from a Detroit meeting with a man who wore many

hats, one of which was labeled: Chairman of the Political Education Council of the U.M. & G.R.W. "What did Fritz think of Mercer?" Mercer was the nominee of the Opposition for the Presidency of the United States, it was almost time to think of him as the foe instead of your own party blood-brothers like Meehan.

"Likes him personally," Nowak grunted. "Who doesn't? I like Jimmy Mercer myself. But he realizes the important thing, that poor Jimmy's too small and ignorant for the job. He tried to worry me by saying he liked the crowd around Mercer, but he didn't fool me for a minute. Fritz Lehnert is not going to contribute one nickel to Mercer's campaign."

"Some men *rise* to the Presidency," said Sutherland. "Andy Johnson, Harry Truman . . ."

"What about Coolidge, Arthur, Hayes and Buchanan?" snapped Houck. "This is no time in history to fool around with a proposition like 'Maybe he'll turn out good in spite of all the evidence to the contrary.' I wish they'd put in a better man, somebody like Willkie or Stevenson. That way, if we lose there's still some chance of pulling through the next four years."

"Very statesmanlike attitude," said Sutherland. "Personally I like it better this way."

The door slammed open and Stoddert stormed in jovially. "Gentlemen, why the long faces?" he demanded. "Everybody packed and ready? On to Chicago!"

CHAPTER 12

THE DELEGATE'S WIFE said, "I'll watch for you on the television, Georgie. And I packed lots of extra aluminum tablets in case you can't find them in Chicago. And don't eat too much rich stuff if you can help it. Is the Morrison a *nice* hotel, Georgie?"

They were waiting in the passenger station of the town where the Delegate owned a hardware store. The train was a few minutes late according to the blackboard.

"Very nice," he told her. "That's the advantage of being in a big delegation. They put the big delegations in the downtown hotels. Some of those guys from Nebraska and

like that wind up way on the North Side. It's a big city, but we're gonna pretty near fill her up. Lots of double delegations half-votes this year. Don't see it myself."

She grinned. "You would if it wasn't Bigelow Township's turn this year."

"Well, maybe I would at that," he said gravely, and then chuckled. "I made it, didn't I? The Honorable George U. Schlemm, duly elected by the registered Party members of the state with a certificate from the Secretary of State to prove it."

"It looks real nice on the wall," she said. "Georgie, you'll be sure to save the credentials? They won't mean anything to Googie for a couple of years, but when she goes to school she'll be mighty proud of her Grampa."

"We won't tell her it took him twenty years to make the grade."

"And eight hundred dollars expenses," she worried. "Georgie, couldn't you have got a double room with somebody?"

"You just don't do it that way. You have to keep up your dignity. Who should I double up with, my alternate?"

She slapped his jaw lightly and giggled. George Schlemm's alternate happened to be a Mrs. Breevy.

"After all," he went on, "we're pretty important people, seriously. Picking a President!"

"Who're you going to vote for?"

"First rundown, the Governor," he said promptly. "That's all settled. After that, we see what happens."

"Senator Meehan's a good man—very religious."

"You haven't been in church since Googie was christened!"

"I know, but still—Georgie, where do these people *come* from? Suddenly the papers tell you somebody's a contender for the nomination and darned if he doesn't get it and you have to vote for him or somebody else you never heard of. This Governor Mercer the Opposition nominated last week, what's he *done?* This Stoddert, Cowlett, Meehan too, I guess . . . here comes the train, Georgie."

The warning bells clanged and the barriers slowly descended to guard the crossing. The Delegate kissed his wife.

"Have some fun," she said. "I'll watch for you. And Georgie, try to vote for a good man."

The Delegate found himself in Chicago's mothy LaSalle Street Station. It had been a very interesting and instructive trip, in the club car, and he weaved slightly as he followed the porter across the floor. No more of that, he told himself, conscience-stricken. The Party didn't send you to Chicago to have a good time. But it was pretty exciting, all the same, to ride in the club car and have business executives and big-account salesmen looked interested, then respectful, as you told them who you were and where you were going. He was a little early, and he was the only delegate on the train, and they had all bought him drinks, even the ones who were going to vote straight Mercer. . . .

He bellowed, "Randy! Hey, Randy, you old thief!"

The man at the newsstand turned and blinked over his bifocals. He recognized the Delegate and his face lit up. "Georgie, damn your heart! Haven't seen you since the state caucus. How's Ethel? The family?" They pumped hands and Georgie, surprised, saw that his friend's look was abstracted.

"Something the matter?"

"Matter?" The other man held out the paper. "You didn't see this?"

The headline on the Chicago *Tribune* was:

BRAXTON B. DAVIS DEAD AT 73
ON EVE OF PARTY CONVENTION

The Delegate was suddenly sober and shocked. "Heart," his friend said wisely. "They didn't tell him, you know. But it'll all come out now, you'll see."

CHAPTER 13

THEY GOT THE NEWS as the plane was over western Pennsylvania. The co-pilot came back and whispered in Mahlon Stoddert's ear. Stoddert looked suddenly gray.

He broke up the bridge game, called Houck away from

his typewriter and said: "Gentlemen, Braxton Davis died this morning. Pneumonia. The pilot just got it on the radio."

They were all silent for a moment. Houck felt his stomach drop away from him. Dead. It happened to everybody, it was likely to happen any minute to a man in his seventies and sick, and it was always unexpected and always a shock. The Grand Old Man of the Senate. If it hadn't been for the horse on the six-bar gate, if it hadn't been for the anesthesia, if it hadn't been for the heartbreak when they dumped him . . .

Nowak crossed himself. Looking at Houck but talking to Stoddert, he said, "His number was up. There isn't any other way to look at it. God rest his soul."

Stoddert said politely, "Please be still a minute, everybody." He closed his eyes and was silent for a moment. His lips moved; and Houck, almost with a sense of shock, saw that he was praying.

Stoddert opened his eyes and said, "Well. There'll be a funeral, I suppose. I want to go to it."

Perry Sutherland frowned, concentrating; then said, "Yeah, sure. This is going to be big, and I wish I knew . . . I dunno; nothing like this ever happened before, but it'll be good if you go to the funeral. Hey, they won't postpone the convention, will they?"

"Not a chance," said Nowak. "Listen, Raymond. We'll have to have a statement from Mahlon. Something big but without politics, you know? Pay tribute to Braxton. God knows he has it coming. All those years in the Senate, the foreign business, the example he set——"

"All right," said Houck.

Sutherland said, "Do it now, will you? We can get it off on the radio. Maybe we can get it in the papers along with the story of his death. And say that Mahlon's hurrying to be with the family, will you? And, wait a minute, can we say something about what Davis did at the Party Day dinner, like——"

Nowak said violently, "*No*. You know what to do, Raymond. Perry's right about getting it on the radio, so . . ."

Houck escaped to his typewriter, ripped out the statement on the nomination of Mercer by the Opposition and put in a fresh piece of paper. Strangely, his eyes stung,

and he wondered if he was going to be airsick. That brilliant, bawdy old man, who but for a couple of bad breaks would have been in that plane with them then. Dead.

Behind him the voices rose and fell. Sutherland was worriedly scheming: "—and it's better if Mahlon's out of town the first couple days anyhow. The funeral's perfect. Holy God, what if Meehan shows up? It's ten to one he'll think of that angle too. Well, the way to play it——"

Closer to Houck and more quietly, Nowak said, "I wish I could go. Tell the old lady I wanted to be there, will you? She'll know what I mean."

"All right, Homer."

"I wish to God we . . ." Nowak's voice trailed off.

"I know, Homer." Houck, listening, craned his neck to get a glimpse of Mahlon Stoddert. The candidate was sitting by the window, hands folded in his lap. He returned Houck's look and nodded slightly.

"Ray!" begged Perry Sutherland. "Please, you aren't typing! The statement for the radio . . ."

The way they worked it out was this: The chartered plane changed course and dropped Houck, Nowak and Sutherland off at Pittsburgh. Stoddert would return to Washington and at a fitting time proceed to Bluegrass for the funeral of Senator Braxton B. Davis.

It was nearly midnight when they got out at Pittsburgh's gleaming new County Airport and watched Stoddert's wing lights blink away toward the east. There was no flight to Chicago that night and no particular point in trying to charter a plane to get them there. At 6 A.M. there would be an airline plane, and in the terminal itself—high on a mountain, miles and miles from Pittsburgh itself—there was a spanking new hotel. They found rooms. Houck had barely got his shoes off when there was a tap on his door: Homer Nowak.

"Nightcap?" said the union man.

"Just the two of us?" Houck asked cautiously.

Nowak laughed and picked up the phone for the desk. "Sutherland's all right," he said. "But enough is enough." He spoke persuasively into the phone, and there was a bellboy with setups practically at once.

"Go ahead," said Nowak, nodding to the phone. "Give her a call."

Houck jumped; telepathy! But then he grinned and said, "I had just decided it was too late when you came in. Pregnant women need their sleep."

Nowak handed Houck a drink, raised his own glass; they drank. Nowak sat down on the edge of the bed and took out a cigarette. "What's she like, Ray?"

"Meg?" Houck thought. "Why, she's a good wife. Thirty-nine. We've been married a long time."

"Any kids?"

"Two girls."

Nowak said restlessly, "You'd think I'd know that. God knows I keep that stuff in my head about every ward-heeler east of the Rockies. Funny, the way we don't know much about each other after all this time."

"We're kingmakers. We don't have time to be friendly. The job has to be compressed into a few months. I've never, not even during the war, worked this hard in my life."

"Check. Those all-night bargaining sessions are pretty flashy and you get bags under your eyes, but they're over in a few days. This thing goes on and on."

"We hope, Homer. If Stoddert's nominated it goes on and on. Mercer can't really put up much of a contest, can he? He's just done a good job of running a rich corn-hog state for sixteen postwar years, and that's been no trick at all."

"You can't seem to get good men nominated any more," Nowak said. "If they were good they were active and if they were active they got into jams that can be held against them. The new way is to pick the best man you can from outside politics and run him. That way they're inexperienced at best and you pray to God they can learn fast. But you can't write off Mercer as a competer. He'll have some smart, hungry men around him. He ran a very good television campaign for his last election fight and whipped a good man."

"Did the President want him?"

Nowak shrugged. "Who knows? With the Twenty-Second Amendment he's a political nobody from about the eigh-

teenth month of his second term on. He can't be reelected, he won't have any patronage when his term's up, he's through. He's a living corpse. If he'd built up a machine he'd still have power, but as I just finished saying, you don't nominate people with machines any more. Like poor Bob Taft. If anybody since George Washington ever had a *right* to the Presidency, it was Bob. He came up through the party ranks, he worked hard and contributed heavily, he built his machine, he learned the job backwards and forwards—and he didn't get it. He was cut out by a man who never held an elective office in his life and so never had a chance to get into a jam. No; the Man in the White House has nothing to say about the nomination of Mercer. Could he make an appeal to old-time, way-back loyalty if he wanted to put somebody of his own across? He couldn't because he's only known the boys for about seven years and *they* gave *him* the Presidency. They don't owe him a plugged nickel for that."

"It's different with the Titular Leader, Homer. I know it. If I could only get to him . . ."

"He's a sick man. He'll be sicker when he hears about Braxton. He loved that man. He's a bit of a prude, you know—no liquor, tobacco or dirty talk allowed within fifty yards, but he let Braxton smoke if he wanted to."

"I sent him a letter when *Report to the People* was published—five years ago, I think. Some rather technical comments on constitutional questions he raised. He answered it—not what you might suppose; a *real* answer. Several days of thinking and digging through his files went into it. I could have turned it into a debate, no doubt, but I let it drop. I didn't want to burden him."

"You were right. When Meehan called on him and he wouldn't see him, that was great. We let it go at that. If Mahlon called and he happened to be really sick, we'd have lost all our advantage from that. He'll make a speech toward Election Day and that's as much as we can hope for. Only a horse's behind like Rosie Meehan would pull a trick like that visit."

"We have to handle them with kid gloves because they're all so old and sick at least part of the time. Why can't this be a young man's game, damn it?"

"Rosie's real young. I guess you can set down any young man who's a presidential possibility as a guy who's sacrificed everything, including honor, to become that."

"Maybe some day," mused Houck, "the perfect candidate will come along. He'll be young and healthy, he'll have a distinguished record in war and peace, he'll know seven foreign languages including Arabic and Russian, he'll be a profound student of history and diplomacy and economics, he'll be tall and handsome and happily married with three beautiful children. And then it'll turn out that, unknown to him, he was born in Canada and isn't eligible for the Presidency." He took a swallow from his drink. "What's your stake in this, Homer?"

"Peace," said Nowak simply.

"I hope so. You aren't counting on any fringe benefits, are you? Like a green light to organize the teachers, or the junior executives?"

Nowak said, "Nothing like that. I'm wearing my statesman hat these days."

"Braxton was going to make the nominating speech as a delegate at large from his state. Whom do we get instead?"

"Somebody from Pennsylvania, I suppose. Braxton would have been recognized first. Now Correy's going to be the senior delegate and he'll waste his spot by nominating the Governor, who will disappear on the second rundown."

The telephone rang and Houck picked it up. It was Sutherland, down the hall. "Get in here, Houck," he was yelling. "Homer there? Him too. Newscast."

"Sutherland," said Houck, hanging up. "Something on a newscast upset him."

"Hell," grumbled Nowak. "Braxton can't die twice. Let's go see."

Sutherland had the television on and Muraski Crowther was pontificating from the screen about the latest Israel-Jordan mess.

Without looking away from the screen Sutherland said, "In the teaser before the commercial he said—well, here it comes."

Crowther was booming, "A famed little old lady made a broken-hearted charge tonight. To a nation mourning the loss of Senator Braxton Davis, the Senator's mother Mrs.

Sarah Lackland Davis——" A still picture of her flipped onto the screen—— "said he was a victim of what she called 'political treachery.' The copyright story comes to us from the Okoma *Liberator,* the country daily which was Senator Davis's hometown newspaper. In an interview with the editor Mrs. Davis said of her son's death, and I quote, 'Braxton passed on from pneumonia, but the pneumonia was caused by a broken heart. And the broken heart was caused by political treachery.' End of quote. Mrs. Davis did not name *any* names. The late Senator's candidacy for his party's presidential nomination was considered a virtual certainty——" The face of Sarah Lackland Davis flipped off and you could see Crowther again, before his array of clocks, maps and teletype printers——"until late last December, when he suffered a riding accident. Since then he was prominent among the supporters of P.P.A.B. chairman Mahlon Stoddert for the nomination."

He picked up another piece of paper and said, "Stoddert himself broke off his flight in a chartered plane to his party's convention in Chicago, leaving the plane at Pittsburgh and boarding another for Kentucky in order to attend Senator Davis's funeral. He said of the Senator's death——"

Houck sat and listened to his statement being read. Then the newscaster moved on to the humorous little item with which every newscast ends, and the five minutes were up.

"Never ends, does it?" said Sutherland vacantly. "I guess she meant us. Now the question is, will she come to her senses and keep quiet?"

"No," said Houck. "The question is, will they let her?" He picked up the regional *TV Guide* provided by the hotel and flipped through it to that evening.

They spent the rest of the night monitoring newscasts and commentators on radio and television. Practically all of them ran the Okoma *Liberator* interview with no comment and just enough background. A feeling came through that they had to carry it but were a little embarrassed at taking a grief-stricken old lady's first hysterical utterance as a news item of any importance or relevance.

On the 6 A.M. Alleghany Airlines flight to Chicago, half the passengers were delegates, alternates or hangers-

on. They swapped visits with the Stoddert group; Houck found himself sitting next to a newspaper publisher from West Virginia combining business with business by attending the convention as delegate-cum-special correspondent. His newspaper came out once every Thursday and, not being in the county seat, got a bare minimum of the advertising it needed; he was quite impressed to be sitting next to the man who so often sat next to Mahlon Stoddert.

"Too bad about Braxton Davis," he offered. "Say, what the old lady said about Mr. Stoddert——"

"She's very old," said Houck. "She was very attached to Braxton—naturally enough."

"Sure." The delegate took time out to flirt with the airline hostess, coming down with the little trays of coffee and toast for the passengers. "Well," the delegate said absently, staring after the hostess's tightly girdled bottom, "I guess it isn't going to make any difference to the way things come out, what Mrs. Davis said. Unless she says it again, I mean."

CHAPTER 14

THE MANAGER of the Fessenden-Lakeview peeped over the mezzanine rail at his lobby. His problem was elementary. He had a seven-hundred-room hotel. Eighty rooms belonged to permanent guests, to corporations which kept them always booked or to members of his staff. A hundred and seventy-five rooms were presently occupied by transients he did not wish to offend by asking them to move on. A hundred additional rooms were occupied by other transients whom he *had* asked to move on, but who showed no signs of doing so. He had left a block of something over three hundred rooms; and he had in his card file, in his room-clerk's satchel of unprocessed mail and in telephone slips and telegrams received nearly five hundred reservations.

By the looks of his lobby, all five hundred persons involved were there right now, and most of them had brought friends.

He retired to his office and began issuing orders to his

staff. To the reservations desk: Tear up all unconfirmed reservations. To the assistant manager: Go up and see those Mercer-for-President rooters in the penthouse that have been hanging on celebrating for a week; tell them we're sorry, but we've got to put the Meehan headquarters in there with them, and if there's any embarrassment . . . To his secretary: Get a list of the booked but unoccupied rooms and get on the phone; see if you can get Consolidated Cupro-Chemical, Western Railways and the Mekatreg newspaper group to release their suites.

And to everybody: Listen, boys, I'm going to have to ask you to give up your own rooms; it's just like last week—only we haven't, for God's sake, got rid of all the last-week bunch yet!

The manager then got on the phone himself. He squeezed four of the five "house" rooms out of the National Headquarters of the Fessenden hotel chain, at long distance. He persuaded two of the seven other Chicago hotels with which he had working arrangements to take on a total of fifteen guests from his overflow. He persuaded the six CBS engineers who had spread out into single rooms after the first convention ended that it was fair and reasonable to double up again, thus freeing three more rooms.

After half an hour, he and his staff had made a net gain of forty-six rooms, leaving him only about a hundred rooms short. He walked thoughtfully to the door of his office on the mezzanine and stared out, seeking inspiration.

The six room clerks had completed registration of seventy-five of a hundred persons at the head of the snake-like lines since the last time he had looked out.

And the crowd in the lobby was, if anything, bigger than before.

Raymond Houck stood halfway down the center aisle of the Chicago Municipal Auditorium and looked about him. The enormous room was nearly empty—which is to say, only about three hundred television and radio engineers, Auditorium employees and rubbernecks were moving around the long slanting aisles, getting ready for the big doings or just staring.

Homer Nowak, beside him, said, "Feel that? Air-condi-

tioning. You don't know how lucky you are, Ray. When we had the Chicago Trades Council here in forty-seven, eighty-six of the brothers passed out and one dropped dead."

Houck said, "Will we be spending much time here when things are going on?"

Nowak grinned. "Keep your fingers crossed. Does Mahlon get it, yes. After the Presidency's decided, we'll be floor managers for the Vice-President, for the platform vote, for all the wind-up. Of course, while they're balloting for Number One we'll be in the hotel, keeping Mahlon company. And if he gets licked . . ."

He glanced at his watch. "Okay, we better get upstairs," he said. That was the Party press room, where Perry Sutherland was buttering old acquaintances; and it was up to them to help spread the butter.

If he gets licked, thought Raymond Houck. Funny, but he didn't seem to care. He had put seven months of caring into this campaign, and he was all cared out.

And anyway, the whole thing was utterly unreal. The past seven months had been a matter of going through the motions—oh, as efficiently and completely as anyone could, of course. He hadn't held back. He hadn't confessed to anyone, not even to Meg, that his actions were *pro forma* and without any real belief in any real outcome. He had marshaled arguments for Mahlon Stoddert conscientiously as any political Monday-morning quarterback explaining national policies to his wife and his neighbors around the television set; and he had felt just that much conviction that anything *he* said or did would have any ultimate effect on America and the years to come.

Did everybody feel like that? Houck wondered. How about Stoddert himself? Given a couple of breaks, given an even chance here and there, Mahlon Stoddert might be the President of the United States of America in another hundred and fifty days—the front-runner of the world, the highest figure in every human's eyes.

Did he believe it possible?

Houck walked into the press room with Homer Nowak and shook the hand of Perry Sutherland with a visible delight that caused Nowak to look at him curiously. It was

reassuring to be with the banal and soothing Sutherland just then. Because, for just a moment there, Houck had begun to see that it *was* possible. What he said and did might *change* history; might be the difference between life and death for American draftees and Israeli farmers and Formosan peasants.

And, for just a moment there, Raymond Houck was powerfully scared.

It was the morning of the funeral of Braxton Bragg Davis. The funeral was hometown and old folks, held in the First Baptist Church of Okoma, burial in the churchyard where the Davises had owned a family plot since 1783. Only the great of the family had been buried there for a century; cousins and even negligible Davises in the direct line were laid to rest in the commercial cemetery outside the city limits. It was a question of space. There was no question at all that Braxton Bragg Davis rated the churchyard. A stone cutter had already added his name, his office and the years of his birth and death to the family monument.

Wryly recalling the scores of state funerals he had attended, the Senator had left instructions in his will that the ceremony was to be modest and the discourse confined to a five-minute "or shorter" sermon by his pastor. There were to be no honorary pallbearers.

His instructions were obeyed to the letter. The Reverend Mr. Dendle kept it short. Presumably the Senator would have barred the press if possible, but had well known it was not possible at all. They were everywhere with pencils and cameras. Sarah Lackland Davis was present, heavily veiled, leaning on the arm of Dr. Dean, who told the newsmen repeatedly, "I am Mrs. Davis's physician. In the name of humanity, leave her alone." The old lady appeared to be in a daze. Dr. Dean moved her about like an artist's mannekin; when he had moved her she stayed put until he moved her again. Once, before Mr. Dendle began his sermon, she lifted her veil and peered around, looking into the pews behind, scanning faces. She said raspily, "Where are all his fine friends now? Where?" Dr. Dean shushed and patted her and she relapsed into apathy.

Her question was well taken. Where were the Senator's fine friends? They were at the national nominating convention of the Party. All except Commissioner Mahlon Stoddert.

He had no staff with him, not even a secretary. He simply had a bedroom in the Okoma Hotel and there he lived like a simple human being rather than a demigod of politics, eating in the hotel restaurant, reading the newspapers in the lobby, waiting for the funeral. He had gone to J. Hoffman & Son, Funeral Directors, and introduced himself, asking for a card of admission which they fell all over themselves making out. He told the inevitable reporters that he was simply down to pay his last respects to an old friend and that when he had done it he'd go on to Chicago. The remarks of Mrs. Davis? He suggested that they ask her to elaborate when she recovered from her tragic loss. How many ballots did the Commissioner think it would take in Chicago to achieve a nomination? He was sorry; he was down here on a personal matter and didn't want to inject politics into it. Well then, did the Commissioner think the prospect in Chicago was good or bad, in just one word? He was sorry; he was down here on a personal matter and didn't want to inject politics into it. Well, then, would the Commissioner agree it was his opinion that——

He was sorry; he had no further comment at this time.

The reporters told each other, "Damned if he isn't down to go to the funeral!"

"Let's try to get through to the old lady again."

"You try; I've given up. I've filed my new lead, anyway. She had pork sausage and a buckwheat cake for lunch. I phoned and asked the butler and he told me. 'Rallying from the shock of bereavement, 91-year-old Mrs. Sarah Lackland Davis, mother of the late Senator Braxton B. Davis, ate a hearty lunch today.' Et cetera. Don't *look* at me like that! It's better than nothing."

"You said that, not me."

The sermon was over and the organist played Handel's *Largo,* the Senator's choice. Dr. Dean moved Mrs. Davis to her feet and to the open casket below the altar, bent her

over it for a moment, straightened her up, turned her around and walked her up the aisle, first and most honored of the mourners. The others in the front pews filed past the casket for their last look on the old face and followed Mrs. Davis up the aisle.

The procession suddenly stopped. Mrs. Davis had glimpsed Mahlon Stoddert in a rear-aisle pew he was sharing, by the grace of J. Hoffman & Son, with the town's leading cobbler and his wife, the pharmacist who purveyed to Bluegrass, and a venerable Irishman who had been the Davis bootlegger during Prohibition.

Dr. Dean tried to urge her on. She snapped at him, "Take your hand off me. There he is! He's the one! Mr. Stoddert, may God forgive you. I can't. Braxton . . ." She dissolved into tears and slumped against Dr. Dean, shaking. Dean was not unprepared. He waved at a man standing inside the church door. The man unfolded a wheel chair and came barreling down the aisle with it; together they eased the weeping old lady down and wheeled her out of the church. The buzz of speech drowned out the *Largo*. Flashbulbs were popping. The Reverend Mr. Dendle was crying from the pulpit, "This is the house of God! Put those cameras away! Do not desecrate our rites."

"Well, we've got a new lead now. Where's a phone?"

"Soda shop across the square. Give 'em the bulletin and then come back. I'll try to talk to Stoddert." He respectfully elbowed his way through the procession up the aisle to Stoddert's pew and leaned over. "Mr. Commissioner, did you answer Mrs. Davis when she accused you of knifing the Senator?"

"I'm sorry; I have no comment at this time. May I point out that you're holding up the mourners?"

When it came his turn, Stoddert joined the procession up the aisle and into the churchyard. A dozen flash cameras were thrust into his face as he walked, and he ignored them. He waited in a rear rank of the big semicircle around the open grave for the professional pallbearers to come out of the church with their burden and lay it on the ropes. The pastor followed, purple with indignation. The crowd parted for Mrs. Davis to be wheeled through by the

two doctors. Again she was a veiled lifeless mannekin. Mr. Dendle mastered his temper, said a prayer of committal and the psalm. From behind the veil an eerie, piping voice joined in from time to time.

"Ashes to ashes . . ." And the casket was lowered and two gravediggers began to fill the grave in. They wore their caps. It was over.

Mahlon Stoddert, streaming a tail of reporters and photographers, walked the short distance to his hotel and checked out at the desk. When the reporters spoke to him he politely declined to comment. When they baited him with barbed questions he declined to be hooked. As he checked out a limousine with D.C. plates pulled up to the hotel door: he told the bellboy to put his bags in its trunk. He tipped him a dollar, said good-by to the room clerk, shook hands with a couple of the reporters and said he'd probably see them in Chicago, and got into the car and vanished from Okoma forever.

"I don't understand it," said a reporter. "Why did he come here? He knew this might happen after what the old lady said."

"Why did he enlist in the R.A.F., for God's sake? Why do all these type do things like that? He had a duty, you God-damned dummy, and he did it. I'm going to vote for that man."

"No, you won't. You'll never get the chance. Not after that story you filed. Sweet old lady accuses politician of betraying her great son, breaking his heart, killing him. What crazy, mixed-up convention would nominate a rat like that? And don't ask me why us reporters are always filing stuff we know is a lot of crap. I don't know the answer to that one."

From Okoma to Chicago, it was eleven hundred and forty miles as the copper wires went. Phone to the county AP desk. A rewrite man demanded a repeat, wrote it down, stared at it and typed out a bulletin. The man in the slot, with one eye on the clock, slugged it *Bulletin* and it went on the wire. To the AP bureau in Washington, where the teletype monitoring the incoming schedule dinged six times, like a run-down alarm. Even while the acting bu-

reau chief was reading it, the automatic machines were reperforating the message, putting it on a yellow tape, feeding it to the lines to, among many other places, Chicago.

Six and one-half minutes after the reporter started out of the church and across the square, the teletypes in the press room where Houck was standing dinged and thumped and chattered out the bulletin.

It so happened that Perry Sutherland was standing next to the teletype machine, gabbing with a famed political expert. Houck heard the bell ring and turned, with mild curiosity; and then he saw Sutherland, still talking, bend to glance at the message coming in on the machine; and then the curiosity wasn't mild and in fact it wasn't curiosity, for he had seen the look on Sutherland's face.

CHAPTER 15

THE PLACE where they agreed to meet was a hotel room registered in the name of a Pennsylvania delegate who chanced to be the secretary-treasurer of a local of Homer Nowak's union. Houck got there first, amazed that he had got away from the reporters, enraged and resentful at the badgering he had been subjected to—and firmly convinced that the end had come.

The Pennsylvania delegate had left a copy of a Philadelphia paper on his bed and Houck nervously glanced through it. Nowak and Sutherland would be along any minute. But what was the use? An old lady, senseless with hysteria, had taken from them the fruits of seven months of intense work.

Houck, leafing irritably through the paper to find the ball scores, was stopped by a political thinker's daily thought. It was the syndicated column of one of the men who had been in the press room when the bulletin came in, and it was a model of how to hedge on a political forecast. After discussing the nomination of Mercer, the political thinker turned to the upcoming convention and its probable developments. He said:

On the eve of the convention, the race has narrowed to two. Even the most devoted of West-Coast partisans no longer concede Gov. Cowlett a chance for more than the Number Two spot. With the tragic death of Braxton Davis—always a strong "dark-horse" possibility in spite of his outspoken endorsement of Commissioner Mahlon Stoddert—and with the withdrawal of Sen. Stouffer, Gov. Kellert and Gov. Fogleson, only Commissioner Stoddert and Sen. John R. O'S. Meehan remain. In view of Gov. Cowlett's dramatic repudiation of the attempt of Dr. Gonzales, influential Meehan backer, to draw up an acceptable joint statement of the two candidates on the thorny question of the Colorado River water division, pre-convention political opinion strongly discounts any "deal" that would result in a Cowlett-Meehan or Meehan-Cowlett slate. With that division among his opponents, and with his record of primary victories in all but Oklahoma and Wyoming, of the fourteen states in which his name was entered, the possibility exists that Mahlon Stoddert will win his party's nomination before the third ballot—always barring, of course, the occurrence of some political mishap.

And that, thought Raymond Houck, was just what you couldn't always bar. One old lady!

He chucked the paper violently across the room—and froze, listening. There was a step in the corridor—but it went away. Houck was under no illusions about how long it would be before the reporters found out where they were. Assuming Sutherland and Nowak had not already been bayed to earth somewhere else, of course. The reporters would be there, no doubt of it. All they could hope for was the chance of a few minutes' private talk, to decide what they should say, to plan on what they might do.

As if it made any difference.

There was a light rap on the door and Perry Sutherland slipped in. "Clear," he reported briefly. "I got rid of the INS man in a cab; he was the last to hang on. God, I hope he isn't too sore! The Hearst chain can give us a rough time in Illinois and . . ."

He stopped, confused. He had forgotten that there was very little chance that Mahlon Stoddert's name would be on the ballot in Illinois, or anywhere else.

"I got through to Mahlon," he said. "He's in the air, and I spoke to him on the plane's radio. Thank God he was smart, for once. He had the plane waiting at a little field near Okoma. I talked him into landing at the little airport instead of the Municipal, but it isn't going to make much difference; they'll have everything covered, of course."

"Maybe we shouldn't have run," said Houck.

Sutherland stared at him. "Not run? My God, boy. What else were we going to do?"

"Well. . . . It doesn't look good to run away," Houck insisted stubbornly.

Sutherland said patiently, "You stick to what you do and let me stick to what I do. Let things cool down a little. Mahlon's in the air, so nobody's going to get to him for five hours. We cook up a statement when Nowak gets here —a stall, naturally, but they can't blame us if we stall, with the boss out of contact. And then . . ." He looked oddly confused. "And then we see what happens," he trailed off.

For the first time in the history of their relationship, Houck felt a touch of sympathy for Perry Sutherland. He was confused and defeated.

Houck thought:

Like me.

Nowak showed up, peered searchingly in the door and asked, "Anybody here?"

"Just us."

Nowak turned and said to the hallway, "Okay. Come on in."

After him came two men Houck had never seen before. He thought that they resembled each other closely enough to be brothers. One was tall and the other short; one was stout, the other average; one was oldish, the other maybe forty. Brothers? And then he saw what the resemblance was. They both wore expressions of comfortable sorrow, like a sole surviving nephew at a funeral.

Nowak introduced them, and Houck recognized the

names. Pegreen, the older, was state chairman of a West Coast delegation, and Munday, the other, was speaker of the state assembly in the same West Coast state. He had seen their names many times.

And always in connection with the same thing: They were the sparkplugs of the Cowlett For President machine.

Pegreen looked at them and said, "I expected the Pennsylvania chairman would be here."

Houck sighed. It was an old misunderstanding. Nowak told Pegreen, "It'd do no harm, but Walsh isn't absolutely essential to a binding discussion. Commissioner Stoddert is *not* a favorite son, Peg. There's a genuine national movement behind him—including a fair representation from your own state. Naturally we keep in touch with Walsh, very close touch. You don't ignore that many votes."

Munday said, straight-faced, "You think you can hold Pennsylvania for the second ballot?"

"We think so," said Sutherland. "We think we can hold them through the fifth ballot, which is as many as it should take to nominate the Commissioner."

Munday said, "They won't vote for him. Nobody's going to vote for a man an old lady said knifed her son. He can't be elected so why should they put him up to run? You, Mr. Sutherland, are the P.R. man, I understand. Could you tell me why you let the Commissioner expose himself?"

"It was his idea," said Sutherland savagely.

"You're stymied," Pegreen said. "I'm really sorry for your crowd. The old lady's senile, her charge is foolish, she doesn't know what she's talking about. But those are the very things you can't say. Wait until the cartoonists get to work on the Commissioner. 'I Accuse!' Heartbroken old lady in black standing over the noble corpse of her son. Pointing the finger at the Commissioner, standing there with the bloody knife still in his hand. Oh, my God. I really am sorry for you people."

"He'll make a television broadcast explaining all the facts," said Sutherland. "That's assuming the whole silly business doesn't blow over."

"And what if she answers the broadcast with a state-

ment?" asked Pegreen kindly. "No, Mr. Sutherland. The question is, how can you cut your losses?"

"I wish I knew what they were thinking," said Houck.

The party was in full blast at the state headquarters in the Morrison. It was a pretty sober affair. You don't get to be a delegate until you've put in some twenty years of work, and by then you've begun to slow down, watch the number of highballs, cigars, calories. There was enough excitement in the air over the great role they would begin to play tomorrow. It was better than alcohol.

The Honorable George U. Schlemm, Bigelow Township, husband to Ethel, father to Bernice, grandfather to Googie, was waltzing inexpertly with his alternate, Mrs. Breevy. She stepped on his foot for the third time in as many bars and by mutual consent they retired to the sidelines.

"I saw you talking with Fitz," she said after he gallantly helped her to punch and a canape. That was the state chairman.

"Just for a couple of minutes. He said we'll caucus tomorrow after the prayers and things. It'll be posted."

"So late?"

"Things are changing fast. You never know what tomorrow'll bring. Probably be our last chance to caucus; from then on we'll thrash it out on the floor."

"First ballot, still the Governor?"

"Of course, Mrs. Breevy. It's the least we can do for him."

"And what about the second ballot?"

"I expect Fitz'll have a recommendation to make. For myself, I wouldn't object to Meehan or Cowlett. Meehan's a great vote-getter; we'll have a winner for sure there. Cowlett's kind of a steadier man, is what I think, but can he get himself elected?"

"I guess Stoddert's out of the running."

"Oh, that's for sure, Mrs. Breevy. He couldn't be elected dog-catcher, is what I told Fitz. Give Mercer all that ammunition to use against the Party? I should say not!"

"You know what they're thinking," said Munday, who obviously was the hatchet man of the team. "Cut your

losses, Mr. Houck. Try to fight it through and you'll wind up with nothing. Make a deal and you'll salvage—we'll see what you salvage."

"You want our delegates," said Nowak.

Pegreen nodded sympathetically. Munday snapped, "On the second ballot."

"We've got to stop Meehan," said Pegreen. "Believe me, Mr. Nowak, that is all the Governor is interested in. I'm authorized to say that."

"The second ballot," brooded Nowak. "You figure you can start a stampede."

"We have some interesting arrangements made," said Munday.

"This is subject to approval by the Commissioner," said Nowak slowly, "but I believe he would settle for the Vice-Presidency under the present circumstances." The faces of Pegreen and Munday did not so much as flicker. "You understand very well that I don't mean an Alexander Throttlebottom Vice-Presidency, I mean the new type where he'll be delegate President and his abilities will be used to the full."

"It would make a nicely balanced ticket, geographically speaking," said Pegreen. He and Munday got up. "I'll discuss this with the Governor," he said, and they left.

Nowak bit the tip off a cigar and spat it into a corner. "What do you think?" he asked the room.

"He can stop Meehan with our delegations on the second ballot," said Sutherland. "He definitely can. And then when he's nominated and in control of the convention——"

"Then," said Houck, "he can explain that the situation's changed, that it wouldn't be a good idea after all to nominate Mahlon for Vice-President."

"They didn't bargain," said Nowak. "You sensed it too, Raymond. They should have put up some kind of a squawk. I think we'd better take off our shirts and paint our backs with iodine to avoid secondary infection. I think we're going to be stabbed. And I don't think there's one damn thing in the world we can do about it."

Sutherland said, "Maybe I'd better get in touch with Gonzales, Homer. Get Meehan and Cowlett bidding against

each other for our delegates—no. Mahlon wouldn't stand for *that.*"

"He'd jump to Mercer first," said Nowak.

Houck was looking through his wallet. "Have you got about a hundred cash on you?" he asked. "I want to make a little trip."

Sutherland said, "Trip? Now? With Mahlon due in?"

"Yes," said Houck tartly. "You great political strategists have been doing just fine so far, haven't you? Give the amateur a chance. Well, have you got a hundred dollars?"

The P.R. man found some twenties in his wallet and handed them over. Houck scribbled a check and said, "I won't tell you where I'm going. If it doesn't work we'll lose that much less by you people being in the dark. Just deal me out of everything until tomorrow afternoon."

He put the bills away and walked out. Sutherland and Nowak stared at each other.

The Illinois Central midnight train took Houck to a town in southern Indiana which was the spiritual home of the Party. He had a couple of hours in a hotel to have his suit sponged and pressed, get the works in a barber's chair and buy new linen.

He didn't phone; he just took the first taxi in the line outside the hotel. The driver did not comment on the address Houck gave him, but Houck was conscious of the man glancing at him curiously as they bumped across the railroad tracks, down a stretch of state highway and into a private drive.

"Wait for you?" the driver offered. Houck paid him and shook his head. It was a demonstration of more confidence than he felt.

The home of Farnsworth W. Clay was set back from the drive and surrounded by old and scraggly trees. It looked like the home of an old gentleman of set habits and small expectancy of life, which it was. It was the sort of house that is fairly large and fairly ugly; out in the woods like this, it might be an eight- or ten-thousand-dollar property; nearer a city, fifteen thousand; in a very desirable suburb, something to be torn down. It was lived in but not pampered. Nothing about it was new, and nothing decrepit.

Houck climbed the red brick steps and rapped on the door of the Titular Head of his party.

The servant who let him in matched the house in age and general state of repair. She took his name and closed the door in his face, but politely. In a minute she came back and said, "Mr. Hoagland will see you."

Houck said, "But I want to see Mr. Clay."

"Mr. Hoagland will see you. You can wait in the sitting room."

The sitting room was, of all things, air-conditioned. It took a moment for Houck to realize it because the air-conditioning, oddly enough, was not turned up to the point of congealing the air around it.

Mr. Hoagland didn't keep him waiting very long. He was a large young man who said, "Good morning, Professor Houck. What can I do for you?"

"Professor" had not been included in the name Houck gave the woman who let him in. "You know who I am."

"Of course, Professor Houck."

"Then you probably know what I want from Mr. Clay."

Mr. Hoagland said politely, "Will you tell me, please?"

"I'd rather talk directly to——"

"Of course you would, Professor Houck. So would everybody, and he's a sick man. I have to tell you that he had a bad night and he's still asleep and it's entirely up to Dr. Nacker whether I can even tell him you're here. But in any case, you'll have to talk to me first, because that's the way it is."

Houck thought. "All right. Do I—do I lay it right on the line for you, as if you were Clay himself?"

"That would be best."

"Yes. Well, you've seen the papers. It was Stoddert or Meehan for the nomination, with the odds on Stoddert, until Sarah Lackland Davis opened up. Now what the smart people tell me—including our own smart people—is that it's Meehan or Cowlett, with Stoddert nowhere. And the odds are on Meehan."

"Mr. Clay was very devoted to Senator Davis," the large young man commented.

"So were all of us," Houck said after a moment. "But —I don't know if you are aware of all the medical facts

concerning Senator Davis. There was damage to his brain. There was a distinct possibility—more than a possibility—that he would be unfit to assume the Presidency if he won it."

"So we understand from Dr. Nacker," the young man agreed.

"All right." Houck collected his thoughts. "We've been approached by Cowlett, indirectly, to throw our weight behind him. We believe that would stop Meehan, and God knows Commissioner Stoddert thinks that is the number-one essential at the present time. But before we do so, I wanted to talk to the chief. Cowlett is—undistinguished. I can't say there's anything wrong with him. He isn't a crook, he isn't a Jew-baiter, he isn't a wild man. But I think that, on balance, in a contest between Cowlett and Mercer, Mercer is slightly the better man. And that is the worst thing I can find to say about Governor Cowlett."

Hoagland asked politely, "And Commissioner Stoddert sent you here instead of coming himself?"

"Oh, no! The Commissioner didn't even know I was coming. It was purely a hope that——"

Hoagland said thoughtfully, "You came here on your own, without any authority from Commissioner Stoddert."

"He was out of touch, Mr. Hoagland! There just wasn't time. I came here because it was my belief that Mr. Clay can help us and nobody else can. I—I've put in eight months working for Stoddert, because I believe that he's the best available prospect for the Presidency——"

"No other reason, Professor Houck?"

Houck looked at him angrily, and then away. That was the first untrue thing he had said, and this surly halfback had picked it up.

"No matter," said Hoagland. "Just what was it that you expected Mr. Clay to do?"

Houck had thought of that. He said frankly, "I don't know. There must be something. Sarah Lackland Davis, maybe. Her son and Mr. Clay were very close; maybe she'd listen to him. Or perhaps a statement to the papers."

Hoagland nodded briefly. It was not assent, or anything close to it; it was the curt nod of the judge who is signify-

ing that pleading has ended and he will now charge the jury before they retire. Hoagland got up.

"I'll talk to Mr. Clay if I can. What Mr. Clay does is, of course, up to Mr. Clay. Dr. Nacker will be here in half an hour. After that . . ."

He politely provided cigarettes and matches and an ash tray, nodded and left.

In a few minutes the housekeeper appeared: "If you'd care for some breakfast, sir, your place is laid in the dining room."

That was a pretty good idea; he hadn't had the appetite for more than coffee in the hotel; and it killed time.

After the broiled ham, fried potatoes and coffee, he retired to the living room again. There was a brief flurry as somebody rapped at the door and was admitted, glanced briefly at Houck and went upstairs. Dr. Nacker, beyond doubt. And then there was more waiting.

Restlessly, Houck switched on the old radio console—there did not seem to be a television set. The unfamiliar stations produced dance records, hymn records, and an interminable commercial for plastic window-screens. He snapped it off and waited.

He glanced at his watch. It was an hour since he had come into the house. He began the second hour of waiting. . . .

And then he began the third. . . .

CHAPTER 16

THE HALL was gigantic and it was full to overflowing. Filling the front half of the floor were the delegates assembled in blocks under standards indicating their states. Filling the rear half were the alternates, equal in number. For each delegate there was an alternate. If a delegate had to go down the hall he first located his alternate, had him passed through the fence that divided the floor and seated in his seat, and then went about his business. The galleries were filled too. Each delegate had been issued visitors' passes to use as he thought best and there was also a thriving trade on Loop street corners in pretty good count-

erfeited visitors' passes at a dollar apiece. The press was there, emphatically, in both its branches: working press and phoney press. At heavyweight championship prize fights and comparable sporting events you will see the damndest people filling up the press benches: novelists, major generals, famous hostesses, automobile manufacturers. This was the case also at the convention.

Everybody had a badge: DELEGATE, ALTERNATE, PRESS, VISITOR, MESSENGER, SERGEANT AT ARMS, USHER, NATIONAL COMMITTEE. There was a concentration of the NATIONAL COMMITTEE badges towards the front, around the platform and on it.

The public-address system roared at them all: "Everybody kindly take his seat. We have to clear the aisles. Everybody sit down. Can you hear me? Start sitting down! Clear those aisles, everybody! We have to start on time for broadcast. Everybody find his seat!"

Reluctantly people began drifting to their seats. Enough paused in the aisles for a final chat to provoke more wounded roars from the loudspeakers.

The Honorable George U. Schlemm, Bigelow Township, stood in the center aisle and said to the Honorable Harry Mackaye, Horton Township, "Well, time to get this show on the road."

From the big box suspended from the ceiling a dozen television cameras panned the crowd and zoomared onto the platform where the national chairman hefted a five-pound gavel. Sixty press still cameras trained on him and sound men slapped switches open to the pair of button mikes that flanked his face.

The national chairman pounded his gavel on a block of lignum vitae, pounded slowly and insistently for a full thirty seconds before an approximate quiet descended. Then three decisive raps, and "I declare this convention open and in session. Following prayers by the Reverend Dr. Slyng, Archbishop Corrigan and Rabbi Mintz, we will proceed to the election of permanent convention officers."

The Reverend Dr. Slyng stepped up to the lectern and began his invocation.

"He'll see you now," said Hoagland. "Put out the ciga-

rette, please. I don't know what he's decided to do. If it's nothing, don't argue. Just thank him for his consideration and leave. I'm not saying you don't know your manners, Professor, but perhaps you don't know how near death the Old Man is—how little it will take to tip him over any one of these days."

"I understand," said Houck, and followed him into the famous den where fifty years of strategy and statesmanship had been planned. The Titular Leader was a shrunken figure in a wheel chair, a wasted caricature of his famous self. The lobes of his ears were a strange gray-blue color, a symptom of his disease. His fingers on the arms of the chair were clubbed with arthritis.

"Sit down, Professor Houck," he said in a fairly strong voice, giving Houck's name the usual mispronunciation. For the first time in many years Houck did not utter a correction. To his secretary he said, "Wait outside. I'll ring you." Hoagland vanished. "I know what you've come for," he said. "Make no mistake, I'm not going to indulge in electioneering at my age for nomination candidates." Houck started to rise, the formal words of thanks already on his lips. The Old Man waved him back into his seat. "However," he said, "I'm not going to let a roorback prevent my party's choice of its standard-bearer from being an open contest decided by merit—insofar as such a thing is possible." His clubbed paw rested on the button of an intercom. He said into it, "Get me Bluegrass on the phone, Mr. Hoagland. Sarah's physician would be best, I suppose."

"Yes, sir."

"I'll try to reason with her. Her behavior was hysterical and uncalled-for and very unfair to a promising young man." He grinned a little. "Since I'm probably the only person in the United States who can tell her so, it's very fortunate you came to me."

"Thank you, sir."

"I liked—I liked the way your man Stoddert dropped everything to go to Braxton's funeral. I read character in that. How was Sarah when you saw her last?"

"Extremely vigorous and clear-headed, sir. Of course that was before Senator Davis's death."

"Of course, of course," the Old Man said testily. "Kindly don't volunteer such foolish remarks again. I have a handful of hours left to me; I don't wish them to be wasted by people telling me things I already know."

Houck was silent.

"I don't think they know what to do with me," said the Old Man. "I have this arthritis, of course, but the thing I'm dying of is polycythemia. They bleed me for it, which is a treatment that went out of fashion before I was born. And they also give me injections of radioactive phosphorus from Oak Ridge. Queer combination."

Hoagland came in and said: "I have Mrs. Davis's physician on the phone, sir. He's a Dr. Dean."

He picked up the desk phone and held it to the Old Man's ear and mouth.

"Dr. Dean," said the Old Man, "this is Farnsworth Clay. I wish to speak to Mrs. Sarah Davis. . . . I was aware of that possibility when I called. Wake her up. We're old friends. She won't mind and it'll do her good."

He leaned back in his chair and said in a pleased way, "He knew me right off. Bare minimum of argument. Professor Houck, is he related to Braxton's old medico?"

"His grandson, sir," said Houck. And thought of much more he could say about young Dr. Dean and his involuntary role in American politics.

"Sarah?" said the Old Man into the phone. "Yes, it's Farnsworth. I'm sorry I couldn't be with you, but you know how it is. You're a few years older than I am, but I'm a lot sicker. How are you, Sarah?"

There was a long pause and then, "You're right, as always. I do want something. You've done a very unkind, unfair thing to a good man. Bluntly, I want you to apologize to Mr. Mahlon Stoddert and explain that you were uninformed as to the facts. . . . Sarah, I happen to be right and Braxton would have wanted it this way. In the name of our old friendship, I ask only this." A pause, and then, sharply: "No. That won't do. You must mention Mr. Stoddert by name and you must say you owe him this apology. Which you do, Sarah, which you do. . . . Thank you, Sarah. That should be unexceptionable. Now remember, you're a Southern gentlewoman and you've promised. . . . No, I'm

not. But I hope to live through the end of the year, and I should like to see our party in the Presidency one more time. Good-by, Sarah."

The Old Man closed his eyes and Hoagland put the phone down on its cradle. Houck waited. After a moment the Old Man looked at him and smiled faintly. "Tell Mr. Stoddert I wish him well. And now I had better rest for a while."

"If you'll wait downstairs," said Mr. Hoagland, "I'll phone for a cab." Houck went out of the room in a daze. At the bottom of the stairs he remembered that he hadn't even said thank you, but it was too late for that. Anyway, that would likely be volunteering foolish remarks, earning him a piping reprimand from the weary invalid. . . . While he was waiting for the cab the housekeeper appeared and, ignoring him, began moving chairs around in the living room. It looked as though there were going to be a party, which was ridiculous.

But Houck, having other wonders in his mind, didn't bother to wonder about this one very long.

The convention, being still on the air, was nominally listening to a vigorous complaint from a member of a Western delegation about the iniquitous and time-wasting practice of certain Eastern states—he named no names—of sending double delegations with half-votes. He had obtained the floor on a point of order, and he had been discussing the matter for nearly half an hour. It was the high point of his life.

The vice-chairman from Pottstown squirmed and scowled and fiddled and said to the chairman, next to him, "Jesus. We're supposed to be seating delegations. How the hell we ever gonna get Meehan nominated if this keeps up? Why don't they shut him up?"

The chairman scolded: "Dope! Look around, dope! Look by the California delegation. You see delegates there, or alternates? Alternates! Look by Massachusetts. Alternates! They're caucusing, you bet. And I bet you fifty cents we caucus too." He winked wisely. "Stoddert and Cowlett. They got to talk something over. Then you see how fast things go." It was a safe bet; the chairman had already

noticed how many of the leaders of his state delegation were off the floor, and they couldn't all be in the men's room. But this he did not explain to his lieutenant, on the well-known principle of Sherlock Holmes and Dr. Watson, Columbus and the egg, magicians and their tricks. It was better to keep the illusion of second sight.

In the Stoddert suite at the Champlain the talking-over was about to begin. Homer Nowak checked his watch gloomily, rubbed out a cigarette butt in the saucer of his coffee cup and looked at the candidate. Stoddert was talking quietly to Perry Sutherland about the details of the press conference they would arrange.

Nowak took out his watch again and looked at it; he had forgotten what it said. Still twenty minutes until the time when Mahlon Stoddert was scheduled to walk out of the door of the suite, down the hall to the elevator; down to the lobby in the elevator which would be waiting, into the cab which would also be waiting; three blocks and then into the hotel where the Cowlett group kept its headquarters. It was impossible that there should still be twenty minutes to go. He rubbed his finger over the engraving on the lid which said:

To Brother Homer A. Nowak
From Local 863, Steel & Foundry Workers
"Always Our Leader"
June Twenty-first, 1954

It was a very good watch, and he couldn't even have forgotten to wind it because it didn't require winding, but all the same he picked up the phone to check the time with the desk.

Somebody was on the wire. Nowak snapped, "Operator, this line is supposed to be kept clear! Put this call on to the phone room!"

Faintly the voice said: "Homer? Is that you, Homer? I've already talked to the phone room. This is Ray Houck."

"Houck! Where the hell are you?"

"Indiana," said the ghostly voice. "Let me talk to Mahlon."

Nowak passed the phone numbly to the candidate. Indiana! But what was there in Indiana? The home of the Titular Leader, and just about nothing else. So what the hell could Raymond Houck be doing in Indiana?

Stoddert was listening to the phone. He looked calm, then he scowled, then he passed the phone to Perry Sutherland and stared into space. . . .

In three minutes the place was jumping. Nowak had to trot next door to call the Cowlett headquarters to tell them there would be a slight delay in the arrangements, because Perry Sutherland was working the instrument in their own suite to a white heat. At long range there was a press conference to arrange in Okoma, where the mother of the late Senator Davis had something of interest to tell the reporters. Nearer by, there was the Pennsylvania state meeting, getting set to caucus, with only minutes to spare to tell them, to tell the world, just what had come out of Houck's trip to Indiana.

And somehow there had to be a moment for thinking things over. It was a help. It was a reprieve. It was more than they had dreamed of being possible. But was it enough?

His name was Godfrey Repp, and he was on leave of absence from the post of publisher of eight West Coast newspapers (which he owned) in order to function as press director for the candidacy of Governor Cowlett (whom he owned.) He believed in guiding with a light rein—especially as Governor Cowlett saw eye to eye with him on every major question confronting the nation, *e.g.,* the necessity of keeping the price of newsprint low and the importance of a strong West Coast representation in the administration—and so he had voluntarily absented himself from the forthcoming Appomattox in Cowlett's suite. It would, in any case, be more fun to be in the press room of the Auditorium when Stoddert's sword was handed over so that he could himself transmit the lead story to his eight newspapers, and accordingly that was where he was. He already had the story written, barring only a blank space for the exact time.

Which was fortunate, because the occasion was already an hour late.

The convention had adjourned for the day, and the press, having filed their stories, were clustered around him, since he had been forethoughtful enough to alert them. He shook them off and glanced at his assistant, monitoring the direct line to Cowlett Headquarters, who shook his head. "Not yet, gentlemen," he told the reporters. "I'll give you the word as soon as I can."

One of them said: "Mr. Repp, is there any significance to this delay? There's been some talk of a special statement from Stoddert——"

"No significance at all."

"But we understand a press conference has been called at Okoma and——"

"I cannot conjecture about what Mrs. Davis may have to say," Repp told them pontifically. He thought for a second and added, just to make sure: "Perhaps she wished to add to her earlier remarks."

Another reporter said, "Farnsworth Clay called a conference too."

Repp shook slightly. That, he confessed to himself, was the only little thing that was bothering him. It didn't much matter what Sarah Lackland Davis had to say at this point; but if the Titular Leader decided to take a hand . . .

An incoming wire-service teletype clanged six bells and began to chatter. Somebody read aloud as the words beat onto the paper at a steady fifty per minute. "Datelined Okoma. 'Mrs. Sarah Lackland Davis publicly apologized today to presidential hopeful Mahlon Stoddert for what she called "an unfortunate lapse." At a news conference she read the following statement: "I wish to apologize to Commissioner Mahlon Stoddert for my unfortunate lapse the other day and for a foolish statement I gave to the press earlier. Now that I am again in command of myself I realize that Mr. Stoddert was never anything but a true and devoted friend to my late son.' "

Godfrey Repp shuddered. Maybe they'd have to accept Stoddert as Vice-President after all, and he was a prying, interfering, knowledgeable sort of fellow.

The two other wire-service incoming machines were

telling the same story. The first repeated its bulletin bells and went into "Sarah Davis Lead One," the expanded story. It broke off again and sounded the bulletin bells once more. "It's from Clay's home town," said a reporter. "Now what the hell——?" He read aloud: " 'Titular Leader Farnsworth Clay broke silence today on the situation facing his party, now convening in Chicago. The ailing elder statesman told reporters, in effect, that he favored the candidacy of Commissioner Mahlon Stoddert. He said: "I endorse any candidate of my party. I do not wish to name a favorite, but I should be happy to vote for Mahlon Stoddert, Governor Andreson or Senator George Leverett." Andreson and Leverett are not regarded as important contenders. Reporters pointed this out to Clay and asked whether his omission of Senator Meehan and Governor Cowlett was deliberate. Clay replied that he would stand on his previous statement.' Mr. Repp—Mr. Repp, can I get you anything? You don't look at all well."

The news hit the Stoddert headquarters by radio only a couple of minutes later. Both bulletins were "interrupt" material.

"God bless Houck," said Sutherland. "I'd kiss him if he were here. Timing? Wonderful. The delegates will have all night to think it over and they'll see it in the morning papers again to refresh their memories."

Nowak was on the phone already. He got through to the Cowlett suite and told Pegreen, "You can stop waiting for us, Peg. If you still want to see us, come on over. Did something happen? Yes: something happened. Sarah Davis publicly apologized to the Commissioner and Farnsworth Clay has endorsed him." He hung up jovially and said to Stoddert, "Well, sir, shall we prepare a little something for the press?"

"I'll just—talk to them, Homer," said Stoddert quietly.

The first shock wave of newsmen arrived in the next minute. Stoddert told them, "I don't have anything prepared, gentlemen. Just say that I'm touched by Mrs. Davis's statement and very happy that we're friends again. As for the kind words Mr. Clay had for me and Governor Andreson and Senator Leverett, I am thankful for them

also. He's a great man. It's a good feeling when somebody of his noble character and incomparable experience tells you you've done well."

After they had left Sutherland urged: "Now drive it home. Make a round of the state caucuses. Just show yourself, shake some hands, talk a little."

"No," said Stoddert. "I'm going to bed. I suppose Cowlett will come around. Tell him he can have the Vice-Presidency and no hard feelings." He smiled. "As his friends pointed out, we'll make a nicely balanced ticket, geographically speaking."

CHAPTER 17

THE SECOND DAY. They sang the national anthem and listened to a prayer and settled down to the blood-and-guts business that had brought them there. As the keynote speaker had reminded them yesterday, theirs was the Party of Unity. The Party of Unity was to spend that day in a snarling eight-way battle royal.

They had voted to limit nominating speeches to twenty minutes, seconding speeches to ten minutes, demonstrations to five. The first name put in nomination was that of Senator John R. O'S. Meehan, in throbbing speech by Dr. Alvarez. He was seconded by a delegate who happened to be a Jewish merchant from Tucson in a speech that carefully counterpointed the emotionalism of Alvarez. "I'm a businessman. I try to do the common-sense thing. And what does plain common sense tell us the country needs at this time?" The demonstration, two marching brass bands and lots of pretty girls, ran a little overtime and was sternly gaveled to an end.

The Honorable George U. Schlemm turned to his neighbor and said, "Don't seem to be too much enthusiasm for Rosie, does there?"

"He does seem to be fading in the stretch," said the neighbor critically. "I admit I thought maybe if things were going his way we might throw the state to him and I wouldn't mind too much, but now I don't know. Those preachers that were praying we should be divinely guided

and all that—it makes you feel pretty important. It makes you think twice about Rosie."

"Yeah," said Schlemm. "The party's over. This is the cold gray light of dawn."

The vice-chairman from Pottstown turned to the chairman and said to him innocently, "You ain't joining the snake-dance in the aisle for Rosie?"

"Shut the mouth," said the chairman, and continued to think. With the Rosie they could win, sure. And you had to have a winner, ain't? Pennsylvania needed lots of new highway mileage, new schools, river and harbor work, lots of things. The way to get them is to be for the winner—*early*.

Last one in's a stinker. If yours is the fourth or fifth state to switch to the man who eventually wins, the best is none too good for you. You're an old comrade who was in there fighting before the tide of battle turned. If you wait until the victory is inevitable before jumping on the band wagon you are merely tolerated. If you put up a last-ditch fight against the winner, you have dug your political grave and might as well climb into it. Those are the ground rules, and the chairman was wrestling with them and with an uneasy conviction that he didn't *want* to vote for Rosie Meehan, that the man was full of crap, that he would sell his grandmother for dogmeat, that it would be a dreadful mistake to trust the country to him.

He sighed to the vice-chairman: "I got it a headache."

Raymond Houck returned to Chicago and a hero's welcome, small-size. Nowak cuffed him across the room, Sutherland nearly smothered him with kisses and Mahlon Stoddert said, "Leave us alone for a minute, will you?"

Houck, the kingmaker, sat down with an expectant, modest smile. Stoddert said, "Thank you for helping when I needed help. I won't forget that I owe you something for that."

"Not at all." Houck had thought that over on the train, very carefully. He wanted nothing, absolutely nothing, beyond the normal expectation of, perhaps, a seat on the circuit bench. He was much too young, much too junior in experience for the high court—yet. Possibly a voice in legal

affairs—nothing big, nothing decisive, but the right of access to Stoddert's ear when——"

"Don't do anything like that again, please."

Houck blinked. The "please" took very little of the sting out of it.

Stoddert said, "The Old Man is in no shape to be bothered about this sort of thing, Raymond. I know why you went there. He knew too—otherwise you would have been out on your tail. But it makes no difference. After you left he called a press conference. He met them down in his living room—the first time in seven months he's been off the second floor of his house. He read them the statement himself, and he answered questions. His doctor threatened to quit, did you know that? But he fooled the doctor by living through it. I'm not guessing about this. I spoke to Dr. Nacker on the phone last night. It was no better than a fifty-fifty chance."

Houck, suddenly cold, said stiffly, "I didn't mean——"

"I don't care what you meant."

Houck shifted uncomfortably. It was hard lines to be bawled out for taking his own time and spending his own money to help a man who not only lacked gratitude, but had got himself into the trouble himself by his willful decision to attend the funeral. . . .

He heard Farnsworth Clay's words again: *"That showed character."*

And that it did, Houck admitted to himself.

Perhaps it really had been a desperate and childish thing he did—going off without consultation, without authority. Of course, he hadn't known that Clay was as sick as that.

But if he had talked it over with Stoddert, say, or even with Nowak, he might have found out.

And—suppose the dice had fallen the other way? Suppose Clay had failed to live through the excitement of the press conference, the strain of being carried down the stairs?

Houck, trying to think like a politician, said slowly, "I see what you mean. If Clay had—had a bad effect from all this, it would have looked pretty bad. First Davis, then Clay. I could have got us in real trouble."

For a moment he thought Stoddert was going to shout at him. The candidate stood up, clutching at the table beside him, his mouth working.

Then Stoddert got himself under control. "That isn't what I mean, Ray. But let it go at that. I'll say what I have to say again, Thanks for what you did. And please don't do anything like it again."

The credentials committee had had a remarkably smooth convention of it. Only two states' delegations were challenged at all seriously, and those only on technical grounds. They wound up their work, reported their findings to the Chair, and the convention, having constituted itself and elected its officers, became a functioning political entity and settled down to work.

More than a dozen names were placed in nomination. There were the serious contenders—Stoddert, Meehan and, fading but game, Governor Cowlett. There were the splinter-group candidates, put up as a perennial convention gesture for the sake of reminding the country that the causes for which they stood still had at least vestigial backing. A very senior representative from Alabama, noted for his proposed constitutional amendment to restore Negro slavery, who had yet to get more than three votes in the first balloting. A once-famous pension plan advocate from California, now more than eligible for a pension himself. A priest whose bishop had sharply limited his proclivity for political dabbling, but still had his admirers.

There were the favorite sons—nearly every state had one, but most of them were presented *pro forma* and failed of a second. It was among them, the veterans of the delegations told each other wisely, that the dark horse nickered in his stall. If there was to be a dark horse this time—and while Stoddert and Meehan contended for the crown, that possibility always remained.

At seven o'clock that night—an hour and a half past their own deadline, with the network men swearing and canceling paid-for time minute by minute, the convention ended its second day. All the nominations were in and the slates officially closed. Fourteen names had been placed in a grab bag, and from them would emerge the person

and identity of the man who would be their party's standard bearer on the Tuesday after the first Monday in November.

Houck had wisely left the hall half an hour early and headed back for his hotel. The big job before him was actually done. He had written the set of six speeches, one of which Stoddert would deliver when the vote was completed; they were good little speeches, they provided for every contingency, and fooling around with them now would be a waste of time.

But that was the way he wished to waste his time. He turned down a couple of offers for dinner and entered the lobby of his hotel.

As he opened the door of his room he suddenly realized it had not been locked.

If some damn reporter . . . He flung it wide.

Meg got up from the armchair by his bed and smiled at him.

"Hello, darling. Surprise!"

He blinked at her for a moment. Surprise! Houck had spent some of World War II mountain-climbing up the spine of Italy, with German 88's trying to discourage him every foot of the way up every hill; if his wife had appeared before him below Monte Cassino or on the pontoon bridge across the Arno, he could not have been more surprised than to see her here.

She said, faltering, "I—I was lonesome. My mother offered to take care of the kids, and——"

Houck laughed out loud. "I'm sorry," he said, and then remembered to kiss her. "It was just—— Well. Let me look at you."

There was no longer any doubt about it, Meg was pregnant. She wore a loose-fitting maternity smock over a skirt that, Houck remembered from the dim past, was a Rube Goldberg contrivance of pleats and drawstrings and expansion pockets.

He kissed her again, and they sat side by side, and gradually he remembered that he was a husband and father. She filled him in on the children. (Molly was fine, the younger one had had a temperature and complained of aching legs but thank God it was only the summer sniffles.) She filled him in on the neighborhood gossip

(very dull) and the academic world that he could scarcely recall (old Dr. Wagenecht had asked for a sabbatical, and the football coach had tried to get the president to call freshmen on athletic scholarships to school two weeks early.) It was very relaxing.

And then he had his chance to explain, simply and modestly, just what he and Mahlon Stoddert, in that order, had been about. He cautioned her to secrecy and told her about his trip to Indiana.

"And for that," he said gloomily, "he reamed me out. He would have let the nomination go by default to spare the Old Man. I keep telling myself he's just quixotic, and then I keep remembering that Don Quixote was a certifiable lunatic. Well, the rundowns start tomorrow and soon we'll know."

"What are the rundowns?"

"The balloting. They have their own slang. Cinch bills. Dogcatcher. It's a real profession, at least as complicated as the law, lingo and all."

"What's Stoddert really like?"

"Oh—I guess he's a great man. I used to think I knew him, even that we were close. Now I don't know. I suppose he's just using me, the way he's using that unspeakable Perry Sutherland. I should know more Renaissance history than I do for this job. I'm a courtier. I try to think of ways to please His Blooming Majesty and smooth things out for him. I'm supposed to have initiative, but not too much initiative. If I ever get caught at an obscene activity called Making Policy, my head will be cut off. If, on the other hand, I don't Carry My Weight, my head will also be cut off. What's he like? I'm really in no position to say; all I can see are these damn trees. Cesare Borgia's flunkies couldn't have known that their boss was a real first-rater. To them he was just the guy who made their lives anxious and miserable. Looking back five long months, I can dimly recall that I thought Mahlon Stoddert was the ablest foreign-policy man around that therefore he'd be the best man to put in the Presidency. I'm standing by that recollection; in fact I'm clinging desperately to it. *That's* what Mahlon Stoddert is like, to answer your question in a nutshell. Say, are you registered here?"

"I am. The maid brought up extra towels."

"And you're about five and a half months gone. Did the doctor say anything special?"

"Nope," she said.

He put her in a cab for the airport at seven-thirty the next morning and reported, yawning, to the headquarters suite.

"What's the matter with you?" Nowak asked, staring. "You look happy."

Houck told him and Nowak said, "Oh. Well, Cowlett's going to switch his delegation to us on the second ballot. Mahlon had a long talk with him and they're satisfied with each other—Mahlon, that Cowlett's a good steady man and Cowlett, that Mahlon may conceivably drop dead within the next four years thereby elevating him to the Presidency. The Illinois chairman's been persuaded that Meehan can't win, and the Illinois boys are very lean since they held out too long against the winner four years ago. They haven't got the state and the party'll go to pieces if they have another four years without patronage. I think we can count on Illinois for the second ballot."

"Texas?" asked Houck.

"Still solid for Meehan. We can't budge them; what, in God's name, can you offer a Texan that he hasn't got?"

"*Fifty* per cent depreciation," grinned Houck.

"If we could deliver, I might do that."

Stoddert strolled in. "Well," he said, "Meehan called me."

"Will he release Texas?" Nowak demanded. "What's his price?"

Stoddert said, "He wanted to name my Secretary of the Interior."

Houck snorted and asked, "Who's he got in mind—Albert B. Fall?"

Stoddert laughed and punched his arm. "He didn't have a name ready to give me. If I'd been willing to pay that price, he of course would have come up with some solid citizen acceptable to the Senate for confirmation. Somebody who would be very grateful to Mr. Meehan and able to show it. Somebody who would be very generous and kind

to our great Southwest. Somebody who would use Interior's patronage to build a really nationwide machine for Mr. Meehan so he'd be able to knock me off four years from now. Naturally I declined."

And that, thought Houck with relief, was that. But Nowak demanded, "What was his second offer?"

"That I coöperate in November to knock off the senior senator from his state, thus leaving Mr. Meehan senior senator with all the rights and privileges appertaining thereto. It isn't much of a price."

"His boom's falling apart and he knows it," said Nowak. "People play with the idea of Meehan for President, but they don't *do* it. Did this country ever go crackpot? No. Look at the Populists. My God, they had everything. And the Native Americans. They could have taken over. By any common-sense prediction they *would* have taken over; their program was unbeatable. We have a majority, let's use it to grind the minorities into the dirt. How can you top that? Any European country you care to name, a party with a clear-cut issue like native majority against immigrant minority would have *won*. But over here—and I guess in England—it just doesn't work. Meehan was just a drunk the electorate was on and now they're sobering up."

"You can ascribe all the instinctive decency to that crowd in the convention hall you like, Homer," said Stoddert. "I made the deal."

Nowak said, "I'm glad. I was afraid you'd have scruples."

Houck said, "Excuse me," and found his way to the bathroom. He locked the door and sat down in a daze. The *one* thing he had thought was utterly impossible had happened.

The delegates were going through the first rundown. For every state there was someone to demand the delegation be polled. The bigger the state, the louder the groan of disapproval that filled the auditorium. But one by one the names were called and the names replied in prolix fashion that they cast one vote—or one-half of a vote—for Whoever.

The Pottsville chairman stood in his turn and said:

"One-half a vote I cast for Stoddert." Sitting down, he turned to the vice-chairman and said: "He's a Native Son." Belligerently. The vice-chairman said nothing and cast his half-vote for Stoddert when his turn came.

George U. Schlemm stood and cleared his throat and looked at the television camera with the gunbarrel lens aimed his way from the big box up there. "One vote for Governor Andreson," he said loudly into the microphone, and sat down. He hoped he had been on and that Esther had been watching. Pretty good for a hardware dealer, he reflected with decent pride. He fished out the state delegation's official booklet—his name and address were in it, just like the Governor's and Fitz's—and checked off the voting so far in the printed score sheet. It provided space for nine rundowns. He had a hunch that all that space wouldn't be needed.

Fitz, Delegate at Large and State Chairman, was moving through the ranks of the delegation, pausing to talk here and there. He reached the neighborhood of George Schlemm and stopped. He beckoned them to lean forward and pay attention. "I've been circulating, fellows," he said, "and I'm getting the feel of things. Now you all know you're not bound after the first ballot. I want you to vote according to your conscience. But I'm sure none of you wants to waste his vote and make the state look bad. The way things look we're paying a fine tribute to the Governor and I'm sure he'll be very pleased. But it doesn't seem he can pick up anything on the second rundown. Neither will Meehan. And Joe Pegreen's just finished telling his delegation that Cowlett's very grateful for their support and hereby releases them—to vote for Stoddert. Fellows, it isn't going to look good if we're the twentieth or even the tenth state to swing over. Our state is a leader, not a follower. I'm leaving it up to you how you'll vote, but I'm casting my vote for Stoddert."

He moved on to the next group.

George U. Schlemm said to his neighbor, "I kind of hoped the Governor might have a chance if the big boys got to fighting, but I guess it's all settled. Do you figure Cowlett gets the Vice-President nomination?"

"Makes sense," his neighbor said. "A good ticket—East

and West. We can win with a ticket like that. Stoddert and Cowlett—I like the sound of that."

The tedious polling ground on and on. The convention recessed for lunch, delegations scattering to their hotels and scampering back within the hour. The final delegates from Puerto Rico and the Territory of Hawaii began to cast their ballots, and the delegates listened to them and the official recorders marked them down and they were counted—just as if Puerto Rico and the Territory of Hawaii between them were able under the Constitution to influence the election by so much as a single vote. Lacking only a few tallies of completion, the score was Stoddert 21½ votes more than Meehan, everybody else nowhere—but enough scattered votes among "everybody else" so that even Stoddert owned a bare third of the total votes cast.

George U. Schlemm straightened his tie, brushed his hand over his thin hair and stood up, making his bid for a place in history. He had had a very active lunch hour. He had heard a word that sounded like "Texas" dropped by a state chairman who clammed up when he saw Schlemm listening. He had chummed with a member of the Texas delegation whom he had gone to the trouble of meeting the night before because the Texan's name was "Schlamm" and there had been a question in George Schlemm's mind if they might be related—German immigrants *circa* 1905 spelling the way they did. Schlamm from Texas had not been willing to say much.

But enough. Enough so that George U. didn't bother about lunch on that lunch hour; he spent it in the delegates' cloakroom, looking feverishly through the copy of Robert's Rules of Order by which the convention was run.

He cried, "Mr. Chairman! Mr. Chairman!"

Hardly anybody heard him, certainly not the chairman. He looked indecisively around the hall. The Texas delegation was certainly beginning to look active. He cried frantically, "Mr. Chairman! Will you give me the floor?"

That time two people heard him. One was his own state chairman, Fitz, who got up with an expression of alarm and began to move toward him along the rows. George U. Schlemm made a mighty effort and managed to

avoid meeting Fitz's eye; he called again for the attention of the Chair.

And, since the other person who heard him had been one of the very efficient sound engineers manning the parabolic mikes, he was now talking into a microphone focused on him, and the whole convention heard him.

The chairman of the convention leaned forward and peered into the white lights as the last of the Puerto Ricans was polled. With some difficulty he recognized George U. Schlemm of Bigelow Township.

George U. Schlemm said loud and strong, the way he had been rehearsing it to himself for nearly an hour: "Mr. Chairman, I want to change my vote. I wish to cast it for Commissioner Mahlon Stoddert, our next President!"

Right beside him was good old Fitz. Since it was too late for good old Fitz to stop him, good old Fitz turned to face the gun-barrel camera and the parabolic mike and began to applaud. The rest of the state delegation took it up, and that was the beginning of a nerveracking hour for the official tellers. Texas was the first state to go over in a bloc—but it barely beat out Alabama and Wyoming, neck and neck. The Hawaiian delegation, which had planned to vote for Stoddert anyway, was trying everything short of gunplay to get the Chair to recognize it and count its vote, but it wasn't any use. West Virginia for Stoddert. Ohio for Stoddert. Florida for Stoddert. Maine for Stoddert.

And so went the nation. By and by someone managed to get recognized on a motion to make it unanimous and by acclaim, but it already was.

Toward the end of the forty-minute demonstration Mahlon Stoddert himself came half-trotting into the hall, hustled over from the hotel as soon as the flash came on the phone. George U. Schlemm dived out of the snake-dance and fought his way toward the platform—just in case Stoddert *had* been watching the television broadcast and *might* recognize him. No such thing developed, but George U. Schlemm didn't really need it. He clung to an aisle post as the demonstration raged around him, staring at the nominee with fatherly love and with adoration. What a story to tell Googie when she grew a little older! How *her*

grandfather had planned and worked and connived to secure the Party's nomination for the greatest, the best-loved, the only logical candidate for President—Mahlon Stoddert!

CHAPTER 18

THE VICTORY celebration was a wowzer. After the thousandth well-wisher had tramped into the suite—none of them seemed to *leave* it—Raymond Houck somehow found himself, for a fraction of a minute, next to the candidate when nobody else was speaking directly to him. Stoddert grinned wanly. "Congratulations," said Houck. It wasn't a very original sentiment at that time and place, but he meant it. Tomorrow he would stop to think about the deal with Rosie Meehan again, but tonight was Mahlon Stoddert's. "What do you want to do next?"

"I want to go out and get stinking drunk," Stoddert said promptly. He laughed shortly at Houck's face. "Oh, I won't do it. I want to do that about once every two weeks, and in the past forty years I haven't done it once. But you asked me what I wanted."

The mayor of Pasadena, California, engaged the candidate's attention just then and Houck drifted away. Along about midnight the candidate got fed up and went to bed, but the victory celebration kept right on. Houck, looking around with surprise, saw that almost no one but himself, of Stoddert's basic staff, was still in the suite; in fact, he hardly recognized a single face. That seemed like a good time for him to go, too. As he went down the hall he heard the noise behind him, sounding queerly louder the farther he got away from it, the more the deathly quiet from the other rooms on the floor became apparent. Even in his own room, three floors and nearly the whole breadth of the hotel away, he could still hear it; but he had no difficulty in getting to sleep.

Homer Nowak woke him up the next morning. There was a loud continuous rapping on his door; and when he opened it Nowak was standing there with a room-service waiter wheeling a breakfast tray. "Stay out of the dining

room," Nowak cautioned him, grinning. "They'll break your arm shaking hands."

Houck blearily excused himself and retired to the bathroom. Somewhat more awake and somewhat cleaner, he came out again to find Nowak already halfway through his second cup of coffee. "Mahlon's still sleeping," Nowak told him. "Let him sleep. He needs it. Sutherland—Ray, you wouldn't believe him if you saw him. He got to celebrating with a couple of INS men in the interests of good public relations. His head's like this." He indicated with two hands two feet apart.

"It's great to be a winner," said Houck.

"And we owe it all to you," Nowak told him. Houck looked up at him defensively. "And, of course, we also owe it all to the Old Man, and we owe it all to Sarah Davis, and we owe it all to George U. Schlemm."

"Who?"

"The one who passed out in the bathroom last night," Nowak explained. "The guy from Fitz's delegation who got up, got recognized and changed his vote from Andreson to Stoddert. He kicked a pebble and started the avalanche. Now, what about the platform? They don't need any of us on the floor; they'll nominate Cowlett by acclamation today. Let's huddle with Mahlon and whip out a directive to the Platform Committee."

Something new had been added outside Stoddert's suite. There were two dark-suited, white-shirted, powerfully built men in the corridor. They were unmistakably Irish. They held at bay a couple of dozen men and women, some of them known to Houck and Nowak, others strangers.

Nowak pushed through the crowd with a minimum of apologies. A state chairman said to him and then to Houck, "Can't you guys get me in to see Mahlon just for five minutes? My God, we were the seventh delegation for him!"

"Sorry," they said. "He's tied up, but just as soon as possible." They identified themselves to the pair of doormen. These checked their names on a list and asked for credentials. They were produced and studied slowly. The final stage was a long, slow head-to-toe visual inspection of them. They understood that they were being memorized. Then one of the Secret Service men produced a key and

let them slip into the suite while others clamored outside.

Stoddert was in pajamas and a dressing gown; his secretary wore her inevitable gray suit. "Morning, Mahlon," said Nowak. "Hell's breaking loose outside."

"I know. Have to do something about that. Raymond, from now on you're my appointment secretary. Congratulations; in a week or two you'll be the best-hated man in the Party."

"I can handle that and the speech-writing, Mahlon, but what about Students For and Professionals For?"

"We're dumping them. Let the local regular Party organization take over from them. Put out a nice letter thanking them and telling them to check in with their county chairmen. I remember the Volunteers for Stevenson; they were a thorn in the side after the nomination."

They had been that, Houck remembered. A thorn that kept the regular organization restless and alert. He said nothing.

"A decent salary goes with it," said Stoddert. "Not just expenses."

"Thank God!" said Houck.

"I heard you had to cash in some bonds, Raymond," Stoddert said looking at him curiously. "How's the family?"

"My wife flew in night before last to spend the evening. She's pregnant, you know, and got lonesome."

"She'll be lonesomer before this thing's over," said Stoddert. "Brownie?"

His secretary passed him a typed sheet of paper. "About the platform," said Stoddert. "How does this sound? Break up huge monopolies squeezing out small businessman. Reforestation. Reclamation. Water use. Development of highways and water systems. Government relief of unemployed by public works. Federal aid to states for relief. Shorten the working day in keeping with increased machine productivity. Not less than one and one-half days off per week." Houck and Nowak exchanged baffled glances. "No child labor. Social-security plan. Freedom of speech, press and assembly. Graduated income tax. Reduction of tariffs. Universal adult suffrage. Abolish the College of Electors. Suffrage to the District of Columbia. Democratic governments for our overseas possessions." He was beginning to

grin. "Cabinet status for the Bureau of Labor," he went on. "Cabinet status for the Bureaus of Health and Education——"

"Mahlon," said Nowak, "what the hell are you giving us?"

"A lesson, I hope," said Stoddert. "That was the Socialist Party platform for 1912. Everything the wild-eyed radicals were demanding back then has come about by now—except D.C. suffrage. So when we write our directive to the platform committee, let's reach for the stars."

It turned out he had some bizarre ideas he'd been hugging to himself. A United States Medical Academy, for one, which was to be a first-class medical and nursing school and teaching hospital under the Department of H.E.W. The graduates would be pledged to serve a couple of hitches with the armed forces before entering civilian practice. Nowak and Houck looked at each other, appalled, over his head. They told him that yes, it would lessen the nurse and doctor shortage, yes, it would ease the medical pinch in the services but that in their opinion it was more a thing for a congressman to introduce, as if independently, so they could feel their way in case opposition developed. He gave way cheerfully and went on to the next: Federal money for a big, forced-draft program of scholarships in Slavic and Middle East languages and cultures. An expanded, perhaps tripled, foreign service. Pruning the list of strategic commodities to a minimum. Tariffs down. Merchant marine. Balanced armed forces. Aid and trade. More and bigger Fulbrights.

These Houck would buy. He recognized them for what they were; each was a probe for peace. Despite an occasional touch of screwiness, Mahlon Stoddert was still the best foreign-policy specialist available.

Perry Sutherland weaved in at noon and sat down as delicately as a man with a china rump. His face was like putty.

"I see you had a wonderful time, Perry," said Stoddert. "I hope this won't happen again before Election. Brownie, get him some B-1's. Perry, you're going to be my personal press secretary for the campaign. The national committee

is retaining Hurleigh and Passevant for the presidential and vice-presidential races."

Sutherland gulped vitamin tablets and nodded. "Good firm," he choked out. "I kind of hoped that with a bigger staff I might——"

"The national committee didn't see it that way. Get yourself a steam bath or something and come back when you're ready to go to work."

By noon the directive was blocked out.

"I'll have eleven for lunch," said Stoddert. He was looking at Houck. Houck gulped and said, "I get it. This is where people start hating me."

He called the phone room and started to jot down a list of the people who had tried to call Stoddert. When it reached twenty names he said, "Hold it. "I'll just come down and look at your list."

In the phone room he picked eleven important names, trying to balance the list for geography, political complexion and specialties. He called them one by one. Some had to be paged, some reached by messenger, at the convention hall, but he reached them all—fast. "This is Commissioner Stoddert's appointment secretary." It was magical. Upstairs again he gave the list to the Secret Service men. The crush in the corridor was as bad as ever, but there weren't any big wheels there by then. They had accepted the inevitable. The small fry hoped for a miracle, that the door might open, that they might just happen to have a word with the great man, a word that would change their lives.

A young man with a press badge said: "Hello, Professor." He knew the voice and studied the face. With a finger-snap he said: "My seminar—'52. Lucas?"

The reporter grinned. "Lukowitz, Professor. Currently with AP."

"You couldn't get established, eh? How's news work?"

"How's politics, Professor?"

"Ask me again on the Wednesday after the first Monday in November; maybe I'll have my mind made up by then."

Other reporters converged purposefully. A photographer with more flashbulbs than sense took a couple of pictures of him.

"Is he coming out, Dr. Houck?"

"He's having lunch in his suite." Sutherland should be here! "Eleven guests; I suppose you want the names." Hell, yes! He read them from his list, they took them down and dashed for phones.

It was the last day of the convention. Nowak crowed to Houck: "We got through on peanuts! Know what it cost us to run the campaign so far?"

"Why——" Houck thought. He'd had the statements from Students for and Nonpartisan Professionals for, of course; and he'd been in on a good many of the other fund-raising arrangements. "I don't know. A quarter of a million?"

Nowak scowled. "Six hundred and fifteen thousand."

Houck said, "My God." He tried to imagine $615,000. Why, that was two-thirds of a million, pretty near. Peanuts?

Nowak said aggrievedly, "That's pretty good, boy. Meehan put out more than that—of course, they're not saying. But it must have been. And Mercer——" The Opposition nominee had had as tough a fight as Stoddert's, and in a richer party.

Houck said, "Money well spent. Now all we have to do is elect him. And what do you suppose *that* will cost?"

Nowak chuckled. "Ah," he said, "there's *real* money. Two million? Three?"

"Where is it all going to go?"

"Wait," said Nowak. "Wait and see."

CHAPTER 19

FIFTY-ONE THOUSAND dollars of the war chest was visible to Houck within twenty yards of where he stood, two weeks later.

Item, a suite of offices, nine rooms, air-conditioned, centrally and impressively located in midtown Manhattan, bearing the gold-leaf sign *National Headquarters Stoddert for President.*

Item, furnishings for same, including six 7-drawer executive desks, mahogany or oak; nine 4-drawer secretarial and junior desks, of softer wood or of metal; chairs, swivel,

leather or wood; chairs, arm, leather; couches; benches; file-cabinets 4-drawer and file-cabinets 2-drawer, with locks and without.

Item, a staff of nine paid workers and fifty-one volunteers to man same, with salaries or expenses paid through to the Tuesday after the first Monday in November.

At $51,000, it was a steal. And it was duplicated in smaller scale all across the country.

Houck examined his own office, met his new chief secretary—female; young; pretty—and departed for his appointment on Madison Avenue with a feeling of being, for the first time in his life, a person of substance in the American mainstream. It was not merely that he was in a position of authority; he was more than used to that, any college professor knew what that was like. But he had a mahogany desk and a red leather chair and a desk intercom and in fact almost all the trappings of majesty that went with a pretty young secretary who owned a sub-secretary of her own.

He might even have been the owner of a midwest leather-belting factory; he was Executive, with seven drawers.

The building he went to on Madison Avenue was even more central and impressive than his own. It had a three-story lobby, marble-faced and terrazzo-paved, with shops in it; the elevators were in banks of six in islands in the center of the lobby; and the firm he visited occupied four solid floors. The name was Lebens, Katcher, Chataway and Bear, but it was not in gold letters anywhere near the waiting room he entered from the elevators. It was assumed that if you reached the ninth floor at 456 Madison Avenue, you *knew* who you had come to visit.

And you certainly had not come to visit Messrs. Lebens, Katcher, Chataway or Bear, because all of those gentlemen had sold out their respective equities in the advertising agency that bore their names long before.

He was greeted with deference and brought by a secretary prettier and younger than his own into a private office that was twenty-seven feet long. Homer Nowak got up from beside the conference table—there was no desk—

and shook hands. He introduced Mr. Christian Rorimer, who owned the office and was the present senior partner of LKC&B.

Christian Rorimer was six feet six inches tall. He had a sort of triangular face, sharp point at the chin, top a mass of bushy white hair, and his agency had won the Party's presidential campaign account in accordance with the soundest advertising traditions—by knifing their competitors. He was as big and fierce and potent as a Hessian mercenary and like a mercenary he was for sale to the highest bidder, but not by halves. Once he was bought he was owned; his life was at the service of his clientele. If his client manufactured sleazy shirtings, he wore them proudly. If his client distilled rotgut, his cellar of thirty-year-old Scotch went down the drain. If his client was Mahlon Stoddert and the party Stoddert headed, all other candidates and parties were to be fought to the death. He might or might not, thought Raymond Houck, feel that Stoddert's election mattered to the nation or to history; there was simply no way to tell. The Hessians of George III might or might not have cared what happened to the Colonies; but what they cared didn't particularly matter to George III, and certainly didn't matter to the Continental they killed.

Houck found him, after the first few minutes, impressive and likeable. For one thing, he knew a lot about Raymond Houck. Rorimer said approvingly, "You're the man who got the testimonial from Farnsworth Clay. A fine piece of work. And Brad Meryman—you'll meet him; he's our copy chief—tells me your course in constitutional law is the best in the country."

Houck struggled with the name. "Oh—Meryman; 1948 or thereabouts."

"That's right. Brad's boy; he's in practice with our own attorneys now."

"That's fine," Houck said automatically, but he really was pleased. When Rorimer excused himself to bring in a couple of the other executives they would have to meet, Houck commented to Nowak: "Seems to be a sharp article. I like him."

"You're supposed to," said Nowak. He looked Houck

over thoughtfully. "No sun tan," he commented. There had been a break of a week after the convention, while the candidate retired to an island in Lake Michigan and his staff got its first and only vacation of the campaign.

Houck said, "It rained every day." He and Meg had squeezed in three days at the little summer place they kept on Cape Cod—no electricity, very little plumbing; perfectly accommodated to a professor's budget and inclinations. And it really had rained, and the children, after the first few days of merciless fawning on Daddy, had been miserable and in the way, and Meg had been pretty pregnant.

Houck looked around the twenty-seven-foot office. "How much of this do you suppose the campaign contributors are paying for?"

Nowak shrugged, not very much interested. "You have to spend money to get anywhere. When the trade unions in this country found that out is when unionism began to be important."

Houck met the partners and the members below partnership level of the task force assigned to the Stoddert-Cowlett candidacy. There was a man for Media Research and Control. Man for Outdoor Advertising. Man for Broadcasting. Man for Newspaper-Magazine. Man for Running Evaluation. Man for Top Creative Copy. Man for Top Creative Art. Man for Films and Stills. Man for Archives and Copy Research. And each of these had platoons and companies of assistants.

The talk in the big board room where they met was general; Houck was merely there to get acquainted with them and they with him. As Stoddert's chief speech writer just below the level of originating policy, he had to have a reciprocal understanding with these people. As the dragon guarding Stoddert's gate he had to be accessible if Stoddert was not, should the rare case come up of an actual burning need for them to confer with the candidate himself.

Rorimer said casually, "We should have a direct line to your desk, Raymond. We'll take care of it."

Houck said, "No, no; I'll have one put through to you from our end."

"We have a very good liaison with N.Y. T. & T.," said Rorimer. "Save you some bother."

"Mr. Rorimer," said Houck, "It will be more economical for us to maintain the line."

Rorimer nodded thoughtfully. "As you say."

"As Houck said" would save Stoddert for President seven hundred and fifty dollars before election day—the fifteen per cent LKC&B would have legitimately billed them over the five thousand dollars a twenty-four-hour, seven-day direct wire would cost them for twenty weeks. It was a drop in the bucket, of course—a slight percentage saving on a necessary minor cost. It would have gone far toward covering the expenses of the Vermont primary—how many ages ago?—that had put Stoddert into the running.

Stoddert went to Washington to resign from the Peace Priorities Allocation Board. The outgoing President gave him an hour in private, political opponent though he was. Stoddert told his strategists, "He tried to get me to promise I'd keep foreign policy out of my campaign. He told me all about how bad it would be if during the campaign the sides hardened into isolationist and internationalist positions. I told him I liked and respected him and wouldn't promise a damned thing, that the person for him to see was Mercer. I told him that if the big corn-and-hog man says anything damaging to the international position of the United States, I'm going to tear his hide off and nail it to the wall. And that meanwhile I'm going to talk sense on foreign policy whenever I feel the urge. Raymond, what have you got for me?"

"The Topeka farm speech ready for your approval. Kansas state chairman wants to see you this afternoon about it and the arrangements; I gave him fifteen minutes. The financial report from Pendleton—with a fifty-word summary clipped to it. Publisher of the Pittsburg *Post* wants a taped interview with you. I gave him 3:30 to 4:00."

"But they're Opposition."

"But my spies tell me they may not stay Opposition. Papers have switched before in the heat of a campaign. We're preparing a couple of hundred words of refresher

and updating on Pittsburgh for you."

"Good. It's been years. I'll see him. What else?"

"Urban League delegation wants to ask you about Negro housing and slum clearance. I gave them 4:01 to 4:05. We'll have a statement on your desk for them by then. Then you leave for the studio for the spot-announcement films until 8:00 and the state chairmen's dinner at the Waldorf. We'll be there."

Inevitably certain terms clustered about Houck: "Gray eminence," "passion for anonymity," and headiest of all, "celebrity's celebrity." To his stupefaction, his name began to appear fairly regularly in the gossip columns. It was announced in these that he and his wife had come to the parting of the ways, that they had reconciled, that they would seek a divorce as soon as the move could be made without embarrassing Stoddert, that—flash! flash! Stop the presses!—Mrs. Houck was pregnant. People he had never heard of in his life but who obviously expected him to be overwhelmed, phoned him and if they got past his secretaries invited him to parties. A garbagey magazine ran an article about him titled " 'Mush' Stoddert's Bigoted Mastermind." It was "documented" by the affidavit of a student dropped from his law school years ago; the fellow claimed Houck used to make frequent anti-Catholic cracks to his classes. There were pictures of Houck's house and of course the famous Meehan rally shot. The really odd part about it was that the issue of the magazine was on sale for a month before anybody connected in any way with Houck knew it existed. Sutherland heard the article discussed in a Third Avenue bar, and not favorably even there. They decided to ignore it and their decision appeared to be right. No repercussion ever occurred. They guessed vaguely that people who read such tripe didn't bother to vote because they thought everybody was crooked anyway.

Stoddert made a major farm-policy speech. Mercer made a major farm-policy speech. Mercer made a major labor-policy speech. Stoddert made a major labor-policy speech. Mercer made a minor foreign-policy speech and Mercer's

national chairman made a major foreign-policy speech and Stoddert exploded like a grenade.

"That cute bastard!" he roared at his own national chairman. "Thinks he can muzzle me, does he? Thinks he can keep sweet and pure and let the dirty politicians play with world peace, does he? No, Otto, you will *not* reply to Meat Head. I will reply personally. I don't care what it costs, get me coast-to-coast simulcast!"

He closeted himself for two hours and emerged, breathing heavily, with a much-penciled document he handed to Houck.

Houck read it in his office and then summoned the palace guard. They looked through the speech silently. "I'm supposed to polish it," said Houck. "Frankly I'd rather touch a match to it. Is there anybody here who'd like to beard Mahlon?"

There was not. The candidate had the bit between his teeth and they knew it. Sutherland said, "He told me to line up air time tonight. Thank God Tuesday's dog night; you can make a lot of ill will when you preempt a good show's time."

Nowak said, "We all know it had to come. Every time you tell yourself you're going to run a nice, decent high-level campaign—as long as the other guy does. And every time . . ." He shrugged. "It had to come."

Charles Lockworth said, "It's like aviation in World War One. First they sent up planes unarmed to take pictures. Then one side gave its pilots pistols and they took pot-shots at the other side. They gave the other side rifles and shotguns so they could shoot back at the guys with pistols. The guys with pistols swapped them for a machine gun. The guys with rifles turned them in for *two* machine guns on their planes. The Commissioner's got to make the speech, Dr. Houck. He can't let them shoot at him without firing back."

Houck sat before his television set that night hoping to the last minute that Stoddert would change his mind, tone down the phrasing at least. He did not.

The grim face filled his screen and the familiar voice said, "I am not going to address my remarks to the politician who spoke to some of you last night on the issues of

war and peace. I shall address them to the candidate who hid behind him. The candidate is presumed to be the leader of his party. I know that I am the leader of mine, and I thank God that I will never have to take the responsibility for such a reckless political gamble as the opposition candidate made yesterday. It was a gamble, my friends, with your lives and the lives of your children.

"The opposition candidate proposes a fifty per cent cut across the board in non-military foreign aid. Fine words. Fine, stupid words! I can only pray that the opposition candidate is a hypocrite as well as a demagogue. I can only pray that he knows very well he lied when he said such a reduction was possible without immediate economic catastrophe and the loss of our allies to neutralism—or even their defection to the enemy. I can only pray that his years of experience with the corn-hog ratio have somehow miraculously equipped him to deal with the complexities of international affairs. I wonder if the opposition candidate happens to know what language is spoken in Pakistan, where seventy-six million of our allies live?

"The opposition candidate proposes a ten per cent cut across the board in military foreign aid. Evidently he has been too busy with his tall corn and his hogs to obtain figures available to every literate person with a legitimate interest in them."

Houck cringed before the television screen as the voice went on.

It was a vitriolic half-hour masterpiece. It called Mercer a coward for letting another voice his opinions. It called him either a fool or a hypocrite for entertaining those opinions. It savagely instructed Mercer in the facts of life pertaining to the Nuclear Age. It raked him for fat complacency in a world whose great reality was hunger and unrest.

It made the great mistake. It did not leave Mercer an out. When Houck snapped off the set he said aloud, "Here we go. A power dive at supersonic speed right into the gutter."

The papers next morning said (Party, extremist) bravo and give 'em Hell; (Party, moderate) sound sentiments but unfortunate vehemence (Opposition, moderate)

disgusting smear; (Opposition, extreme) things bordering on the unprintable, gibbers of rage. They learned before noon that Mercer would reply that night, same time same network.

The slightly chubby face of Mercer was distorted with anger on the television screen as he reached the climax of his address. Houck was frankly baffled as to what that climax would be. For about fifteen minutes Mercer had talked about his own background, his rise to eminence in the great American tradition. For the past ten minutes he had been talking about Stoddert's background with emphasis on his service to a foreign government (as Mercer chose to put Stoddert's hitch with the R.A.F.) and his work for the foundations and the P.P.A.C., listing every trip abroad Stoddert had made, with sub-totals of the time he had spent abroad accumulating and accumulating to a rather surprising grand total.

"For such a man, as revealed by his documentary record," shouted Mercer, "I have only one word. He has not chosen America nor will America choose him. The word for such an alien in our midst is *disloyal.* I charge the opposition candidate with essential disloyalty to the United States!"

His studio audience was cheering him thunderously. In God's name, wondered Houck, why? And then he noticed that the speech was over. There wasn't going to be any more. Mercer, kind and likeable Jimmy Mercer, had called Mahlon Stoddert disloyal, or "essentially disloyal," whatever that meant, and rested his case.

And the opposition papers and commentators would pretend he had said something meaningful and damning and vitally important. Some people who could not or would not think would at once accept the "disloyalty" of Stoddert as gospel. Others would wait and wonder and after seeing and hearing Stoddert called "essentially disloyal" fifty times a day would finally come to believe that Stoddert was "essentially disloyal."

Houck got to bed and wondered what the curious whining noise he heard might be. He thought of the good citizens who would be exposed to the press and broadcast barrage

and couldn't really blame the ones who would be broken by it. Trained soldiers, even high-ranking officers, had been known to succumb to brainwashing; what chance did an unalerted civilian have?

The noise was getting damned annoying; he muffled his head in pillows and was surprised to find it was still there, louder than ever. It wasn't from outside; it was right in his head. When he got the time he'd have to drop in at a doctor's and find out what *that* was all about.

CHAPTER 20

THE IMMEDIATE EFFECT of Mercer's rejoinder was this: Like the drunken heckler who bellows *"Crap!"* after an involved point, he shocks his audience, startles them—and causes them to forget the involved point.

Stoddert stayed with the Inner Circle of his advisers for a couple of hours, nominally working on the Topeka speech, actually snatching at the afternoon papers as they came in. Stoddert had made a fighting counter-statement, but, as he insisted on being bound by the rules of logic, it was merely quoted in full while Mercer got the headlines. The headlines were all Mercer's. Inside the papers, the editorials were what anyone might have expected. The pro-Stoddert press blazed with indignation at Mercer; since they had blazed with indignation all along, they had no stops left to pull out. The pro-Mercer press hedged on the accuracy of the charge—and complimented Mercer on his courage in airing it.

Mahlon Stoddert grumbled, "Disloyal! The trouble is,' no one believes Jimmy really means it. He doesn't, of course. It's a plain dirty word by now, like 'son of a bitch.' It isn't meant to be taken literally. If anybody took it literally, we could prove different, but . . ."

He shrugged and reached for his hat. "Good night."

Houck said, "I think I'll stick around, Mahlon. Do you want us to call you if anything comes up?"

"No." The candidate nodded to his staff and left, trailing his Secret Service escort.

Houck and Nowak looked at each other. "He's sore."

Nowak said, "Sure. Do you know why? Because he thinks it's his own fault. The President asked him to lay off, and he said he would if Mercer did, and Mercer pulled a fast one. Well, Stoddert doesn't like that kind of fast one, so he swung. It was like that business the Meehan gang did with you in Oklahoma. Well, maybe this will have a happy ending too. Who thinks about Meehan any more?"

Six hours later Houck got an answer to that question. It was nearly eleven o'clock. The phone in his hotel room rang. "Ray, this is Nowak. I'm coming up." Houck was left staring at the receiver; Nowak had hung up.

Houck picked his suit jacket off the chair and hung it up to make space for Nowak. This was one night he had counted on getting to bed early; naturally Nowak had to break it up.

He didn't have time to be irritated very long. Nowak came furiously in with the morning tabloids, both folded open to page 3. It was the same story in both of them, off the AP wire, slightly altered in each case for Policy:

> Tucson, Ariz., Oct. 9: Sen. John R. O'S. Meehan today refused comment on charges of Gov. Paul G. Mercer that his party's presidential nominee, Com. Mahlon Stoddert, had "impugned his own loyalty to this country." Sen. Meehan, once considered Com. Stoddert's chief rival for their party's nomination, reminded reporters that he was scheduled to make a "major campaign broadcast" on Columbus Day, Oct. 12, and said "any information I have for the American public on Com. Stoddert's loyalty will be given at that time."

Houck looked up blankly. Nowak roared, "Blackmail! The louse is going to hold us up!"

Houck said temperately, "Wait a minute, Homer. After all, we should have figured on this. Meehan's been saying for ten years that he's the country's number-one expert on disloyalty in all of its manifestations. It's only natural that some reporter should have asked him what he thought. And I don't see that it's important that he holds off answering."

Nowak said, "I tried to phone him. I couldn't get hold of him."

"Well, what of it? Maybe he's— Maybe— You couldn't get hold of him?"

"I got his secretary," said Nowak wrathfully. "I got as far as his secretary, and that's as far as I could get. 'The Senator can't be disturbed, Mr. Nowak. No, Mr. Nowak, the Senator doesn't want to talk to you. But I'll tell you what, Mr. Nowak, you can talk to Dr. Gonzales about it tomorrow, because he just caught a plane to New York with an important message for Stoddert.' "

Nowak picked up the tabloid, glanced at the story again and absent-mindedly tore the paper in half. "Important message," he said. "I can hardly wait to find out how much he wants."

Rosie Meehan's envoy was due to arrive at LaGuardia Field at 10:50 in the morning. Houck, who had arranged a screening of TV commercials for that time, canceled the screening in order to be on hand—and ten minutes later had to go to the trouble of uncanceling it, when Mahlon Stoddert told him: "I can handle Gonzales by myself. It'll be me and him, Raymond. I don't want an audience."

Houck rode up Madison Avenue in an atmosphere of wounded pride. He stalked into the offices of Lebens, Katcher, Chataway and Bear prepared to dislike whatever they showed him.

That turned out to be hardly necessary. He didn't have to dislike the filmed commercials because he was in a bad mood; he was perfectly able to dislike them on their merits.

The first one was an animated cartoon which seemed to Houck to strike a new low in tastelessness. The characters were a donkey and an elephant who respectively proclaimed themselves Danny Democrat and Ralph Republican, and proceeded to beat hell out of each other in a comic rough-and-tumble for a few seconds, until an American bald eagle fluttered down beside them and pointed out that all Americans, whatever their political party, should vote for that greatest, that most splendiferous, that God-given leader, Mahlon Stoddert. The donkey and the ele-

phant were immediately convinced. They left off fighting, in order to join in the Stoddert campaign jingle:

"We're for Stoddert,
We're for Stoddert,
Stoddert, Stoddert, Stoddert, Stoddert,
Stoddert, Stoddert, Stoddert."

Then they all turned and trudged away into a suddenly appearing sunset, which silhouetted the enormous rear of the elephant, the bony hips of the donkey and the perky tail-feathers of the eagle against the rainbow-like legend appearing in the sky: *Vote for Stoddert and Cowlett!*

"Notice the bottoms?" asked the account executive proudly as the lights went up. "That's the Disney touch. Four of our animators used to work for him."

Houck wet his lips and started to speak. The a.e. stopped him. "Get the whole picture," he said. "There are six of those, and there's no sense hashing them over one at a time. Marv, start Number Two!" The voice from the projection booth acknowledged and the screen brightened again.

No. 2 was a farm scene. A flop-eared rabbit in a straw hat was riding a tractor across what turned out to be a carrot patch. He sang a little song about Stoddert and Cowlett and leaped off the tractor to pull carrots out of the ground. The carrots revealed themselves to be scrolls of parchment, which unwound to show pictures of the candidates.

No. 3 was filmed with live actors. Houck recognized a girl who made her living by stepping in and out of cars on television. She and a young man kissed and sang the Stoddert song and kissed again.

No. 4 was a little outdoor playground scene where three- and four-year-olds were playing Ring Around the Rosie, but the words were "Mommie votes for Stoddert, Daddie votes for Stoddert," and so did Uncle and Auntie and Brother and Sister, and instead of "All fall down," there was a sudden zoom closeup to the cutest of the kids who said hoarsely and emphatically, with a proud grin: "He's —Oh—*KAY!*"

"Took us sixteen takes to get that CU right," said the account executive. "We're going to run that twice a night on the Ronnie Rat Club through to the election. That fills up the last Ronnie Rat time slot and the only comparable thing is Goon Toons, a full hour later and with nowhere near the audience and viewer-loyalty. Watch the next one closely, Mr. Houck. We're rather proud of it."

It started with a little operetta-like scene in the manicured back yard of a development ranch bungalow, one of a row. Late afternoon. All the girls from all the bungalows in the row were hanging out the wash and singing "The Five Twenty-Five is the Happiness Train" because it brings back Harry and Eddie and Joe and Freddie. The girls in their well-fitted blouses and bouffant skirts, bragged a little in recitative, strictly friendly kidding, about how well their husbands were doing in the city, and then joined voices with "heavenly harmony" strings in the back for the last line, with a sweeping, balletic gesture: "That wonderful city out there!" They held the last word as the camera swept in the direction of their gesture through a blur to the wonderful city, bright in the afternoon sun with its skyscraper towers and church spires. The girls' voices stopped as the camera held on the city; the "heavenly harmony" strings got louder and coarser. A growling tuba added dissonance. Dissonant tympani began to whisper far away at 70 beats per minute, building slowly in volume and tempo. Houck found himself digging his nails into his palms and crouching as he stared at the bright, pretty scene and the menace of the music swelled. When the kettledrums were thundering at an unbearable 120 beats per minute there was a sudden two seconds of dead silence and then an unspeakable smear of noise and wild light on the screen. The camera panned back to the suburbs, now with a towering mushroom cloud in the background, dollied in, intercut jaggedly among the agonized faces of the girls as they struggled to realize the awful truth. A distant ironic derby-muted trumpet searched their minds, playing in mechanically strict time "The Five Twenty-Five is the Happiness Train." The intercutting slowed like a roulette wheel running down, clicking to a stop on the suffering face of the girl who was vaguely the

leader of the troupe. She whispered like a soul from hell the burning words, "Why didn't I vote for Stoddert—before it was Too Late?" They looked up in anguish at the sky, from which somebody, apparently God, spoke in an announcer's decisive basso: "But it's *not* too late. *Vote for Stoddert—Now!*"

The screen went white. "That'll get 'em in Levittown," said the account executive. "It'll be mostly for afternoon spots, but there's built-in Male Appeal too."

"I still say we're going to have some heart attacks with those kettledrums," exploded an assistant. "Mr. Houck. I appeal to you!"

"Over my head," commented the executive quietly. "You know what that means, Miltie."

"I'm beyond caring what it means, Frank. What do you say, Mr. Houck?"

Houck said, "I think it's a very effective presentation. It's no worse than they've been insinuating against us. I approve it in full, Frank. Let's see Number 6."

He fainted in his office around noon and they sent for a doctor. The doctor checked him over, decided he could safely walk to his own office on a lower floor and there put him through a one-hour physical. As Houck was dressing he told him: "It's what we call essential hypertension. No, I won't tell you how high your blood pressure is; that's none of your business. You should take things easier, avoid situations of frustration and anger. I can give you the new tranquilizing drugs and they'll probably help. Here's a prescription. One-half tablet of each per day, building up by half-tablet increments every three days to three whole tablets of each per day. Come and see me then. Come and see me also if you notice any dizziness, especially when you rise from a chair or get out of bed suddenly. That'll be hypotensive vertigo, meaning we got your pressure too far down."

"There's nothing organic?" asked Houck.

"Apparently not. Perhaps you're just working very hard at something you dislike intensely. The answer to that, of course, is up to you. Just leave your address with the young lady outside and she'll bill you. Tell me, Mr. Houck, is

there any truth to that weird story about Stoddert wanting to establish some kind of socialized medicine academy?"

Situation of frustration and anger, doc. "Not a word," said Houck scornfully.

Back in his own office he gave the prescription and the schedule of doses to his secretary and passed the word that his faint had meant nothing in particular, just overwork.

Lunch at 1:30 with Stoddert; the national chairman; Godfrey Repp, the publisher from out West; Rorimer of LKC&B, and Sutherland.

"I hear you fainted," said Sutherland.

"It was nothing. I'm to take build-up pills and relax a little more."

"Great trick if you can do it. How were the TV spots?"

"Technically superb. I certify them free from errors of doctrine or morals. They ought to do us a lot of good."

Sutherland turned to Repp. "Perhaps you've been wondering why you were invited, Mr. Repp."

"Can't say I have," said Repp, astonished. "As a leading publisher and an early backer of Governor Cowlett——"

"As a leading member of the Mutual Press Association," broke in Sutherland. "A recent analysis of two thousand MPA dispatches covering the campaign shows measurable bias toward Mercer." He took a sheaf of multigraphed papers out of his briefcase, handed it to Repp and resumed spooning his soup. Repp glanced at the papers. Sutherland said, "I presume you'll take this up with the board of MPA?"

Repp glanced at Stoddert, who was eating silently. The candidate met his eye and said, "We think it would be the best way to handle it, Godfrey."

"In that case," said Repp, "I'll certainly try."

Rorimer said pleasantly, "My accounting department tells me you people are a little delinquent. In fact, the other day I had to borrow one and a half million dollars, roughly, for the expenses of the campaign. If you boys don't mind paying the interest, that's all right with us, of course."

The national chairman said, "We don't mind. Bankers have a right to live too." He scribbled in a notebook. "We'll turn the heat on some Texas pledges and see if we can't

transform them into cash. What's the date interest is computed, Mr. Rorimer?"

The ad man told him. "I think we can beat that," said the chairman. "I like to work with a deadline. Gives you a talking point."

Repp and Rorimer left early and together, on a hint from the chairman. Over dessert Houck asked, "How was it with Gonzales, Mahlon?"

"We achieved a meeting of minds," said the candidate.

"No doubt. Mind telling me what it was, Mahlon?"

Stoddert looked at Houck. He said, "Rosie will eulogize me in the Columbus day speech and kick a little dirt at Mercer." He attended to his fruit cup busily.

"Mahlon," said Houck, "Does he get to name your Secretary of the Interior?"

The candidate nodded his head and went on eating just as though the world had not crumbled into ruins.

Nowak appeared at Houck's hotel room again that night. He eyed the opened portable typewriter with the blank sheet of paper in it, the unopened fifth of whiskey with the unopened bottle of soda and the melting ice cubes beside it, the ash tray stacked with cigarette butts.

All he said was, "You ought to get out of this damn room once in a while."

Houck said ungraciously, "Sit down."

Nowak dumped his coat on the bed and, without asking, ran his thumbnail around the seal of the liquor. He poured himself a drink, looked at Houck, and poured one for Houck too. He said, "What's essential hypertension?"

Houck took the drink from him. "Let's see," he said. "I didn't say 'essential hypertension' to you, and I didn't say it to anybody in the office. The only time I used the words was when I called my own doctor in Connecticut this afternoon to bring him up to date. Miss Freebeiter put that call through for me, so——"

Nowak said, "What's the difference? Be glad she told me instead of a reporter. Now tell me what it is."

Houck explained what the doctor had told him. "The cause of hypertension is—may be—can sometimes be—

doing a job you hate. So maybe I hate my job. And, oh yes, it can shorten your life a few years."

Nowak nodded to the typewriter. "That isn't a speech, is it?"

Houck laughed. "It isn't anything. But if it ever gets to be anything, it'll be a letter of resignation. For reasons of health. Not Meehan—health. Want to argue about that?"

Nowak took a pull on his drink. "Ray," he said, "let's not kid. Do you want out?"

Houck set his glass down and fumbled moodily for a cigarette. "I don't know. I've been sitting here for an hour trying to decide if I want out or not."

Nowak asked, "Do you think Stoddert ought to be President?"

Houck shook his head wonderingly. "I don't know. Jesus, I just don't know. That's what my wife keeps asking me, and all I can tell her is that I used to think so. I guess I still do, but how can I tell? I'm his valet, and no man is a hero, etc. I keep thinking of presidents like Franklin Roosevelt and Teddy Roosevelt—not to mention Washington and Lincoln, for God's sake. All right, Mahlon's no Lincoln. But couldn't he be at least a—a Wilson?"

Nowak said, almost in a roar, "You bloody amateurs! How the hell do you think Lincoln got elected? Not by being what you mean by a 'Lincoln,' Houck! You're supposed to be a professor and you've got more schooling than I have, but I swear to God, Houck, on the history of American dirty politics you're a dope! Lincoln was maybe the greatest president we ever had, and his whole administration is a record of compromises, concessions and dirty deals. He bought Stanton and paid him off with a Cabinet post in order to be allowed to function as president in the first place. He freed the slaves, but the first thing he did in office was try to jam through a constitutional amendment to make slavery perpetual and untouchable. He—"

"Now, wait! That was during a war. You have to—"

"Exactly, during a war! And during a war he turned over half his army to a politician as a bribe to get votes. What would you think of Roosevelt if he'd made Senator Bilbo, say, a five-star general and put him in next to Eisenhower, both equal, both in charge, in Europe? But that's what

Lincoln did to Grant in the West when he gave McClernand Grant's army—without telling Grant. And the reason was there was an election coming up, and McClernand had the votes. Well, Meehan's got votes and we need them. So any deal Stoddert can make with Meehan to get them is a deal worth doing. If you're sore at Stoddert for treating with Meehan, you're a soft-headed idiot. If you're sore because he treats you like his helper, which you are, instead of a tin god and a power behind the throne, which you're not—then get out, Ray! You're with us or you're against us. Make up your mind which!"

The next morning Nowak was in Houck's office when Mahlon Stoddert stormed in. He was furious. "Houck! Rorimer tells me you okayed that film commercial about the atomic bomb!"

"Why, yes, Mahlon. It seemed to me——"

"Houck, I don't care *what* it seemed to your poor little brain! You've made me look as cheap and contemptible as Mercer with his 'yah, yah, you're disloyal!' From now on, you're off that assignment, Houck. I'm turning it over to Claudy from the national committee, but while he's flying in I want you to get up to Rorimer's office and make sure that commercial never gets on the air again. You hear?"

He swept out.

Houck stared after him, frozen-faced. Then he winked at Nowak. "Finish up here, Homer. I've got to go earn my pay."

He actually sat on the same platform with Meehan when the senator delivered his Columbus Day speech, and it was as Stoddert's personal representative. He actually read a message from Stoddert in that capacity which warmly endorsed Meehan's "militant vigilance over the American ideals we hold so dear."

Militant, vigilant Rosie Meehan then stood up and spoke. He thanked Commissioner Stoddert for his generous words. He himself had nothing but admiration for that great leader. As one who had some experience in questions of loyalty, he was happy to know that their party's

standard-bearer was a man of unblemished fidelity to his nation. He did not merely surmise that—he *knew* it, being equipped with a large staff of devoted and well-trained investigators.

Some foolish charges had been made, said Senator Meehan. His nostrils were beginning to flare and he was breathing faster. "Who has made these charges? What is *his* record, my friends?"

And Stoddert sat and listened while Meehan wove the familiar web around Jimmy Mercer. The senator's voice rose in pitch and volume each time he "linked" Mercer to a man who knew a man who had a sister whose best friend had once belonged to an association listed by the Attorney General. Meehan was almost screaming by the time he reached "Document Twelve," which he flourished wildly in the air. "Let the opposition candidate explain Document Twelve!" he howled. "Let him explain the exact nature of his virtual *partnership* with Y. W. Giddings of Benton Harbor, Michigan! Giddings whose mother belonged to the infamous International Workers Order! Giddings whose father belonged to the same despicable, Godless gang! Giddings whose elder brother held a membership card to the lending library of the notorious Readers Book Shop of Chicago! Giddings who lived with a woman unabashedly avowing membership in the Young Peoples' Socialist League!" The last word was a drawn-out banshee screech.

Meehan sort of slumped over the lectern. It was a long five seconds before he drew himself upright again and limply held the paper aloft. "Yes," he whispered, "let him explain Document Twelve."

The speech was over and the kind of people who applauded at Meehan speeches were insanely applauding this one. Houck kept his hands patting for a while and then stopped. At least Meehan hadn't accused Mercer of homosexuality. McCarthy back in '52 hadn't been that generous to Stevenson.

The next day things went predictably. First Mercer's headquarters indignantly denied that Mercer had ever heard of Y.W. Giddings and later in the day retracted, for Mercer had indeed sat on a three-month grand jury with

him some years ago. Whether or not this constituted "virtual partnership" no man could say, for the term was not in any legal dictionary. Mrs. Giddings began the tedious process of filing suite for slander against Senator Meehan, for she had indeed once belonged to the Young Peoples' Socialist League and she had indeed "lived with" Giddings; Meehan had neglected to mention that they were married at the time. Most papers ignored her action and a few of the greatest and bravest mentioned it only in a typographical whisper, for even the greatest and bravest newspapers do not like to remind people unnecessarily that there are such things as libel and slander suits.

"Yeah, but what about Document Twelve?" passed into the repertory of barroom arguers who chose to take the side of that knightly, dedicated intellectual, Commissioner Mahlon Stoddert.

CHAPTER 21

RAYMOND HOUCK woke up with a start. He stared at the wall of his compartment unseeingly for a minute, wondering what had crashed or exploded to wake him. Then he realized that what had waked him was silence. The train wasn't moving. There were voices outside, but no jolt and clatter. Obviously they were in a station.

It was six o'clock by the watch on his wrist. Late, very late; he should be up and dressed by now. He glanced out of the window, lifting aside the drawn curtain, and it was raining. That was the ninth day of the whistle-stop trip, and the ninth morning it had been raining.

The porter brought him in the accumulation of wires and messages for Mahlon Stoddert, already screened by the sleepless girls on the secretarial staff, in the car behind. The one on top wasn't for Stoddert, though; it was addressed to Houck, from his wife. DOCTOR SAYS ANY DAY NOW. ANY CHANCE YOUR BEING HERE? CALL ME. LOVE.

He picked up the phone by his berth and waited for the train operator; she took a good twenty seconds to respond to his light and ask, "Your call, please?"

He asked in a raw voice, "Don't you like this glamor as-

signment, Miss Magruder? I want faster service in the future. Get my wife, please." He hung up. It was impossible to get away. Impossible. Three days to go, then the Nation For Stoddert all-day show and then—Election Day. It was impossible.

The correspondents in their car had been playing Adjectives about the train personnel the other day when Houck wandered in for a drink. "Cold, assured, brilliant," he heard somebody say, and there was a general nodding of heads.

"Who?" he asked as he headed for the bar.

"You," said the correspondent apologetically.

"Well, thanks. How'd Nowak come out, if you've reached him yet?"

One of them said, "I think it was 'balding, burly, dynamic.' "

"He won't like the 'balding,' " said Houck.

His phone rang and he snatched it up. "Ready with Mrs. Houck," said Miss Magruder.

"Hello, darling. I got your wire. Can you hear me? This radiotelephone thing——"

"I can hear you, dear. You sound tired."

"To hell with me. How are you?"

"A couple of contractions through the night. Nothing since. The doctor says he'd like to give me pit—pituitrin shots and bring it on. That's the way they do it nowadays after you've had your first. Should I tell him to go ahead? Can you come home?"

"Darling, I'm sorry." He paused.

Her voice was almost gay when she answered. "Don't feel bad about it. It was just a hope. I'll tell the doctor I'll wait it out. Maybe by then——"

"Look, if it's a question of risk——"

"It isn't. Just a matter of convenience for everybody. Mostly, I suspect, the doctor! To heck with him. You go ahead and do your job, dear. I feel better already talking to you."

"I'm glad," he said inadequately.

She told him: "I'll say good-by now, darling. And—take care of yourself." She hung up.

He replaced the phone carefully and wondered if she

had heard anything. And then his phone rang and he had no time to wonder; it was Stoddert's Brownie asking about the morning mail. He attacked it furiously, had it sorted in ten minutes and handed the stuffed folders to a messenger. The slimmest was for Stoddert.

He showered and dressed fast, gulped some breakfast from a tray and went back to Stoddert's car. Stoddert was dictating replies to Brownie; he waved him a welcome and kept working. Houck consulted the timetable, the calendar and his watch, and dug through the files for ten minutes.

Stoddert slapped down the last letter and got up; Brownie turned to her noiseless typewriter. "Good morning, Raymond," the candidate yawned. "Where are we and when am I on?"

"Springville, Ohio. County seat of Clark. Population, 111,000. National Casket Company and printing plant of Custis Publications. No distress area, flood problem every spring, plenty of skilled labor. You appear in eighteen minutes. It's raining like hell. I've put together some appropriate farm, labor and upstream-flood-control paragraphs before you go into the peace proposal."

Stoddert's car was of course the last in the train, with an observation platform for speeches. Houck cautiously lifted the screen of a rearward window a little and dropped it after peeking. "Looks like three acres of umbrellas," he said with satisfaction. "At six-thirty that's not bad; the local work must have been top-notch. Be sure to tell the county chairman so."

"Right, Raymond. I'll see him now. What's his name?"

Houck handed him a sheet which bore the county chairman's name, name of wife, name and ages of children. Stoddert looked at the sheet, nodded and laid it carefully face down before turning to the composite speech Houck had assembled for him.

He went forward to the next car and found the county chairman busy with his national committeeman, whom they had picked up at a whistle stop practically on the Indiana-Ohio line. "The Commissioner would like to meet you, Mr. Dieterle," he told the county chairman. "Mr. Radney, would you take him in?"

He found Nowak in the office car working on his mail.

"Homer," he said, "Why don't you ask Mahlon if he wants you to say a couple of words here? It's a big union town. The Compositors and Foundry, your old outfit."

Nowak looked bewildered. "Zanesville?" he asked uncertainly. "Compositors and Foundry?"

"Springville," said Houck. "Zanesville in three hours."

"My God, you're right! I'll get back there. Raymond, I don't know how you keep track!"

"The legal mind," said Houck to his disappearing back. Perry Sutherland asked him, "What'll I tell the boys?"

"Speech on schedule. Looks like a very good turnout for the time and weather. Let 'em know a statement on floods is on the agenda. That'll interest the boys from Connecticut and a few other points."

Sutherland picked up a hand mike and said, "Attention, press car. This is Springville, Ohio. Commissioner Stoddert will speak at the tailgate in thirteen minutes. There's a good crowd under the umbrellas, so if some of you photographers want to take pictures of a good crowd under umbrellas, get going. Attention Clancy from the Hartford *Courant* and other reporters unlucky enough to live in flood-ravaged areas. The Commissioner will make a statement on floods in his speech. Attention *Labor Daily*. Homer Nowak will also make a few brief remarks. Seventy-threes and out." The speech would be heard over a loudspeaker in the press car and there was plenty of time for anybody who cared to to file copy with the Springville manager of Western Union, who had come aboard. It was an easy stop—no scrambles for a remote telegraph office or general store phone, no need to use the expensive radiotelephone facilities aboard the train.

Ten minutes clear, barring emergencies. "I'll be in the Mayo Clinic," he told Sutherland.

"Got a cold?" asked the P.R. man absently.

He found the train doctor dressing in his double compartment and grouchy. "Why weren't you in yesterday, Mr. Houck?"

"Because I was busy and felt pretty good," said Houck, already pulling off his shirt. He faced the doctor at the little table. The doctor wrapped the sphygmomanometer

cuff, put the stethoscope to his wrist, pumped the bulb and studied the dancing column of mercury.

The doctor said at last, "Very nice. We can reduce the dosage again. How are the head noises?"

"Sometimes I go for a couple of hours without noticing them."

"You're making some kind of adjustment, Mr. Houck, either physiological or psychological. Cut down to four of the white and four of the yellow per day."

Houck went forward to the press car, cold, assured and brilliant. A quintet which had obviously been up all night playing poker greeted him amid a debris of cards, chips, glasses and butts.

"I was just saying, Houck, that I like this train," a battered veteran told him. "I rode with Truman and Dewey both in '48, and it wasn't like this. You know what would've happened to a poker session like this on the Dewey train? It would've piffled out around eleven-thirty, because the limit would've been too low to sustain interest. We would then have had one weak but expensive rye highball apiece and gone beddie-bye. On the Truman train we'd still be playing, for bigger stakes than we could afford, and we'd be belting straight bourbon. I'm saying nothing against the candidates. I'm only saying the people around them get to be caricatures of them. And I for one have no objection to being a caricature of Stoddert."

"Thanks. He's speaking now, by the way. Brownie's going to send back the transcript, with ad libs, as soon as she gets it typed."

The veteran said with devotion, "I *like* this train." He riffled the cards and dealt.

They averaged fifteen stops a day. Sometimes it was only for ten minutes or less—the candidate rising from his meal, tucking his napkin under his plate, speaking a few dozen words to the hundred or so persons who had drifted down to the railroad and returning to his cooling soup. Some were full-dress affairs in a hall, with radio and TV coverage. They meandered through twenty-two states, backing and shooting off at right angles; waiting in a siding through the night sometimes, so as not to pass a populous town

without a speech; sometimes racing for hours on end across the prairies. A map of their journey would have looked something like the route of an army troop train trying to keep to the land-grant railroads. It was not a very good way of covering distance, but the boys in the press car figured up that in nineteen days, Commissioner Mahlon Stoddert had been seen in the flesh by more than three hundred thousand persons.

They were not in the train all that time, of course. On the really long jumps sometimes Stoddert and Houck and a few of the others would fly ahead, to get a night's sleep in a stationary bed or have a few hours for conference in a pivotal state. But mostly they were tied to the train. It was slow and horribly expensive, but it was a lot cheaper than hiring the fleet of air liners that would be needed to carry the dozen VIP's, the two dozen clerical workers, the city room full of reporters, the private doctor and the barber, the shoeshine man and the trained nurse, the communications men and the guards, who accompanied Mahlon Stoddert wherever he went. And—slow? It was slow; but in the long run faster than anything else, since everyone managed to arrive at the same time.

Houck survived. It was grueling work, with early-to-rise and late-to-bed hours only one part of it. He found himself doing what he had not done since he proudly achieved the age of four: taking naps. Sometimes they were morning naps, sometimes evening; but whenever he had time he retreated to his compartment and slept until he had to wake up again. He hardly ever had a chance to hear his words coming out of Stoddert's lips these days, since it was only while Stoddert was actually pinned down on the platform, addressing an audience, that he could be reasonably sure the candidate was not going to call him in for a quick change in some speech. Each day had one big set speech, which meant an hour or more solid. It was then that Houck locked his door, pulled out the folder of Paragraphs for All Occasions and, matching it against the next day's itinerary, fabricated the proper number and kind of addresses for Stoddert to make. It was not necessary to be original in these speeches; the audiences wanted to hear the Stoddert they were familiar with, making the statements

they expected from him. But it was quite necessary to make sure they were neither too short nor too long, and that the sentiments matched the community. Factory towns: The paragraphs went in on the Stoddert Equitable Labor-Practice Bill; the Stoddert Immigration Proposal; the Stoddert Social-Security Plan. Farm communities: The key words in the paragraphs were "parity," "conservation," "price support." Big cities were more complicated, since big cities meant big audiences and big audiences meant bigger speeches; but Stoddert keyed most of his big-city addresses to foreign relations and how to avoid war.

Houck produced all those words on demand, and found time to do his other chores as well. He survived it; but it was an ordeal. When he was awake, he was working. When he wasn't working, he was asleep. It got things done, and it made the time pass; but it wasn't fun.

Eventually it ended. The Inner Circle left the train in St. Louis and flew to California in a chartered plane. Stoddert and his running-mate, Cowlett, who had joined them in St. Louis, had the berths; all Houck had was an ordinary seat. But he was asleep before takeoff, and the first he knew of their arrival at Los Angeles Municipal Airport was when the stewardess shook him awake.

Christian Rorimer had flown out to be with them. It was too big an event to trust to anyone but himself.

He met Stoddert and the Inner Circle in their hotel. Rorimer had an Inner Circle of his own along for the occasion, mostly executives from the Los Angeles branch of his agency, the men who had made the arrangements for the Big Day. It was nine o'clock in the morning as the advertising-agency geniuses swept into the presidential suite. Rorimer greeted them all, introduced his helpers and ordered: "Listen!" From the street, fifteen stories below, there was a sound of music, and then a blaring from a sound truck. The words were indistinguishable.

"Oh, damn," said Rorimer, clouding up. He glared at a red-haired man in yellow slacks. "What's it supposed to be saying, Frelinghausen?"

Frelinghausen felt his throat and said worriedly, "We're pretty far up here, Mr. Rorimer. It's an, uh, appeal to

everybody to take the day off and come help celebrate America for Stoddert Day."

Rorimer turned to the candidate. "All right, you get the idea, anyway. Frankly, if anybody tries to get in now they're wasting their time anyhow. They say at the Bowl that there isn't going to be a seat left by ten o'clock."

He shepherded them all out and into the waiting elevators. As they bustled through the lobby of the hotel, the sofa-dwellers and chair-sitters murmuring and staring curiously, one of the girls from the secretarial pool came running after Houck. "Call for you, Mr. Houck. It's Connecticut on the wire."

Houck didn't hesitate. "You couldn't reach me," he told her without breaking stride. It was not, he knew, anything special, since he had a private arrangement with one of the UP men for keeping posted on the maternity ward. And he just couldn't take time to talk to Meg now.

Of course, this wasn't really his show. It wasn't even Stoddert's except that Stoddert naturally had to be there. It was conceived in the brain of Christian Rorimer and executed by a staff of nearly three hundred producers, directors, promotion men and entertainment specialists, as a tribute to Mahlon Stoddert, partly to get him elected forty-eight hours later, partly to raise cash to pay off the mortgage on the old Party. Stoddert would, from time to time, stand up at his ringside table and take a bow; but the work would be done by stars of stage, screen, Hollywood and the Army & Navy, and what Stoddert would have to say needed no talented political ghost to compose.

The procession started off for the Bowl in sparkling sunshine. It was November, but the breeze off the Pacific was only pleasantly cool, and Mahlon Stoddert's car, preceded only by a sound truck, was a top-down convertible. He sat on the folded top like Roosevelt in any of his inauguration parades, grinning and waving to the gapers.

They were cheering him! Houck noted that down as a valuable statistic, then remembered the record-breaking crowds that had attended every move of Douglas MacArthur's when he returned to America. Well, perhaps the cheers meant nothing, but they *were* cheering him, and they would sound good in the newsreels.

The motorcade took fifty minutes, the first fifty minutes of idleness Houck had known in more than a month. He could not sleep under the eyes of thousands and it would be taken as arrogance if he read or dictated. Therefore he mechanically smiled at the crowd, watched the scenery and thought as little as possible, but more than he wished.

There was the matter of Eugene Lewton, four days ago in a great midwestern industrial city. Lewton had been Houck's demigod when he went to law school. Lewton had been dean of the school after a distinguished corporate practice. His pronouncements went forth to the country glowing with common sense, knifing to the heart of the issue at hand, consummate models of good law and a compassionate heart. Houck had deliberately modeled himself after Lewton and, he hoped, succeeded. He grieved with the rest of the school when Lewton, his debt to education paid, went back to private practice.

He had come aboard the train four days ago to see Houck. The gray eminence and celebrity's celebrity was flattered and happy. Lewton remembered him well and was pleased with his success; they wrangled technically and happily over the recent Supreme Court decisions. Then Lewton had to go; a court appearance within the hour.

"Like to meet Stoddert first?" asked Houck. "A picture wouldn't do either of you any harm."

Lewton laughed and said, "It might bewilder a few people, Raymond. I'm a very inactive member of the national committee of Mercer for President."

"What?"

His incredulous shout rang so loud in the narrow train that people came running to see what was wrong. He waved them away and sat down.

"I'm not the only one, you know, who likes Mercer," said Lewton with a smile. "I expect several million people will like him well enough to vote him into the Presidency."

"But—but—with your views——?"

"What's the matter with my views? I like Mercer and I'm going to vote for him."

"After what his hatchet men have said and insinuated about Stoddert?"

"I could turn that question around, Raymond. What about your ineffable Mr. Meehan? What about that A-bomb film?" For a liberal weekly had got hold of a copy of the script and flailed Stoddert mercilessly. "No," Lewton went on comfortably, "I like the Governor. He's not a brilliant man like your Mr. Stoddert, but he's never done a dishonorable thing in his life, he's an able administrator on the record, and I think he'll let the experts do their job. I happen to disapprove of prima-donna presidents; given half a chance they let the country wind up in the soup. I'm sorry to end this on a slightly sour note, Raymond. They're both good men in a dirty game and no doubt we're both of us partly right. Come and see me if you're ever in town, won't you?"

Houck sat, bewildered, for twenty minutes after the meeting. Lewton, a man with a first-rate brain, did not see that there was a difference between the Mercer smears and the Stoddert stratagems. He did not see that the times demanded a consummate technician and not a muddler-through. He did not see that Stoddert was, by a dispassionate evaluation, the outstanding man of his time for intellect, experience and character.

Sitting in the motorcade, Houck smiled at the crowds and wondered where Lewton had gone wrong and whether, conceivably, millions more might have gone as far wrong.

CHAPTER 22

THEY CALLED IT the Blanket. Stoddert's Blanket originated from the Hollywood Bowl, Mercer's from the Chicago Municipal Auditorium. Each was a 10 A.M. to 2:00 A.M. television and radio simulcast, nationwide, with volunteer talent. It was well that the talent was voluntary. One of Rorimer's statisticians computed that if all the stars who appeared on the two Blankets were to bill them at their usual guest-shot rates, the total would run over one billion dollars.

Not since John Wilkes Booth slipped into Ford's Theater on April 14th, 1865, had the acting profession been so intimately associated with politics. It had been building for

the past few elections and on this one reached some sort of climax. There was not one member of Actors' Equity, American Guild of Variety Artists, Motion Picture Actors Association or Broadcasting Performers' Guild who had not this year declared for Stoddert or Mercer and who, having declared, had failed to campaign energetically for the chosen candidate. An embarrassment of riches faced the producers of the Blankets, but they had fitted everybody in somehow. The afternoon edition of Pageant for Americans alone gave speaking parts to thirty-five major stars of screen and television.

It was one o'clock in the afternoon in Connecticut when The Blanket started. There was something wrong with the television set, something to be adjusted by one of the small knobs in the back, but Mrs. Houck was in no shape to bend over to do it. She sat in the kitchen and drank a cup of tea and listened to the radio version over her small white kitchen set. "The Star Spangled Banner," of course, sung by a couple of million dollars' worth of talent, and then while the camera, no doubt, played over the vast crowd and the celebrities, a sultry-voiced blond cinema menace gave the blind radio audience the pitch.

"There's Randy Stewart over there, he's getting up and going over to Commissioner Stoddert's table and shaking his hand. Let's see if the sound men can't switch on the table mike there—"

Randy Stewart's famous, thrilling voice: "Ah know, Mr. Commissionuh, thet this gret tuhn-out is jest a foah-runnuh of youh trah-umphant election to the Presidency tomorrow, shore as ah'm standin' heah!"

Stoddert: "Thanks, Randy. Thanks very much."

Blond menace: "Commissioner Stoddert's wearing a blue single-breasted suit and an off-white shirt—that's for television, I guess you know—and a figured brown tie, the famous tie with our great party's symbolic animal on it. With him at the table are—let's see, there's Homer Nowak, the great labor leader, our wonderful national chairman, who set the rival candidate straight on a few facts last night in his brilliant speech, and next to *him* is, is—what? Who? Oh—is the brilliant professor of law so closely iden-

tified with our great cause, Professor Raymond—uh—Houck."

Mrs. Houck put down her cup of tea and hurried awkwardly to the living room. It was too bad that Ellen wasn't on hand to fix the television set, but if she got down on her knees and clung to the top of the console, she could easily reach the little knobs. Getting up again would be uncomfortable. Stretching to see the picture at the front of the set while she twiddled with the back would be impossible. But she could at least get a flickering, wavering idea of what her husband looked like, three thousand miles away. If they looked toward him again, that was.

She lowered herself clumsily to her knees, and Something Happened.

First it was hot and —odd, and then it was sodden and chilly. It was a great, astonishing gush. Even alone, no one to see, no surprised questions from the kids to answer, it was quite humiliating.

The picture came on and jerked violently in a vertical direction, like a nickelodeon film out of time with its shutter. Mrs. Houck got up and hurried toward the bathroom. She was beginning to be worried. In fact, she was scared sick.

The M-G-M Men's Choir roared out "Marching Along Together" and "God Bless America" in quick succession with a happy disregard of party lines. That fast-rising fan favorite and star of films—anyway, of one film, to be released very soon—Rack Pisen glowered and mumbled truculently at Commissioner Stoddert. He wasn't angry; it was the only way he knew how to talk. The National A.A.U. Men's Singles Champion came on to sing a number, and a famous musical-comedy singer accompanied him on the banjo. They were followed by a celebrated television panelist, who led the enormous audience in singing "The Battle Hymn of the Republic," with special Stoddert lyrics for the occasion.

Since those who didn't know the new lyrics sang happily off-key with the old, they made quite a racket. Mrs. Houck feverishly snapped off the television set, which was blaring. She could still hear what was going on from the kitchen radio, faintly. That was the way she wanted it.

Temporarily shored up, disciplining herself to sit down and drink a cup of coffee, her morale had begun to come back. Ellen should return from the shopping within the next half hour, and certainly nothing else would happen before then. Would it? She stopped with her coffee cup half to her mouth and concentrated on what was going on inside her body, feeling for twinges with nerve endings she wasn't sure were there. She didn't *feel* as if anything was going to happen. The release of the amniotic fluid made her feel better, in fact. Lighter and less crudely misshapen.

The trouble was, her last experience in this field was nine years back and quite different. The two girls had been born without the sac breaking until the very last minute. She had felt contractions—"pains," she started to call them, and conscientiously corrected herself—she had felt contractions with the first one that went on for nearly three days before the baby was born. And the second one had come in the middle of the night; she had waked up with a contraction that was real rouser, and the baby was delivered before noon.

Naturally, Raymond had been home on both occasions. Naturally. Didn't she have a *right* to have him home for something like that? And he had fussed, trying to avoid the appearance of fussing; and he had sneaked downstairs to phone the doctor long before pride would have permitted Meg herself to do it; and he had taken care of rounding up the bed jacket and the toothbrush and the vanity case and the extravagant new fitted lounging robe that was held out as a sort of a bribe to give birth so as to be able to wear it. And, come to think of it, he had driven the car to the hospital; who was going to do it this time? Not Ellen—not unless the kids came along, and that was a thought that shook her to her toes. She certainly wouldn't want to do it herself—even if she could. Would it have to be a cab? And wasn't it just her luck that this time—third babies *always* come faster—she might be just halfway to the hospital and then one of those things that you read about in the papers might happen? *Cabby Delivers Twins Unassisted.* Silly, improvident women, she had always thought.

Well—

Something unequivocally grasped at her, inside the abdomen below the navel.

She had presence of mind enough to note the time by the electric clock over the television set.

It only lasted a few seconds but it was for real. Seven minutes past two. It was when the pains—when the *contractions*—came fifteen minutes apart that she had started for the hospital last time. If they were as close as half an hour apart, she calculated she would call the doctor and at least get him alerted. She would get *somebody* alerted. It simply wasn't fair that of all the two billion and a half people in the world, only she knew that she was on the point of having a baby. She would pamper herself, she decided grimly; as soon as they came even twenty minutes apart—perhaps twenty-five—she would call the cab and get ready. Everything was packed, everything but the new fitted lounging robe that she didn't have because Raymond hadn't been home to buy it. And hadn't cared enough to order it by mail and—— That wasn't fair.

She remembered her coffee and took a sip from the nearly full cup. It was cold. The clock said eleven minutes past two. Four minutes.

Maybe she thought, feeling defiantly sorry for herself, she would just pick up the phone and call the doctor now. Why not? She was all alone, wasn't she? And it certainly made all kinds of sense not to take silly chances. Maybe the doctor would scold her for not calling him as soon as the fluid broke. She thought wistfully: Maybe he'll come right over.

Twelve minutes past two. No, he wouldn't come right over, because it was right smack in the middle of his office hours. Now, there was a fine, unarguable reason for calling him right away. Why not just pick up the phone and say, "Dr. Shafter, there's no rush, I think, but I thought I'd better call now so as not to have to disturb you later and——"

And he would ask her how far apart the contractions were coming, and if she confessed there was only one he would be very patient, but she would know he was smiling.

Fourteen minutes past two. Seven minutes since the first

contraction. Well, the thing to do was to get her mind off it. Go out in the kitchen, pour out this slop, get a fresh cup of coffee. She stood up and, waddling slightly, headed toward the kitchen.

Before she reached the door she changed her mind and turned toward the phone.

Before she got across the room the second contraction caught her, hard.

CHAPTER 23

THE AFTERNOON performance of A Pageant for Americans was on. It had been written by Eldo Channing, winner of the first Pulitzer Prize for Television Drama; the lyrics were by Marylyn Nafe, three-time winner of the Pulitzer Prize for poetry and a passionate Stoddert rooter; three Prix de Rome composers under the direction of the conductor of the Chicago Municipal Symphony had scored the work. The important thing about it was that the girls in the chorus wore tight little bodices and tight little pants.

Stoddert kept trying to avert his eyes and finally said to Houck, "I haven't been to a burlesque show in twenty years, Raymond and now *this*. Get them covered up for the evening performance."

Houck wiggled through the crowd back of the bandshell and finally found Danny Strone, actor, producer-director, chairman of Hollywood for Stoddert and Cowlett. "The Commissioner thinks the girls are too bare," he said. "He wants them covered up for the evening performance."

"I tried to get costume sketches approved," said Strone. "I failed to get through. Who stopped me?"

"I did," said Houck. "Never mind about whose fault it is, if anybody's. No man is an *Ilande*, Danny. Get them covered up."

"Cloaks," said Strone. "A hundred and twenty-four cloaks. We can just have them pinked, there's no time for hemming, not even iron-on binding. One clasp at the neck, another at the bazoom. Knee-length okay?"

"That's reasonable," said Houck, extrapolating from Stoddert's reaction to certain campaign films. "And Danny,

I think it would be okay to let the cloaks—*swirl* a little."

Strone turned to a helper and gave the order. The helper tore his hair and dashed off to have one hundred and twenty-four cloaks turned out. Strone laid a hand on Houck's arm. "How's it going?" he asked humbly.

"The pageant? Great. It's a wonderful production."

"No. The campaign. How's he holding up? Is he cheerful?"

"You know him, Danny. Nothing gets him down. He's going to win tomorrow."

"You really think so. The polls leave it up to a five per cent 'undecided.' "

"Remember forty-eight, Danny, when the polls elected Tom Dewey President by a landslide? Don't worry, Danny. The thinkers and the community leaders are for Stoddert." He punched him on the shoulder, this being show business territory, and went back around the shell again. Stoddert was doing the conference bit, talking seriously with important people, making decisions, jabbing papers with his finger, sending folks off with a manly handclasp and a grin. All this was from time to time on camera; it was one of the visual themes of the Blanket. Mercer was a sportsman and music-lover, which appealed to the sportsmen and music lovers. Stoddert had chosen to be a man without hobbies, a mercilessly hard worker, with all the criticism that this implied of Mercer for taking it easy.

"America enters the Air Age!" thundered the god voice which announced the pageant. Stoddert, on camera, laid down his papers and turned to the stage looking exalted. When the red light on the camera assigned to them winked out, Houck slipped into a chair and told the candidate: "They'll have knee-length cloaks for the evening performance. There isn't much leg art for the rest of the show anyway." He glanced down at the monitor set and winced. On stage the Wright Brothers were carrying their little kite onto the sands of Kitty Hawk, a chorus was singing. "The Ballad of Wilbur and Orville," and a few curious Carolina town folks were—unhistorically, as Houck recollected—looking on. The skirt of one girl was accidentally blowing high in the breeze from an offstage wind machine. Her thighs filled the monitor set.

Houck picked up the phone. "Control booth," he snapped. He got it, and after a slight argument, the director. "No more leering closeups of female anatomy," he ordered. "I don't *care* what von Stroheim always told you, mister! Your version of the Oregon Trail looked like Minsky's Runway. From now on, dignity."

Stoddert was chuckling as he hung up. "The best-hated man in the Party," he said. "Are you trying to broaden your field, Raymond, and become the best-hated man in the continental United States?"

"And the Territories if necessary," said Houck truculently.

"You couldn't be elected dog-catcher," said Stoddert, studying him, "and that's why I'm in favor of an appointive federal judiciary." Then he turned his attention to the stage. It was as close as he had ever come to mentioning that there might be a tangible reward in store for Houck, and the law professor remembered a 1948 statement ascribed to John Foster Dulles who, everybody knew, would be Mr. Dewey's Secretary of State. "Yeah," commented Mr. Dulles in effect; "everybody knows it except me and Mr. Dewey."

On stage the Air Age had leaped from Kitty Hawk to the Battle of Britain—a chorus down front roaring in virile fashion the approximate history of that high-water mark of courage. A huge screen descended behind the shadowed band shell, and a beefed-up movie projector lit it with strange, crude flickering movies of aircraft seen from the air. One of them soundlessly exploded and hurtled down. Another immediately appeared. The huge voice said tensely: "Ladies and gentlemen, you are witnessing actual gun-camera combat films shot from the *Dakota,* in which Mahlon Stoddert fought in the Battle of Britain!"

The applause and cheering smote Houck like a physical blow.

"Five seconds!" a network man yelled at them. Stoddert composed his face into calm nobility. The red light on their television camera winked on briefly and then winked off.

The phone rang and Houck picked it up. "Houck speaking," he said. "Message center, Mr. Houck. From your home town, a Doctor Shafter. Telephone message quote,

"Mrs. Houck entered University hospital two fifty-five E.S.T. for delivery. Proceeding normally. She sends love. Thought you'd like to know.' Unquote."

"Send this answer," said Houck, suddenly white-faced. "No, connect me with the hospital. No, she'll be in the delivery room. Send this telephone message for my wife. All my love, darling, signed Raymond. And wire her some flowers. White roses—something." He hung up and looked at Stoddert, who was doing the business bit again. It was well that Houck was not on camera.

This stinking, inhuman business, he thought. And Jack Shafter helps out with a filthy crack like that. Cold, assured, brilliant Professor Houck! Brother, if they only knew! The head noises were getting quite bad suddenly. He took out his pill box and swallowed one yellow and one white, neat.

How many Dean Lewtons were there, anyway? How many good men gone wrong? You're riding the curve, boy, he told himself. Elation, depression, elation. Only they were right. This miserable business that was keeping him from his wife's bedside, his students' needs, the calm and routine that a middle-aged man deserved and needed. . . .

It was miserable. It had made him ill. It had kept him from his wife when she needed him. It was childish and crude and it had a cesspool smell if you poked too deeply into it; and it was possibly the most important thing in the world. Because everything else—*everything* else, including the life expectancy of Bantu tribesmen and Japanese fishermen—depended on it.

In any case, it was all over now. The voters would tell the rest of the story; it was out of his hands.

A well-loved American humorist, in baggy pants and putty nose, appeared before the television cameras to slap his partner, dressed in Mercer's famous pince-nez, over the head with a bladder.

Sutherland roared with laughter and nudged Houck. Then he did a double-take. "What did you say?"

Houck said, "I was talking to myself. I was quoting the eminent churchman who said, 'I know my church is under the direct guidance of God. No such institution of rogues

and scalawags, operated by mere mortal man, could have survived for an instant.' "

Sutherland said, puzzled, "I don't see the connection."

Houck stood up. "God does," he said. He leaned over and shook Stoddert's hand. "D-day," he explained. "Good luck, Mahlon, and good-by. I've got to catch a plane."

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