

**APPOINTMENT AT
ANGAHUAN**

by James A. Kline and Richard S. Platz

Copyright 1982 and 1987
James A. Kline and Richard S. Platz
P.O. Box 797, Blue Lake, CA 95525

All rights reserved

Without limiting the rights under copyright reserved above, no part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in or introduced into a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means (electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, or otherwise), without the prior written permission of the copyright owner.

This is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places and incidents are the product of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously. Any resemblance to actual events, locations, or persons, living or dead, is entirely coincidental.

CHAPTER 1

Eric Johanson was tired and tense. The afternoon's drive had not been long, but the events of the past few days had left him over-wrought. As he took the second exit into Del Oro, he wondered if he would ever be able to relax as long as this Tarascan business was unfinished.

If only he could talk to Shimoko. She knew more about this than anyone. His daughter could answer the questions that were plaguing him. But those damned cultists would never let her talk on the phone. Tomorrow he'd drive down there and find out just what the hell was going on.

He sighed wearily as he turned the automobile into a familiar street lined with tall black walnut trees, but the sense of foreboding which hung over him refused to dissipate. A few minutes later he pulled through the murky twilight into his own driveway. Johanson clicked off the headlights and ignition and sat motionless in the gathering gloom, staring at the back entrance to his house. He felt old, older than his 54 years. Too old for all this fuss.

Johanson opened the car door, uttered a snort of resolve, and climbed out. He collected his briefcase and luggage from the trunk and set them down beside the back door. Holding the key poised to pierce the lock, he grasped the cold brass knob. The door was unlatched and creaked open before the key could find its niche. All the vague fears which had nagged at him for the past week coagulated suddenly in the pit of his stomach. A pain shot through his shoulder and down his left arm, the same sharp throbbing he had already felt several times earlier that day.

Warily Johanson reached inside and clicked on the hallway light. The entrance hall and kitchen were empty. He picked up his briefcase and overnight bag and pushed through the doorway into the kitchen, his heart pounding violently. He stepped to the center of the room, stopped, and listened. A bright dizziness swept over him, and he had to lean against the counter for a moment until it had passed. Nothing seemed to be out of place. He set down his bags and moved quietly through the door into the dining room. Something *was* amiss. Through the doorway of his study Johanson could see papers and books littering the floor.

Again he stood silently listening, waiting. Nothing. He tiptoed

across the dining room, his mouth dry, his muscles tensed. Was this really happening to him? he wondered. Outside the door to the study he hesitated. He heard nothing, saw nothing. Johanson stepped carefully through the doorway.

Suddenly from his left a bare bronze-hued arm reached for him. His nervous system screamed for adrenaline as he watched a giant body appear behind the arm. Eric Johanson was face to face with a monstrous Indian who held him in an iron grip.

With the strength born of terror Johanson struggled to free himself. The two stumbled across the room toward the ransacked desk, and Johanson felt a sudden tightening in his chest, then a searing pain which took his breath away and buckled his knees.

The Indian spun him around and a powerful hand tightened on his throat. Johanson felt himself being lifted off the ground by his neck and slammed hard against the wall. He had never felt such a crushing pain as he now felt in his chest, but it was not caused by anything the Indian was doing!

“Where is it?” boomed an eerie voice through the faintness and nausea.

Johanson saw puzzlement creep into the giant Indian’s eyes, but it seemed insignificant, of no concern to him anymore. He shut his own eyes and felt blackness closing in.

The overwhelming pain in his chest receded as abruptly as it had begun. It didn’t diminish in intensity, but grew distant, as if it were happening to someone else. A forgotten peacefulness filled the vacuum. Is this death? he wondered. He felt himself sliding down the wall as the Indian loosened his grip. It didn’t matter anymore. His daughter’s face appeared clearly before his closed eyes, and he regretted he would never see her again. Nothing else really mattered now. All the pressing concerns of only a few moments before seemed so meaningless now. So silly. A silly map, a silly journey, a silly life. Now it was strangely silent within his pain, and Johanson realized that his heart was no longer beating. His body was dying. Had died. He would die.

CHAPTER 2

Things were simpler before Felix Sterculius walked into his office. In the early days he would gaze dreamily at the law school diploma centered proudly on the wall behind his desk proclaiming to all the world that Jedediah Aaron LeBaron was qualified as an attorney and counselor at law.

LeBaron had never really set out to become a lawyer. It had just sort of happened, with the brutal inevitability that springs from inattention. He had to do something after receiving his Bachelor of Arts degree, and blind momentum had carried him on through law school.

That same diploma had bided its dusty time in a dark steamer trunk immediately after law school. Emerging from the cocoon of twenty-straight years of schooling, LeBaron had ventured forth to see the world, finally settling for two years of relaxation in central Mexico. But when his savings were gone and his system had finally sweated out the poison of all those years of formal learning, he had returned to the spruce- and fir-covered hills of northern California, to the tiny town of Los Arboles, to open his own private practice.

As he had proudly watched the words “J. Aaron LeBaron, Att’y” appear in gold block letters on the window of his converted storefront office (he would have liked more, but gold leaf was going for twenty dollars a letter), he had congratulated himself on having chosen the gentle bucolic atmosphere of a rural law practice. He had wondered why anyone would wish to practice the noble profession caged in by concrete and asphalt and breathing the carbon monoxide of a larger city.

Now he knew. Big cities have clients, clients have money, and money was needed to pay the bills that kept the office open and bought food and shelter. The concept was so simple he had completely overlooked it at first. Never before had he appreciated the need to earn his daily bread, so blunted had the edge of his husbandry become from student loans and gifts from home, and so dimmed had his wits grown

from a surfeit of schooling.

The romantic allure of an idyllic small town law practice in a pastoral setting had proved a cruel seduction. Now he lived with the jaded reality as with a mistress he secretly loathed, yet couldn't quite bring himself to leave. Rather than championing the worthy causes of exploited rustics, he had spent three years worrying whether someone would walk through the front door with enough money in his pocket to pay the telephone bill or with a fat enough bank account to cover the modest retainer he would require so that his secretary's paycheck wouldn't bounce. His clientele consisted chiefly of illiterate, jobless loggers, penniless for all practical purposes, and tightfisted, though lofty-minded, professors from the ivory towers of nearby Del Oro State University, who perpetually panicked in the teeth of real-world encounters and distrusted anyone who did not. Nonetheless, things were without question simpler then.

Behind the gold-lettered plate glass window he sat, poring over his latest *Time* magazine, to all the world busily advancing the noble profession of legal counselor and advocate. Outside a Friday afternoon languished about the sleepy town like a summer's yawn.

He was handsome in a rugged sort of way that fit his backwoods setting, with light-brown hair and piercing pale blue eyes which could unnerve a witness on cross-examination. His new suntan looked good on him.

LeBaron had just returned from ten glorious, un lawyerly days on the beach at Guymas. The MacIntyre dog-bite litigation had finally settled, and he had instantly spent every cent of the modest fee on plane fare to Mexico, before he really had a chance to contemplate the soundest way to invest his temporary profit.

Now he was back, his money exchanged for a suntan, his freedom stolen by that sneak-thief time, and the rent was overdue. He yawned. "Something will turn up," he said to himself and turned another page.

LeBaron had been skirting the precipice of financial collapse for so long it had grown as familiar as an old neighborhood. So far, something had always turned up. "And anyway," he would tell himself when despair would finally ferment into the heady wine of fatalism, which seemed to occur more and more frequently of late, "I came into

town with nothing, so if I go out the same way, there's no great loss." He stretched and yawned and turned another page.

He pursued with interest an article about the growing political unrest in Guatemala. LeBaron had never actually made it as far south as Guatemala, but he had managed to spend time in Mexico each year for a number of years now, whether he could afford it or not. He was concerned, nonetheless, because what happened in Guatemala was bound to affect what happened in Mexico, and what happened in Mexico was bound to affect the security of his little "retirement fund". He still had almost \$4500 in Mexican bonds salted away from the intruding eyes of the IRS. It was an investment from an earlier, happier age, now earning nearly eighty per cent interest. It wasn't much, but it was his escape route in the event the shit ever hit the fan.

So LeBaron found the article unsettling. Communist guerrillas, supplied with Russian arms by way of Cuba, were involved in a hit-and-run offensive campaign in a renewed attempt to destabilize the country. Mass uprisings and civil war loomed on the horizon. Guatemala, the report announced, was "one year away" from the kind of bloody turmoil consuming El Salvador. LeBaron would have read the entire depressing report like a bystander transfixed at the scene of a gruesome automobile accident, had his secretary not cracked the door to announce quietly that a Mr. Felix Sterculius would like to see him if he could find the time.

"Who?" asked LeBaron, closing the offensive magazine and tossing it on the table behind him.

Becky Sue slipped through the narrow opening in an undulating motion that instantly reminded LeBaron why he put up with her laggardly typing, inaccurate spelling, and mathematical ineptitude. With her dark blond hair, pretty face, and incredible figure she might have become a very successful chorus girl if anyone had bothered to tell her that there was more to the world than slopping hogs and providing secretarial services for a failing small-town lawyer.

"Felix Sterculius," she whispered. LeBaron's pulse quickened at the implied intimacy of her whisper. "He just walked in. He wouldn't tell me what it's about. Says he wants you to file a lawsuit for him."

"Well, sure, tell him I'll be with him in a minute." He watched

her squeeze back through the doorway.

LeBaron had enough sense to keep a new client waiting lest he form the opinion that his new attorney had no other clients, which was too painfully close to the truth. He heaved a deep sigh and looked out the window.

LeBaron allowed his mind to wander back to the early days just after he had hired Becky Sue. He conjured up a picture of her smiling at him from the blue-striped sheets of his water bed, her firm round breasts white where her bikini had blocked out the sun. They hadn't resisted the carnal hunger which arose spontaneously at their earliest encounter. They had been marvelously compatible, from a physical standpoint, enjoying enthusiastically the pleasures of each other's body.

Afterward, though, there was never much to say. They didn't even seem to talk the same language. The smooth operation of the office had begun to deteriorate. LeBaron had learned the wisdom of the maxim: "Don't get involved with the help." Eventually he had decided to break off their sexual involvement, and they had both learned to live with the decision, though the undercurrent of erotic tension often still filled the space between them. At such times he wondered if he had made the right decision.

After a while he looked at his watch and then out the window again. Finally, he got up and asked his new client to please come in.

Felix Sterculius was tall and slim with silver-gray hair, perfectly trimmed. He was well-manicured and groomed and wore a neatly tailored, expensive charcoal pinstriped suit. His bearing was of the utmost dignity, yet light and resilient, as if he were about to serve up a tennis ball. LeBaron's first impression was that he must have come to the wrong office by mistake. But he addressed LeBaron by name, as if he had intended to see him and no one else. LeBaron asked what he could do for him.

"I would like for you to represent me," was the reply.

"I see," said LeBaron, with a show of careful consideration. "What seems to be the problem?"

"My wife is pregnant, Mr. LeBaron."

"I see," LeBaron repeated crisply, limbering up, alert for a more substantive volley.

“I would like the pregnancy terminated.”

“Have you discussed this matter with your wife?”

“No,” said Sterculius, looking down at his hands. “That would do no good. She is a rigid, practicing Catholic and would never consider an abortion.”

Like the first hint of morning light on the eastern horizon, the suspicion began to dawn in LeBaron’s mind that he had a wacko seated across from him. No wonder he had come to see LeBaron; he had probably already made the rounds and couldn’t find a legitimate attorney to represent him. But LeBaron had nothing better to do, so he politely explained his understanding of the law. “I’m afraid that a husband has no cause of action in California to prevent his wife from giving birth to her child. It’s her free choice. Nor, might I add,” he added, suspecting a hidden motive, “does prenatal protest by the father relieve him from his law-imposed duty to support the child once it is born.”

“I see.” It was Sterculius’ turn to reply tersely.

“Was the child conceived during wedlock?” asked LeBaron, exploring the delicate issue of paternity, which he now suspected to be the true underlying issue.

“Yes, of course. We have been married for . . . let’s see . . . four . . . no, five years this April.”

“Living together continuously?”

“Yes.”

“And you have had sexual relations with your wife?”

“Yes, of course.”

“Do you have any reason to believe that you are not the father of the child?”

“No, of course not.”

LeBaron had not expected that response. He scratched his head. “Well, anyway,” he continued gratuitously, “under California law you would be conclusively presumed to be the father.”

“But I *am* the father.” Sterculius hesitated, yet he obviously had more to say.

LeBaron waited, no longer certain he understood what the older man was trying to accomplish. He glanced openly at his watch to remind his client that an attorney’s time is a precious commodity.

Presently Sterculius began again. "I understand in California a lawsuit can be brought on grounds known as 'wrongful life.'"

"Well, yes," answered LeBaron, the cerebral wheels whirring to determine if the statement had any relevance. Perhaps he had been too hasty. "One court recently handed down a decision suggesting that a child born with defects known to the parents during pregnancy might have a cause of action against the parents for not terminating the pregnancy."

"Yes, you see," said Sterculius, brightening. "If the child could sue after birth, why couldn't it sue *before* to prevent the birth?"

LeBaron sat back in his chair. "Why not indeed," he thought to himself. And his thoughts answered themselves, "Because no lawyer in his right mind would take on such a hair-brained, marginal-recovery lawsuit without requiring up front a fat enough retainer to scare off any sensible client." But he smiled at the older man and said, "I suppose it could be done, but it's a new area of law, quite unconventional, and the chances of success are remote at best."

"But there is *some* chance of success, is there not?"

"Well, I'm not even sure the law will permit you to represent an unborn child," LeBaron demurred. "And you have no cause of action on your own behalf." He sat back in his chair and scratched his head. He needed a polite way to terminate the interview. He attempted another serve. "When is the child due?"

Sterculius smiled, as if returning a volley he had been prepared for. "Seven months."

"You're sure she's pregnant?"

"No question about it."

LeBaron thought the matter over. He had been following the "wrongful life" cases out of pure curiosity, but had never imagined he might come this close to one. The courts had weighed the delicate question of whether nonexistence is better than impaired existence, and one court had curiously tipped the balance in favor of nonexistence. He explained his understanding of the court's opinion briefly to Sterculius. "I'm sorry to bring up a sensitive subject, but it is important to get the facts out as completely as possible at the very beginning. What precisely is the nature of the birth defect that the doctors anticipate in this case?"

“Why, none that I know of. I haven’t had an opportunity to look at the medical records yet, however. The child may be perfectly normal.”

LeBaron laid his pen on his yellow legal pad. Yes, indeed, he did have a wacko in his office. “Then we are not really talking about a case of potentially impaired existence, are we?”

Sterculius smiled and leaned forward in his chair as if he were about to stroke home the advantage point. He looked LeBaron straight in the eye. “Is not *all* existence impaired existence?”

LeBaron looked at him. A philosophical wacko. Yet there was a mad reasonableness underlying the simple statement. Too bad California law held otherwise. Or did it? Perhaps the broader question had simply never reached the higher courts. Nor would it, as far as he was concerned, without the proper financial motivation. He decided to talk turkey. “You certainly have a point Mr. Sterculius. My hourly rate is seventy-five dollars.” It was only a slight exaggeration. “And while some attorneys may take a case on a contingent fee basis, your complaint seems to smack of injunctive relief rather than damages. Your suit would not generate a fund of money from which my attorney’s fees might be paid. I’m afraid that I would only be able to undertake representation on a straight-time fee basis. Perhaps you will be able to work out contingent fee arrangements with some other lawyer. I wish you the best of luck.” He rose and offered the older man his hand.

Sterculius pulled a wad of hundred dollar bills from an inside coat pocket and began peeling them off, one by one.

LeBaron sank slowly back into his chair in hypnotic fascination.

“Perhaps I did not make myself clear,” Sterculius said, manipulating the crisp bills with the graceful fingers of a magician, “but I would like to employ your services. At your usual hourly rate, of course. Is fifteen hundred enough to get the matter started?” He laid the clean bills on the edge of the cluttered desk. They looked out of place there, like debutantes lost at a punk-rock festival.

LeBaron looked up from the neat stack to Sterculius’ face, saw no hint of the tasteless joke he feared, and then down to the meager scribblings and doodles on the yellow pad in front of him. An attorney is not a judge, he thought, but an advocate, a hired gun. His job is to represent his client’s interests as best he can, right or wrong, for better or

for worse, in an adversary system wherein truth is ultimately attained through the resolution of conflicting claims. However, an attorney must not hold out unreasonable hopes of success, lest his client later sue him for misrepresentation.

He looked at the money once again, swallowed an internal protest, and said, "I must inform you that under the current status of California law, as I understand it--though I have yet to carefully research the problem--you have very little chance of winning such a lawsuit."

"I understand that, Mr. LeBaron. But if there is any chance of winning at all, I would like to proceed. You might say I simply want my day in court."

It was good. Too good. LeBaron was suspicious when things went too well, but he couldn't think of any plausible ulterior motive Sterculius might be concealing. Perhaps this was simply his peculiar way of humiliating his wife, rather than beating her soundly with his fists as most of LeBaron's clients would have done.

The older man smiled warmly, disarmingly. LeBaron made a note on his yellow pad to confirm to the client in a letter his painful disclosure that the lawsuit didn't have a snowball's chance in hell. Then LeBaron smiled. "I will take the case." He reached lovingly for the fifteen crisp one-hundred dollar bills. "I will have my secretary write you a receipt--"

"That won't be necessary, Mr. LeBaron. After all, if you can't trust your lawyer, who can you trust? But there *is* one other thing."

LeBaron's heart sank, and he set the bills down gingerly at arm's length so as not to become too attached to them. "What is that?"

"Well, Mr. LeBaron, my wife lives in Mexico--"

"Mexico!" interrupted LeBaron. "This lawsuit will have to be brought at the residence of the unborn child, which is obviously the place where the mother resides. I'm afraid I won't be able to represent you in Mex--"

"Pardon me," broke in Sterculius, laughing formally, "did I say that my *wife* lived in Mexico? I'm sorry. I meant to say that my wife's *doctor* lives in Mexico. No, *she* lives right here in this very county, but the pregnancy was diagnosed and some prenatal testing was done while we were on vacation in Guadalajara."

Something wasn't quite right. LeBaron had the distinct

impression that Sterculius was making the whole story up just to satisfy him. A crazy notion, but he couldn't quite shake it, even though the older man's benign demeanor betrayed no sign of deception. "What is your residence address here?" LeBaron asked suspiciously.

Without the slightest hesitation Sterculius rattled off a street address in the better section of nearby Del Oro, which LeBaron jotted down on his pad.

"I also have an investigator working for me in Mexico," Sterculius continued, "an Englishman named Tewksbury. He is assembling all the necessary medical records. But here is the problem: I may need to ask you to fly to Guadalajara to make sure Tewksbury has gotten together everything that might be relevant."

LeBaron was struck dumb.

"And perhaps take a statement from the doctor," added Sterculius after a moment.

Small world, LeBaron thought. He had a strange feeling that Sterculius already knew about his frequent trips to Mexico. He finally found the composure to say, "I've spent a lot of time in Guadalajara. I lived near there for almost two years."

"No! Really? What a remarkable coincidence." The older man slapped his leg and appeared genuinely surprised. "This could help matters immensely. That is, if the trip actually becomes necessary, as I fear it will. Of course, I intend to pay all expenses, plus a per diem fee that we can agree upon. Say, \$750 per day?"

"That would probably be adequate," LeBaron fought to keep from breaking into an enormous grin. At that rate, he could earn the retainer in two days of vacation, with all expenses paid. Had he finally found the golden-egg-laying goose? LeBaron didn't want to look for reasons to distrust Sterculius. "Yes, if I have enough advance notice," he said, his face a mask of seriousness, "I would probably be able to get away for a few days, anyway. Only if the case requires it, of course."

"Of course," replied Sterculius, smiling as if he had just scored the match point.

An hour later, the interview completed, LeBaron walked his new client out to his Mercedes, and shaking hands like an old friend, ended the most successful beginning of his short career. Slowly he counted out

the fifteen one-hundred-dollar bills for Becky Sue to log into the receipts, but refused to give her any of the details. Instead, he sent her down the street to the local market for a bottle of cold champagne, promising the full story when she returned.

Well, well, well, things were looking up, LeBaron mused as he glanced through the four pages of detailed notes he had just taken. Then he laid them aside carefully and leaned back in his chair. Monday he would begin researching the case and draft a complaint. Today he and Becky Sue were going to celebrate. This case might even be weird enough for him to leak to the newspapers as a special interest story. He might get interviewed on local television if news were slow enough. The free advertising would be another paving stone on the road to unbridled success.

When Becky Sue returned he locked the front door and drew the blinds. Enough business for one day. He explained in splendid detail the wonderful prospects involved in the new case as he fiddled with the wire harness restraining the plastic stopper on the bottle. Pop! The stopper caromed about the office, denting the acoustic ceiling tile overhead, and the bubbling liquid foamed onto Becky Sue's desktop. They were giggling together even before they drank their first toast from stained coffee mugs. "To prosperity!" chortled LeBaron.

"To our happy office," chorused Becky Sue brightly.

They inhaled the bubbling liquid, and LeBaron refilled the cups, then lowered himself into one of the waiting chairs next to Becky Sue's desk. They laughed and joked, and a warm glow worked its way under the cares of the long week and gradually dislodged them.

"If the rest of this Sterculius money comes through," said LeBaron at length, as he grew magnanimous in the alcoholic glow of success, "there will be a modest, though appreciative bonus in this for you. In thanks for your undying allegiance through troubled times."

Becky Sue was overjoyed and proclaimed her fondest appreciation for her wonderful boss. On impulse, she bent over and kissed him affectionately on the cheek, and as she did so, her breasts lightly brushed his shoulder. As she straightened up, their eyes met, and in that overflowing instant before they each looked away in embarrassment, the shadow of an unspeakable urgency passed between them.

LeBaron awkwardly splashed the rest of the champagne into the cups. His fingers felt thick and bumbling from the alcohol, and his pulse raced, pumping exotic chemicals into his system. She too was flushed with the moment and obviously excited to be alone with him in the forbidden gap between work and weekend. The imminence of further physical contact lay palpably between them.

LeBaron stood up and lurched to the open doorway of his office.

Two-and-one-half thousand million years ago terrestrial life had blundered upon the strategy of sexual reproduction, and its subtle efficacy had been improving ever since. LeBaron glanced over his shoulder at Becky Sue and his arms and legs tingled with the desire to touch her and press her against him. Piquantly she smiled back. He stuck his hands deep into his pockets and sighed, turning to look out his office window. LeBaron had good reason to resist these insistent animal drives, after all. They had nothing in common beyond a physical craving, and their last involvement had merely disrupted the tranquility of the office. Only a fool would dare get involved with the help. He considered himself to be a creature of reason and discipline. Yet he lingered in the doorway.

Besides, Becky Sue had become engaged to a local pig-farmer named Ricky Lee Walton. True, she sometimes talked of breaking off their engagement, but love never runs smooth. The warm glow and intimacy of the moment were apparently addling her reason, however, for she stood and slowly glided over beside him. She slipped her hand under his arm and laid her head against his shoulder.

“Don’t get involved with the help,” a voice still cried in the recesses of his mind, but more distant than before. Reason, after all, was little more than an apology tacked on in the most recent eyeblink of evolutionary development. What chance did it have against such ancient reproductive tactics as the tingling of the skin, forgetfulness, and the rising tide of adrenaline and testosterone-laced blood swelling sweet erectile tissues.

LeBaron turned and embraced Becky Sue. He bent and kissed her yielding mouth, felt the warmth of her body pressing his. For a timeless instant they stood clinging together, craving each other, enraptured. Nature was toying with them and might have had its way if the telephone hadn’t rung.

It was her fiance, Ricky Lee. He called every afternoon just after slopping the hogs. He didn't quite trust Becky Sue alone all day with her godless shyster boss.

As Becky Sue chatted nervously, LeBaron withdrew into his office and closed the door. He sat down heavily in his chair. The yellow pad of scribbled notes lay just where he had left it. He thought of his reasonable objection to involvement with his secretary, and of his receding passion, and he smiled. Somehow choices were being made, but it was more like they were making him, than he was making them. The storm had passed for today, but he wondered what the future might hold. Perhaps another day, when things were arranged a little more favorably Distracted by the petty indulgences of the moment, LeBaron little suspected that things would never be simple for him again.

CHAPTER 3

“Well, I guess we’re ready to get started.” L. Dencil Peterman, chairman of the Department of Psychology at Del Oro State University and head of the Retention, Tenure and Promotion committee, spoke with a nervous and thoroughly inauthentic cheerfulness. “This is the first step in the process to determine whether Dr., uh, Rivers will be granted tenure.”

Peterman was a relic of earlier days at Del Oro. A once ambitious young scholar, he had fallen victim to the snail’s pace of a small state university. A gaunt man, he peered out from behind old-fashioned wire-rimmed spectacles. A thin moustache rode uneasily on his upper lip. The only animation that invaded his visage was a twitch of the eyebrows that appeared when he was under stress, which was most of the time. Once he had aspired to a university vice president’s chair, maybe even the presidency. Now he hoped only to spend the last few years of his career as Dean of the School of Behavioral and Social Sciences. And he was going to make damn sure that nothing got in the way of that vestigial dream.

“Would you like to begin, Dr. Rivers, by telling the committee what you see as your role in psychology and in this department over the next five years.” Peterman squinted expectantly across the table.

Dr. Jeffery Rivers sat at the opposite end of the table staring inscrutably back at Peterman and the other three committee members. He looked younger than his thirty-five years. Though not handsome in a classical way, his intelligent, forthright eyes and confident bearing made him an attractive man. An easy sense of humor and concern for students had made him a popular teacher. Perhaps too popular, he thought ruefully, remembering several other “popular” instructors who had had to bear their colleague’s wrath at promotion time. He had been thinking about this meeting for several weeks and what he would say when his moment finally arrived. He didn’t plan to stay at Del Oro State indefinitely, but then he wasn’t ready to toss away his chance to acquire

tenure. He was going to have to tread the tightrope between saying what he really thought about the department and misrepresenting himself so egregiously that it would be obvious to the committee.

“As a teacher. I see myself as a teacher.”

The committee members fumbled nervously with their pencils and stole glances at one another.

“But, Jeff, don’t you have some area or specialty you’d like to move into. Your earlier publications on alcohol and drug abuse were quite good, yet you’ve stopped publishing and doing research. Do you plan to continue that work or do you have some new directions you’d like to pursue?” The speaker was Sally Zimmerman, a small, drab fiftyish woman with washed-out blue eyes and close-cropped dull blond hair. Another department old timer, Sally was truly dedicated to her profession. She attended all the psychological conventions, at her own expense if necessary, reading papers, listening to papers, talking about papers, and trying desperately to find some unattached male to whisper sweet nothings in her ear. She had spotted Jeff’s potential as an inamorato shortly after he had been hired. His disinterest was almost immediately apparent, however, and now her feelings toward him vacillated between secret lust and a desire for retribution against him as the nearest representative of life’s inherent unfairness.

“Well, Sally, I am changing directions, but just when I will have something new to submit for publication, I can’t say. My priority right now is teaching, and since I’ve been devoting most of my time to developing new classes, I just haven’t had time to think about starting any new research.”

Jeff had anticipated the question and planned his answer carefully. If he had wanted to share his innermost thoughts, he would have told them that he considered ninety-five per cent of the research literature trivial, written and submitted only because some second-rate scholar needed one more publication for his next promotion, published because an insecure editor needed more copy to fill the pages of his nascent volume, and read by his colleagues in the endless barnyard scramble for a higher position on the meaningless dungheap of psychological trivia. But he wasn’t going to be that honest just yet.

“And what exactly is this new direction?” Peterman queried, his

eyes shifting nervously from Jeff to Sally and then back.

“Generalist.” Jeff replied, looking Peterman straight in the eye.

“A journalist?” Bill Carlson, the third committee member, was confused. He was confused most of the time. An obese, sweaty man, Carlson seldom seemed to comprehend what was going on around him. His incompetence as a teacher was legend among students. How he had retained a professorship was a mystery to Jeff. He was the best argument against the tenure system in town, maybe in the state.

“Generalist, Bill. I think Jeff said ‘a generalist’,” Peterman corrected. He suppressed an eye roll and looked back at Jeff. Though he used Carlson shamelessly as an errand boy and occasionally as an axe-man, Peterman had trouble disguising his distaste for the man.

“And what would you do as a generalist?” Peterman asked warily. Jeff’s unexpected response made the chairman ever so slightly uncomfortable.

“Well, as I see it, psychology has a lot of specialists--people who accumulate large stocks of knowledge about limited areas. What it lacks are generalists--people, specialists if you will, who devote their energies toward integrating the various specialties. And maybe go beyond that to integrating psychology with other academic disciplines like political science, economics, biology, religious studies . . .”

“Mmmm, yes, well, that sounds nice in theory, but practically speaking what exactly can we expect to see?” Peterman had regained his air of superiority.

“It’s a little difficult to be specific at this point in time,” Jeff conceded. “A standard methodology has yet to be established, and work in the area has only just begun. But I might, for example, work on extending the work of Alan Watts, and integrating Eastern psychology with Western psychology, or help behaviorists and psychoanalysts find some common ground for describing and discussing human motivation and behavior.”

“And this might just be a wild goose chase, too.” Peterman’s tone had more than a hint of the rancor he had been nourishing for the last twenty years.

“Well I really don’t think so.” Jeff replied. Momentarily he considered appending a rationale to his assertion, but thought better of it

and remained silent.

“Ummhhh . . . so your area of specialization is . . . generalism.” Peterman raised his eyebrows challengingly as he glared down the table at Jeff. “Well, I don’t think we need to belabor this,” he announced officiously. “We have several matters to discuss, and time is of the essence.”

Surprised by Peterman’s abruptness, Jeff glanced around the table, but he found no sympathetic eyes returning his gaze. Each of the committee members stared quietly at the RTP folder in front of him.

“Let’s see,” Peterman continued. “Publications, service to the community, committee work. All this seems to be in order and quite straight forward. Teaching methods.” Peterman spoke the words slowly and with relish. “Jack, I think you had some questions here.”

Jack Termin was a hard, dry pedant who lived by the book of science. A small ferret of a man, Termin had large ears and sharp, darting eyes. His temper and his patience with non-behavioral social scientists were no longer than his graying crew cut. A sworn, confirmed, and ordained behaviorist, he rejected any other approach to understanding the human condition. “Dr. Rivers, I have here your required reading lists from the last several semesters. Strangely, I find not one text book on any of the lists. Instead I see such books as *Journey to Ixtlan* by Carlos Castenada, *Psychotherapy East and West* by Alan Watts, *Zen Mind, Beginners Mind* by . . . some Chinese author, *Student as Nigger* by Jerry Farber, and then several things by Freud. Not one volume by a legitimate behavioral scientist. How can you possibly teach behavioral science with this kind of text material? Students cannot help but get a badly distorted picture of the field from this sort of . . . material.” Termin was not offering constructive criticism.

“Well, Jack, I can understand that someone of your orientation might not agree with my choice of readings, but I think what we’re talking about here is simply a difference in perspective and choice of teaching method.”

“It is not a question of choice of perspective at all, Dr. Rivers,” Termin replied forcefully. “It is our job as instructors to teach students the best of current thinking in the field of behavioral science. You cannot possibly do that with the readings you have assigned.”

“Excuse me, Jack, but I don’t think all the data is in on which is the best approach to psychology. And until it is, I am not about to put all my eggs in the behaviorist basket. As someone who prides himself on being an empiricist, I’m sure you, too, will want to wait until all the facts are in before making your decision on the relative merits of different approaches to psychology.”

“I don’t have to wait. I already know,” Termin insisted loudly, exasperated. “The only way we are ever going to understand human psychology is by applying the scientific method to the problem as behaviorism has done. Now when you’re teaching a survey course like 1-A, you might have to bring in Freud and Rogers and some of those other people, but what the hell do you think you’re doing presenting religion as a legitimate part of psychology?”

“I assume you’re talking about *Zen Mind, Beginners Mind* and my lectures on Zen and Mexican Indian sorcery. Jack, I not only have the right to present that material in an introductory course, I have an obligation to tell students about it. We all do. These are ancient and tested systems of psychology.”

“What!?” Jack Termin was about to explode. “Nobody is going to tell me I have to teach some mumbo jumbo religious garbage in my classes.”

“Well maybe somebody ought to tell you something about teaching.” Jeff regretted it almost as soon as he had said it. He had promised himself he wasn’t going to get carried away.

“Dr. Rivers. Let’s try to keep this on a professional level,” Peterman admonished. “I think Jack has a point, and I hope it hasn’t been wasted on you.”

Jeff looked at the table in front of him and said nothing. He knew he was being set up, and he wondered what was coming next.

Peterman pulled a sheet of paper out of his folder and set it on the table before him. “I have a letter here from the father of one of your students. It’s rather long so I won’t read it. To paraphrase, he is quite upset that you are discussing and advocating the use of drugs to students in your 1-A classes. He has asked that I remove you from teaching. This is not the first time we have received such a complaint, Dr. Rivers. Have you anything to say in your defense?”

“It’s a bunch of crap. I have never advocated drug use in any class at any time. I have presented and discussed drug use in religious or quasi-religious rituals in the same spirit as Aldous Huxley or anyone else who simply wants to understand the drug’s effects. Anyone who misunderstood that as advocacy of use did not listen to what I said.”

“He also says that you have denigrated the Christian religion and affronted his daughter’s sensibilities by suggesting that Jesus Christ was a mushroom.”

“Sure I gave them some of the stuff from Allegro’s book. I never told them it was the truth. I just said it was an alternative interpretation of the Bible, and that they should try to explore all alternatives before making up their minds.”

“Well, you’ve got to be careful when you’re dealing with a bunch of impressionable young minds, don’t you think? It’s just not professionally responsible to go off recklessly offending the sensibilities of the community.” Peterman was beginning to work up a self-righteous head of steam.

“Well, if exposing students to alternative points of view and trying to make them conscious of their unconscious biases is considered reckless and irresponsible, then I guess that’s what I do and what I intend to continue doing.”

Uncomfortable Socratic ghosts were being stirred up, and the committee members fidgeted quietly in their seats.

Peterman, feeling the challenge, decided he was going to have to come down on this young upstart who was beginning to create some waves that might adversely affect his aspirations for deanship. “Dr. Rivers. This feedback is intended for your edification, as an aid in your professional growth. If you continue to treat it in such an ego-centric and hostile way, this committee will have no alternative but to respond accordingly. And while we’re on the subject of professional responsibility, Dr. Rivers, it has become widely known that you are pursuing an, uh, extra-curricular involvement with one of our students. While the university has no rules or guidelines specifically prohibiting such liaisons, the American Psychological Association’s code of ethics does proscribe such behavior and I think it would be in your best interests to discontinue this . . . affair.”

Jeff glared balefully at the Chairman. “That’s bullshit!” he replied quietly. “What I do outside class with other adults is none of your goddamned business. And if you ever even vaguely imply publicly that anything I’m doing is improper, illegal, or unethical, you had better get on the phone to your lawyer, because I’m gonna sue your ass for slander.

“And another thing,” he continued, his voice rising, “I’m not sure I even want tenure in this jerkwater institution, but I’ll tell you what. My student evaluations are as high as anybody’s in this department and I’ve got more publications than half of the full professors here. I deserve tenure. If this committee tries to stop my promotion on the basis of the stuff that’s been brought up here today, or anything else, I’m gonna sue your asses for that, too.”

Jeff shoved his chair back from the table and stormed out of the room. Oblivious to the people in the corridor, he made his way toward the exit. He was enraged by Peterman’s gall, his stupidity. And Termin. That tunnel-visioned twirp.

He left the building and entered the gray April afternoon. He could hardly believe what had just happened. In fact, many of the things that had happened during his four years of teaching at Del Oro had come as a surprise. Graduate school had prepared him academically for his position, but had failed to give him much insight into the practical aspects of teaching at a middle-sized state university. Slowly, sometimes painfully, he was learning. And the more he learned, the less he wanted to stay in academia. A professorship had seemed so glamorous, so important at first. But gradually the luster of his fantasy had been dulled by the corrosive power of day-to-day reality.

He had come to his first teaching job at Del Oro with great expectations for improving the quality of education. Four-and-one-half years of teaching undergraduates had, however, tarnished the enthusiasm he had brought to the first semesters of his didactic endeavors. And what commitment had not been dissolved by the lackadaisical student attitude of the school ranked number two in Playboy Magazine’s “Good Party Schools Directory” had been poleaxed by the petty backbiting of a lackluster faculty.

Later that afternoon Jeff was back in his office discussing the

ill-fated meeting with his office-mate, Jay Cadwalader. “You know, Jay, if I got a decent offer, or better yet an indecent offer, I’d chuck this whole academic scene. I really would.”

The two friends had often discussed fantasies of leaving their professorial robes behind and trying on new careers. Both had grown restless and cynical in their years of teaching. Now Jeff found himself one giant step closer to his escape fantasy.

“I think I’ll wait till next semester to get out,” Jay responded. “I’ve got this gorgeous blond that sits in the front row of my nine o’clock 1-A class, and, Jeff, you would not believe her warm weather wardrobe.”

There was a soft knock on the office door. Cadwalader called out a “C’mon in” over his shoulder and the door swung open. It was Tod Richards, an acquaintance of Jeff’s from the Anthropology Department.

“Well, well, what brings you over to this end of the campus?” Jeff asked. “Looking for more data on sex and repression in savage societies?”

The corners of Tod’s mouth turned up momentarily in a poor imitation of a smile. “Hi guys. How’s it going?” Without giving them time to respond, he asked glumly, “Have you heard about Eric?”

“No. I didn’t know he was back from Mexico yet,” Jeff answered.

“Well, apparently he got back last night or early this morning, and, uh, one of his neighbors found him dead just before noon.”

The playful smile evaporated from Jeff’s face. He sat stunned, staring at his colleague in disbelief.

“I just heard about it at the Anthro office. I thought you’d want to know. It’s hard to believe. They found him this morning on the floor of his study. The cause of death hasn’t been determined, but his house was all torn apart, and the police think he surprised a burglar who panicked and did him in.”

“God in heaven!” Cadwalader exploded angrily. “What is wrong with this world.”

Jeff lowered his head and brought his hand to his forehead. “Shit.” It was a barely audible whisper. Although Eric Johanson was much Jeff’s senior, the two men had grown to be close friends in the last years and shared a number of interests. “Did they catch the son-of-a-bitch who did it?”

“No. And apparently there’s not a clue to go on. Strangely enough, whoever it was left behind a lot of valuables sitting right in plain sight. I guess the guy just freaked out and left in a hurry.”

The bad news hung heavily upon the three men. Cadwalader finally broke the thick silence. “I don’t know about you guys, but I don’t feel like hanging around here. You want to come over to my house for a drink?”

“Thanks,” Tod replied, “but I’ve got to meet my wife in a little while.” He turned to Jeff. “Sorry to be the one to bring you the bad news.”

Jeff nodded.

“I’ll be talking with you.” Tod shut the door discreetly behind him.

“Jeff?” Cadwalader asked softly.

“Yeah.” Jeff knew it was going to be a long afternoon. Eric had been a good friend, and the thought of never seeing him again would be hard getting used to. The senselessness of the murder made it doubly difficult. Somberly the two men donned their raincoats as protection against the gray drizzle of a late April day.

Just then the door swung open. A healthy, tanned face appeared, highlighted by sparkling green eyes and encircled by wavy auburn hair. It was Krista Bennett, a graduate assistant in the Department and Jeff’s current inamorata. “Hi, Doctors,” she giggled. “Do you have a few minutes, Jeff?”

“Hi, Kris. Come on in and close the door.”

Sensing something amiss, Krista stepped quickly inside and shut the door.

“Eric Johanson was killed this morning. Tod Richards just told us.”

“Oh, my God. That’s terrible. What happened?”

“He was murdered by some bastard he discovered burglarizing his house.” The sadness in Jeff’s voice barely outweighed his anger.

“Is there anything I can do?”

“No. We were just going over to Jay’s for a drink. Anything I need to do for you before we go?”

“No. It was nothing important.”

“What time are you going to be home?”

“About six,” she answered.

“I’ll call you.”

Jeff awoke with a start to a nasty hangover. Oh God, he thought, I’m late for my eight o’clock. Then the pain erased his thoughts, and he laid his head back on the pillow. As consciousness gradually returned, Jeff remembered it was Friday and he had no classes until one o’clock. He relaxed and groggily contemplated getting up to take some aspirin.

The sheets next to him moved. He turned his head and saw familiar auburn curls.

“Krista,” he croaked.

“Mmmmmmm. You awake already?” she asked sleepily. “I thought you’d be out until noon, at least.”

“What happened?”

“You needed a little help getting to bed. I guess the business about Eric hit you pretty hard.”

Eric. The word echoed through his throbbing head. “Oh, Jesus,” he whispered as the events of the previous day filtered through the slowly-clearing fog of his morning-after.

Krista made some soft morning sounds and moved closer as she slid her hand across his chest. He lay there enjoying her warmth and comfort. Pressed against his arm he felt the softness of her breast, and a cell assembly deep in his hypothalamus urged him to forget about the aspirin.

A crisp knock on the front door triggered a spinal reflex, and by the time the input signal had cycled to his ravaged organs of consciousness, Jeff found himself sitting up, his legs over the edge of the bed. He heaved himself into a standing position and stumbled unsteadily toward the closet. Grabbing his robe, he lurched for the stairs.

The knock came again with more urgency.

“Coming, coming,” he called a little too loudly for his own comfort. He managed to ease down the stairway and open the door.

“Special delivery for Dr. Jeffery Rivers.”

“I’m Dr. Rivers.”

“Sign here, please.”

He signed, accepted a large manila envelope, and closed the door.

His senses reeling from the sudden activity, he stared blankly at the silent missive in his hand. He drew a deep breath. He needed those aspirin and a strong cup of coffee. His head throbbed as he trudged gingerly into the kitchen, dropped the envelope on the kitchen table, and put some water on to boil.

Outside the rain had stopped, and the sun was beginning to make its appearance through the departing clouds. "S'bout time," he muttered absently, recalling the unbroken gray of the previous week. The last of the April showers had done its work, and fat droplets hung heavily from the new foliage bursting forth in his back yard. Hypnotized, he stared at the bejeweled blossoms on the Dogwood just outside the window.

The insistent hiss of the tea kettle brought him back. He loaded a big spoonful of instant coffee into his cup and added some water. Slowly he turned, shook four aspirin from the bottle on the counter, popped them into his mouth, and washed them down with the scalding beverage.

Jeff returned to the table, eased himself gently into a chair, and picked up the envelope. Turning it over several times, he was dumbfounded to see that the return address was that of his own office at the university. The typed label bore no other marks to identify the sender.

"What the hell is this?" he asked the empty room.

He tore open the end of the envelope and found inside a smaller envelope and a letter several pages in length. The small envelope was heavily crisscrossed with tape and in black pen on both sides bore the words, "Please Do Not Open." Mystified, Jeff turned his attention to the letter. Leafing quickly through to the last page, he was stunned to see the signature of Eric Johanson.

"Holy shit," he muttered, and returned quickly to the first page.

April 28 Tucson, Ariz.

Dear Jeff,

The contents of this letter should not be shared with anyone. As you read further, you will understand the need for secrecy. Please forgive me for involving you in an undertaking that may be dangerous, but I need to have

the help of someone I can trust. And, if my suspicions are correct, the rewards for our efforts will be enormous.

Briefly, here is the situation--

Just then Jeff heard the stairs creak under Krista's weight. Quickly he replaced the contents of the larger envelope and tossed it carelessly onto a pile of papers on the writing desk in the corner of the kitchen.

"Who was it?" Krista asked, stepping sleepily through the door, clad in one of Jeff's old plaid shirts.

"Just the mailman."

"Oh sure, I should have known."

"Huh?"

"Doesn't the postman always knock twice?"

"Oh . . . yeah."

"Sorry, I shouldn't try those on a sick man." Krista put her arm around Jeff's shoulder as she offered her mock apology. She took her favorite mug down from its peg above the stove. "Anything important?" She spooned some instant coffee in.

"I don't know." Jeff watched her pour hot water into the mug and stir the contents. "I haven't read it yet. Thought I'd let my head clear a bit first. Do you have anything scheduled this morning?"

Krista looked at the clock. "Oh my God! I've got to get going. I promised to take Steve's ten-thirty Physiology Lab." She tried to drink her coffee, burned her lip, and set the mug on the stove. "I'm going to get dressed," she purred, encircling Jeff's neck with her arms and kissing him on the cheek.

He patted her arm absently.

"Could you write me a forty-minute lecture on the rhinencephalon . . . to go?" she called over her shoulder as she scurried out of the kitchen.

"It'll mean more to you if you do it yourself."

"Don't know enough for forty minutes, huh?" she teased from halfway up the stairs.

Jeff chuckled to himself. When he was sure she was all the way upstairs, he picked up the enigmatic letter and stared at it. He decided to wait until Krista was gone before reading the rest and tossed it back on

the writing desk. He ambled over to the stove to fix himself another cup of coffee.

Krista entered the kitchen a few minutes later, drank her coffee in one big gulp, and set the mug in the sink. “Will you be in your office this afternoon?”

“Yeah, after my one o’clock”

“I’ll see you then.” She gave him a peck on the lips. “Hey, I’m really sorry about Eric. I know how close you guys were.”

“Thanks. And thanks for putting this degenerate to bed last night.”

“Anytime. Gotta run. See ya.” She was gone.

Jeff listened for her car to start, warm up briefly, then pull away. He took the letter out of its envelope and quickly found the point where he had been interrupted.

Briefly, here is the situation. Six days ago I bought an interesting artifact in a small shop in Guadalajara. I have known the shopkeeper for many years and he watches for artifacts which might be of interest to me. Although I was uncertain of its precise nature when I purchased it, I now have compelling reasons to believe it is a map to a treasure of enormous wealth reputedly hidden by the Tarascan King Zuangua around 1520 to prevent its confiscation by the invading Spaniards.

Since my expertise is in Aztec and Mayan cultures, I realized I would need help deciphering the glyphs. I decided to return to the United States to enlist the aid of my daughter, Shimoko. As I have mentioned to you before, she is an expert in the history and language of the Tarascans.

Shortly after I crossed the border, however, my vehicle was broken into and searched, although nothing was taken. That same evening my motel room was ransacked. Again nothing was taken. I’m afraid someone knows I have the map and wants to take it away from me.

I believe it is no longer safe to keep the map concealed on my person. Hence, I am delivering it to you in the enclosed envelope. Please keep it in your safe deposit box until I get back. I'll show it to you then.

I hope I'm not going to have trouble getting through to Shimoko. I'd like to get her out of that damned Church of the Ancient Mysteries. This map might be the thing that does it. I hope so.

I'll fill you in on the details when I get back. Looking forward to seeing you soon.

As always, Eric

Jeff turned the little package over in his hands. Could this be what Eric had been killed for? He decided not to open it for the time being. Carefully he reread the letter. Maybe he ought to take everything down to the police right now and let them sort matters out. But somehow he didn't think that was what Eric would have wanted him to do. No, he owed it to Eric first to pay a visit to his daughter first.

Later that afternoon Jeff was finishing a lecture to his Psychology of Personality class. "So you see, psychology and religion really have a common historical basis, they ask some of the same questions and deal with some of the same problems. Both are interested in the meaning of life, the reasons humans behave as they do, and the reasons we experience the world as we do. Religion, however, has forgotten that its metaphors are *only* metaphors and has taken them quite literally. Psychology, desperately desiring respectability, has adopted the scientific method and made of it a Procrustean bed for its subject matter. In doing so, both have lost some of their essential meaning and vitality. Any questions?"

A well-scrubbed brunette in the middle of the room raised her hand.

"Yes, Debbie."

"Where does psychotherapy fit in?"

"Good question. That's exactly what we're going to talk about next time. Anybody else? Okay, don't forget to pick up one of the

handouts on the front of my desk on your way out. We'll be discussing the material in them next Monday. See you then."

Jeff watched the students file out of the small lecture room as he gathered his notes together. Tucking the materials under his arm, he headed toward the door, exchanging pleasantries with the few remaining students.

"Dr. Rivers?" A slightly antagonistic voice shot out of the crowd to his left.

Jeff turned, semi-consciously recognizing a non-student tone. "What can I do for you?"

A stocky, balding man in an old, worn brown suit stuck out his hand. "Lieutenant Durken, Del Oro P. D. I'd like to talk to you about Eric Johanson."

"Sure. Let's go down to my office."

They entered his empty office, and Jeff motioned to a chair beside his desk. "Have a seat."

"I understand you were a friend of the deceased." Durken sat down without taking his eyes off Jeff's face.

"Yes."

"What can you tell us that might shed some light on Dr. Johanson's death?"

Jeff's thoughts raced to the letter. "Nothing really," he deadpanned. "I'm totally surprised and shocked. Eric hadn't an enemy in the world. But I thought the police had determined he was killed in a scuffle with a burglar."

Durken adopted a superior tone. "That's the way it would appear. However, things are not always as they seem. We're checking out all possible leads. Did Dr. Johanson have anything of particular value in his home?"

"Well . . . he did have some artifacts of archaeological significance, some nice art works, the usual stereo, color tv, and so forth. But no Mona Lisas, if that's what you mean."

"You're pretty familiar with the contents of Dr. Johanson's house?"

"Probably as familiar as anyone."

"We'd like to have you come over and take a look around. See if

you notice anything missing.”

“Sure. When?”

“This afternoon.” Durken’s tone left little room for refusal.

“Okay. How about three-thirty?”

“Fine. I’ll meet you there.” Durken rose, grasped the doorknob, then turned. “Sorry about your friend, Dr. Rivers.” His gruff voice had become more friendly. “We’re doing our best to find the party or parties responsible.”

“Thank you, Lieutenant. I’m sure you are.”

Eric Johanson’s house was a mess. Drawers had been emptied onto the floor, furniture torn apart, and paintings ripped off the wall. It looked more like the work of a berserk vandal than a thief.

Jeff found Lieutenant Durken in the study talking with a uniformed policeman. Durken dismissed the officer and greeted Jeff. “Thanks for stopping by, Dr. Rivers.”

“The way this place is torn up, it’s going to be hard to tell what’s missing.”

“We realize that, but we’d appreciate it if you’d do the best you can. Why don’t we start in the living room.”

“Whatever they were looking for, it must have been small,” Durken said as they inspected the fragments of a tiny Aztec ceremonial vase smashed against the hearth. “And they must have wanted it pretty bad.”

Jeff nodded. He no longer harbored any doubt the map was what the murderer had been after. He wondered if there was any way of tracing it into his hands.

An hour later Jeff was preparing to leave. “Like I said, I can’t be absolutely certain that nothing is missing, but it seems to me that everything of significance is still here.” The two men walked slowly toward the front door.

“We appreciate your help, Professor. If we need anything else from you, we’ll be in touch.” Lieutenant Durken held out his hand.

“One other thing, Lieutenant. Have they established the cause of death yet?”

“Preliminary findings indicate natural causes, though the

coroner's report won't be out for a coupla days."

Jeff looked around the demolished house. "Natural causes?"

Durken nodded. "Heart attack. There were some superficial cuts and bruises on the body, but it looks like Dr. Johanson was literally frightened to death. Why?"

"Just curious. Goodbye, Lieutenant."

The funeral was Sunday. Jeff had greeted the beautiful, sunny May morning with mixed emotions. The thought of bidding a final farewell to his old friend saddened him, but he was looking forward to meeting Shimoko Johanson.

Not that he was sure she was coming. His phone calls to the head office of the Church of the Ancient Mysteries had produced less than salutary results. He kept getting transferred to the same emotionless female voice which told him time and again that Shimoko was unavailable at the moment, but that his message would be passed along to her as quickly as possible. Jeff had insisted that Shimoko return his call and had finally threatened to come out there himself. But it was a male member of the Church who had called him back. The man had politely taken down all of the pertinent information regarding the funeral, but he would make no commitment to Shimoko's attendance, promising only that he would "do his best to get Sister Shimoko to the funeral."

Jeff had no difficulty recognizing the delegation from the Church of the Ancient Mysteries when it arrived. Their saffron robes stood out among the conservatively dressed Del Orans like poppies in a wheat field. It took him only a moment, too, to pick Shimoko out of the group. The five-year-old snapshots of her taken at one of Eric's archaeological digs did not, however, prepare him for the exotic beauty who entered the chapel. He found himself stealing glances at her throughout the service and later at the cemetery. More than ever he was anxious to meet her.

People began to depart following the conclusion of the graveside services. Jeff positioned himself to intercept Shimoko and her entourage as they made their way back to the parking area.

"Ms. Johanson?"

"Yes?"

"I'm Jeff Rivers. I was a friend of your father."

Shimoko stopped and stared at him with an unblinking gaze that made him wonder for an instant if he had said something wrong. Though blond as her Scandinavian father, Shimoko had golden brown skin and features of a distinctly Oriental caste, the heritage of her Japanese mother who had died some fifteen years earlier.

"I'm terribly sorry . . . about your father." He paused, unable to think of anything else to add.

"Thank you, Mr. . . ." Shimoko replied slowly. There was something distant about her that caught Jeff off guard.

"Sister Shimoko appreciates your concern, Mr. Rivers," interjected a small, mousy woman standing beside her. "However, for us at the Church of the Ancient Mysteries, the death of a loved one is not an occasion for sadness. We view death not as an end, but as a transition to a plane of lesser suffering."

Though echoing the sentiments of venerable religious traditions with which he had more than a passing acquaintance, and some measure of respect, the words on this woman's lips sounded tinny, a hollow parody of the original. A mild disquiet began to gnaw at him. "Of course," he replied, trying to maintain an air of cordiality.

Shimoko's saffron-clad cohorts seemed nervous, and Jeff sensed in their movements an attempt to maneuver her away from him.

"If you have some time before you leave, I would really like to speak with you," Jeff persisted.

Shimoko looked around, obviously confused. "Well . . . I guess so."

Before the words were out of her mouth, a slender, bespectacled man brandishing a smile that came and went a little too easily moved in between Shimoko and Jeff. "I'm sorry to deny your request, Mr. Rivers," he said in an oily, sycophantic voice, "but Sister Shimoko has just finished an intense meditational retreat and very much needs rest and solitude. In her desire to be of service to others, she forgets her own health. I'm sure you'll forgive her for asking to be excused from diverting her attention from her own spiritual and physical well-being."

Jeff felt a surge of anger. He shot a questioning glance at Shimoko. "Is that what you want, Ms. Johanson?"

"Yes, whatever Brother Gessho says is best," she responded

limply. "I'm very tired."

"Now, if you'll excuse us," oozed the man who she had referred to as Brother Gessho, "we must make preparations to return to our sanctuary."

Jeff watched the group move off in the direction of the cars. He hoped Brother Gessho would choke on his sanctimony.