

Sins and Virtues



a M*A*S*H slash novel

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2006

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This zine contains approximately 137 850 words.

Read this first

“Slash” means a fan story in which one or more of the characters has sexual feelings for or has sex with another character of the same sex. In this novel, one of those characters is an ordained Roman Catholic priest. If you feel that this is likely to cause you any emotional, moral, spiritual, or other difficulty, you should probably not read further.

This novel is based on the TV series *M*A*S*H*, broadcast from 1972 to 1983, starring Alan Alda as Hawkeye Pierce, William Christopher as Father Mulcahy, Mike Farrell as B. J. Hunnicutt, Wayne Rogers as Trapper John McIntyre, Loretta Swit as Margaret Houlihan, Jamie Farr as Maxwell Klinger, Larry Linville as Frank Burns, Gary Burghoff as Radar O'Reilly, Harry Morgan as Sherman Potter, David Ogden Stiers as Charles Emerson Winchester III, and McLean Stevenson as Henry Blake. This novel includes spoilers for many episodes of *M*A*S*H*, including the events of the series finale, *Goodbye, Farewell, Amen*. No infringement of copyright is intended, no profit is being made, and no conclusions should be drawn about the sexual orientation of any of the real people named.

*M*A*S*H* was based on the events of the Korean War, which officially began on 25th June 1950 and officially ended with an armistice on 27th July, 1953. It's estimated that between 3.8 and 5.6 million people were killed on either side of the conflict.

“M*A*S*H” stands for Mobile Army Surgical Hospital, and refers to a United States Army medical unit serving as a fully functional hospital in a combat area of operations. The units were first established in August 1945, and were deployed during the Korean War and later conflicts. MASH units were designed to get experienced personnel closer to the front, so that the wounded could be treated sooner and with greater success. Casualties were first treated at the point of injury through buddy aid, then routed through a battalion aid station for emergency stabilizing surgery, and finally routed to the MASH for the most extensive treatment. The last MASH unit in South Korea was not decommissioned till 1997. The U.S. Army decommissioned the last MASH unit, 212th M*A*S*H, on 16th February 2006. (Details from Wikipedia.)

Korea

An Officer and a Gentleman

For Scarlatti, with fondest love.

They were both very drunk. Even by the standards of the Swamp, which set standards in drunkenness for the 4077th, which set standards for Korea – or at least for the surrounding area – they were very, very drunk.

“Andrea, Sylvie...” Trapper was counting on his fingers. “Lucy, Maria, Terry....”

“No, I had Terry,” Hawkeye slurred. He thought about it. “I had Sylvie, too.”

“Before or after me?” Trapper was drinking a Swamp martini. His eyes looked glazed through the clear liquid.

“Both,” Hawkeye said, and grinned.

“Can’t be both.”

“Can be.”

“Sylvie...” Trapper sounded faintly perturbed. “Hey. Why would she want you after she’d had me?”

“Cause I am the smoothest-talking doctor this side of the Pacific.”

“Can’t be.”

“Can be,” Hawkeye said.

Trapper rolled up on his elbow and jerked a finger in Hawkeye’s general direction. The martini should have spilled out of his glass, but he saved it with a slurp. “I am smoother than you. I am smooth as... as a very smooth... as this martini.”

“Can’t be,” Hawkeye said. “You want to know why?”

Trapper thought about it. “Yeah. I think I do. I want to know why.”

“You’re married.”

“What does that prove?”

“Bachelors are smoother than married men.”

“How do you figure that?”

“We get more practice.”

“Hell if,” Trapper said. “You’ve never been married.”

“Yep,” Hawkeye said.

“Married men get plenty of practice. Trust me.”

“I wouldn’t trust you. You’re drunk.”

“But smooth.”

“I am smoother than you,” Hawkeye said.

“No you’re not,” Trapper said. He poured himself another martini, ultra-dry, straight from the bottle. “You’re not so special. This martini is smoother than you are.”

Hawkeye picked the glass from out Trapper’s hand and slurped it. “No, I am smoother than this. Definitely smoother than this. There isn’t anyone smoother than me. Or any drink smoother than me. I am smoother than, than a very very smooth thing... *and* I had Sylvie. And Terry. And Lee. And Natalie...”

“You never had Natalie!”

“Did too. Once. Anyone. I can have anyone... if I want them.”
“Anyone?”
“Yeah.” Hawkeye finished the martini in one gulp. “Anyone.” He lay down flat.
“Anyone at all.”
“Bet?”
“Yeah. Bet.” Hawkeye stared at the canvas roof above him. It was rippling. “What do you bet?”
“Uh...” Trapper retrieved the glass, tried to suck some more martini out of it, and let it go. “Three bottles real gin. And a bottle of vermouth.”
“Okay...” Hawkeye tried to sit up and lay back down again in a hurry. “Okay. Bet.”
“Bet,” Trapper agreed, and started to laugh. “Three bottles. And vermouth.”
“I’ll win.”
“You’ll lose,” Trapper prophesied, laughing. “Best in Tokyo, okay?”
“I’ll win!” Hawkeye tilted his head to glare at Trapper. “Any nurse – ”
“Who said *nurse*?”
“What?”
“Anyone, you said,” Trapper said. “Father Mulcahy.” He was still laughing. “If you can get *him*, I’ll pay up. If not...”
“Father Mulcahy,” Hawkeye said. He started to laugh, too.

It was a joke: a drunk joke. It didn’t really matter which of them won, and it was going to be Trapper, but hell. A bet was a bet was a bet. And a gin was a gin was a gin. And the wages of gin was...

Early morning Mass.

Father Mulcahy did an ecumenical service later on in the day for anyone to attend, but at dawn on Sundays he served Mass. Assuming that he wasn’t still in the operating theatre. But Hawkeye had seen him go directly from scrubbing up to serve Mass, at a point when any of the other staff would have been ready to drop with fatigue – either into bed, or into a dry martini, depending. Or, if Frank Burns, into a blind funk.

There were two other Catholics at Mass that morning: Klinger, in a neat practical cotton print, white gloves and demure earrings, and a nurse who was good at her job but didn’t do anything else. Trapper and Hawkeye had both established this, in two separate attempts. No chance of slipping in at the back. Mulcahy showed no sign of surprise that his tiny congregation had expanded by 50%, but Klinger raised his eyebrows and said in a stage whisper “Converting, sir?”

The nurse took communion. Klinger didn’t. Hawkeye stayed in his seat, wondering what the rules were. Father Mulcahy said formally “*Ite, missa est*” and the service was over: quick and plain.

Klinger and the nurse left: Hawkeye had been preparing an opening line all through Mass, and leaned back in his seat, keeping a smile off his face, ready to use it. Mulcahy was still standing by the small altar: when the door closed on the heels of the nurse, he cleared his throat. “Are you all right?”

Hawkeye looked up at him, and the opening line melted out of his mind. “No.”

“Oh, dear.” Mulcahy sat down beside him, and sighed. “Is there anything I can do?”

“No,” Hawkeye repeated. He was trying *not* to think what those nicely parted lips would look like round his cock. From the altar, Mulcahy had represented the

unattainable. Sitting next to him, Mulcahy seemed far too attainable, and Hawkeye was feeling rather like a cad. The bet had been okay, so long as he'd been absolutely sure he would lose it. He was no longer absolutely sure. Mulcahy was flesh and breath and lips: Hawkeye had a justified confidence in his ability to persuade anyone made of flesh and breath into bed, unless they were already committed or started out hating him. And Mulcahy certainly didn't hate him.

"Are you sure?" Mulcahy looked concerned. His hand shifted up across his chest, to touch the silver cross he wore. "If there's anything I can do...?"

Hawkeye stood up. Of course, in theory Mulcahy *was* already committed to someone else. Or rather, Someone Else.

"Want to walk over to the mess tent with me, get some coffee?"

"I was going to have breakfast, actually," Mulcahy admitted, getting to his feet.

"Ah yes. Breakfast. The army's way of making you sorry you got up in the morning." They were walking towards the mess tent: Hawkeye knew without looking that Mulcahy had casually matched his stride to Hawkeye's own. Mulcahy was effortlessly good at that.

Mulcahy smiled at him, his blue eyes kind and still a little worried. "I could have a word with Colonel Blake about getting you a four-day leave in Seoul. Perhaps you'd feel better if you got away from here for a little."

"I'd feel better if I got you away from here for a little," Hawkeye said, and added smoothly, "I'd feel better if we *all* got away from here for a while. Like, the entire war."

Mulcahy hesitated mid-stride, glancing up at him, and in the middle of that hesitation, Frank Burns shoved past them into the mess tent, growling something that might have been "Good morning, Father," but might just as easily have been "Goddamn you, Pierce": only the syllables were clear.

"On the other hand, we could leave Frank here," Hawkeye said, catching the door as it swung back on Burns's heels, before it could hit Mulcahy in the face. He held it open for Mulcahy, and went through after him. "As a deterrent to North Korean invasion. More humane than landmines."

Hawkeye was good at lying. He had the various methods down to a fine art. It wasn't until he actually walked Mulcahy to the door of his tent, one night eight days later, after the last batch of patients had been freighted off to Seoul and Tokyo, that he admitted to himself that he had been manoeuvring himself into this position all along.

He and Mulcahy, together, alone, in Mulcahy's private tent: Mulcahy slightly drunk, but not to incapacity. If it could be done at all, it could be done now.

"Mind if I come in?" Hawkeye asked.

"Oh... certainly," Mulcahy said. He looked up at Hawkeye again with that kind and worried glance, but ushered Hawkeye in without a word beyond "Sit down," until he had closed the door, and sat down in the chair opposite the one Hawkeye had chosen.

"I know you're not a Catholic," he said, sounding uncertain for the first time.

"Agnostic," Hawkeye said, grinning. He had been unable to avoid getting more than a little sozzled himself. It was rude to make someone drink alone, as well as tactically inadvisable. "I don't believe in anything. Well, one thing. Okay, two."

Mulcahy smiled a little. "I was going to say, even if you're not a Catholic, if there's anything you need to talk about, I – well, I would regard it as secret as the confessional."

“What makes you think there’s something I want to talk about?”

“You’ve been spending quite a lot of time with me. You’ve even come to Mass. Twice. And I know you’re not a very religious man.” Mulcahy smiled again, though his voice was diffident. “And I know my sermons aren’t that interesting. So I thought – you might want to talk about something. If you do, well, I’m available.”

Hawkeye leaned forward. He could never resist a straight line. “Are you?” he said, and without thought, his voice sank to a caressing purr.

Mulcahy nearly jumped out of his skin. “What? I – ” he gulped, and said more steadily, “I’m sorry, Hawkeye – I know you didn’t mean – ”

But he hadn’t said no, Hawkeye noted with the sober part of his brain. He hadn’t said no. “Ask me what I believe in,” he said, keeping his voice level and uncaressing. His eyes held Mulcahy’s, and he was pleased with what he saw.

Mulcahy’s voice was still slightly uncertain. “All right...” He steadied himself with a visible effort, and went on, “What do you believe in?”

“Two things,” Hawkeye said. “The second one’s drink.”

“And what’s the first?” Mulcahy’s voice was almost back to normal. There was an undertone of gentle but relentless inquiry.

“I’ll show you,” Hawkeye said. He stood up, and Mulcahy stood up too, and Hawkeye moved in and took hold of him and kissed him, all so swiftly that he had let go and stepped back before Mulcahy could complete a movement of resistance.

“If you hit me, Francis, you’ll knock me out.”

Mulcahy lowered his hands, uncurling from fists, with a look of shame so abject that Hawkeye felt guilt for the first time. “I’m sorry,” Mulcahy said, nearly stuttering. “Sorry. But you mustn’t – I’m sorry if I let you think – ”

“Mustn’t what?” Hawkeye asked. Guilt was easily suppressed when he was drunk. It was the best reason for drinking. He moved in again. There had been no instinctive resistance: Mulcahy wasn’t finding the idea intrinsically unappealing. When he had time to think about it, he knew he must not: but if he wasn’t given time to think? “Mustn’t do this?” He kissed Mulcahy’s mouth, teasing his lips apart and tasting Mulcahy with a brief tormenting flicker of his tongue. “Or this?” He moved, running his hands down Mulcahy’s back, sliding his mouth over Mulcahy’s cheek, feeling the fine stubble under his lips. “Or this?” He kissed the sensitive spot under the ear, nuzzling down into Mulcahy’s neck. “What mustn’t I do, Francis? Just tell me and I’ll stop.” He could feel Mulcahy’s cock, rising and hardening against him, and without even being touched.

“Any of it,” Mulcahy said. He sounded choked and uncertain. “Hawkeye, don’t – ”

Hawkeye could unbutton army fatigues one-handed. He’d done it before. One arm still round Mulcahy’s back, his lips now testing the line of Mulcahy’s jaw, he felt him quiver and press close to Hawkeye. “Beautiful,” he whispered. “Francis, you’re beautiful like this.”

“Hawkeye, don’t,” Mulcahy said. It was almost a whimper: the good kind of whimper. How long had it been for him that a simple touch could reduce him to this state so fast?

A long time. Hawkeye swallowed. Of course. Years. Maybe since forever.

He let go, with extraordinary difficulty, and stepped back. He had loosened both their trousers, but hadn’t ventured inside; and even so Mulcahy was shivering and red in the face, drunk and aroused and shaking his head. “I can’t – ”

Seduction was a messy business when you had to stop it halfway. Hawkeye didn't want to think what he must look like.

"I know," he said. "I'm sorry. I shouldn't have tried –"

"I shouldn't have let it get this far," Mulcahy said. "I wasn't expecting –"

"Oh for God's sake, you must know about me," Hawkeye interrupted with exasperation. "You of all people."

"What do you mean – me of all people?" For the first time, Mulcahy sounded genuinely indignant.

"You take confession," Hawkeye said. "People talk to you."

"Well, there are rumours about you and Captain McIntyre," Mulcahy admitted. "People say things –"

"What things?"

"I couldn't possibly repeat them," Mulcahy said, apparently quite surprised that Hawkeye could think anything else,

"Pity, they might give us ideas. Anyway, Trapper and I are just good friends, whatever it looks like." Hawkeye drew himself up. The effect was spoiled when his trousers fell down. Seconds later, Mulcahy's trousers also fell.

They looked at each other a moment, and Mulcahy chuckled. It was an unpracticed kind of laugh, but nothing uncertain in it. Hawkeye felt himself go hot with embarrassment. Mulcahy said "Hawkeye, what do you *think* it looks like, right now?"

"Okay, we're good friends who have orgasms together on a semi-regular basis," Hawkeye acknowledged. "You know, like whenever there's an R in the month or we run out of nurses."

"And you've run out of nurses and Trapper hasn't?" Mulcahy bent down and pulled his trousers up: Hawkeye followed suit. There was a faintly resigned note in Mulcahy's voice. "Since it's March?"

"It wasn't like that," Hawkeye protested. He had vague thoughts of confessing the bet: he had lost it anyway. "I just –"

Mulcahy was watching him: he looked calmer now. He had his professional face on. If Hawkeye confessed to the bet, he would forgive it. But it would hurt him.

"I wanted you," Hawkeye said. "Is that so strange? You're gorgeous."

"Hawkeye!" Mulcahy's voice rose, unprofessionally.

"No, you are. You are, Francis. Beautiful. Okay? I just – oh, hell. I'm sorry." That came out completely genuinely. "I didn't mean to upset you this much. But I did it because I wanted you. You're not second-best to anybody."

"Well." Mulcahy was eyeing him cautiously. "I'll take that as a compliment. But I think you should leave, Hawkeye."

"Yeah, I guess." Disappointed, Hawkeye made himself grin. It had always been a point of honour to take dismissals cheerfully. "Of course, you're missing the chance of a lifetime. I don't offer myself to just anybody, you know." He backed away. "A person's got to be at least breathing."

Mulcahy swallowed. "Of course."

"You know what? I could really use a drink," Hawkeye said, with heartfelt sincerity. "Uh – want one?"

"I think we've both already had too much to drink."

“Says the man who once got sozzled on communion wine.” Hawkeye produced his hip-flask, with a flourish. “One drink. Just one. Nothing more.” He paused. “I really do want to talk to you. Please.”

“I suppose so,” Mulcahy said reluctantly, visibly facing up to his responsibilities.

Hawkeye sat down on Mulcahy’s bed with studied casualness, every movement saying *It just happens to be the nearest thing to sit on*. Mulcahy sat down on his chair. He still looked nervous. He leaned forward, evidently trying to put on a priestly face.

“Look,” Hawkeye started. “I mean – listen. You and I, we’re friends, right?”

“Well, I’ve always –” Mulcahy swallowed. “Yes, Hawkeye.”

“I wouldn’t want anything to disturb that friendship. What I just did was really stupid. I’m really angry with myself.”

“Don’t,” Mulcahy said. “It’s all right. I don’t –” He accepted the flask with fingers that fumbled, and took a participatory swallow. Hawkeye took the flask back from him and put it to his mouth. He swallowed without drinking. He didn’t intend to get any drunker. Mulcahy was almost drunk enough for both of them. “Hawkeye, if I was upset, that was my own fault. You must understand, I’m not – I’m not offended, but I don’t –”

“But we’re still friends?” Hawkeye passed the flask to Mulcahy, leaning forward to do it and forgetting to lean back.

“Of course,” Mulcahy said. He stared earnestly into Hawkeye’s face. “I understand... I mean... I wasn’t... I didn’t want to hurt your feelings.”

“I didn’t mean to upset you,” Hawkeye said, just as earnestly. “You know, I really – I really like you, Francis.” He hoped he sounded drunk enough to get the right note of maudlin sincerity: and then, remembering how much he’d had to drink, decided he only needed to worry about whatever vestige of sobriety Mulcahy had left.

As if telepathically inspired, Mulcahy put the flask to his mouth again. Hawkeye kept his face solemn.

Mulcahy gasped a little, and said, not even slurring the words a little bit, “I like you, Hawkeye.”

“And me kissing you didn’t change that?”

“No,” Mulcahy said, definitely. “Oh no.” He leaned in a bit nearer. “I really like you,” he confided.

“I’m sorry –”

“Don’t be sorry,” Mulcahy said. “Why shouldn’t I like you? You’re a good man, Hawkeye.”

“Oh, come on –” Hawkeye was genuinely disconcerted.

“You stopped,” Mulcahy said. “I really – couldn’t have –”

“You stopped me,” Hawkeye said. He cast his eyes down in shame. “I’m ashamed of myself,” he lied. “You know, grabbing at a friend like that – but sometimes you want a friend, you know? Someone who wants more – someone who wants more than just – just flesh.”

The breathy touch on the side of his face was Mulcahy’s lips. Hawkeye did not smile. “Thanks,” he said softly.

“Hawkeye?”

“No,” Hawkeye said, not moving. “You know if you – if you start touching me –”

“No,” Mulcahy said in agreement. He didn’t move. “You’re right. We mustn’t.”

Hawkeye turned his head. Just enough. Lips to lips. “Even if – ” He was so close to Mulcahy’s mouth that the plosive closure of *if* puffed air into the other man’s parted lips. “No,” Hawkeye breathed.

Mulcahy kissed him.

Hawkeye wrapped his arms round him and kissed him back. “No,” he whispered. Then he put a lot of attention into kissing Mulcahy again.

After that, it was easy. And very pleasant. At one point – they were both naked by then – Mulcahy did try to push Hawkeye away, but it was only with the palm of one hand against Hawkeye’s shoulder, the other hand trapped between their thighs, and Hawkeye easily distracted him with a long teasing nibble down Mulcahy’s forearm, tonguing at his elbow. Mulcahy was easily distracted, but oddly passive: he followed Hawkeye’s lead, but didn’t initiate. Hawkeye hesitated only once: when he went down on Mulcahy and heard him sob, a small broken sound. But Mulcahy’s whole body felt strung tight and ready to come: all Hawkeye’s experience told him that stopping now would get him... well, cursed out if he were having sex with anyone but Mulcahy.

Excommunicated, probably, under the circumstances.

Mulcahy came. All his body went slack and melting like butter: for an instant. Then he was trembling again, the tremors different from the tense shivers pre-orgasm. Hawkeye figured he was about to get his face slapped. Or something. He shifted himself so that he could see Mulcahy’s face.

No. No face-slapping. Mulcahy’s mouth was trembling. He looked, of all things, as if he were about to cry. But before Hawkeye could be certain, Mulcahy turned over and wriggled down the bed – a hasty manoeuvre that got his face out of Hawkeye’s sight and his knees off the edge of the bunk. Hawkeye thought for a instant that Mulcahy was trying to get away, and moved to sit up, meaning to reassure the other man that he didn’t have to go – hell, it was Mulcahy’s tent –

– but then Mulcahy leaned forward, his hands grabbing at Hawkeye’s thighs, and pushed his mouth onto Hawkeye’s cock.

It wasn’t the best blowjob Hawkeye had ever had. It wasn’t the worst, either: the worst one ever, in Hawkeye’s estimation, was always going to be the one Sue Ellen Norton tried to give him when they were both fourteen and neither of them had any idea what they were doing, and when they heard Mrs Norton come in downstairs Sue Ellen had nearly vasectomised him. But any blowjob – apart from one involving amateur surgery – is a good blowjob: though Mulcahy was clumsily tentative, retreating when he should have advanced, using his lips instead of his tongue, no idea how to use his gag reflex – still it was good, almost enough to drive away the war outside the tent walls. Hawkeye knew he should come soon, not wear out this unpracticed mouth, but for a minute or two he wondered if he could – and then Mulcahy’s tongue, by good luck or by guess, touched Hawkeye’s cock in a way that if he went on doing it Hawkeye knew he could not help but come. His muscles were clenching, he was afraid his legs would cramp up, he tried to think of things that made him come when he jerked off, Trapper blowing that guy in Tokyo with the biggest dick either of them had ever seen, Trapper grunting underneath him the way he did before he came, but his mind’s eye kept drifting back to Mulcahy’s face, lips slightly parted, sitting next to him after Mass.

He came. It wasn’t the best orgasm he’d ever had, either: but it was good. Hawkeye’s muscles relaxed. It was good.

Mulcahy jerked his head back, getting half a faceful and half a mouthful of come. He had a look of startled accomplishment on his face.

It was good. Hawkeye wanted to lie down somewhere soft and warm with an armful of man for about twelve hours: an army cot with Mulcahy for the next six hours was the best he could hope for. Good. Good enough. He wrapped his hands round Mulcahy's wrists and tugged him upwards, pulling him into the bed with Hawkeye. "We'll fit, don't worry --" he mumbled.

"Hawkeye, I want --" Mulcahy sounded too much awake.

"Not now," Hawkeye protested. He could feel sleep coming over him, better than sex right now, better than a Martini right now, better than anything right now. Mulcahy smelt great. Hawkeye nuzzled his nose into Mulcahy's neck. "Later, okay? Later..."

"Hawkeye --"

"Not now," Hawkeye mumbled. He couldn't keep his eyes open. He didn't have to. It felt great.

The siren blared, outside in the compound, from the wrong direction. Hawkeye jerked upwards -- the wrong direction, because he wasn't in the Swamp, he was in Mulcahy's tent.

"Incoming wounded. All staff to the compound. Triage in the compound. Incoming wounded."

"Not now," Hawkeye mumbled: but he was standing up. If he was vertical and could walk a straight line he could do triage, that was the rule of thumb he and Trap both worked by. But not naked. He was struggling into his uniform, blanking out with tiredness. Even an hour's sleep would have helped. It hadn't even been ten minutes.

Mulcahy was fully dressed now. just sitting down to pull on his shoes. No, he was grubbing under the bunk for his dog tags and his cross.

"Father, can you get me about half a pint of coffee?" Hawkeye could hear the trucks coming into the compound now: there was literally no time for anything else. Triage, then surgery. God.

Mulcahy looked up. His face held an odd expression: vulnerable, startled. "Yes," he said. He stood up. "Can we talk -- about this --"

"Not now," Hawkeye snapped, and then, with exasperation at himself as much as at Mulcahy, "Let's just tell the wounded out there to quit bleeding until we've got time for them, okay?"

He was already crossing the compound before it occurred to him that it had been a cruel thing to say to Mulcahy, of all people. He meant to apologise when Mulcahy got him his coffee, but he was checking out a stomach wound at the time and it was minutes after he'd downed the bitter blackness before he realised that Mulcahy had passed him the cup.

They were in surgery for twelve hours. Frank Burns stepped out after four hours for a four hour nap, and came back grumbling that Hot Lips Houlihan had woken him up. He didn't say how, and this provided Trapper and Hawkeye with fuel for four hours worth of jokes: Burns and Houlihan complained to Blake at regular intervals, and Blake protested that they should stop, all as routine as twelve hours of surgery on wounded kids could ever be. Eighty-nine casualties, of which they lost one. Three amputations: foot, leg to the

knee, leg to the thigh. One kid with his face full of shrapnel who would live, but who would never see again. Too many stomach wounds.

“We’ve got to get them to stop telling the kids they’ve got guts,” Hawkeye told Trapper.

“I know they’ve got guts. I’ve seen most of them.”

“Seen them? I’ve given them a hands-on, in-depth appraisal!” Hawkeye looked up. He had a teenager on the table with a belly full of metal and a right leg that ended around the knee: Father Mulcahy had come back with the x-rays and Hawkeye squinted, trying to work out what was wrong with the femur –

“That’s a scapula,” he snapped. “You’re showing me his shoulder, not his leg!”

“Sorry,” Mulcahy mumbled. He was fumbling with the x-rays.

Blake glanced up. “Go and get some rest, Father.”

“No, I’m fine.” Mulcahy dropped the sheaf of photographs on the floor, and dropped to his knees beside them, scrambling to pick them up. He held up the right one, and Hawkeye looked at it: he had nearly finished stitching up the stomach, and the leg had to come off next.

“This boy’s going to lose his knee,” he said out loud. “Damn, I hate it when that happens.”

“You sure?” Trap said from the other table.

“Move it round, Father, let the nice doctor have a good look.”

“Let me have a look at it too,” Blake added.

“What about me?” Burns demanded.

“Sure, Frank, whatever turns you on.” Trap’s voice was nasal with tiredness.

“Hawkeye, I don’t see there’s any of the joint left to save. He must have stepped right on the mine.”

It was the kind of medical conference they were all used to having, and it wrapped up fast: the x-ray was clear enough. Even Burns said only, after one look, “He should be grateful to lose his leg for his country!”

“You should get some rest, Father,” Houlihan said.

“No, I’ll be okay – ” Mulcahy showed Trap the x-ray of the scapula: Trapper nodded after a minute’s study, and Mulcahy moved away again.

It was past noon when they staggered out of the operating theatre: Hawkeye leaning on Trapper’s shoulder, Trapper keeping his balance with an arm round Hawkeye’s shoulders. Burns was sent off to post-op, grumbling about it. Blake got into the showers ahead of them, rubbed himself down briskly, wrapped himself up in a bathrobe, and went off to his tent to ignore his paperwork. Radar was trailing after him.

“I want a shower,” Trap said.

“I want to sleep.”

“I’m not sleeping with you until you’ve had a shower.”

“Who says I want to sleep with you?”

“Who else would want to sleep with you the way you smell right now?”

The first answer that crossed Hawkeye’s mind was *Father Mulcahy – he’s very forgiving* but he managed not to say it. He couldn’t stop himself from laughing: Trapper steered him, giggling weakly, into the shower box that Blake had just vacated.

"I'll get the bathrobes," Trapper promised. "If you feel yourself going to sleep, switch the water on."

Trapper disappeared. Hawkeye leaned against the side of the shower. After a minute, he closed his eyes. Sex was good. Even bad sex was good. It was like coffee in that respect. But more fun. He'd feel better if he'd had even four hours more sleep. Sex wasn't a substitute for sleep. Nor was coffee.

"Hawkeye?"

Hawkeye blinked his eyes open. Trapper was back. "That was quick."

"You were asleep on your feet," Trapper said.

"Neat trick," Hawkeye said, self-approvingly. "Now if only I could manage that on someone else's feet."

He stripped off and got under the shower, briefly grateful that both he and Father Mulcahy – *Francis* – had swallowed. *No muss, no fuss*.

Not quite no muss: Francis, looking vulnerable without his glasses, with come splattered over half his face. It was a lovely picture. He was too tired to get hard over it, but he felt a stir: what had Francis done with his come? No image would come: he'd barely had his eyes open.

"You want breakfast?" Trapper asked.

"I don't even want lunch," Hawkeye said. He wrapped the bathrobe round himself. With any luck he'd have half an hour in his tent alone with Frank and Trapper elsewhere: time to jerk off and fall asleep before either of them came back. He was looking forward to that. Sleep.

"Sure?"

"Yeah. I just want sleep."

"She must have been good last night." Wrapped in his own bathrobe, Trapper looked clean and shining. They were walking through the compound towards the Swamp: any public reference to sex, by unspoken mutual agreement, would always be heterosexual. Even – especially – when it wasn't. Trapper grinned, with the kind of lascivious flippancy that only he could manage, and glanced at Mulcahy's tent. The chair outside was empty. "Was she?"

"I don't think she even knew what I was on about," Hawkeye said.

Trapper laughed, and choked it off almost immediately, looking at Hawkeye with a mixture of surprise, amusement – and even an element of shock. "God – you actually *tried* –"

They had reached the door of the Swamp. Frank wasn't there. Hawkeye made for his cot and collapsed on it. Trapper sat down on his own bed and stared at Hawkeye with rising eyebrows and rising amusement. Despite himself, Hawkeye noted the difference between *really* sitting down on the bed because it just happened to be the nearest thing to sit on, and his own much-practiced imitation.

"I want to get some sleep," Hawkeye said.

"You'll do *anything* to win a bet, won't you?"

"Yeah, but I lost this one," Hawkeye said. "Three bottles of gin, Tokyo's best, okay?"

"*And* a bottle of vermouth," Trapper said automatically. He was grinning. "So what happened?"

“Nothing happened.” Hawkeye said. “I got him drunk, I got him alone, and he – ” *Francis’s face, half-splattered with come* “ – just had *no* idea what I was on about. He thought I had a personal problem I wanted to talk about – ”

Trapper laughed. This time he didn’t choke it off. He stood up, still laughing.

“It’s not funny – ” Hawkeye protested, with the right note of indignation.

“Remind me never to bet you you can’t seduce Henry,” Trapper said. He turned round just as he got to the door. “Radar would be *very* upset.”

He got the last word. Hawkeye lay back on the cot just as he was and pulled the blanket over himself. He was even too tired to jerk off, though coming would have made sleep easier. Dragged down by tiredness, he went under like a drowning man.

When Hawkeye woke again, it was late afternoon. Squinting at his watch, he figured he’d slept five hours: it was unlikely that he’d managed to get twenty-nine hours rest without someone wanting him for something. What had woken him was the garbage truck: it arrived infrequently enough that he’d not yet learned how to sleep through it.

He was still tired enough that it actually took a couple of minutes mental debate before he could make up his mind that it would be better to get up and eat whatever kind of food was available than to lie here too hungry to get back to sleep again. The last thing he’d eaten had been a sandwich fed to him at half past something in the morning by someone – Natalie? Gillian?

Father Mulcahy.

Hawkeye was already on his feet and halfway into his army fatigues before he remembered. Mulcahy. Father. *Francis*.

Can we talk about this?

No. Not now. How does ‘never’ sound?

Hawkeye glanced cautiously out of the Swamp door. The chair outside Mulcahy’s tent was empty. Good. He had made it all the way into the mess tent and was standing in line for whatever the army called food today when he saw Mulcahy watching him.

The priest was sitting at a table from which he could see the whole of the mess tent: he was nursing a mug of coffee, and he looked as if he had been there for some time. Hawkeye switched on his widest smile, picked up an empty tray, and marched up to the serving table to collect himself a stomachful of warmed-over protein and fatty carbohydrates. The army called it liver and mashed potato.

When he turned back from the serving table, having put everyone within earshot (including Hawkeye himself) off their food, Mulcahy was still sitting, still watching. With ineffable precision, as Hawkeye’s gaze slid over him, the priest caught his eye, nodded, and waved a hand at the seat opposite him. It was neatly and casually done: to ignore it would have been a public snub.

Hawkeye formed an opening line in his mind, walking across the mess tent carrying the unappetising tray, and this time, didn’t let the expression on Mulcahy’s face put him off using it. “If we keep meeting like this, Father, people will start to talk.”

“I hope not.” Having snared Hawkeye, Mulcahy was staring down into his coffee. He spoke quietly and without much expression.

Hawkeye sniffed his first forkful of liver, made a sound of disgust, and ate it. It tasted no worse than he’d expected, but he made another loud sound of even more appalled

disgust. “How can they expect us to eat this? I’ve thrown better stuff than this away after surgery!”

Mulcahy drank another mouthful of coffee. “I’ve got a jeep for the afternoon,” he said. “There’s no wounded expected. Come out to the orphanage with me.”

“What?”

“I – we need to talk. In private.” Mulcahy looked up. “We really do, Hawkeye.”

He looked very appealing: worried and wide-eyed. Hawkeye wanted to lean across the table and kiss him. He would have liked to drag him off to his tent and ravish him. He would have settled for being able to sit across the table from him and tease him.

“Couldn’t we just pretend it never happened?” Hawkeye inquired. He went on eating the liver and potato. There was the ghost of an old onion in there somewhere.

“You may be able to,” Mulcahy said. His voice grated a little. “I can’t. We need to talk.”

“Okay,” Hawkeye agreed. “We’ll talk. Does it have to be right now? I mean, I’ve got patients...”

“Captain McIntyre’s in post-op,” Mulcahy said. He was now patently saving his last mouthful of coffee for the moment when Hawkeye should have finished the last of his food, and the problem was that Hawkeye had no wish to spin out the eating of it. The prospect of a ‘talk’ with Father Mulcahy was excruciating – the more so as Hawkeye was uncomfortably conscious of not having behaved well at all the previous night – but at least it would come to an end.

“Okay,” Hawkeye said, chasing the unpalatable agreement with a still more unpalatable mouthful of mashed potato. “Why am I coming out to the orphanage with you?”

To his surprise, Mulcahy picked up his meaning immediately. “Because there are two new children and I want you to give them a physical. They’re brother and sister, and they seem to have been wandering for quite some time. I don’t think there’s much wrong with them beyond simple starvation, but I’d like you to check.”

“How old are they?”

“They don’t seem to know,” Mulcahy said. “My guess would be that the girl is eight and her brother is five.”

“I’ll come,” Hawkeye agreed. He stirred what was left of the food on his tray with his fork, looking at the patterns he could make in the slurry. “I’d have come for that anyway, you know.”

When he glanced up, Mulcahy had finished his coffee and was on his feet. “I know. You’re a good man, Hawkeye.”

There was a bad taste in Hawkeye’s mouth, and it was not altogether the food. He finished it anyway – fuel was fuel – and went to put together a medical kit. Radar had already scavenged enough spare food to fill two cartons – cans and packets, bits and pieces. He did it every time Mulcahy went to the orphanage.

The road to the orphanage was about as safe as driving anywhere: nevertheless, no one usually stopped by the side of the road and sat as if admiring the view. Mulcahy sat staring straight ahead at the dullest group of trees that Hawkeye had seen in a long time. On the other hand, better dull than snipers. Or bazookas.

“Can’t we talk and drive,” Hawkeye suggested after a minute.

Mulcahy sighed. “Hawkeye... did you seduce me last night just because you were drunk, or did you have some other reason?”

Hawkeye jumped. “Well – ” He glanced at Mulcahy, and managed a wide grin. “You know – ”

“Please, Hawkeye,” Mulcahy said sharply. “Don’t start the nonsense again.”

“What nonsense?”

“Calling me a very – ” Mulcahy swallowed. “Just don’t.”

“You are a very attractive man.”

“Hawkeye – ” There was genuine pain in that one word, and it stopped Hawkeye cold. “You see, if you... seduced me because you were drunk, I suppose I can just stay away from you when you’re drunk. If you had some other reason...” he glanced at Hawkeye. “You see, there’s usually a priest at the orphanage.”

“Yeah,” Hawkeye said, and then it sank in. “You’re going to confession.”

“Well, I did commit a mortal sin last night,” Mulcahy said. “And before I can receive absolution, I must be repentant and have the firm intention to avoid a future occasion of sin.”

That hurt. “Listen, it wasn’t just me,” Hawkeye snapped. “You went down on me like you were starving and I was your last meal!”

Mulcahy’s hands clenched on the wheel. “I know,” he said. “I remember thinking that as I had already committed a mortal sin I might at least...eat a full helping, as it were. But it *is* a sin, Hawkeye. Whether or not you repent it is between you and your conscience. For me, it’s different – I – I broke a promise last night. I didn’t mean to, and God knows I don’t intend to do it again, but I never intended to do it last night. I need to know why you did it. I need to know that... whatever motivated you to seduce me... you’re not going to do it again.”

“You don’t have the willpower to resist me?” It started out as a joke. It trailed off as Hawkeye realised it wasn’t very funny.

Mulcahy shook his head.

Hawkeye sat still, dry-mouthed. After a long moment, he muttered, “You sure know how to take the fun out of things, Father.”

“So you see,” Mulcahy said with perfect gravity, “I need to know whether I will have to apply for a transfer away from the 4077th, or if I can just arrange to keep you at arm’s length when you’re drunk.”

“Apply for a *transfer*?” Hawkeye nearly choked.

Mulcahy started the jeep. “To avoid the occasion of sin,” he said, and said nothing more, all the way to the orphanage.

The two kids were suffering from nothing worse than starvation, exhaustion, and extreme emotional trauma: Hawkeye examined them, found nothing to advise on (the sisters at the orphanage were far more experienced than Hawkeye in dealing with refugee children suffering all three, and often worse) and made himself feel useful by advising on the best treatment for persistent diarrhoea.

He didn’t notice when Mulcahy slipped away: he only remembered when Mulcahy came back. Hawkeye didn’t know exactly what a confessed and repentant priest would look like: it hadn’t occurred to him that Mulcahy would need to go to confession. The church the Pierces hadn’t gone to on Sundays had been Presbyterian, and in Crabapple

Cove not going to the Methodist church was the only other conceivable option. There wasn't any other church not to go to.

What does he have to say? What kind of detail – ?

They were almost gone when the priest at the orphanage came out and shook hands with Mulcahy: Hawkeye, sitting in the driver's seat, desperate to get out, eyed the strange priest with a nervous embarrassment that was foreign to him. *Does he know it was me?*

The strange priest said something not in English, and Mulcahy said something back in the same language. They were smiling and nodding at each other. Hawkeye jerked the jeep into gear and drove off. He wasn't planning to stop for any views.

"Father – ?"

"Hawkeye, are you sure we should be driving this fast?"

"Yes," Hawkeye said, but he slowed down. "Father, would it make any difference if I promised – if I swore – that I won't *ever* do – I won't touch you or say anything to you even when we're alone? You won't need to avoid me."

Mulcahy glanced at him, startled. "Actually, I'd just been telling Father Casalino that I probably wouldn't need to apply for a transfer because the – the man I'd sinned with had only fallen because he was so drunk."

You didn't tell him my name? Buoyed on a wave of embarrassed relief, Hawkeye heard himself say giddily, "No, it wasn't. I meant it. Every deed and every word. I don't have to be drunk to appreciate you."

"Oh," Mulcahy said. His voice fell a little, sounding worried.

"But I swear –" Hawkeye fumbled for something convincing "– on my father's grave, drunk or sober, never again."

"Your father's still alive, isn't he?"

"In Crabapple Cove, we plan ahead." Hawkeye jerked a glance sideways. "I'd hate it if you left because you were afraid of me."

Neither of them said anything most of the rest of the way back to the base. They passed the stand of trees when Mulcahy had stopped on the way out, and, as if reminded by them, Mulcahy said abruptly, "I'm not afraid of you, Hawkeye. Of myself, I suppose. But I trust you. I won't talk to Colonel Blake about a transfer."

Hawkeye was familiar with the awkwardness of being around someone with whom he had had sex, but who was not about to admit to it or to repeat the experience: though the reason in the past had, mostly, been *Christ was I drunk last night, I don't remember a thing!*

Not Christ, I was drunk last night: please forgive me my sin.

But the technique he employed for dealing with men who didn't remember worked just as well for a man he couldn't forget: behave normally, avoiding neither teasing nor familiarity, and don't talk about it. Mulcahy couldn't – Hawkeye assumed – have the same kind of experience, but he followed Hawkeye's lead with trusting ease, for the years they spent together in Korea.

7260 words

May 2004

Out and Far Tonight

for Shoshanna, with love and respect

Of all the things BJ hadn't expected about the 4077th, the still in the Swamp was still the least expected. Pierce and O'Reilly managed it with offhand ease, and the liquor that resulted was... potable, at least.

O'Reilly's share in the still consisted of finding the raw materials and assisting in the regular production of the mash: he drank grape Nehis by preference. Pierce drank in Rosie's Bar or the "officer's club" for pleasure: but when Pierce simply, violently, did not want to be sober, he'd be found sprawled on his bed, drinking "Swamp martinis" as if each one represented a planned and longed-for achievement. He was not an angry or a sloppy drunk, and he could operate with astonishing skill exhausted or hungover. He just had two modes of drinking: either considerably or voraciously. BJ's alcohol consumption was going up to a level that he didn't, himself, quite like to think about: but he was always at least three drinks behind Pierce.

The hospital was almost empty: all but two patients had been trucked out this morning, and the last two were waiting a deluxe ride where there was room for them to travel flat on their backs with an IV beside them. They'd live, though they might not walk again. Three corpses, representing the 4077th's current failure rate, were boxed and awaiting passage out. None of them had been on BJ's table, which was something to be grateful for.

Burns was off somewhere with the head nurse. BJ was trying to keep an open mind about the head nurse: Pierce had a rough mouth and a brutal sense of humour, but it was generally directed at people who deserved it. Still, aside from her... association with Burns, for whom BJ could find no excuses whatsoever, BJ couldn't see that Pierce had any good reason to dislike her.

One sniff inside the Swamp and you knew why it had acquired that name. So far BJ was still philosophically assuring his nose that it would get used to it, while his nose was protesting that it never ever would.

"It gets better," Pierce said, from his bed.

BJ glanced over. Burns had one half of the tent to himself: Pierce and the previous surgeon had split the other half between them. All of McIntyre's belongings had been cleared out, of course. BJ supposed he should, at some point, move his bed or his belongings, lay claim to a full third of the tent: so far he had not wanted to spend the necessary time inside the Swamp when wide awake.

"What gets better?"

"The smell." Pierce took a long, thoughtful swallow of clear liquid from a martini glass. "Of course, this helps."

"I wondered why you drank it," BJ said, pointlessly amused.

"Glass over there. Have some nosepaint. Finest vintage. From yesterday."

BJ thought about it. It was early evening: in an hour or so the mess tent would start serving something that passed for dinner. At home, he'd be coming home about now. Peg would have made dinner, or they'd go out. Take in a movie. Stay home and settle down like bookends on the sofa they'd inherited from Peg's parents, that fitted them both as

neatly as if it were a shared sleeping bag. They'd read or listen to the radio. Talk about what had happened that day. A long evening was a pleasure, time stretching out before them.

He could go over to the mess tent early and get a cup of coffee. He could read whatever newspapers had been delivered to the camp in the past couple of days that he hadn't read already. He could catch up on medical journals. He could go for a walk, though the 4077th had been here long enough that the surroundings were a mess, and further away was too dangerous. He could write a letter to Peg, though his last letter had been sealed and deposited with the mail and wouldn't even be picked up till tomorrow morning.

"Thanks," BJ said after a moment. He picked up the glass and bottle, and lifted the bottle to the light, pretending to examine it, though he had no idea what he would be looking for. "Ah yes: three pm yesterday. An excellent vintage."

"No, this is from ten am," Pierce said cheerfully. "It's been at least thirty hours in the bottle by now."

"More than enough," BJ agreed, still wondering at himself. He poured a cautious ounce or so in the glass. Pierce reached up and tilted the bottle to provide a more generous measure.

"You don't appreciate it until you've drunk enough to numb the tastebuds," he said.

The spirit was all but raw: it felt almost oily in his mouth, and then burned. BJ swallowed hastily, finding the burn went all the way down his throat. He sat down on his bed and remembered to breathe.

"Good stuff," Pierce said.

"You could say that," BJ said, and coughed. "Do you mind if I ask you a personal question?"

Pierce rolled up on his elbow and stared at BJ through narrowed eyes. "You mind if I give you a personal answer?"

"How come you call the head nurse 'Hotlips'?"

"Well, that wasn't the personal question I was expecting you to ask," Pierce said, and lay down again. "Ancient history."

"How long have you been here?"

"About seven hundred years." Pierce squinted. "So has she."

"Neither of you look it."

"She's a good nurse," Pierce acknowledged. "In fact, she's a terrific nurse. She's a tight-assed, metal-mouthed, military-minded..." He took another drink.

"What?"

"Don't interrupt me in my search for the perfect noun."

"Is that what you're doing?" BJ lay down. Everything looked a little hazier.

"Trying to forget statistics."

"What?"

"We have a ninety-seven point eight percent survival rate here," Pierce said. "Like Hotlips says. Which is pretty good, right? Military people like statistics." He eyed the bottle. "I calculate that I should be able to get twenty-four point five percent more drunk before supper."

“All three of them were on your table,” BJ said. He hadn’t put it together before. He rolled over on to his side. Pierce reached out the bottle. BJ shook his head. “Look, there is no way you should blame yourself – ”

“Who else is there to blame?”

“Well, the people who shot at them would be a start.”

Pierce shrugged. He waved the bottle again at BJ. “We’re in hell. They’re all shooting at each other. When I operate on them and they live, it feels like there’s some point to me being here. When they die under my hands, it’s just hell.” He paused. “Of course, when I operate on them and they live and they go back into combat and they get shot again and they come back here again and I operate on them again, I feel like they could just replace me with a revolving door.”

“Providing it could operate.”

“There’s always a snag.” Pierce poured himself another Swamp martini. “Come on. I hate to drink alone.”

BJ watched himself holding out the glass. Pierce poured him another measure.

“Am I really going to drink that?” BJ wondered out loud.

“Trust me,” Pierce said, “it’ll make this place look a lot better.” He drank. “Or make you go blind.”

BJ took a drink. It still tasted like a kick in the mouth. He wiped his lips. “Why did you and O’Reilly set this up?”

“Trap and I had the idea,” Pierce said. He twisted his mouth into a teeth-showing grin. “Hey, it seemed like a good idea at the time. Radar helped us get the bits and pieces. It still seems like a good idea now.”

“Captain McIntyre?”

“Trapper John. Yeah.”

“How long was he here?”

“Over a year. Almost as long as me and Hotlips.”

“And Burns?”

“Same time as Hotlips.”

BJ swallowed another load. He was finding it impossible to decide whether or not he disliked the stuff. This was probably a bad sign. “Frank Burns and…” He trailed off, trying to decide if he should say Houlihan, Margaret, or Hotlips.

“Yeah. They are,” Pierce said, apparently understanding.

“An item.”

“Of some kind. Yeah.”

“He’s married.”

“Yeah.” Pierce didn’t appear to be shocked. “He is.” He took another drink. “There’s a lot of that about.”

“What?”

“Marriage.”

“I’m married,” BJ said.

“I won’t hold it against you. Some of my best friends are married.”

“I heard someone saying you were married,” BJ said, though he hadn’t meant to. It hadn’t sounded like the kind of joke you repeat to the person it’s being made about.

“Really? Did they say who to?”

BJ stared at the remaining alcohol in his glass. “No one in particular,” he said, deciding that he didn’t have the courage of his convictions.

More alcohol splashed into the glass. BJ looked up. Pierce was grinning like a maniac. “It was Trapper, wasn’t it? Was I supposed to be the wife or the husband?”

“What?” BJ half-laughed. He took a quick swallow. “I didn’t – ”

“Who was the bridesmaid, Klinger or Radar?”

“What?”

“From the first time we took a four-day leave in Seoul together,” Pierce said. “It started with a crack about honeymoons and went on from there.”

It didn’t sound like the kind of joke that two soldiers should have tolerated. It didn’t sound like the kind of joke that anyone should have tolerated. BJ finished the liquid in his glass. Pierce was right – he couldn’t tell what the Swamp smelled like any more. “And you put up with it...?”

“Hell, we encouraged it.” Pierce was laughing. “You wouldn’t believe how much Ferret-face hated it. On the one hand, he’d have loved to get something that would have got both of us kicked out of the 4077th. Especially me. On other hand, if he believed it, it would have meant he was sharing a tent with a pair of queers. He couldn’t stand to think about it. But he kept hoping it was true.”

“Didn’t you ever worry about getting court-martialled for real?”

“Even the army requires a little thing like evidence,” Pierce said reasonably. “More?”

BJ blinked. Pierce was holding out the bottle.

“I think I’m already twenty-four point five percent drunk,” BJ said.

“So am I. But I’m an over-achiever,” Pierce said, and poured another glass.

Mail call at the 4077th was an occasion that no one that missed. Father Mulcahy, however, was not subject to this rule: he’d borrowed a jeep and Captain Pierce and gone to the orphanage. When O’Reilly came by the Swamp, BJ accepted both sets of letters: he put Pierce’s down on his cot, and took his own off to the mess tent to read with a coffee.

Pierce and Mulcahy weren’t back till early evening: BJ was back on his own cot, tracing Erin’s brightly coloured scrawls across the page. “Mail on your bed,” he said, without looking up. “You got a letter from McIntyre.”

“Trap?” Pierce sounded mildly surprised. He sat down on the cot and picked up his letters. “Dad. Nudist’s Weekly. Mmmm, perfume.” He sniffed it. “Natalie. I knew it. She misses me!”

“You had four letters,” BJ said. “One of them had McIntyre’s name on the back. I noticed it because Peggy’s best friend’s name is June Macintyre and I thought it was for me at first.”

“It isn’t here.”

BJ looked up. “Oh. Actually, I think I opened it before I realised it wasn’t for me. I was afraid she was writing to me because of something to do with Peggy. Don’t worry, I didn’t read past ‘Dear Hawkeye’. At least, not once I was sure June wasn’t writing to you.”

Pierce had grabbed up BJ’s bundle of letters, and was sorting through it. “Not here either.”

“Well, I took my letters through to the mess tent,” BJ said. “I might have left it there. Don’t worry, someone’s sure to give it back to you.”

Pierce was gone before BJ finished the sentence. BJ looked after him with a small, private smile, and picked up his bundle of letters again.

It was over half an hour before Pierce came back. "It isn't there," he said. "They were setting up the tables for supper and it isn't there."

"What?" BJ looked up from his letters.

"The letter. From Trap. McIntyre. Igor said he saw you sitting at the table by the stove and you had a stack of mail with you, but he swears you didn't leave anything behind you."

"Oh." BJ shrugged thoughtfully. "Well, if he says so. I got called over to post-op for a while – I know I had my mail with me then. I was sure I picked it all up again, but I might have missed one."

"Where did you put it down?"

BJ shrugged again. "Probably where we hang the coats. I don't remember. That patient with the chest wound and the Type O Positive blood –"

"Russell," Pierce said. "Is he okay?"

"He gave us five minutes worry this afternoon," BJ said. "But he'll be fine."

"Good," Pierce said. "You put your mail down by the entrance?"

"Somewhere around there."

Pierce left again. He was gone nearly an hour this time: with Burns on duty he would have trouble getting out of post-op. When he came back, BJ was picking himself up to head over to the mess tent for something approaching food.

"It isn't there," Pierce said.

"What?" BJ looked puzzled. "Look, it has to be. I didn't go anywhere else. Mail delivered here, I went to the mess tent, I went to post-op, I came back here. If someone's picked it up, they'll give it back to you, surely?"

"I searched everywhere." Pierce had his hands thrust deep in his pockets. He hadn't moved from the tent entrance. "It isn't in the mess tent and it isn't in post-op, so it has to be here."

"Well, I did step into Colonel Potter's office," BJ said.

"Did you have your letters with you then?"

"I think so, but I don't think I put them down."

"Okay. Russell's looking healthy," Pierce added. "Good pulse."

"And very handsome blood pressure, considering."

"You're O Positive, aren't you?"

"I plead guilty."

"We may need a pint of you later."

"I gave at the office."

"Is that where you left the letter?"

"What?" BJ shrugged. "Look, it'll be somewhere about. If you let me get through to the mess tent, I'll try and remember where else I went."

"Where *else*?" Pierce stepped aside. "I thought you said you just went there, there, and here." He jerked in three directions with his thumb. He was grinning, showing all his teeth.

"Well," BJ said thoughtfully, "I stepped into the Colonel's office..." he was walking casually towards the mess tent, and Pierce was perforce walking with him. "I had a word

with the Colonel, and showed off Erin's handwriting. Then I came back here..." He trailed off his voice. "Wait a minute. I went for a beer at Rosie's."

"Rosie's!" Pierce veered off as suddenly as if the wind had changed. BJ grinned to himself.

The food was no better than usual, but BJ enjoyed it more. He was heading back towards the Swamp when Pierce appeared beside him. "It isn't there," he said abruptly.

"Well," BJ shrugged widely. "I don't know. Maybe I dropped it in the compound."

"No, no," Pierce said. "I've seen the way you hang on to your mail."

"Well, maybe it's in the Swamp," BJ offered.

"Where?"

BJ shrugged even more widely. "How would I know? I thought I left it on your bed."

They had reached the Swamp. BJ cast himself down on his bed. Pierce's quarter of the tent was a mess: but he set about searching it like a wolf. After he had turned over, lifted, and shaken, every object that could possibly have concealed a letter, he turned and looked at BJ's quarter of the tent.

"No, wait, you're not doing that to my stuff –" BJ protested. He was trying to keep a tight rein on his grin. "Look, I remember now, I decided I needed to see what the view was like from up the flagpole –" He was choking back a laugh with difficulty. "Maybe I left it up there –"

Pierce took a step towards BJ. He was showing all his teeth in a wide grin. "There never was a letter," he said quietly.

BJ dropped his head back and laughed out loud. It was the perfect moment. "Gotcha!" Silence.

BJ lifted his head. Pierce was standing with his hands in his pockets and his head thrust forward: he was still grinning, but it didn't look like humour any more. It was so near to Pierce's habitual wide-mouthed smile that it was a long moment before BJ recognised it for what it was.

"There never was a letter." Pierce's voice was hardly recognisable: rough and grating.

Looking up at him, BJ was genuinely afraid, for a long moment, that Pierce was going to hit him. But Pierce never took his hands out of his pockets. He swung round and went out. BJ sat up and stared after him.

There had been so much anger in Pierce's voice, so much pain in that grimace. A simple joke couldn't have caused that.

A simple joke had. Or something. BJ got to his feet and went after him.

Pierce was halfway across the compound. Father Mulcahy was moving to intercept. BJ stopped. Mulcahy could probably deal with it better than he could.

You broke it, you fix it.

BJ swallowed. Pierce and Mulcahy were standing close together. Mulcahy was saying something. Pierce was shaking his head. He glanced round and saw BJ: something happened to his face. "Look, Father, I'm fine. I'm just going for a walk."

"Hawkeye," BJ said rapidly, "I'm sorry."

Mulcahy gave BJ an odd look. He didn't say anything to BJ, but to Pierce he said "If you need to talk –"

Pierce's gaze flicked from BJ to Mulcahy. There was an oddly trapped look in his eyes. "I'm fine."

"Why don't I go for a walk with you?" BJ offered.

“That sounds like a good idea,” Mulcahy said, to Pierce, and faded.

“I didn’t know there was anywhere to go for a walk around here,” BJ said.

“There’s the minefield,” Pierce said.

BJ grinned. “You’re on your own if you want to go for a stroll there.”

Pierce nodded, as if accepting a brush-off, and turned away. BJ grabbed at his arm.

“No, wait. Hawkeye, I don’t get it, but I’m sorry.”

Pierce turned back. He was still nodding. “Okay, you’re sorry, fine. It was just a joke, right?” He grinned, widely, and it still looked like a grimace. “Look, I just want to go for a walk.”

“It’s getting dark,” BJ said. He glanced round. “Hell, it *is* dark.” Night came swiftly in Korea: dusk was as quickly over with as dawn. “Come back to the Swamp and we’ll – have a drink.”

“I don’t want a drink,” Pierce said. But he was following BJ back to the Swamp. BJ nearly cracked “That’s a first,” but was afraid that the sentence, untruncated, would be “I don’t want a drink with you.”

Pierce retrieved a bottle of the still’s end-product from the bashed-together cupboard where he kept the stuff. BJ picked up two glasses, and held them out to Pierce as if he expected the other man to fill them. He wasn’t sure that he did, but after a moment Pierce unscrewed the cap and sloshed a couple of ounces into one glass, then the other. He took the second glass from BJ’s hand, looked at it, and drank.

BJ drank from his own glass. He was surprised but not relieved when Pierce laughed, and, laughing, poured them each another drink, then sat down on his cot. “You really got me going. Chasing all over the camp for a letter that didn’t even exist. I’ve got to hand it to you.” He lifted his glass as if in a toast. “Underneath that apple pie and hot dog look beats the heart of a practical joker.” He looked up at BJ and laughed again. “It was – good going. Trapper would have been proud of you.”

It was fairly convincing. Or would have been if Pierce had managed it ten minutes earlier.

“I’m sorry,” BJ said again, sitting down on the cot opposite Pierce.

The door of the tent swung open and Burns walked in. Pierce looked up. “Good morning, Frank,” he said blithely.

“That’s easy for you to say,” Burns snarled, sitting down. “I’ve been slaving away in post-op and you’ve been sitting here doing nothing all day.”

“Frank, the only patient in post-op right now who needs the attention of a doctor is Russell, and, lucky for him, he got one, even though *you* were on duty.”

“I’m tired of your insinuations,” Burns snapped. He could put a kind of pompous self-pity into his snap that BJ had found irritating almost on first hearing.

“BJ, did I ever tell you about the time Trapper and I put minced meat into Frank’s ears when he was asleep?” Pierce was grinning.

“No, I don’t believe you did.” BJ glanced at Burns.

“There was a dog in camp at the time. Belonged to one of the transport sergeants.”

“I’m beginning to see the end of this story.”

“The best bit was what Ferret-face was muttering when the dog was licking his ear.”

“In his sleep?”

“Well, waking up. Haven’t you ever been woken up by a wet tongue in your ear?”

BJ shook his head. “I never kiss and tell.”

"I don't want to tell tales out of school, but we never knew Frank and General McArthur were on such good terms." Pierce's voice was a miracle of understated humour: BJ eyed him. The tone was perfect.

"Should have been court-martialled for that, assaulting an officer!"

"They couldn't have court-martialled the dog for licking your ear, Frank." Pierce was laughing.

"You weisenheimer," Burns snarled. "I haven't forgotten the time you put fresh cheese in my slippers."

"Fresh cheese?" BJ raised his eyebrows. "Where did you get fresh cheese around here?"

"Brought some back from Seoul," Pierce said, sotto voice.

"I haven't seen fresh cheese in weeks," BJ said.

"Next time we go to Seoul we'll pick some up. There's a great little cheese shop off the street one down from the flower market."

BJ nodded. Burns was glowering across the tent at Pierce, and Pierce was grinning insouciantly back. It was a perfectly familiar picture: but it didn't fit with what BJ had heard in Pierce's voice not even half an hour ago.

"You glued my head to the pillow!"

"It wasn't as if you were *using* it."

Burns spluttered. "Why, you –"

Pierce stood up, grinning. "I think I'll head on over to the mess tent and see if there's any food left."

"I didn't know there was any food there in the first place," BJ said.

"Sometimes I close my eyes and pretend what I'm eating is edible. Sometimes I have to hold my nose, too." He was retreating out the door. "And my tongue."

"As if you'd ever held your tongue in your life," Burns spat after him, and then looked absurdly pleased with himself.

Burns was not BJ's idea of good company. He got up and went out.

Pierce wasn't in the mess tent. Nor in the officer's club. Nor in Rosie's, when BJ went across the road to look.

Nor in post-op. Colonel Potter was on duty, and catching up with his paperwork. Russell was quiet: his blood-pressure was up and his pulse was normal.

There was no one at all in the Colonel's office. O'Reilly glanced up as BJ went by, twice, but said nothing. BJ went out into the night, and stood still, looking around the compound. The light from the tents made the surrounding countryside look darker.

"Brilliant, BJ," he muttered to himself. "Absolutely brilliant. I think I'd feel better if I knew exactly what I should be apologising for when I find him." He paused. "I think I'd feel better if I could find him." He glanced round again. "Or maybe if I could just quit talking to myself."

O'Reilly coughed behind him. "Sir?"

"What?" BJ turned. "Radar?" He was trying to get used to being an officer. "Can I do anything for you, soldier?"

"Hawkeye's up where the choppers land. That's where he always goes when he wants to be alone."

"How did you know I was looking for him?"

O'Reilly twitched. "Just did. But please don't tell him I told you."

“Okay.” BJ nodded.

The chopper field was beaten red earth. There was a scrub of bushes and grass around it. The road to it was rutted dirt, packed hard by jeep wheels. Apart from the possibility of being interrupted by casualty loads, it was probably about as private a place as you’d get inside the camp perimeter.

BJ usually took the road at a run. At a walking pace, in the dark, it still wasn’t much of a road.

Assuming that Pierce wouldn’t sit down in the middle of the field, BJ walked round it. It wasn’t very big. He didn’t see anyone.

Of course, there was the possibility that O’Reilly had been playing his own practical joke on BJ. If he went back up and asked O’Reilly, he’d probably get directed back to somewhere else. “Or maybe I should just go back and get some sleep,” he added out loud. “Worry about apologising tomorrow.”

A bush about five feet off stirred. Pierce stood up from it. “Oh, for crying out loud,” he said. His teeth showed as a brief flash of white. “You already said you were sorry once, BJ. You don’t need to keep following me round the camp saying it again every time you see me.” He came a bit closer. “What *are* you doing here?”

“Radar told me where to go.”

“The little fink.”

“He told me not to tell you he had.”

“You big fink.”

“I’m sorry.”

“Yeah, you already said. It was just a joke, BJ. It was a pretty funny joke. Got me going. I’ll get you back sometime.” Pierce’s voice was light and cheerful. His face was invisible.

“I think the only thing you could do that would hurt me as much as I hurt you is fake a letter from Peg telling me she’s divorcing me,” BJ said. “What I can’t figure out is...” And then he stopped. Light came on. “Those jokes about you and Captain McIntyre...” He stopped again. This wasn’t something he’d ever imagined thinking about anyone he liked.

“For the love of God,” Pierce said abruptly, “just leave it alone. Do you hear me? Just *leave it alone.*” He turned away and went down the road towards camp.

BJ followed him. Pierce was heading towards the Swamp. He was walking with his head down, hands stuck in his pockets, looking very tired.

BJ enjoyed practical jokes. He’d heard enough stories from the other staff that made it clear Pierce enjoyed them too: tying Frank Burns’ big toe to his bed and then yelling “Fire!” was one that he was still trying to think of a method of repeating without duplication. Sometimes a joke backfired, got more serious than ever intended, and BJ had found that the only thing to do under those circumstances was to acknowledge, apologise, and make amends. Any delay made matters worse.

When his victim wouldn’t let him apologise for it and didn’t want him to acknowledge it, it was tough to figure out what he could do to make amends for it.

And he really didn’t want to know what he was afraid he did know about Pierce. They had to shower together, scrub together, hell, they were sharing a *tent*, cots within arm’s reach of each other...

He was sleeping in McIntyre's cot. Positioned where Pierce could reach out and touch it, or rather, the sleeper in it.

Well, he'd been thinking about moving the cot. Rearranging the Swamp. Laying claim to a full third of it. Maybe not tonight.

Dear Peg, I just found out that the man I like best in the camp has deviant tendencies...

BJ stopped. "And you'll tell me that if I liked him before, I can still like him now," he muttered, to Peggy several thousand miles away. "I do like him, Peg. But what if he –"

Well, he hasn't. And just because he formed a relationship with a man he was sharing a tent with for a year in the middle of a war, it doesn't mean he's really deviant.

Pierce stopped by the door of the Swamp and held it open, glancing over his shoulder at BJ. "Come on in. Frank's gone over to visit with Hotlips for the rest of the night."

"How do you know?"

"His bed's empty. And Hotlips got a new package of nail varnish today."

"Nail varnish?"

"Hotlips likes to have Frank do her nails."

"I wish I didn't know that," BJ said.

Pierce sat down on his cot. "From the look on your face, that's not the only thing you wish you didn't know."

BJ shrugged. He remained standing.

"Why don't you get your questions over with?" Pierce asked.

"I don't know that I want to," BJ said.

"I'd just as soon you didn't spin it out." Pierce grinned at him. "What's your first one – am I really a homosexual, or am I just faking it to get more dates on Saturday night?"

"Well, something along those lines," BJ admitted. "You don't... you don't act like a homosexual."

"Listen," Pierce said abruptly, and then stopped. He shrugged. "There was a report came out three years ago, about how people have sex."

"Do you really need a report on that?"

"I read it cover to cover."

"Somehow that doesn't surprise me."

"The doctor who did the research reports that thirty-seven percent of men have orgasms with other men at some time in their lives."

"That seems pretty high."

"Judging by my experience, it's pretty low. But then he wasn't doing his survey in a war zone." Pierce grinned widely and abruptly. "You know what they say about men going into combat."

"I do," BJ acknowledged, "but don't they usually assume that men want women?"

"Mere prejudice." Pierce got up to retrieve the bottle from the makeshift cupboard. "And at least fifty percent wrong." He picked up the glasses they had abandoned an hour ago, and filled them both. "Which one was yours?"

"Does it matter? They've been disinfected."

Pierce smiled. "Thoroughly." He handed him one and sat down on the bed.

BJ sat down on the bed opposite. "So you're not a homosexual...?"

"I love women," Pierce said. "I love men. I'm just naturally loveable." He drank.

BJ matched him. "So you found out here you...?"

Pierce shrugged. He took another quick drink, and BJ lifted the glass to his mouth again. The Swamp gin was beginning to taste good to him.

“No,” Pierce said. “I found out *that* the first time I got a successful blow-job.”

“A *successful* blow-job?” BJ was distracted.

“Crabapple Cove kids start young and try harder,” Pierce said. He sounded drunk: BJ wondered how much he’d had. On an empty stomach? “But no amount of trying teaches you to keep your teeth inside your lips.”

Involuntarily, BJ winced. “Ouch.”

“Boys take more care with their equipment,” Pierce said. He lifted his glass to his mouth again and swallowed. His words were definitely slurring.

BJ took another sip. “That’s not my experience,” he said. The glass was almost empty.

“Oh?” Pierce was grinning, showing most of his teeth. He reached out and sloshed more into BJ’s glass. His own didn’t seem to be any emptier.

“How much have you had to drink? I mean eat?”

“Not hungry,” Pierce said. “Not for anything they serve in the mess tent.”

“I’ve still got some of Peg’s cake left,” BJ offered. The tin box with the cake Peg had sent, arriving mostly as fruited crumbs, was sitting on top of the battered box. Getting up to reach it was beginning to look like something of an effort, but Pierce ought to eat something. BJ was conscious that he was becoming more drunk than he should, even by his current standards, and he’d had supper.

Pierce shook his head. He was lying flat and somehow managing to drink out of the Martini glass. BJ eyed this achievement and decided not to emulate it. He lay down, propped up on his elbow. “Fifty percent?” he said. “Where?”

“Where, what?”

“You can get thrown out of the army for deviant behaviour.”

“Many’s the time I’ve thought of that,” Pierce said reflectively. “The downside would be explaining to my dad why I got thrown out of the army. The upside would be, well, getting thrown out of the army. Still, I’m told the paperwork is a pain in the ass.” He laughed.

“So how can you have – where can you have – you know –” BJ waved his hand wordlessly, not sure how to say it.

“If you needed to know, you would,” Pierce said. He waved his hand in what BJ recognised after a moment as a mimicry of his own gesture. “I bet every army base has a place where you can go if you... you know.”

“I don’t get it.”

“How many people are there in this unit? Not counting patients.”

“Seventy-five, eighty,” BJ said. “Something like that.”

“How many women?”

“Eleven,” BJ said. This was a figure that every man in the unit knew by heart.

“So you’ve got at least fifty men whose choices are their own right hand, or left hand, depending on personal preference, or nothing at all, or wandering down to the place where you go if you want to get a blow-job. Or have someone else’s hand do the job for you, which is at least a damn sight friendlier than your own. And by my reckoning, at least two dozen are going to pick the blow-job.” He laughed. “One side or the other.” He wasn’t slurring his words any more.

“Why?” BJ realised, hearing his own voice, that he was close to complete befuddlement. He stared at the last few drops in his glass and finished them before he spilled them. “I don’t get it.”

Pierce sat up. He had definitely sobered. “I could show you.”

BJ lay back and dropped his glass and laughed. “Come on.”

Pierce seemed to be coming closer. He settled down on the cot beside BJ. His face was very close to BJ’s, and he was smiling. He looked predatory. “I was hoping you’d say that.”

“Now, wait – ” BJ protested.

Pierce kissed him. “No time to wait.” His voice brushed across the skin of BJ’s face like his lips: it was distortingly pleasant. His hands were busy. BJ was finding it hard to focus. Hawkeye’s mouth on his; Hawkeye’s hand at his groin, stroking him, skilled even through two layers of cloth; other hand sliding under his jacket, finding a sensitive point on his chest through his t-shirt. It all felt good, it felt wrong but terribly good, coming from too many directions to stop it or to protest.

“Hawk – ” he started breathlessly, but Hawkeye’s mouth interrupted him again.

Dear Peg, last night I found out my bunkie is one hell of a kisser -

Pierce was an inch or so shorter than him and more lightly built: he couldn’t possibly be pinning BJ down. He was resting half on top of BJ, providing a tantalising pressure on BJ’s groin: growing arousal made it hard to think, but he ought to be stopping Hawkeye before it went too far and neither of them *could* stop –

Pierce shifted his weight a little and BJ felt a hard shape pressing against his thigh. He went on kissing BJ, and it was some measurable time before BJ could work out what it was: an erection, not his. He was in bed with another man, and the man was turned on. So was he.

The strangeness of this held him between protest and enthusiasm: he hadn’t felt like this in so long, so many weeks since anyone had held him like this. A physical memory of Peg lying over him, her breasts soft and lush against his chest, her eyes intent on his, her weight comfortable and comforting: a physical memory jarring with the immediacy of Hawkeye’s weight on him, a different weight but just as comfortable, oddly comforting.

Dear Peg, I don’t know how to apologise to you for this, but I was unfaithful to you last night with Hawkeye –

BJ jerked back, physically separating himself from Pierce as far as he could, pressing his hands against Hawkeye’s shoulders. “Hawk – stop it.”

“Stop what?” Hawkeye was grinning. His voice was smooth as silk. He bent his head again and kissed BJ’s mouth, running his tongue along his lips. Somehow he had shifted his weight so that he was resting on BJ again, and now his hands were moving at the waistband of BJ’s trousers, pulling them down. BJ tried to move back again and found he couldn’t. Hawkeye’s hands were doing something magical to his cock, though it was trapped inside his shorts and weeping to get out. “Tell me what you don’t want me to do,” he said, his voice tickling inside BJ’s ear, “and I’ll stop doing it.”

“Stop – ” BJ managed to get out, but it was not much more than a breathy huff of air before Hawkeye’s tongue was inside his mouth. BJ closed his eyes. He wasn’t surprised that Hawkeye wasn’t paying attention – he wasn’t sure he wanted Hawkeye to stop doing

what he was doing. He was hard as rock and he'd got there somehow without ever having to do anything but lie back and let it happen, and Hawkeye was –

Not doing anything.

BJ blinked his eyes open and stared up. Hawkeye's face was looming very close over his own, eyes half-shut and his mouth twisted. He looked tired and unhappy.

Moving with an effort, Hawkeye pushed himself up and off BJ: it was almost a relief, and almost a disappointment, when Hawkeye's erection stopped touching him. He could still see it tenting the front of Hawkeye's pants.

Hawkeye sat down on his cot: sat rather as a puppet falls, and lay back as if his strings had been cut. He put an arm over his face, and said nothing.

After a moment, BJ propped himself up on his elbows. "What was that about – ?"

"Nothing," Hawkeye said. His voice was grating. "Nothing happened, just go to sleep."

"You can't just say 'nothing happened'."

"Just did. You were drunk, I was drunk, nothing happened, okay, go to sleep."

"Hawk –"

"Go to sleep." Hawkeye's voice shook. He rolled over, curling up on himself. If he felt anything like BJ felt, he wasn't going to sleep. "Good night."

BJ levered himself up to a sitting position, and eyed the distance separating the two cots. Not far. He got up on to his feet, jerked his trousers up again before they fell, and navigated himself across the space between, sitting down on the cot beside Hawkeye. "Hawk?"

"I'm not here. Go away," Hawkeye said into the pillow.

BJ sat there a minute longer. Hawkeye's shoulders gave him no help. He got up and went out. To the latrine, where he relieved himself: he almost never jerked off in there, but his balls were aching. The chill of the night air made him feel less drunk. Following a succession of small thefts that would have bothered him more if he'd been in any way sober, he came back to the Swamp. Hawkeye had put the light out, but wasn't asleep: he groaned a protest when BJ put the light back on.

Hawkeye sat up, looking ruffled. "What the hell?"

BJ put the stolen items down on the bed, one by one. "Half a loaf of bread, Army issue, soldiers, midnight snacks, for the use of. Jar of French mustard. Can of Virginia ham. Pack of cheese slices. Breadknife. Plate."

"What?"

"You missed supper. Ham and cheese sandwich okay with you?"

Hawkeye stared at him. He seemed to have been stricken speechless. It was the first time BJ had ever seen him look genuinely surprised, and BJ found he quite liked the look. He picked up the can of ham – it was the sort that came with a key – and began to open it. Hawkeye said nothing until BJ started spreading the mustard on the hacked-off slices of bread.

"Let me do it." Hawkeye held out his hand for the knife, and BJ passed it to him. He layered ham with cheese, mortaring it with more mustard, and topped it with the other slice of bread. "Thanks," he added, with an odd look at BJ from under his brows.

"It's the least I can do."

"Finding a Virginia ham?"

“I think it used to belong to Frank,” BJ admitted. “I got it from the stash someone keeps in the supply hut.”

“They have Mafia connections,” Hawkeye said, chewing. “You’d better offer to pay for it in the morning.”

“I’ll post a notice on the camp bulletin board. The mustard’s from Sergeant Kimball’s private stores and the cheese is from the stash Burns had in the colonel’s office. I wondered why he didn’t like fresh cheese.”

Hawkeye finished one half of his sandwich and started on the other. “Not that I don’t appreciate this, but why?”

BJ sat down on his own bed. The amount he’d drunk was catching up on him again. It was warm in the tent. “I played that damn joke on you. I didn’t know about you and Trapper. I wouldn’t have done it if I’d known. I’m sorry.” His bed actually felt comfortable. He kicked off his shoes and started to wriggle under the blanket.

Hawkeye shifted the food from his bed to the floor. He put the can of ham down respectfully: everything else went down with a succession of thumps.

“There wasn’t anything to know about me and Trapper,” he said. He sounded impossibly tired. “That’s the way it works. Once it’s over it’s over. Trapper knew that.” He got up and put the light out. BJ heard him move back to his cot and lie down with a thump.

“How long were you two together?”

“We never really were,” Hawkeye said. He was slurring the words. “After the night’s over, it’s over, and it never happened. It was just a longer night than usual. About a year.”

BJ stared across the darkness at the shadow in the other bed. *Mail on your bed. You got a letter from McIntyre.* He felt horrified and small. “You must have been miserable,” he said.

Hawkeye didn’t answer.

The other thing that bothered BJ, waking up to reveille, was that he suspected he would get used to feeling half-hungover in the morning. Hawkeye was already up, brushing his teeth: Frank Burns was a muffled lump under the far tent wall, emitting small puppy-like snores.

It was beginning to be cold enough in the mornings that it didn’t make sense to get undressed until you got to the shower. BJ got up and pushed his feet into his shoes. Towel. Soap. Clean fatigues. Well, fairly clean. Shaving gear.

Hawkeye was doing the same thing, about half a minute behind. They usually went over to the showers together. Hawkeye stood still a moment, looking at BJ, a question visible in his eyes.

BJ shrugged. “Coming?” he asked, moving towards the door.

“If only,” Hawkeye muttered, and followed him.

It didn’t feel odd to be undressing in the shower tent with Hawkeye until BJ thought about it. Even then, he had to force himself to feel it was odd: Hawkeye wasn’t even looking at him. It was a classic bad situation to be in – a good reason, BJ realised he would have said if anyone had asked him, why queers couldn’t be allowed in the army. But then Hawkeye had already... had already tried something, and he’d stopped. Drunk as he was, tired as he was, angry and miserable and horny as he was, he’d stopped.

“Hawk, about last night – ”

Hawkeye glanced at the door and stepped under the shower. He spoke so quietly BJ could hardly hear him over the sound of the water. "Can't we just pretend it never happened?"

"No," BJ said after a moment's thought, "I don't think I can."

Hawkeye made a face. "Figures." He was silent for a minute, soaping himself. His face, directly under the flow of water from the shower, looked closed-off. "You want a transfer?"

"No," BJ said, emphatically, without any need for thought. "But – what do we do now?"

"Shower, shave, get dressed, have what passes for breakfast, check on Russell, wait for today's wounded." Hawkeye grinned, briefly. "You might want to brush your teeth, too."

BJ thought about it, rubbing soap on his face. He reached out and Hawkeye passed him his razor, no fumbling. He went on thinking about it, passing the blade across his skin, seeing Hawkeye's face out of the corner of his eye as he focussed on his own in the mirror. He didn't cut himself once.

"How do you think I'd look with a moustache?"

There was a pause. Hawkeye went on shaving. He had a heavier beard than BJ, and it took him longer. He looked at BJ, and ducked his head on one side, grinning crookedly. "Cute as the devil."

August 2004

7660 words



For Ever

For Ann, for always.

Mulcahy had kept going the whole way telling himself that it was more than likely that Hawkeye Pierce wouldn't even be there. The address at Crabapple Cove in Maine was his father's address, and he'd planned to go there when he went home: but all these months after he had been discharged, he almost certainly had a job at a big hospital. In Maine, maybe. Somewhere else, perhaps.

He had almost concluded the house must be empty – he wasn't even sure if the bell was working – when the door opened and Hawkeye stood blinking in the strong afternoon sunlight, looking exactly like the rumpled and exhausted surgeon in Korea. He was even wearing the same brightly-coloured towelling bathrobe. That was shock enough to render him speechless.

“Father Mulcahy?” Hawkeye said. He looked as if he found the sight incredulous, and leaned forward, blinking a little harder, as if to convince himself of his own eyes. “Father Francis Mulcahy?”

It seemed too much to explain just there on the doorstep. He managed a nod. His smile felt awkward.

“Not that I'm not pleased to see you,” Hawkeye said, still looking as if he didn't quite believe it, “but what are you doing here?”

“I... wanted to see you.” Mulcahy essayed another awkward smile. “May I – ”
However the conversation went, he didn't want to have it on the doorstep.

“Oh, yeah,” Hawkeye said, and then as if a switch had tripped, he grinned, widely, toothily, and stood aside, waving Mulcahy in with a grandiose gesture. He started to say “Have you seen – ” and took Mulcahy's hand and shook it, stepping back abruptly, closing the door. Speech was impossible. The hall was dark after the sunlight inside, but not cluttered: Mulcahy followed Hawkeye's retreating back without mishap, through another door at the far end into a big kitchen, sunlit through grimy windows. Here was clutter: plates, cups, and crumbs. A frying-pan and a kettle were on the stove, which was wood-fired and cold.

“Can I get you anything?” Hawkeye asked, staring around, as if suddenly aware of the mess. “I just woke up myself.”

“I'm sorry,” Mulcahy said. “Are you on night duty?”

“Yeah, something like that.” Hawkeye moved towards the kettle, then stopped. “Damn, I need to get more wood in. Sorry, Father. I'm not used to guests – Sit down, I'll put something together – ”

“May I make a suggestion?” Mulcahy offered.

“Sure.”

“I think I can get the stove started,” Mulcahy said diffidently, “if you'd like to have a shower.”

Hawkeye stared at him. “Do I smell that bad?” He wrinkled his nose. “Don't answer that, Father.” He made an elaborate pantomime out of sniffing under one arm, finishing with a suspicious look at Mulcahy. “Yeah, well, you might be right. Don't worry about the stove – just go sit outside, enjoy the view. I'll be back in fifteen minutes. Don't go

away.” He got to the kitchen door and turned again, pointing. “Through *that* door you will find two comfortable chairs and the best view in Maine. Sit down, enjoy, don’t go away, and I’ll be back when I’m sweeter-smelling.”

Mulcahy found himself smiling, without awkwardness. “All right.”

“I really mean it about not going away.” Hawkeye managed to leer and look wistful at the same time. “I’ll even splash on some perfume.”

“No need,” Mulcahy said. He knew it for a pantomime, familiar teasing: it was a relief to see Hawkeye the same.

There were two ancient basketwork chairs on the veranda, padded with cushions so faded that the flowers were grey. The woodpile was still well-stacked, and Mulcahy was perfectly familiar with wood-burning stoves. He got the fire started and filled the kettle, before he went obediently outside and sat down to enjoy the view of the cove that gave the town its name. Far below the sea washed silently against the rocks.

He kept glancing at the door: a dark head poked out a few minutes later. “I also meant it about not bothering with the stove.” Hawkeye looked wider awake, and more refreshed, though there were still dark marks under his eyes that spoke of too little sleep.

“Oh, it was no trouble,” Mulcahy assured him.

“If that stove was no trouble, then it was a miracle.” Hawkeye paused. “Of course, miracles are your stock in trade.”

“Not really, I’m afraid.” Mulcahy smiled, deliberately.

“Want lunch? I’m going to have breakfast. I can pretty much guarantee that it’s going to taste better than army food.”

“Ah yes, army food. You know, while I was on retreat, I used to think fondly of the food in the mess tent.”

“You were on retreat?” Hawkeye peered at him.

“For nearly six months.”

“Oh.”

Mulcahy could see Hawkeye decide not to ask. He couldn’t think of a way to get Hawkeye to ask. He shifted uncomfortably. “How is your father?” he asked.

He knew he’d said something wrong: he’d seen Hawkeye get that appalled, haunted look before. As in Korea, the look vanished into a face-twisting grin after only a moment. “Yeah. Well. He’s fine, you know, I mean for where he is –” He stopped, and swallowed. “He’s dead.”

“Hawkeye – “ Mulcahy’s throat felt rough. “When? How?”

“He had a heart attack. Just over three weeks ago. He was hospitalised, and then he had another one, and, well, there was nothing they could do. The funeral was...”

Hawkeye screwed his face up, thinking. “Six days ago. I’m still eating the casseroles. That’s what they do here. Bring casseroles.”

During his years as an army chaplain, Mulcahy had listened to so many people tell him that someone they cared about had died. But at this moment, as at all the moments before, he wished he could think of something to say.

“Oh,” he said. “Oh, I’m sorry... Hawkeye, you loved him so much.”

“Loved him?” Hawkeye’s face twisted again. He put his forehead down against his fist. He might have said something then. Mulcahy waited, horrified. It was only a moment before Hawkeye lifted his head again. “Oh God, Father, I miss him so much.”

He seemed to hear what he had said, and laughed. "I used to imagine introducing the two of you. 'Dad, this is Father. Father, this is Dad.'"

My name is Francis, Mulcahy thought about saying, and didn't. "When did you... imagine introducing us?"

"Oh..." There were tears on Hawkeye's face, but he was grinning. "A lot of times. I'd think about coming home from the war and getting to show you off to my dad. When I did things – that doctors don't get to do in Crabapple Cove. Chasing nurses all over. Drinking till I fell over. Operating hungover. I'd think about my dad, and I'd think about telling him all the stuff I did over there, but then I'd think about telling him, this is Father Mulcahy, and he – *he* likes me, and if he likes me, I don't really care if you don't like me."

Mulcahy put his hand out to touch Hawkeye's upper arm: he patted him gently, cautiously, and Hawkeye's other hand moved to grab his hand. He had narrow, ugly hands, but his grip was familiarly strong and sure. "But you know what's funny, Father? I mean, really? He *did* like me. I never found out till I was in Korea, but he liked me. He missed me. I came first with him, even before his patients. But I had to go to Korea to find it out, because we'd never have written each other those kind of letters if I hadn't, and then he has to die, not even a year after I get back... He was only sixty-four. What did he have to go and die for?" His mouth was twisted up with pain, making his words hard to understand, and his grip on Mulcahy's hand was savagely tight.

Mulcahy let him hang on. He put his hand on Hawkeye's shoulder. He realised after a little while, feeling terribly helpless, that Hawkeye was crying, his body racked with sobs.

"I'm sorry," Mulcahy said again. He could not make out what Hawkeye was saying. "Don't," he said helplessly. "It's all right, Hawkeye. Don't –"

Hawkeye looked up. His face was smeared with tears and snot. He sniffed heartily, and used the back of his free hand to wipe his nose. With a visible effort, he put on his familiar wide-mouthed grin. "Sorry, Father. I'm a mess." Tears were still leaking out of the corners of his eyes. "I'm sorry –" He stood up. "I'll get lunch. Casserole okay with you? Mrs Godden over the road did me a tuna casserole I really ought to eat today. It'll probably be fine if you add enough ketchup."

"Hawkeye." Mulcahy stood up. He took hold of Hawkeye's arms and turned him back to face him. He spoke with familiar authority. "You can cry for your father. You don't need to – to clown in front of me."

Hawkeye's grin held a moment, and collapsed. He was swallowing hard, looking as if he were trying to say something, and not succeeding. He spoke, finally. "I miss him." Not able to say anything – Mulcahy was finding it hard to talk himself – he put his arms round Hawkeye and hugged him close. The taller man nearly collapsed against him. This close, despite the toothpaste and soap, Mulcahy could smell that Hawkeye was still drunk.

There were things Mulcahy wanted to say more, but there was one thing he needed to tell Hawkeye as soon as possible. He pushed Hawkeye back, seeing the change in Hawkeye's face as he did so, and said as clearly as he could, "Hawkeye, I'm deaf."

The look on Hawkeye's face changed to confusion. "What?"

"I can't hear you. Unless I can see your face, I can't tell what you're saying."

"What?" Hawkeye was still looking bewildered. "How long – when did it happen? You were 'on retreat' –"

“I’ve learned to read lips,” Mulcahy said. He smiled, because he had learned that that reassured people at this point in his confession. “It really doesn’t matter, except that I sometimes appear to be ignoring people when I don’t intend to. And I do – I do have to see your face.”

Hawkeye caught at his arms again. “Deaf?” he repeated.

“Yes.” Mulcahy smiled and nodded again. “I’m really quite good at lip-reading now.” He was also making progress in signs, and he’d learned finger-spelling, but he presumed Hawkeye wouldn’t know either.

Hawkeye shook him. “Deaf?” He was clearly all but shouting it.

“Yes,” Mulcahy said. He wasn’t sure how loudly he said it, but he was trying to project his voice over Hawkeye’s: the other man closed his mouth and swallowed.

“I’m sorry, Father.”

“My name is Francis,” Mulcahy said.

“When did it happen? How did it happen?”

“That’s not really important,” Mulcahy said.

“Of course it’s important. Who’s been treating you? When did it happen? You weren’t deaf in Korea – what happened to you?”

“Both my eardrums were ruptured,” Mulcahy said. “I’ve been examined by one of the best doctors in the diocese of Pennsylvania. There’s nothing that can be done. I do have a hearing aid, but I find it uncomfortable and it doesn’t help very much. It happened,” he was conscious of prevarication, “shortly before I left the army. Unexploded munitions.” That was true, if misleading.

“I thought you were all safe,” Hawkeye said. His face held a dazed, almost betrayed look, and his grip on Mulcahy’s arms was tightening. “All but Henry Blake, God rest his soul. Trapper and Beej and Radar and Margaret and the Colonel and even Charles. I thought you were all *safe*.”

“I am safe,” Mulcahy said. “I’m just deaf.”

Hawkeye let go of him, sat down and buried his face in his hands. Doubly cut off, Mulcahy pushed his hands down by his sides and shut his mouth. It felt like someone slamming a door in his face. He hated it.

It was only a moment: Hawkeye lifted his head and dropped his hands away from his face. He looked vulnerable and bleary-eyed. “Sorry, Father,” he said again. “I’ll try to remember.” He stood up again. “What about that tuna casserole?”

“Sounds delicious,” Mulcahy said. He followed Hawkeye in.

The casserole tasted just fine to Mulcahy: Hawkeye ate it without enthusiasm. The plates and cutlery were clean, if not the table, but there was a short stack of dishes already in the sink. Hawkeye stood up and cleared their plates, adding them to the pile.

“How long can you stay, Father?” Hawkeye turned round as he asked it. Mulcahy had been watching the back of his head.

Mulcahy hesitated, watching Hawkeye’s lips move, trying to make up his mind. “Actually, I don’t have any current plans.”

“Where are you staying?”

“I left my suitcase at the diner by the bus station,” Mulcahy said. “You seem to have quite a lot of guesthouses here. I – ” he stopped. “I didn’t want to make plans to stay here until I knew where you were.”

Hawkeye stared at him. A small, cautious smile appeared on his face. “You know, you could stay here,” he said. “I mean, I have...” the smile faded. “Three spare rooms, right now.”

“I’d be glad to,” Mulcahy said.

“Good.” The smile came back. “Good. Let’s go. We can grab a cup of coffee there.” Hawkeye stood up. “I guess I’d better get dressed,” he added, as if suddenly realising he was still in his bathrobe. “You need a crack at the bathroom, Father? It’s down the hall on the right.”

It occurred to Mulcahy that this was the first time he’d ever seen Hawkeye in ordinary civilian clothes. They were all a little too big for him, and there was something odd about them in other ways. Mulcahy was getting into the car before it dawned on him that the clothes were from before the Korean war: when Hawkeye hadn’t been quite so thin. The bathrobe had disguised it, but surely Hawkeye was thinner than he had been in Korea.

But he drove more carefully. Drunk or sober. It was a couple of miles to the bus station, down narrow roads. Hawkeye took them as slowly as if he was sober. Slower, probably, Mulcahy realised. “How many families around here?” he asked.

Hawkeye pulled to a halt at a junction before he turned his head to look at Mulcahy. “Quite a few.” He grinned a little. “Dad delivered half his patients.”

The diner was brighter than it had been this morning, because the windows faced west, away from the coast. It wasn’t a tourist place. The man behind the counter, a big man with white hair and a face like a stone slab, came out from behind the counter when he saw them come in: not grudgingly, as he had come this morning to point Mulcahy in the direction of the old Pierce house, but with a surprising turn of speed.

“Ben. Good to see you. Y’friend found you, then?”

“Oh, yes –” Hawkeye wasn’t facing Mulcahy any more, and Mulcahy was conscious of sudden guiltstricken panic. He ought to have told Hawkeye earlier, no matter how awkward the moment. He stood there in silence, conscious of the man’s eyes on him, trying not to stare too obviously at the side of Hawkeye’s face, wanting to *hear* so badly he could have screamed for it.

The man held out his hand to Mulcahy, who smiled, nodded, and shook it. Hawkeye was moving over to a table in the corner. Mulcahy followed him.

“Daniel Sheffield,” Hawkeye said when they sat down. “Makes the best coffee in Maine.”

Mulcahy smiled and nodded. He could not speak for a moment.

Sheffield reappeared with two steaming cups. The coffee was midnight black. Mulcahy looked down into it, glad for a moment to break eye contact, and then, ashamed of himself, looking up again. Sheffield had already gone: so had the milk jug. Hawkeye was looking at him with an odd expression. Mulcahy lifted his mug and tasted the coffee: it *was* good, and he said so.

A minute or so later, Sheffield reappeared with Mulcahy’s case in one hand and a fresh jug of milk in the other. He said something to Hawkeye that Mulcahy didn’t quite catch – something about Hawkeye’s car – and went away again, ignoring Mulcahy’s tentative thanks.

“Is there a problem with your car?”

“Not exactly,” Hawkeye said. “It’s my dad’s. Daniel was just pointing out to me that half the main street can see where it’s parked, and the other half will find out in half an hour.”

“I’m sorry, I don’t understand – ”

Hawkeye lifted his own coffee mug. “It means we don’t have very long before a lot of people will come in here for coffee,” he said, and looked wry. “It’s not that they all need a doctor right now. But they all want to know whether I’m staying. Stick with me, Father, it’s not a conversation I want to have right now.” He drank coffee. “Or ever.”

Mulcahy nodded. “Hawkeye, can I ask you for a favour?” He hoped he was asking quietly enough: it looked like the kind of place where the radio would be playing constantly.

“Sure, Father, anything.”

“Call me Francis,” Mulcahy said. “Or whatever you like, but not ‘Father’. Don’t tell them I’m a – priest.” He got it out without much of a change in his voice.

“What?” Hawkeye was frowning at him.

“Please, Hawkeye, just do as I ask you,” Mulcahy said. He was conscious that there wasn’t much authority in his voice.

“Okay,” Hawkeye said. He looked startled. “What’s the matter – bottom fell out of your Vatican stock?”

“I don’t – ” Mulcahy shook his head. “I don’t want to talk about it here.”

Hawkeye was looking at him intently. “Okay,” he said again.

Mulcahy drank his coffee slowly. Hawkeye was right: over the next hour, people came in to the diner, one by one or two by two, and apparently just happened to walk past the table where they were sitting. They didn’t seem to ask Hawkeye anything: mostly they didn’t mention his father. They accepted being introduced to Mulcahy, with an unsmiling nod and a slow handshake, but Mulcahy was conscious, as the silent and irregular procession went on, that their attention was on Hawkeye: very much on Hawkeye. Sitting across the table from him, Mulcahy watched as Hawkeye said much the same things, over and over: “Yes, it’s a nice day. Friend of mine from Korea, Francis Mulcahy. Good coffee. Thanks for the casserole. Nice day. Korea. Francis Mulcahy. Coffee. Casserole.”

Hawkeye’s voice could deliver savage sarcasms while his face smiled: Mulcahy, sitting, watching, nursing his coffee, realised that he had no idea, and perhaps never would know, what Hawkeye’s voice was saying to these townspeople who had known him so long. They were all older people: they called him Ben. No one called him Hawkeye – or Doctor Pierce, either. During that time, Sheffield came over to deliver two refills each and, with the second refill, two plates with slices of pie: Hawkeye ate his without seeming to notice. It was apple pie, homemade, good: Mulcahy ate his without taking his eyes off the silent conversations taking place two feet away.

Initially, learning how to lip-read had required a level of concentration that Mulcahy had sometimes thought he would never achieve for long enough to be able to have a conversation with anyone again. He could do it now almost without being conscious of it, so long as the person speaking was facing him and spoke reasonably articulately: a change in angle, a slurred habit of speech, and he would be struggling again. Following a conversation between two people, even if the angle was right to see both faces at the same time, still required exhausting levels of concentration, and three people was all but impossible: by the time Mulcahy had finished his pie, he needed a break, and after three

cups of coffee, he needed the rest room. An elderly couple – they looked sufficiently alike that Mulcahy wondered if they were brother and sister, not husband and wife – had just finished telling Hawkeye something – about the weather, Mulcahy guessed, from Hawkeye’s response – and moved on to their own table. Mulcahy got up.

Hawkeye looked up at him – a quick flash of panic, almost, it seemed. “Fa – Mulcahy?” he said.

Mulcahy jerked his thumb at the restroom door, and smiled. “Call of nature,” he said, and turned away.

The restroom was small, but reasonably clean: Mulcahy locked himself into it, used the toilet, and washed his hands: seminary rote followed by MASH unit drill. He sat down on the toilet seat and took his specs off to rub at his eyes. He had come, selfishly, thinking only of his own needs, to tug at Hawkeye’s sleeve and insist on his attention. It seemed – if he could judge by the short while he had spent in Hawkeye’s company – that God had in mind a usefulness for him. If he could help Hawkeye, and he thought in all humility that he could, perhaps that was the purpose God had in mind when he had set off on the trek from Pennsylvania to Maine.

“And perhaps not,” Mulcahy murmured. He bowed his head and whispered, “Dear Lord, not my will but yours be done.” He paused a moment, trying to think. “Let me do some good, and if I can’t, let me do no harm. Help me in the hour of my weakness. Amen.” He stood up, and added, an afterthought of a prayer, “And, dear God, if you can see your way clear to it, no more three-way conversations for at least the next twelve hours?” He put his specs back on, took a breath, and went out of the door into the silent, crowded room.

There were three people standing by Hawkeye’s table: Mulcahy could not see his face clearly enough to know what he was saying, but from all across the room he could see that Hawkeye’s gaze was turned towards the restroom door.

As Mulcahy approached the table, Hawkeye stood up. He picked up Mulcahy’s suitcase with one hand, and took hold of Mulcahy’s arm with the other. “Come on, Father, I remember you said – ” and then his face was turned away from Mulcahy’s as they were both walking towards the door, and without literally turning Hawkeye around, Mulcahy could not see what he was saying. Almost certainly some excuse to get out of the diner.

“Sorry I let you in for that, Father,” Hawkeye said, turning his face towards Mulcahy as he backed out of the diner’s parking lot.

“That’s all right,” Mulcahy said, automatically. And then, suddenly remembering, “I didn’t pay for my coffee. Or the pie.”

“I paid,” Hawkeye said. “It’s okay.” He was driving slowly down the road away from the direction they had come in, towards a sign saying General Stores. There was almost no traffic, but what there was was coming along in the other direction at quite a clip. Mulcahy appreciated Hawkeye’s efforts to talk to him, but wished quite heartily that Hawkeye would keep his eyes on the road. “Steak for dinner tonight. The kind of steak I used to dream about in Korea.”

The groceries Hawkeye bought had included a bottle of gin and another of Scotch. Mulcahy said nothing. Hawkeye seemed to have sobered, though that might just be the effect of the coffee. He was driving more quickly on his road home, but he was keeping

his eye on the road. Back at the house, he let Mulcahy help him put away the various groceries: in the cupboard where the bottles went, there was another fifth of Scotch with – according to Mulcahy’s experienced judgement – about a quarter of a pint left, half a bottle of vermouth, and two dusty bottles of red wine at the back. That was somewhat reassuring, though the box full of empty bottles was not.

“Let’s go sit out there again while the sun’s still on the veranda,” Hawkeye said. He was reaching down a pair of glasses. “Scotch for you, Father?”

“I don’t want a drink,” Mulcahy said. “I asked you to call me Francis.”

“Well, I do,” Hawkeye said. “Come on, Father, I hate to drink alone.”

“You’ve been doing it a good deal over the last six days, I think,” Mulcahy said. As always, he was conscious of standing on shaky ground. He had once, in Korea, ended up drinking his store of sacramental wine – which, being stronger and sweeter than most wines, had made him too drunk to preach a sermon before he had realised how much he had taken. Though another priest who had worked in three wars had told him worse things happened to sacramental wine in war, and though theologically until it was consecrated it was just fermented grape juice, still, Mulcahy had never been able to think about it without embarrassment, or the nickname he’d briefly acquired because of it. He looked back at Hawkeye, hoping that the other man would be kind enough not to mention ‘Dago Red’.

Hawkeye shrugged a little. “To tell you the truth,” he said with apparent mildness, “I don’t think I’ve been sober any time in the last six days.”

Mulcahy took some small measure of courage: he hoped the mildness was real. “Perhaps you ought to consider it?”

“I was planning to stay drunk for a week,” Hawkeye said. “How about joining me?”

Mulcahy hesitated. He hadn’t had a Scotch in months – or anything at all: he *was* missing it. And Hawkeye was capable of real self-control, or had been. “Why don’t we at least wait until after we’ve eaten?”

“You take all the fun out of things, Father,” Hawkeye said, but he was smiling. He put the glasses down and turned towards the door to the veranda.

“I asked you to call me Francis,” Mulcahy said.

Hawkeye turned around. “Yeah, I was going to ask you about that.”

Mulcahy’s heart thumped. He had changed his mind a hundred times since his arrival about loading his problems on to Hawkeye; but then, Hawkeye’s compassion had always been a road out of sin for him. Maybe that was what God had intended, to make use of Mulcahy’s pain.

“It’s not a matter of my personal preference, Hawkeye,” he began slowly. “I am suspended from the priesthood.” He sat down on one of the chairs: Hawkeye sat down on the other, looking bewildered.

“How? What?”

“I’m not allowed to say Mass – ” not in church and not to others “ – nor to take confession or give absolution – ” except *in extremis*, though this exemption was hardly likely to be of use to anyone, handicapped as he was “ – and I’m not allowed to wear the clerical collar or any other sign of priesthood, or call myself or allow anyone to call me ‘Father’ or ‘Reverend’.” It was a litany of pain for him, but it came out quite briefly.

From looking him in the face, Hawkeye’s gaze tipped downward to his throat. “I can’t believe I didn’t notice,” he said.

“You were used to seeing me in military clothing,” Mulcahy said simply. He wore the crucifix his sister had given him tucked inside his shirt: wearing it outside, as he had done in his years of priesthood, would not have contravened the letter of his suspension, but would decidedly have contravened its spirit.

“They kicked you out because you’re *deaf*?”

“No,” Mulcahy said. It was true he had demanded of God, a year or so ago, when it had become clear that the handicap was no passing thing, “What use is a deaf priest?” But God had answered him. “I learned to read lips so that I could still communicate with the hearing, and I’m learning to sign so that I could minister to the deaf. Even if I couldn’t, if I were incapable, I would still be a priest – I could still be a priest.”

Tu es sacerdos in aeternum... The phrase of music his ears could no longer hear sounded inside his head. “I was suspended because I adhered to a difference in doctrine.”

Hawkeye looked at him, head cocked on one side. After a moment, he said “Just that?”

Mulcahy brought his hands together in front of him, still ashamed to remember it. “And – and because I lost my temper with a Monsignor. And my bishop.”

He had known Hawkeye would laugh. He wished he could still hear the sudden shout of it. He was startled when he realised the open-mouthed grimace Hawkeye made wasn’t laughter: he couldn’t read it at all.

“Father, what *happened*?”

“You mustn’t call me that,” Mulcahy said wearily.

Hawkeye broke eye contact for a moment. “I don’t want to call you Francis,” he said, looking down. He looked up again. “In private? Who’s going to know?”

Mulcahy gestured upwards. “And me,” he added.

“How?” Hawkeye shook his head. He looked frustrated. “Why? What happened? How long are you suspended for?”

“I don’t know, exactly,” Mulcahy said, answering the easiest question with the easiest answer. He was again conscious that he was prevaricating. “I was suspended seven months ago.”

“For what? Losing your temper?”

“That was... a side effect.” It might be the right thing to do, to tell Hawkeye, but all of a sudden, Mulcahy was certain he couldn’t. He had come four hundred miles to tug at Hawkeye’s sleeve, it might be that God wanted him to show Hawkeye his pain, but going through all that again just seemed impossible. He took his specs off again and rubbed his eyes.

It was still disconcerting when people appeared in front of him without warning: it was twice as disconcerting when it was Hawkeye. He crouched down and looked up into Mulcahy’s face. This close, even without his specs, Hawkeye’s face was clear. There were tears standing in the corners of his eyes.

“You’re the best priest I ever knew. There’s got to be some mistake.”

Mulcahy shook his head. He tried to smile. “No. Or perhaps, yes – I don’t think – ” He swallowed. “It’s difficult to explain.”

“Sorry.” The corners of Hawkeye’s mouth went up. “I don’t want to put you through the Spanish Inquisition. That’s more your department.”

Mulcahy tried to smile back. He put his specs on.

“Let’s go pick out a room for you,” Hawkeye said. “You want a sea view?”

There were four bedrooms upstairs. Hawkeye pointed at one door. "From that room you get a view of the sea, but the sunrise gets up unpleasantly early in this part of the world." He pointed at the other. "From *that* room you get a view of the road and too many trees, but the sun lets you sleep in till noon. Both rooms come with full service, lack of central heating, and mice in the roof."

"I'll take the sea view."

"Okay, but don't come running to me to complain when the sun gets you out of bed at half past way too early."

It was a big, bare-boarded room, smelling a little musty. The furniture was battered and mis-matched. Hawkeye disappeared without warning, and reappeared a minute or two later with an armful of bedding. Hawkeye started to make the bed up: after a minute watching him, Mulcahy stepped in. "Excuse me."

He had learned how to make a bed to Major Houlihan's standards, at the speed required when there were two hundred patients coming through in twenty-four hours. He looked up to see Hawkeye smiling at him. "You'll make someone a good nurse."

"Thank you," Mulcahy said.

There was something odd about Hawkeye's smile. He stepped back into the hall: Mulcahy left his suitcase by the bed and followed him. The door to the other bedroom facing the sea was open; Hawkeye was standing just inside the room, looking round. The room Mulcahy had just tenanted had smelt clean, if dustily unused: this room smelt like a bedroom shut up with unclean sheets and stale sweat. The bed was unmade: the coverlet thrown back and half-fallen to the floor.

Hawkeye looked over at him. "I guess I should clear this room out."

"I'll help," Mulcahy said.

"Oh, no, I couldn't possibly let you, thank you, it's a deal." Hawkeye looked round again. "I was born in this room, you know?"

"Really?"

"So they tell me." Hawkeye shrugged and grinned. "I don't remember it. My dad was born in the room across the hall."

"You have a lot of family history in this house."

"We have a lot of family history in this town. There are Pierces buried in the graveyard since 1680." Hawkeye was still grinning. "Mostly they wait till we're dead."

Mulcahy went across to the window and pushed it up. There was a stick to prop it open: it had worn a hole into the old wood of the sash. "Hawkeye, why don't you put some water on to heat up?"

Hawkeye was still standing by the door. The grin on his face looked fixed by now. "Sure. Don't do anything I wouldn't do."

He left the room. Mulcahy didn't waste time. He stripped the bed to the bare mattress, and packed the bedding into the laundry basket, which was a quarter full with stale socks and shorts and a couple of elderly-looking shirts. He left it at the top of the stairs, not sure whether he could carry it down.

The room already smelled fresher when he came back into it. By the time Hawkeye came upstairs, Mulcahy was sorting through the clothes in the closet.

"Are there any of these you want to keep?" Mulcahy was taking shirts off the hangers and folding them tidily.

“Shouldn’t think so,” Hawkeye said. He wandered over to look at the bed. “Where did the sheets go?”

“The basket at the top of the stairs,” Mulcahy said.

“Oh, right.” Hawkeye picked up a shirt. “I never saw Dad wear this.” He put it down again, unfolded, on top of another pile. “Look, I can’t ask you to help with this. Why don’t we go downstairs and have a drink.”

Mulcahy looked at Hawkeye for a moment. “Why don’t you sort out the books on those shelves,” he suggested gently.

“Into what?”

“Books you want to keep, books to give away.”

“They’re Dad’s books.”

Mulcahy said nothing. After a moment, Hawkeye made an annoyed grimace. “Yeah. Right.”

Mulcahy stopped folding shirts. “We don’t have to do this now,” he said, feeling apologetic.

Hawkeye picked a book off the shelves, looked at it, put it back. “No. I’ve been meaning to do this for the past five days.” He was keeping his face turned towards Mulcahy with what seemed like an effort. “Only I kept opening the door, standing right there,” he jerked his thumb at the door, “and deciding to go downstairs and have another drink. I never thought of opening the window.”

“We still don’t have to do this today.”

“I’ve got a week’s compassionate leave from Maine General for the funeral.”

Mulcahy began folding shirts again, carefully. “And you spent it...”

“Getting drunk,” Hawkeye said cordially. He was stacking books in ordered piles, occasionally glancing down at them, but not speaking when he did so. “Maine General expects me back day after tomorrow. But Doctor Allen went to medical school with my dad. He told me at the funeral if I needed more time I should call him. Allen’s the chief surgeon there.”

“Have you?”

“No.” Hawkeye shook his head. “I’m not sure Allen expects me back.”

“And the townspeople here want you to stay?” Mulcahy asked.

Hawkeye shrugged again. “They’d be proud of me if I went back to Maine General. They’d be pleased with me if I stayed here.”

“It sounds like an enviable decision,” Mulcahy said. He didn’t need to hear the tones in Hawkeye’s voice to know it wasn’t, not for Hawkeye.

“Yeah,” Hawkeye said, and went on stacking books.

They worked together in companionable silence, sorting through the treasures and oddments and detritus of a life: Hawkeye produced bags and boxes and carried them downstairs. A few things were kept: most were put away. There was something very comforting about doing a straightforward job, visibly making a difference: Mulcahy stopped trying to keep an eye on Hawkeye to see if he wanted to talk, and just worked.

He was sorting through a drawer of old ties when Hawkeye’s legs appeared in front of him, and Mulcahy sat back on his heels. Hawkeye crouched down and said something – Mulcahy wasn’t focussing, and missed it. He was too close and too unguarded. He should get up, but he was fixed there. He didn’t know what Hawkeye was saying. *Dear Lord, help me in the hour of my weakness...*

“What was that?” Hawkeye shifted a little: the light from the window was full on his face.

“Sorry, I was... thinking out loud. I didn’t catch what you said.”

Hawkeye caught hold of his arms and pulled him up, walking them both to the window. With the sinking light full on his face, he said “Time to stop for steaks, okay?”

“Oh...” Mulcahy nodded. He had a feeling Hawkeye had said something more, but he didn’t want to ask. He turned away from the light and went towards the door. The stairs were barely lit. Mulcahy put a careful hand on the banister and took them slowly: Hawkeye had run down ahead of him.

Hawkeye waited till the light was on his face to ask “How do you like your steak done?”

“It’s been so long since I had a steak, I can’t remember.”

“Medium rare suit you?”

“Sounds delicious,” Mulcahy said.

“Good, because that’s the only way I know how to cook them. Sit down.” He pulled out a chair for Mulcahy by the table, and Mulcahy sat with a relief from physical weariness he hadn’t even been aware of till then.

It was warm in the kitchen, brightly lit: Hawkeye planted a glass of red wine in front of him and went back to the stove. Mulcahy drank from the glass, watching Hawkeye move, before he even remembered that he’d meant to suggest they both refrain.

It was good wine. Or at least it tasted good to Mulcahy. The smell of cooking food was good, too. Hawkeye was moving round the room: a look at his face suggested he was singing some variant on Italian opera, pointless to try lip-reading. Mulcahy sat back in the chair and relaxed.

Hawkeye appeared in front of him and refilled his glass. “What did you do when you got back from Korea?”

“Slept for a week,” Mulcahy said, smiling.

Hawkeye paused, grinning. “Yeah, I did that myself. Then I turned over and slept for another week. Had a hard time getting off with no shelling in the background, but once I was asleep, my dad couldn’t wake me up for anything. He said I ate in my sleep. I don’t remember it, but I did wake up with food stains all over my jammies.” Evidently hearing something from the stove, he spun round. After a minute, he turned back again. “So what did you do after you woke up?”

“I talked to my bishop,” Mulcahy said. He caught himself smiling. “Well, wrote to him. We were sitting on either side of his desk passing notes across to each other. I hadn’t done that since I was in high school.” He saw Hawkeye’s shoulders shake. “It was a Catholic high school,” he said solemnly, “and the nuns were *very* strict.”

He’d been assigned, after paper discussion, to a parish near the Pennsylvania School for the Deaf, and assigned the lightest parish duties: there were already two priests in the parish house. “I’d decided to learn how to sign to the deaf: I was hoping to work with deaf people, perhaps to return to teaching.”

“You’d be good at that,” Hawkeye said, turning round again. “For a corpsman, you were very patient.”

“I like teaching,” Mulcahy said, mildly amused. He’d liked his classes studying at the school, too. “I’ve been learning sign language. Did you know our American sign language is one of the oldest signing systems for the deaf in the world? Derived from the

French signing system, which was developed before the French Revolution.” He had picked up this historical detail from the local Deaf Club, which was where – before he had gone on retreat – he had picked up most of the signs he knew.

Hawkeye was dishing up steak, baked potato, and some roughly-dressed salad. “No, I didn’t know that.” He set one plate down in front of Mulcahy, and passed him a knife and fork. “You know you really were a corpsman, after three years with the 4077th? I’d give you a job any time.”

“There are schools for the deaf, but no hospitals for the deaf,” Mulcahy said. “This smells good, Hawkeye.”

“Well, tuck in.” Hawkeye lifted his glass. “Cheers.”

Mulcahy hesitated. “Do you mind if I say a blessing?”

Hawkeye shook his head. He put his glass down.

Mulcahy crossed himself. “Bless us, O Lord, and these Thy gifts which we are about to receive from Thy bounty through Christ our Lord. Amen.”

“Amen,” Hawkeye said. He drank from his glass.

Mulcahy was attacking the steak with enthusiasm. He had last had a steak dinner after he’d passed Chaplain’s School, with the other chaplains, before they were posted to Korea: four years ago. He had eaten three mouthfuls – buttery, peppery, tender and juicy – before he remembered to look up from his plate.

“So how difficult are these signs to learn?” Hawkeye asked.

“I find it less difficult than Korean,” Mulcahy said. “More difficult than Latin or Greek.” He shrugged, smiling at himself. “But then I began those when I was younger, and had a better memory. I think the children at the orphanage learned more English from me and the sisters than we learned Korean from them.”

“How do you memorise all the signs? Is there a book?”

“You can’t memorise all the signs,” Mulcahy said. He had thought this himself when he began the task, but a few days’ conversation with some of his new deaf parishioners, graduates of the school who now worked in the area, had disabused him of this idea.

“Why not?”

“Well,” Mulcahy said, “can you memorise every word in English?”

Hawkeye shrugged, his fork pausing halfway to his mouth. Then he grinned. “I used to think Charles had tried.”

“There are a few books describing some of the signs,” Mulcahy said. “But you don’t learn a language from a dictionary.” The Jesuit house where he had spent six months on retreat was attached to a home for severely handicapped children, one reason he had chosen it. Two lay brothers, deaf-mutes, who were not permitted to take vows because of their handicap, had consented to spend their recreation hours with him, speaking to him in charitably slow sign language, and gently correcting his errors. They could not speak a word aloud, and found it pleasant and unusual – he had realised towards the end of his time there – to have a visitor who did not regard them as simple-minded. “I learned it – I am learning it – through other deaf people.”

“What does it look like?”

Mulcahy lifted his hands. He had learned to sign the Our Father, and had practiced it till he could do it smoothly, speaking aloud at the same time.

Hawkeye watched, momentarily frozen, as if absorbing the movement of Mulcahy's hands through his eyes. "I should learn that," he said, when Mulcahy had finished with the gesture that said *Amen*.

Mulcahy was startled. "It is quite difficult," he said cautiously. "If you don't have a need to learn it – most deaf people do learn to communicate by lip-reading."

"It looks good," Hawkeye shrugged. He smiled at Mulcahy, an odd and secret smile.

"This steak is *delicious*," Mulcahy said, changing the subject.

"I know the field this cow grew up in," Hawkeye said, and began to eat his steak again, with as much enthusiasm as Mulcahy. "My dad could have cooked it better, but I used to *dream* about these steaks when I was in Korea. This was the Sunday night meal he always used to cook – I remember the first time he decided I was old enough to have a glass of wine with it."

"How old were you?"

"Twenty-seven. I'd just graduated from medical school," Hawkeye said, and grinned again. "My fifteenth birthday. I didn't tell him I'd been sneaking nips out of his Scotch bottle for three years. He didn't tell me till I was in Korea that he'd known all along and he'd been docking it from my allowance."

"I wish I could have met him."

"I wish you could too. I found a nice apartment in Portland, five minutes from the hospital, but for months my dad kept showing up and driving me down here for the weekend. I kept telling him I learned to drive in Korea and he should buy me a jeep for my birthday so he wouldn't have to make the trip."

"Yes," Mulcahy agreed. "The first time I tried to drive a civilian car, it was a little confusing."

"I hate it there," Hawkeye said conversationally. He started to eat his steak again, and for a moment Mulcahy wasn't sure he'd got the words right.

"I worked there for nine months after I got out of residency and it was fine. I got my job back inside a month after I came back. I'm the brightest bright young surgeon and if I stay there I'll probably end up in Doctor Allen's shoes." He paused. "Well, maybe not literally his shoes, because I can't say I share his taste in footwear, but something like that." He went back to eating his steak.

Mulcahy ate his. It still tasted good. He finished the wine in his glass: the bottle was mostly dead. He accepted the half glass that was left when Hawkeye split the remaining wine between them, but left it standing. He hoped that would be enough to discourage Hawkeye from opening the next bottle.

"Did you ever tell your father you hated it?"

"How could I tell him? He was so proud of me." Hawkeye had finished the food on his plate. "Maybe I should have written him a letter." He said it with a wide-mouthed smile that, in Mulcahy's expert opinion, looked nothing like the real thing.

"You would have told him, if you'd had more time," Mulcahy said. "And he would still have been proud of you."

"For doing what?" Hawkeye asked. He still had the wide-mouthed smile on. "You know what I was thinking about last night?"

Mulcahy shook his head.

"Joining the army. It looked kind of reasonable somewhere between the fifth and the sixth Martini."

Mulcahy stared at him. “Hawkeye, may I speak quite frankly?”

“Why not?”

“Well, not that it’s my place to diagnose, but... are you *crazy*?”

“No,” Hawkeye said. The smile looked more natural now. “But I was very, very, very drunk.”

“After five Martinis?”

“That was counting since lunchtime.” Hawkeye frowned. “Of course, that wouldn’t mean I wasn’t crazy as well as drunk.”

“Hawkeye, I’ve seen you very, very, very drunk – and you wanted to get *out* of the army. Even more than when you were sober.”

“I know, I know. It’s a crazy idea. I just – you know, when I saw you this morning, I could have sworn I was still drunk and seeing things.”

“You *were* still drunk.”

“At least I wasn’t seeing things. I wanted to – I wanted to be back in the 4077th. I was crawling into a bottle hoping I’d wake up there.” Hawkeye seemed to hear what he was saying. “Maybe I was crazy.”

“Did you want to be back when your father was still alive?”

“No. Yes.” Hawkeye shrugged. “I wanted to be back where I knew what I was doing. I don’t know what I’m doing in Maine General.”

“You have other alternatives,” Mulcahy said. He was trying to think of a way of phrasing them politely.

“Sure. But I’d rather stay alive and keep doing surgery, so that rules out suicide and applying for a job as a janitor.”

“Hawkeye!” Mulcahy sat up, shocked inexpressibly.

“What’s the matter, you don’t approve of janitors?”

Mulcahy leaned forward. “Hawkeye, I’m... I’m appalled. Are you really so... so *selfish* you would waste all your skill as a surgeon, all your ability to save lives, just because you don’t want to leave Maine?”

He had spoken from a sense of righteous anger. It was not even a split second after he said “Maine” that he realised he had no right to speak to Hawkeye like that at all: he was suspended from the priesthood, Hawkeye never had been a Catholic, he wasn’t Hawkeye’s chaplain any more, and he was a guest in Hawkeye’s house – and an uninvited guest, at that.

“Hawkeye, I...”

Hawkeye was grinning: it was one of Hawkeye’s real grins, but not a nice one. “You fight dirty, Father.”

Mulcahy kept his eyes fixed on Hawkeye’s face with difficulty. “I’m sorry,” he said. “But you... you have other alternatives than Maine General Hospital. Or any other big hospital. There are neighbourhood clinics in Philadelphia where your skills would be a godsend. There are neighbourhoods where they have *no* doctor, and no one willing to work there. When I hear you complaining that you don’t know what to do with yourself, I think about the families I used to know who had no medical care at all. And I get...” he swallowed, trying to minimise it, not liking the expression on Hawkeye’s face “...quite cross.” He folded his hands together. “And... I’m sorry... but I’ve asked you not to call me ‘Father’.”

Hawkeye stood up. He picked up both plates, took them across to the sink, and dropped them in it. When he turned round, he wasn't grinning any more. "I never liked those plates anyway." He came back to the table and sat down. "I'm sorry. I'm irresponsible, egotistical, self-righteous, and those are widely regarded as my *good* qualities." He picked up his glass and finished the wine in it in one quick swallow. "Drink up. You're a glass behind."

"I don't think..."

Hawkeye was on his feet again. A tumbler and a Martini glass. Gin, vermouth, an almost-empty bottle of Scotch. The full one stood on the kitchen counter, and the golden liquid inside seemed to be winking at him.

"Drink up," Hawkeye said again, looking at the wine left in Mulcahy's glass.

"Do you think this is... a good idea?"

"Yes," Hawkeye said. He was smiling. "I don't know about me, but you look like a man who's three drinks behind."

Mulcahy swallowed. It was rough, comfortable teasing: he'd missed it as much as anything else about Korea. He wanted to empty his glass and push out the tumbler for the waiting drink: the taste of Scotch, the warmth of acceptance. He wanted both.

Hawkeye sat down, facing Mulcahy. "You did say let's wait till after we've eaten."

Mulcahy took his specs off and rubbed the bridge of his nose. When he put them back on, Hawkeye had pushed the bottles to one side.

"Look," he said. "Let's make a deal."

"What?"

Hawkeye put his arms on the table and leaned forward. "I won't talk you into having a drink with me, if you'll talk to me about how come you got suspended."

Helplessly, Mulcahy laughed. It was a Hawkeye-style bargain: he should have expected it. He reached up to take off his specs again, but Hawkeye's hand caught at his.

"Don't do that," Hawkeye said. His voice might have been as gentle as his grip on Mulcahy's fingers. "You take off your glasses when you don't want to talk, and I really think you need to talk."

"It's not... terribly interesting."

"Hit the high points."

Mulcahy sat still, blinking and trying to pray. He was certain it would be a good thing if Hawkeye didn't settle in for another night of hard drinking. He was not sure it would be a good thing to tell Hawkeye the full story of his suspension. And it would hurt, but Hawkeye was right: the worst of the hurt would go with confession. But he ought to confess it to God: take this hurt to a priest, not to an agnostic friend. The urge that had driven him nearly four hundred miles to talk to Hawkeye, could he trust it?

If he needed to talk to Hawkeye, Hawkeye needed him. Not him specifically. but someone in pain whom Hawkeye felt he could help.

"I was assigned to a parish, but not doing very much of the parish work," Mulcahy started. "It wasn't anywhere near my old neighbourhoods. I was born in Philadelphia, but it's a big city. About seven months ago, I had... a disagreement with one of the priests in the parish house, which was resolved by the bishop."

"Against you?"

"No," Mulcahy said. "The other priest wanted to deny communion to... some of his parishioners. I... felt that this would be wrong. It's a very strong decision to take, and I

didn't feel that he was justified in taking it. The bishop agreed. But I said... some doctrinally incorrect things, in the presence of my bishop, and a visiting Monsignor, and..."

"Was that when you lost your temper?"

"No." Mulcahy stopped. He was doubtful again. "I shouldn't be... shouldn't be telling you about this."

Hawkeye tilted his head. "I won't tell anyone. Neither will..." He pointed upward.

"I mean..." Mulcahy swallowed. There were reasons why he shouldn't be talking to Hawkeye, of all people. "It could be an occasion of sin."

"For you or for me?"

"I hope not for you." Mulcahy looked at their joined hands, and up at Hawkeye's face. It was ridiculous to suppose that. "Do you remember two patients who came through back in 1952? Dan Lowry and Gary Sturges?"

"Sturges?" Hawkeye looked startled. "Yes, I remember him. I diagnosed him with leukaemia. What about him? Did he --"

"I don't know," Mulcahy admitted. "I wasn't able to keep track of him after he was sent home. He stayed in the unit for a few days after his diagnosis, if you remember --"

"Yeah, I remember." Hawkeye had let go of Mulcahy's hand. He was sitting with his hands folded together now, tucked under his chin. "You talked me into not sending him to Tokyo right away so he could spend a day or two with his buddy."

"I spent quite a lot of time with them," Mulcahy said. "And when I became aware that they were... were involved in a rather directly physical sense, I found myself in a difficult position."

Hawkeye laughed, abruptly and wildly. "Come off it, F – Come off it. You can't possibly have been as innocent as you looked. There was a lot of that going around."

"Fornication is a sin," Mulcahy said. "But I felt – I came to feel, at least, that it was a sin that – that if I could find it understandable that two people who were in such danger, or under such terrible stress, would seek a little human warmth with each other, God would understand it, too. But this was – these two men had formed a relationship. A deviant relationship. They were not... this was not some chance... camaraderie leading to sin, this was the intention to sin and to keep sinning. And Gary – Sturges – was dying. I knew what I should do. I should have brought him to the awareness of his sin, told him that he ought to separate from his... his buddy, repent what they had done in the past, and avoid the future occasion of sin."

"What stopped you?" Hawkeye's face had gone expressionless.

"I couldn't find it in my heart or my conscience to do so," Mulcahy said. "It seemed to me... that their love for each other – was something good in itself. It was not... I couldn't." He stopped. "I prayed that I had made the right decision. I found no direct answer. But a similar... Well, I don't *know* that it was a similar situation. There were two women in the parish I was assigned to, but we had no reason to believe they were... They'd been living together for many years, and one of them *was* rather, well, mannish, and neither of them... they were both a bit standoffish with men, rather career-orientated, if you get my drift."

"I think we're drifting in the same direction." Hawkeye was smiling. There was an edge to his smile.

“But they were regular attenders at Mass, and very active in Church work, very good women. They were publicly known to be friends, perhaps as close as sisters, but not... It didn't seem to me... or to my bishop... that there was any justification to deny them communion, as one of the parish priests wanted to do. After all, we had no reason to believe there was anything sinful about their relationship.”

“What about the other priest?”

“He said we should take the question to our bishop, and he did. He was their regular confessor.”

“And...?”

“At the first meeting, I said... what I shouldn't have said. That even if they were, perhaps, physically intimate... I felt that their love for each other made this... made their relationship something good in itself.”

“Ah.” Hawkeye nodded. “And then the roof fell in?”

“There was a second meeting... this one a rather more formal one. I was... I was questioned about my views. I told them how I had come to feel... what I felt, and then the Monsignor asked me – ”

Mulcahy could not speak for a minute. His hands went up to his specs, and then he caught Hawkeye's gaze and put his hands together in his lap.

“He asked me,” Mulcahy went on with difficulty, “if I had... sinned in this way myself. That his experience told him that priests who defended this kind of sin were usually those who had themselves... been defiled by it.”

He saw Hawkeye's face change, and stopped. “I'm sorry,” he said.

“No, go on,” Hawkeye said.

“I told them – the Monsignor, and my bishop – that I had sinned once since my ordination with a man I had met in Korea. That I had repented it, and confessed, and had avoided the occasion of sin ever since. That my experience had perhaps made me more aware of the temptation to commit this kind of sin, but had not formed my views on it.”

He stopped again. “Hawkeye, I'm sorry. I – ” He swallowed. “I know you don't feel about this the same way, but I – am trying to tell you how this happened.”

“You don't have to apologise to me,” Hawkeye said. His face had gone expressionless again. “You really don't.”

“My bishop asked me if I had avoided seeing the man after I had sinned with him, and I told him no, I had worked with him daily for three years, but that I had never sinned with him again.”

Mulcahy drew a deep breath. He was struggling to keep his eyes fixed on Hawkeye's. “I was – I hoped that would be the end of it. You understand, this was seven months ago: I was still sometimes finding it very difficult to read lips, even in a one-to-one conversation. My bishop and the Monsignor had been communicating their questions to me by written notes: but of course when they spoke to each other, I could only try to follow what they were saying if they faced me. I'd asked them to do so at the beginning of the meeting, but they sometimes forgot. And I'm sure it was just forgetfulness, but at the time...” Mulcahy was conscious of his fingers clenching on each other, “the Monsignor began to say something about me, and then turned to my bishop and continued to speak – but I couldn't see what he was saying. And I ... I...”

He couldn't go on. He was struggling with tears. Hawkeye was no help: he had his elbows on the table and his face half-buried in his hands, only his eyes visible.

“Sorry,” Mulcahy said again, and took his specs off briefly to wipe his eyes. He slid them back on again and went on. “You see, the last thing I saw the Monsignor say was that I – I was lying. I saw him speaking to my bishop, but I couldn’t *hear* – and the frustration, and the feeling of having my word doubted – I lost my temper.” He hesitated. “Rather... excessively.” All he could say for himself was that he had not thrown a punch, nor anything except hard words. But after having said things he regretted, he had walked out.

Hawkeye still had his hands shielding most of his face. His eyes were shadowed.

“I was... I received a letter from my bishop notifying me that I was suspended from the priesthood, and suggesting that I might want to spend some time in prayer and contemplation, to consider my vocation. So I went on retreat.”

Hawkeye put his hands down on the table. “Father,” he said, “I suppose...” His mouth twisted suddenly. “I never did this before, but I’ve heard the formula is ‘Father, forgive me, for I have sinned.’”

“Hawkeye, I didn’t tell you this to reproach you – ”

“I know you didn’t,” Hawkeye said. “You ought to be cursing me. I – God, Father, I don’t know how to say how sorry I am – ”

“There’s no need to apologise, Hawkeye.” Mulcahy swallowed. “I’m sorry, I wouldn’t have told you the story if I’d known it would make you blame yourself. We discussed it the next day, you gave your word you’d... you’d let it alone, and – I was more to blame. We were both drunk, after all, but I *knew* it was wrong.”

“No, you weren’t,” Hawkeye said. “Nothing that happened that night was your fault. I’d made up my mind to get you into bed, and I did it. I was so fucking selfish and stupid and pigheaded and arrogant I never thought twice about any consequences you’d suffer, but God, please believe me, I would never have done it – ” His mouth collapsed. He was saying something, but Mulcahy couldn’t understand him.

Mulcahy reached forward and took hold of Hawkeye’s hands. He gripped them firmly. “You mustn’t blame yourself,” he said, as distinctly as he could.

Hawkeye jerked his hands out from under Mulcahy’s. He wrapped his arms round himself and sat staring at Mulcahy. “Please. Tell me the suspension’s temporary. Tell me they’re going to see sense and put you back in. You’re a good priest. It’s not your fault that some stupid, arrogant, horny doctor who had his brains in his balls and his sense in a bottle decided to pull you off the tracks. Just once, goddammit, and you didn’t even want me till I got my hands on you – ”

“But I did,” Mulcahy said. “And that’s not your fault, either. Hawkeye, please, stop blaming yourself for this. I wasn’t suspended for sins I committed and repented, I was suspended for defying my bishop – for expressing an opinion contrary to doctrine.”

Hawkeye shook his head. He was biting down on something. “You – please, curse me out. Excommunicate me. Something.”

“Hawkeye, don’t,” Mulcahy said helplessly.

“Tell me it’s temporary. It is temporary, isn’t it? They can’t keep you suspended forever.”

“No.” Mulcahy swallowed. “No, they won’t.” He felt the prevarication was justified when he saw Hawkeye relax a little.

“Okay. But – Father, if there’s anything I can do for you, ever, just ask, it’s yours. It won’t make up for what I did to you, but it’ll make me feel a little better for being such a complete bastard.”

“There *is* something you can do for me.” Mulcahy took a breath. “Remember to call me Francis, and not ‘Father’. And don’t – say anything about me being a priest.”

“Okay.” The prominent Adam’s apple in Hawkeye’s throat jerked up and down. He was shivering. “Okay. Until you get unsuspected. Then I’m going to take great pleasure in...” He stopped speaking. His eyes were focussed on Mulcahy with almost preternatural intensity. “Oh no. Oh, please, no.”

“Hawkeye – ”

“Father, you never were much of a liar. You don’t think you’re ever going to be taken off this suspension. Do you?”

Mulcahy put his hands to his face and jerked his specs off. He folded them neatly and set them down on the table. He couldn’t see Hawkeye’s face now, or only as a blurred shadow among others. “Oh no,” he said into the shadows. “I know. I have another six months or so. That’s how long I think the Holy See takes to process an application for laicization. As Klinger would say, I’m being defrocked.” He laughed, because it was funny, and *ha, ha* turned somehow to sobs in his throat: he sobbed out loud twice before he could suppress it.

The hand on his shoulder had to be Hawkeye: Mulcahy got up hastily, meaning to put his specs on and retreat. Dizziness caught him, and he couldn’t compensate for it: he was falling, and the floor was very hard.

Hawkeye was kneeling over him, easing his specs back on. He finished, and sat back on his heels, looking down at Mulcahy. “Sorry,” he said. “I know you don’t want to talk to me, and I can’t blame you, but I need to ask you a couple of questions. Medical only.”

Mulcahy nodded.

“How many fingers am I holding up?” Hawkeye lifted his hand.

Mulcahy tracked it. “Three.”

“That’s a good start. Mind if I check out the back of your head?” His hands were gentle and thorough. “Okay. You went down with quite a crash, but it looks like you got away with it. Second question, and this one’s important: how long have you been losing your balance like this?”

“I do fine, usually, if I can see.”

“Come on. When I’m talking to you like a doctor, I want an answer.”

“Nearly a year,” Mulcahy said.

Hawkeye frowned. “Connected with your deafness?”

“Yes.” Mulcahy sat up cautiously. He rubbed the back of his head: it felt like he was going to have quite a lump. The floor was wood, fortunately. There was a strong smell of gin. Mulcahy glanced round. The table had been pushed to one side. Obscured by it, it was a little while before Mulcahy’s eyes could pick out the source of the smell: broken glass and puddles of liquid on the other side of it. Hawkeye must have pushed the table hard to knock over the bottles.

Hawkeye shrugged widely when Mulcahy looked back at him. His face was set in hard, sad lines: he had been like this sometimes in Korea, when breaking bad news to a patient. He sat there a long moment, staring at Mulcahy. “Look – I can understand if you

don't want anything else at all from me, but – would you let me take a look in your ears? We'd need to drive down to dad's office, and I'd rather do that tonight.”

“No need.” Mulcahy found a smile. “I was told there was some nerve damage, too, and that this would mean I would find myself losing my balance. But, as I said, so long as I can see my surroundings, I manage very well.” He stopped, realising what Hawkeye was saying. He didn't especially want to go out into the unlit road – from inside the brightly-lit kitchen, the night looked very dark – but he had hurt Hawkeye's feelings enormously, if unintentionally, and perhaps he ought to accept this.

Hawkeye glanced up at the windows. “Okay, so the last thing you want is to go out for a walk in a town where we think street lighting is for tourists. Right. Never mind. Can we –” He put his hands palm down on the floor. “I'm sorry,” he said baldly. “I didn't intend to panic you like that.”

Mulcahy rubbed the back of his head again, trying to soothe the ache. He was tired. It had been so obvious to him why he had tried to retreat, it hadn't occurred to him that it wouldn't be equally obvious to Hawkeye. “I told you years ago, it's not you I'm afraid of. It's myself. I have feelings for you it would be wrong for me to act on, even if you shared them. I know that for you, it was just – just an act of pleasure with a friend, not something that was especially important to you or even especially memorable, but for me...” He had tried very hard not to put it into words. “It was more than that.”

Hawkeye twitched. He had been sitting easily on the floor, but he shifted abruptly as if it had stuck pins into his backside. He had been looking at Mulcahy in one way, but his expression had changed. “It was more than that for me, too.”

Mulcahy shook his head, slowly. “There's no need to... invent stories about it,” he said, as gently as he could. For him it had been an astonishing, almost terrifying, venture into sensual pleasure: the peak sexual experience of his adult life. But he had so few sexual experiences in his adult life, and he suspected that what he knew about the range and depth of Hawkeye's sexual experience was not even half of it. And as he'd discovered within an hour of Hawkeye's leaving his bed, the other man had an enviable capacity to switch off what had happened and focus entirely on what he was doing *now*. He had known he must avoid a future occasion of sin: he had realised that if he was to remain of any use to the 4077th, he must avoid such distractions. Priests were celibate for many good reasons, in the wisdom of the Church.

“I'm not making this up.” Hawkeye shifted again. “I couldn't forget you. I didn't want to – You're the only man who ever said no to me and made it stick.”

“That can't be true,” Mulcahy said, feeling dazed.

“Well, there are men I never tried to get into bed,” Hawkeye said, with some measure of humour. “Colonel named-after-a-tank Potter, for example. He'd have flattened me. And I know all about Christ-was-I-drank-last-night amnesia.”

“What?”

“A lot of guys – most guys, really – they're persuadable, if they're drunk enough, if I get my hands on them, but come the morning, it ... never happened. It's all ‘Christ was I drunk last night, I don't remember a thing’. And some nights are longer than others. Trapper was a pretty long night.”

“But I didn't say no to you,” Mulcahy said. He wasn't too tired to feel embarrassed. “At least, I didn't manage to say no... for long.”

“I didn’t let you,” Hawkeye said. He looked savage for an instant. “But I meant the next day. I figured you’d be an amnesia type for certain. But if you want to tell yourself you did something, you got BJ to stay with the unit.”

“What?” Mulcahy knew he ought to muster outrage, but he was too tired to express it, though not to feel it. “You – didn’t... Hawkeye, he was a happily married man!”

“Sure. But I can have anyone, if I want them. I got him drunk, I got my hands on him, I had him – he was trying to say no to me, but he’d given up really wanting to say no – ” Hawkeye shook his head. “And then, well, I thought about you.”

“About... me?”

“You telling me you were going to ask for a transfer. And all of a sudden I just... so I got up and I left him alone. I liked him. I liked working with him. I didn’t want to lose him. And I figured I might, if I went ahead and did what I’d planned. You did that.”

“Oh,” Mulcahy said. “Oh... my.” He couldn’t think of anything more coherent to say than that. Sheer exhaustion was sweeping over him. He was sure he was going to feel something about what Hawkeye had just told him, but he couldn’t feel anything just now. If he had work to do or an office to perform he could stay awake for hours, but he was afraid that if they were just going to sit here and talk he was going to start going to sleep. “Hawkeye, do you have any coffee in the house?”

“Sure,” Hawkeye said. “Are you sure you want any?”

“If it wouldn’t be any trouble,” Mulcahy said politely.

“In my considered medical opinion, you look like you should take two aspirin and call me in the morning.”

“What?”

“Well, you can skip calling me in the morning. Though I can think of some names you might want to call me, if you need any help. But I insist on the aspirin.” Hawkeye got up on his knees, holding his hands out. “If I could think of a better way of putting this, I would: time for you to go to bed.”

Mulcahy put out his hands and let Hawkeye pull him to his feet and steady him. He let go. “Thank you.”

“Can you make it upstairs?”

“I did this afternoon,” Mulcahy reminded him, a little dryly.

“Yeah.” Hawkeye glanced round the kitchen. “I should clean up in here before the gin soaks into the floor forever. My family don’t take any wooden Martinis. Good night.”

“Good night,” Mulcahy said.

The stairs did seem to be higher and steeper than this afternoon. Mulcahy made it up to the landing, found the room where he had left his suitcase, hung his jacket over the back of a chair, and sat down on the bed to ease his shoes off. His breviary was at the top of his case, the marker still at the beginning of Nones. He had time to complete his Office before midnight.

He went through Nones, Vespers, and then Compline: familiar and soothing, even in his tiredness, even if he could no longer hear them.

He was saying Compline when he became strangely certain of a presence behind him. When he turned round, he was unsurprised to see Hawkeye. The other man was sitting on the floor, his back to the wall, his hands on his knees, an odd expression on his face.

When he saw Mulcahy turn around, he stood up. "Sorry. I came in to make sure you had aspirin, and I didn't want to interrupt."

"I knew you were there," Mulcahy said. "It's all right."

Hawkeye handed him a glass of water and two aspirin. "Drink up."

Obediently, Mulcahy swallowed. "Thank you," he said. Hawkeye looked more tired and unhappy than he had when Mulcahy had seen him first early this afternoon, all the lines on his face drawn down. He shouldn't have told Hawkeye.

"Okay." Hawkeye abstracted the glass from Mulcahy's hand. "Good night, Father."

Mulcahy stood still, looking at Hawkeye. *Let me do some good, and if I can't, let me do no harm.* He was so tired he could hardly think.

As Hawkeye turned away, Mulcahy caught hold of his sleeve.

"What is it?"

"Sleep well," Mulcahy said, and put his arms round Hawkeye in an awkward embrace. After a moment, he felt Hawkeye's arms close round his shoulders. Standing like this, they couldn't talk: Mulcahy could feel Hawkeye's breath catching in his chest and throat.

After a while, Hawkeye stepped back, his hands on Mulcahy's shoulders. He was smiling, though his eyes were wet. "Thanks. But I can't keep you here all night." He walked Mulcahy across to the bed, sat him down, and stepped back. "You know, you looked tired enough when you went upstairs, without starting a long phone call. Go to sleep."

"I have to say Divine Office." Mulcahy couldn't imagine why he'd said that: Hawkeye would neither know nor care.

Hawkeye grimaced. "You don't have to do anything except go to sleep right now," he said. "Just – go to sleep." He was backing out of the room. "If the light's still on when I come back upstairs again, I'm docking your allowance," he added before he closed the door.

It was dark and someone was shaking him awake, with an urgency that usually betokened a dying soldier needing the last rites. Mulcahy sat up, hand reaching out for his specs, wondering where his dog tags had got to, trying to remember where he had –

He wasn't in Korea –

But it *was* Hawkeye who was shaking him awake –

"What is it?" Mulcahy asked. His face hurt: he had been weeping in his sleep. That happened. Hawkeye would see it if the light was on. That couldn't be helped. "Hawkeye, I can't hear you if I can't see you –" He was tired and he couldn't find his specs in the dark and he could smell Hawkeye's breath from here –

Hawkeye let go of his shoulder and crossed the room, a barely visible shadow in the moonlight. He switched the light on and came back: his mouth was moving, he was talking. It seemed like a long time before Mulcahy realised where his specs were, on top of his breviary, just not quite in the same place as he had put them in Korea –

He put them on, blinking as the room came into focus, and realised with a sinking heart that it hadn't made any difference –

Hawkeye was still talking. Mulcahy stared at his mouth, willing the movements to turn into something he could understand. Hawkeye was talking fast and his face was an angry mask. He caught "sorry," and said "That's all right," in hope that this would calm Hawkeye down enough to let him understand.

Hawkeye shook his head and said something – his mouth was too distorted to make it out – and he bent closer to Mulcahy. He was shouting, apparently furious.

“Hawkeye,” Mulcahy said. He knew what had gone wrong: He was exhausted. Hawkeye was drunk. He wasn’t focussing as well as he should, Hawkeye wasn’t talking as distinctly as he might be. Once he lost track of what someone was saying it got worse. It didn’t help if the person who was talking to him was overcompensating.

He saw it before he knew what it was he was seeing: the muscle movements distorting Hawkeye’s face and throat away from understanding. Hawkeye was crying. He lost track of anger. “Hawkeye,” he said again, trying to put urgency into his voice, and then as Hawkeye didn’t seem to hear him, he reached up and caught hold of Hawkeye’s arms.

Hawkeye seemed to lose his balance and collapsed on top of him. Mulcahy could feel the sobs racking him. Without thinking about it, Mulcahy put his arms around Hawkeye, and held on: Hawkeye’s face was wet, and Mulcahy kissed his cheek.

Hawkeye seemed to freeze. Then he turned his head and kissed Mulcahy. He was shivering: his breath tickled. He went on kissing him: his hands slid under his shoulders and began to massage his back. His mouth tasted of Scotch, familiar and welcome. It was comforting. It felt good.

It felt too good. Hawkeye was lying over him: he didn’t have to move – he couldn’t move –

He could. He hadn’t even let go of Hawkeye. He didn’t want to. He’d wanted this. *I am such a bad priest.*

Hawkeye’s hands were moving more slowly, his mouth kissing lazily, his shivers lessening. He said something – there was a puff of air and his lips moved – but then he put his head down against Mulcahy’s shoulder and, after a while, he had gone to sleep. Mulcahy lay still, holding his love in his arms, knowing it couldn’t last past morning.

Sun through the window lit up dust rising and falling in the shadows high in the ceiling. One of his brothers was asleep with his head against Francis’s shoulder. He had pushed himself across the bed to lie with half his weight on him. Early summer morning. Mam would be calling them for breakfast soon.

He couldn’t hear. Mam was dead. Not his brother.

Hawkeye’s hair was soft. Mulcahy lay still, trying to tell himself he was asleep. Then he told himself he didn’t want to wake Hawkeye. The longer the man slept, the better.

Despite the sun, Hawkeye slept on. He was breathing gently and steadily.

When it happened, it happened quite abruptly: Hawkeye lifted his head, hair flopping into eyes still half-closed with drowsiness, and stared, and blinked his eyes fully open.

“Morning.”

“Good morning.”

“Sleep well?”

“Yes.”

“Good.” Hawkeye yawned enormously. He was smiling. “What can I get you for breakfast?”

“I should get up. I didn’t want to wake you.”

Hawkeye’s smile died. He sat up, abruptly. “You’re not planning to go?”

“No,” Mulcahy said, just as abruptly. “But I need to say Divine Office.”

Hawkeye glanced at the breviary. "Say it here," he suggested. "I won't interrupt. I may not be able to stay awake, but I won't interrupt."

Mulcahy shook his head. When he glanced back before leaving the room, Hawkeye had fallen over on his face on the bed and was burrowing into the pillows. By the look of him, he'd be asleep again in five minutes.

Showered, dressed, and sitting on the veranda, Mulcahy had reached Terce when he saw a dark head poking out from the door. It wasn't Hawkeye.

"Hello," the man said. "You must be Francis Mulcahy?"

"Yes," Mulcahy said.

"I'm Bill Pierce. Ben's cousin. Is he..."

He looked like Hawkeye: same dark hair, beaky nose, blue eyes, but in Bill the ingredients were transformed: he was almost improbably handsome. He sat down on the other chair without waiting for an invitation. "I had breakfast at Sheff's and he said Ben had a friend of his from Korea staying with him. You a doctor?"

"No..." Mulcahy faced the issue. "I was... I served as a corpsman." He added, in part for distraction, "I'm deaf, by the way. Unless I can see your face, I can't tell what you're saying."

Bill had been looking down at the cove. He jerked his head round and looked at Mulcahy. "You're deaf? I'd never – no one mentioned –"

"I've learned to read lips," Mulcahy said. He smiled, for reassurance. "I sometimes appear to be ignoring people when I don't intend to. I do have to see your face."

"Right." Bill looked uncomfortable. "Well, what brings you to Maine?" He spoke with exaggerated mouth movements. Mulcahy half-guessed what he said, had to presume it was a question.

"I'm just visiting," he said, cautiously.

Bill nodded. "Right." He looked up, and smiled: a wide-mouthed, white-toothed smile with no pain in it. "Hawkeye! You're looking well."

Hawkeye was wearing his towelling bathrobe, looking, in fact, tired and rumped. Mulcahy caught only the last half of what he said " – do you want?"

Bill got to his feet. He and Hawkeye were standing facing each other, with Mulcahy in between: Mulcahy glanced up, wondering if he had imagined the hostility in Hawkeye's words, but from the look on Bill's face, he hadn't.

" – is going on with you?"

Mulcahy glanced back at Hawkeye. He couldn't follow a conversation like this. He wasn't even sure he should try.

"What do you want, Billy?" Hawkeye asked again.

Mulcahy repressed the impulse to turn his head and try to catch what Bill was saying.

"I haven't made up my mind," Hawkeye said. A pause, as Bill replied, and then he said, "Look, it's my house."

Irrepressibly, Mulcahy's gaze twitched back to look at Bill's face.

" – live here all by yourself, kid!"

Whatever Hawkeye answered was short: Mulcahy didn't catch it. Bill stepped forward. Hawkeye moved, quick and agile, and sat down in the chair Bill had left. He settled back, spreading his arms, tilting his head sideways, giving Bill the kind of immovable, insolent

look that had stopped generals and death and Major Houlihan cold: it didn't look as if Bill was used to meeting it.

He stood there, staring at Hawkeye, looking uncertain: then he said, with some dignity, "Okay, Ben. When you make up your mind, let us know." He glanced at Mulcahy. "Enjoy your visit, Mr Mulcahy."

"Thank you, Mr Pierce," Mulcahy said.

"How long were you planning to stay?" Bill was making the slightly exaggerated mouth movements again. But it was a simple and obvious enough question. Unfortunately, Mulcahy didn't quite have an answer. He shrugged.

"Well, we'll hope to see you two over for dinner sometime, if you're staying," Bill said, and turned away: whatever else he said was invisible.

Hawkeye sat still, looking tense, for another few minutes. Then he relaxed. "That was my cousin Billy."

"Yes, he introduced himself. Besides, I think I would have recognised him."

"We're supposed to look alike. I've never seen it."

"There is a ... family likeness."

"Sure, except he's good-looking." Hawkeye's grin had an edge to it, but it relaxed after a minute. "Listen, about last night." He stopped.

Mulcahy waited, flinching. He could not ask Hawkeye to forget it had happened.

"You were crying," Hawkeye said. "I was in my dad's room – and I heard you." He looked uneasy. "I thought you were awake, but you were crying in your sleep." He stopped again, and then said, with visible emphasis, "You're *not* okay, Father."

"I was probably dreaming," Mulcahy said. He made an effort to smile. "It's to be expected, I suppose. I'll be all right." He hesitated. "I couldn't help noticing... you seemed rather..."

Hawkeye looked down, briefly, but he met Mulcahy's eyes again after a moment. "Yeah, I was drunk. I meant to finish off clearing out my dad's room, and I brought the Scotch upstairs to help. It didn't."

"You should have waited till morning. I'm – I would be happy to help. I'm sorry I was too tired to do anything more last night."

"Martyr," Hawkeye said. He smiled quickly. "Look, I'm going back to Portland tomorrow morning." He didn't look too happy about it. "I'm due back for the afternoon shift. You want to stay here?"

"What?"

"You can stay here, if you want." Hawkeye shrugged largely. "I mean, there's plenty of room. You said you didn't have any plans, and there's... plenty of room. And you seem to have a knack with that damn stove."

"Thank you," Mulcahy said. "But ..."

"No, really, you – if you need somewhere to stay, think things over, I'll be up in Portland all week. Just don't have too many wild parties while I'm gone."

"I don't think so," Mulcahy said.

"Have as many wild parties as you like, then. Some of my neighbours haven't been to a wild party in years, you should invite them."

"Hawkeye. Thank you." Mulcahy swallowed. "Thank you very much, but I... I'd better be going, when you go."

"Why? Because Bill wants the house? I don't want to let it to him."

“It is very tempting,” Mulcahy admitted. “But I don’t think I should.” He steeled himself. “After what happened last night.”

There was a long pause. Hawkeye finally said, “If you mean after what I told you last night, I’ll stay away next weekend, too, if you like. As long as you like.”

Mulcahy felt the familiar rise of frustration and embarrassment. “I don’t know what you told me last night,” he said, trying to keep his voice level. “I couldn’t understand you. I was tired and you were drunk – and it didn’t help when you started to shout.”

“You noticed I was yelling,” Hawkeye said. He looked horror-struck. “You didn’t understand... how much of it didn’t you get?”

“I gathered you were sorry. I didn’t know for what.”

Hawkeye looked away. It was another long time before he looked back again. “This was easier to say when I was drunk and you were tired,” he said. “Now I’m tired and you’re sober.”

“You don’t need to tell me anything,” Mulcahy said, firmly and with a need to convince himself of his sincerity. Whatever it was, it had clearly upset Hawkeye. “Why does your cousin want this house?”

Hawkeye shrugged. “He’s married. They have two kids, third one on the way. They’re living in a wartime semi over by Levinetown. This is a great house to raise a family in. This is a great place for kids to grow up in. If I was in his shoes, I’d want this house too. They talked to me right after the funeral, told me I could keep my own room, be part of the family –” His hand, clenched into a fist, was tapping against the side of the chair. “I told them I needed to think about it. I didn’t need to think about it. I don’t want to come home for weekends and be Uncle Hawkeye in the spare room in my own house.”

“It’s difficult for you,” Mulcahy said.

Hawkeye looked back at him. “He can’t figure out why I won’t just do what he tells me, you know? I always did. When we were kids.”

“This is a big decision,” Mulcahy said. He was feeling for the right words to say. “It’s not just a child’s game. I’m sure he understands that.”

“I’d like you to stay here,” Hawkeye said. “Give you time to think. I owe you.”

“No, you don’t,” Mulcahy said. He was on more sure ground now, embarrassed though he was. “We talked about this.”

“We didn’t.” Hawkeye’s fist, unclenched, was gripping at the edge of his chair. “You’re gorgeous. I didn’t need, I don’t need to be drunk to want you –”

“Please, Hawkeye,” Mulcahy said, both startled and hurt. “This isn’t the time for your nonsense –”

“It isn’t nonsense,” Hawkeye said, abruptly, cutting across Mulcahy. “You’re a beautiful man, and you told me years ago I had to keep you at arm’s length if I wanted you – and I’ve never called you Francis since –”

Mulcahy’s blood seemed to go hot and thick in his veins. He remembered. *What mustn’t I do, Francis? Tell me and I’ll stop.* Hawkeye’s voice had licked inside his ears, sending ripples of feeling down his flesh.

“But the reason I wouldn’t stop that night – I had a stupid bet on with Trapper.”

“A bet?” Mulcahy stared. “With –” He had plunged from heat to cold. “What kind of bet?” he asked, a stupid question to which he didn’t want to know the answer.

“I can’t even remember how it started,” Hawkeye said. “Trapper bet me I couldn’t seduce you. So I did.”

There were so many stupid questions to which he didn't want to know the answer fighting to get out of his mouth. Mulcahy discovered that he was asking "How many people knew about – the bet? That you won it?"

"No one," Hawkeye said. He was sitting hunched in his chair, his arms tucked in at his sides. "I told Trapper I lost the bet. I didn't tell anyone else."

"You went to – all that trouble – and didn't take your winnings?"

"I started out wanting you and thinking I'd lose. Then I – thought you'd let me –" Hawkeye seemed to have trouble talking. "I thought we could just – not talk about it and take our chances once in a while. You could just forget about it in between times. Most guys do. Then you told me –" Hawkeye was keeping his face up, towards Mulcahy, with a visible effort. "You told me how much it mattered to you, and you told me that I couldn't have you even as a friend unless I stayed at arm's length. But that night – it wasn't your fault. None of it was your fault. You're a good priest. You can't let them do this to you."

"I am not a good priest," Mulcahy said through a stiff mouth. "I don't – know – what – I am, but I was – not –" He was shaking. He wanted to say *Couldn't we just pretend it never happened?* but he didn't want to watch Hawkeye laugh at him. He couldn't face one thing more. Helplessly, he said "And Captain Hunnicutt resisted you. *He* managed to stop you."

"No," Hawkeye said. "He didn't. Beej couldn't have stopped me if I'd gone ahead. Don't know what he'd have done if I'd gone ahead. No, I do know. He'd have written his wife in the morning to tell her he'd been unfaithful, and he'd have beaten me up, and then he'd have applied for a transfer out of the 4077th, assuming either or both of us had managed to talk fast enough to get out of being court-martialled. So, you may not remember what I did to you with any joy, Francis, for which I can't say I blame you, but you can tell yourself you saved one marriage and two careers."

Mulcahy swallowed. He'd been right. He couldn't face one thing more. "I do, though," he said, through a tight throat. "Remember it. With joy." He took his specs off and stared at Hawkeye through a blur. "I was – such a bad priest."

The blur that was Hawkeye came closer. "Please," Mulcahy said. "Don't –"

Hawkeye ignored him. He abstracted Mulcahy's specs neatly, and put them down. He was too close to be able to read what he was saying: his lips moved. Mulcahy could guess: "You can cry."

He put his head down. "Don't, Hawkeye," he said. It was a last-ditch protest, and he didn't expect Hawkeye to pay attention.

Hawkeye put his arms round him. It was a brotherly embrace, not carnal, and Mulcahy turned his head into the offered shoulder and stopped fighting the grief that had been blocking the back of his nose and clutching at his throat for three days now: since the morning he finished the letter to his bishop.

Iuravit Dominus et non paenitebit eum tu es sacerdos in aeternum... The choir had sung the psalm nine years ago, in triumph and in glory, rejoicing in the newly ordained priests, celebrating the end of the world war. Mulcahy had stood in the cathedral among his brother priests, hearing the voices soar, still feeling the touch of his bishop's hands on his head, making him a priest forever ... *in aeternum secundum ordinem Melchisedech.*

For ever. Until about six months from now.

He had tried to comfort people who had lost a foot or a hand or a limb: tried to, because when he was with them at the MASH unit they had usually been either in a dazed, unaccepting state, or in the first fierce rage against their loss. It had not occurred to him till now to draw any parallel between their situation and his own. It was not a good parallel: he was still hale and sound, apart from his deafness. But it was something like: he had been trying not to think that he would never give communion again, never bless the sacrament, never take confession. Never be a priest again. Never.

It was some time before he came to himself, from the selfishness of grief. He was clutching Hawkeye very hard, and his face was sore. Somehow they were squeezed next to each other on a basketwork chair intended for one: Hawkeye hadn't moved since he'd sat down. His arms were round Mulcahy's shoulders. He was thin, too thin, but solid and warm, and Mulcahy wanted him with a passion that was almost as disconcerting as it was overwhelming.

"Thank you," Mulcahy said.

He *felt* Hawkeye say something – he could almost, he thought, have guessed the words from the vibration of sound on skin. There were accounts of deaf people who could interpret spoken words from the feel of the voice on the back of the hand: Mulcahy thought about Hawkeye speaking to him like that, and shuddered.

He couldn't resist Hawkeye. He had come four hundred miles because he had wanted this. Not only because there was no one else who would have listened to his confession without condemnation – who would have listened and then held him. If that were all, it was selfish, but not an occasion of sin. He had come four hundred miles because some part of him had hoped Hawkeye would seduce him again – the worst had already happened, he could not be further punished for what he had done – and he should have known, he would have known if he had thought about it, that of course Hawkeye would blame himself. All of this was bad enough, but to have gone on, to have told Hawkeye and taken this from him, after Hawkeye had suffered a most devastating loss. Selfishness piled on sin piled on needy grabbing. It served him right to find out that the night that had inspired this had been, for Hawkeye, the winning of a bet. Mulcahy shuddered again, and, on shaky legs, stood up and changed chairs.

"Thank you," he said again, sitting down before dizziness could catch him. He saw a familiar shape of wire and glass lying on top of his breviary, and put his specs on.

"You okay?"

"Yes," Mulcahy said. "No. But I will be."

Hawkeye leaned forward. "Listen, Father – okay, Francis – you know I wouldn't -- " He drew a deep breath. "Do anything you don't want, right?"

That's not the problem, Mulcahy nearly said out loud. "No. I mean yes. I know that."

"Okay," Hawkeye said again. He put his hands together. "What can I get you for breakfast?"

"Anything," Mulcahy said.

"French toast? Sausages?" Hawkeye stood up. "Tell you what, I'll bring it out here – No – " Mulcahy had started to get to his feet. "No, I can do it. No problem."

Mulcahy sat down. He watched Hawkeye disappear through the door, and picked up his breviary again. He'd been interrupted in the middle of saying the psalms for Terce. He sat there staring at the words, feeling as if a larger chasm that time had separated him from them.

After a while, he began to read the assigned psalm again at the line where he had stopped. It was still – until he was laicized – his obligation. He supposed he might stop. He could not think of a good reason to go on, but that in itself did not seem to be a good reason to stop.

“I tried to get Igor to make this once, in Korea,” Hawkeye said, waving a piece of French toast at the end of a fork.

“Really? How did it turn out?”

“You ate it, you tell me. I couldn’t taste it for crying. Dried egg, powdered milk, army bread. I think the sugar was okay, for World War II issue.”

Mulcahy smiled and nodded. And ate it, mechanically.

“Was the food ‘on retreat’ really worse than in the army?”

“Different,” Mulcahy said. “The Jesuits tend not to cook with food from previous wars.”

“No interest in military history?”

“Mathematics is more traditional for Jesuits,” Mulcahy said. “Shall we finish sorting out your father’s things today?”

“If you want,” Hawkeye said. “Or we could head down to Sheff’s for a good cup of coffee.”

“This is fine,” Mulcahy said. He smiled at Hawkeye. “Besides, I thought you wanted to avoid having that conversation – ”

“Stay or go?” Hawkeye shrugged again. “I can’t work here. I’ll end up getting drunk seven nights a week, eight if I can squeeze them in, without O.R. to stay sober for.”

“Have you – ” Mulcahy stopped. “How often have you been getting drunk?”

Hawkeye looked up, looked down, shifted his eyes from side to side, and twitched. It was a visible, intentionally comic routine. But when he finally spoke, he seemed serious. “Not when I have to operate the next day. And I think there’s a few other nights I didn’t have more than one Martini, but – look, I got seasoned in Korea.”

“I know,” Mulcahy said, “So did I.”

“Hell, compared to the rest of us, you were sober.”

“‘Dago Red’,” Mulcahy said, squelching the shame that overtook him.

“Look, in any contest about who was the biggest drunk in the camp, you’d come so far behind the winners you wouldn’t even be on the scoreboard. But I’d be somewhere near the top of the list. It didn’t worry me then. Much. Often. At least not a lot. But...” He stopped. “My dad noticed how much I was drinking. And it worried *him*, even if he never said anything. I mean, not that he couldn’t put the juice away when he wanted to, but...” He stopped again. “He didn’t much want to, as far as I know, except for after Mom died.”

“How old were you?”

“Ten. He didn’t want to worry me about it. He used to wait till I’d gone to bed, Friday or Saturday night, and then he’d get drunk downstairs. And I’d stay awake upstairs, even when he took hours over it, because I was afraid if I went to sleep I’d wake up in the morning and he’d be dead downstairs.” Hawkeye was smiling, as if he were describing a successful practical joke played on him. “Once he’d got upstairs to bed, it seemed like he’d be okay and I could catch some sleep. I never told him that. Not even in a letter.”

Nothing Mulcahy could say seemed adequate. “How long did this go on?” he asked.

"I can't remember," Hawkeye said. "No, really, I can't. I know he'd stopped doing it by the time I went to high school. And it sort of tapered off after a while, maybe a year. But when Mom was dying Dad never told me there was anything wrong with her. He just kept making me fancy breakfasts and telling me there was nothing to worry about. I thought he was going to die too, and if he was, he'd just have gone on telling me there was nothing to worry about until he wasn't there any more and Aunt Ellen and Uncle John moved in."

"Who?"

"Billy's mom and dad. Uncle John's dead now. Aunt Ellen moved to Florida. They'd have moved in here like a shot. Just like Billy's trying to do." Hawkeye's grin had slipped. "Look, why don't you stay here? It's perfect. You said you didn't have any plans, you don't need to pay me any rent, and I'll come down from Portland on my days off. You'd be doing me a favour."

"I can't stay here," Mulcahy said. "You don't have to let the house to your cousin Billy if you don't want to. What would your father have wanted you to do? He left it to *you*."

"He wanted me to get married and have grandkids." Hawkeye looked back at Mulcahy. "We never talked about that much, either. I did tell him I wasn't the easiest guy in the world to live with, and he said neither was he, but he'd found the right woman eventually and so would I."

"You will," Mulcahy said.

"Oh, come off it." Hawkeye did laugh then. "In all my life, I've met six people I figured I could live with. Five of them were men, and none of them were interested in living with *me*."

"Who was the woman?"

"You must have met her – she was with the 4077th for a while."

"Oh yes," Mulcahy said, remembering. "Carlye. Nurse Walton, I mean. But, Hawkeye, you're – you're very eligible." He saw Hawkeye grin, a sudden twist of genuine amusement, and plunged on, knowing he was in over his head. "You could find someone very easily who would want to marry you, and good marriages are made out of – of friendship, as much as they are out of... romantic love. Have you really given it serious consideration?"

"Yes," Hawkeye said. He was grinning, very obviously, very thoroughly amused. "Recently. But I have a feeling that if I proposed... it wouldn't happen. One of us would run a mile – and I'm not sure it would be me." He was still grinning, but there were edges to it. "I'm charming, witty, and very persuasive. But I'm a real bastard when you get to know me."

Mulcahy's heart thumped. "You know that's not true," he said.

Hawkeye showed most of his teeth. "Let's not argue about this. I don't want you to know me that well. More coffee?"

"No, thank you," Mulcahy eyed Hawkeye cautiously. He could not think of any good way the conversation could go if he directly confronted Hawkeye: when someone was this determined to attack himself, arguing with him could drive him to making more and more vicious statements about himself. "Why don't we finish clearing out your father's room?" He picked up the plates and got, carefully, to his feet. Hawkeye was clearing the rest of their breakfast back on to the tray. He stood up.

“Okay. Why can’t you stay?”

Because if I stay, we’ll go to bed. Mulcahy swallowed hard, finding a truthful but less revealing answer. “I spent six months giving myself time to think, Hawkeye. I don’t think I need any more time.”

They were putting the plates and things down in the kitchen. Hawkeye caught his eye firmly. “What are you going to do? Where are you going to go?”

“I have a letter of introduction to Fred Sparks, the superintendent of the New York School for the Deaf – it doesn’t mention...” Mulcahy’s voice trailed off, but he caught himself and said, with determination, “that I’m a priest.”

“Why New York?”

“Because the headmaster of the Pennsylvania School for the Deaf knows Sparks – he said that he would trust his recommendation. I have a teaching certificate for Pennsylvania, but I got it when I was a priest – I can’t use it now. I can’t show it to anyone. But I hoped that with this letter – ” He stopped. He hadn’t tried to find a job without the help of the Church since he was twenty. “In any case, I want to keep working with the deaf, and the headmaster thought that Sparks would be able to help me find work.” He smiled. “I can always be a janitor. Cleanliness *is* next to godliness.”

Hawkeye didn’t even smile. “You’re still a priest,” he said abruptly.

“Yes.” Mulcahy steadied himself.

Hawkeye looked as if he were speaking with reluctance, but his lips shaped the words clearly enough. “This laicization. Can’t you appeal? I mean, I can think of about a hundred people right off who’d be glad to tell anyone you’re a great priest. Some of them are even Catholic. There’s that cardinal who visited, he thought you were terrific – ”

“No.” Mulcahy cut Hawkeye off. He had thought of all this himself, the three days between receiving his bishop’s letter and replying to it. Cardinal Riordan, other priests who had worked with Mulcahy in Korea and in Philadelphia, even his sister’s abbess: to ask them to defend him against his bishop’s judgement would be to turn the hierarchy of the Church upside down. And besides – “I spent six months on retreat,” he said slowly, “and after much prayer and thought it seemed to me that I needed to be at work, even if I was suspended from the priesthood. I wrote to my bishop and told him that I was sorry I had set my judgement up against his, and I would not say anything about what we had discussed – I would keep silent if I were asked my opinion on such matters. Then I went back to the school. I never saw my bishop again, but he sent his – his confidential assistant to – to tell me that to keep silent wasn’t enough: if the... subject came up, I must condemn it. I said I didn’t think I could do that... and I asked to see my bishop, to talk to him personally.”

“Then what happened?”

“He wrote me a letter inviting me to apply for laicization,” Mulcahy said, briefly, “just a week ago.”

Hawkeye’s jaw dropped. He looked stunned. “So don’t apply!”

“He ordained me,” Mulcahy said. He had no words to explain to Hawkeye what that meant to him.

“You still want to be a priest – don’t you?”

“Yes.” Mulcahy rarely lost his temper. He had lost it often enough when he was a child, when the neighbourhood kids or his own older brothers had thought it amusing to tease the skinny kid with the specs until he exploded into helpless, pathetic rages. He’d

done the same thing to his sister, in the casual way children have of passing on an unwanted gift. Then he had learned how to box, and how to keep his temper, and with the help of a punching bag and gloves he'd rarely lost control since. But he had found himself on the edge of pure anger far more often in the past year than he could ever remember since he first learned that he had a left hook that could knock out a much larger boy. He did not want to explode at Hawkeye. He did not want to say anything he knew he would regret. "Please don't say that to me, Hawkeye."

"You're not going to apply," Hawkeye said. "Just don't. I mean – just don't." He still looked as if he were forcing himself to say it, but also as if he meant it. "They can't force you, can they? Can they?"

The letter from his bishop had been kind, even concerned: but explicit. "If he no longer thinks I should be a priest..."

I would not have ordained you if I had known...

Mulcahy put a grip on his temper, and forced himself to say calmly, "I wrote back to my bishop the day before yesterday, consenting to his putting forward my application for laicization."

Hawkeye's mouth twisted. "How can you be so meek and so stubborn at the same time?"

"It goes with the job description, I'm afraid."

"I see." Hawkeye nodded. "They've got you coming and going, haven't they? Refuse to do what they want, and you're not obedient enough to be a priest: do what they want, and you're *not* a priest."

Real rage burned. "Hawkeye," Mulcahy said, still not quite explosive, "I have to ask you not to speak to me like that about the authority of the Church."

Hawkeye's eyebrows went up: he opened his mouth, but closed it without saying anything. They stood there, looking at each other, Mulcahy conscious of how much anger he had inside him and how little Hawkeye deserved it.

"I'm sorry," he managed at last.

Hawkeye shook his head. "Don't," he said. "You want to yell at me, you want to hit me, go ahead. I've earned it."

"Does blaming yourself so vehemently make you feel better?" Mulcahy asked, and then, unkindly, turned his back on Hawkeye and made for the door.

He was aware, as he climbed the stairs, that Hawkeye wasn't far behind him: but he did not turn round.

The Scotch bottle was on the floor beside the dresser, with a glass to keep it company. It had been full the night before. Mulcahy picked it up. Hawkeye materialised in front of him and took it back. He glanced at the level of alcohol in the bottle, looked back at Mulcahy, and shrugged, emphatically and dismissively. He retrieved the glass from the floor – there was a splash of Scotch still in it – and went out. He came back, a few minutes later, still as sober as he'd left – as far as Mulcahy could judge.

They didn't talk much for the next couple of hours: the routine had been worked out yesterday. Hawkeye's face smoothed out a little.

"We're done," Hawkeye said. He bent over the bed and picked up a small pile of ties. "You want these?" He held them out to Mulcahy with an odd, hopeful expression that slid into amusement as Mulcahy put his hand up to touch his shirt-collar.

“Thank you,” Mulcahy said, with shared amusement. He took the ties from Hawkeye. They were all in dark colours, cotton and silk: Hawkeye had been sorting them out from among the others earlier.

“I’ve always been a fan of neckties,” Hawkeye said. “You need any help putting one on?”

“I think I remember how,” Mulcahy said.

“See, I want to buy you dinner. You can’t be in Maine and not eat lobster, it’s against state law. And I never was any good at cooking animals that try to climb out of the pot and wave at me. Maine lobster, drawn butter, best string French fries, fresh coleslaw... am I getting to you?”

“It sounds delicious,” Mulcahy said.

“Someday I’ll come up with something that gets you more enthusiastic than *delicious*,” Hawkeye said. “But I have to take you out for dinner, anyway, because there’s only Mrs Clark’s casserole in the icebox, and there’s a reason it’s still there. Can you cook?”

“Well, I don’t like to boast, but my spaghetti bolognese is so good that a – guest from Rome asked for third helpings,” Mulcahy said.

Hawkeye was smiling. “My dad was a better cook than me. But I do the best fish. There’s a stream just down that way – ” he gestured with his thumb “ – where you can get the finest trout in the world. You ever fish?”

“Not often,” Mulcahy said.

Hawkeye looked back at him. “Stay on and we’ll go fishing next weekend.”

Mulcahy shook his head. “I really can’t.” He turned away, trying to be casual.

He left all but one of the ties on the bed in the room where he – they – had slept last night. Hawkeye was waiting for him at the top of the stairs.

“There’s a few things I need to do before we drive over to the lobster house in Levintown,” he said. “Mind coming with me?”

“Glad to.”

“It’s only the next cove over,” Hawkeye said, “but my dad *didn’t* deliver half the town.”

Walking down to the car, Mulcahy said, carefully, “It’s where your cousin Billy lives, isn’t it?”

“Yes.” Hawkeye turned to look at Mulcahy. “But there’s a couple of thousand people live there, not counting tourists. We don’t have to run into him.”

“How many children did you say he has?”

“Two. Boy, girl. Danny and Mary. There’s a third due end of this year.”

“How old are they?”

“I guess Danny must be seven by now. Mary’s four.” Hawkeye stopped by the car, still with his eyes on Mulcahy.

“Do you like them?”

Hawkeye shrugged. “They seem like good kids. Yeah, I like them – they’re... good kids.” He opened the car door, and got in.

“I just wondered,” Mulcahy said, diffidently, getting in beside him, “if you’d find it easier to think of it as letting your young cousins have your house, not their father. If you don’t want to live here yourself.”

That closed the conversation. Hawkeye’s mouth shut tight, and he drove carefully.

Crabapple Cove had two streets, and any number of small roads twisting around it. The Methodist church was at the north end of one street, and the Presbyterian church at the south end of the other. Hawkeye delivered a box of clothes to each.

On the way back from the Presbyterian church, Hawkeye turned right, abruptly, and parked behind a building. There had only been two boxes in the back seat: Mulcahy glanced across at him.

“Okay,” Hawkeye said. “Would you let me take a look in your ears?”

“Here?” Mulcahy said.

“Not *here* here. I haven’t given anyone a physical in the front seat of my dad’s car since I was eighteen. *There* here.” Hawkeye pointed. “My dad’s office. Fully equipped. Including a chaperone, if you want one. Mrs Forrest. My dad’s nurse.”

“For my *ears*?”

Hawkeye hunched up his shoulders, ducked his head, and grinned. “Some people are very shy about their ears.”

Mrs Forrest seemed neither pleased nor surprised by Hawkeye’s arrival. She was in her early sixties, with the look Mulcahy recognised of a competent nurse who knows exactly how competent she is: she greeted Hawkeye with a kind of detached friendliness tempered with exasperation.

“I’ve been wondering when you would step in and let me know what you plan to do.”

“Nice to see you, too.” Hawkeye gestured. “My friend – ”

“Francis Mulcahy,” Mrs Forrest said. She held out her hand. “I understand you were a corpsman with Ben’s unit.”

Mulcahy shook it. “Mrs Forrest,” he said.

“And you’re deaf?”

“Yes,” Mulcahy said.

“I’m sorry,” Mrs Forrest said.

“Billy’s been by, has he?” Hawkeye asked.

“He’s worried about you, Ben. Well, it’s none of my business, and that’s what I told him.”

“I’m not planning to stay here, Mrs Forrest.”

They were standing by the desk in the waiting-room, both of them with the light falling on their faces, both standing half-turned towards Mulcahy: miraculously he could follow both sides of the conversation with surprising ease. It was cheering.

Mrs Forrest looked exasperated. “I know that, Ben. You have your job at Maine General. But do you want to keep this office open, and sell the practice as a going concern, or shut it down?”

Hawkeye glanced at Mulcahy. “F – Francis? You mind if Mrs Forrest and I have a quick business conversation?”

“Not at all,” Mulcahy said. He sat down on one of the hard chairs by the wall, and picked up a copy of the Readers Digest from 1951. “I don’t believe I’ve read this one.”

Hawkeye peered. “Neither have I.”

“They all belong to you, Ben, and after we finish this conversation you can take them home with you, if you want.”

Mulcahy dropped his gaze, and cut himself out of the conversation. He looked through the magazine without reading it until Hawkeye's legs appeared in front of him again. He looked up.

"The doctor is ready for you now," Hawkeye said, with a familiar, amused twitch of his mouth.

Mulcahy put down the magazine and followed Hawkeye into the surgery. It was bleak and clean and tidy: Mulcahy obeyed Hawkeye's gesture to sit down on the end of the examination couch. He felt Hawkeye's hands on the side of his head, fingers pressing at his ear: and then a moment later, Hawkeye took his specs off. Mulcahy opened his mouth to protest, then shut it. He couldn't see Hawkeye's face, and he would normally have asked a doctor to position himself so that he could see what he was saying, but this was more for Hawkeye's peace of mind than anything else.

Metal and glass cold inside his ear. Hawkeye's hand holding his head still. Mulcahy folded his hands in his lap and looked across the room at the white squares hanging on the shadowed green wall. After a few minutes, Hawkeye stepped round to the other side: his lips were moving, but Mulcahy couldn't catch what he saying. His hand gripped the back of Mulcahy's head, warm and solid: the metal touch inside his other ear was cold and hard.

When the metal touch moved away from his ear, Mulcahy assumed he was done. Hawkeye moved round to stand in front of Mulcahy, and put his hand on Mulcahy's face. It wasn't a caress: Hawkeye meant to check his eyes as well. Mulcahy sat still. He recognised what was happening a few minutes later: Hawkeye was giving him a full upper-body physical. At least, Mulcahy trusted it would stop at that. Hawkeye was capable of a focus Mulcahy envied on what he was doing *now*, but –

God, help me in the hour of my weakness. Help me now, dear Lord...

It seemed a long time before Hawkeye slid his specs back on to his face and stepped back. Mulcahy stood up and began to tuck his shirt back in to his waistband, keeping his head down. Hawkeye didn't move.

Mulcahy looked up. Hawkeye smiled at him. "You're in good shape," he said, and then stopped.

They stood looking at each other. The smile faded from Hawkeye's face. Something else replaced it.

"Francis," he said, and looked as if he were trying to find words. Then he glanced over his shoulder. "Come in?"

The door opened. "Doctor Pierce," Mrs Forrest said, looking formal. "May I speak with you?"

"Sure," Hawkeye said.

She closed the door behind her. "I'm sorry to interrupt," she said to Mulcahy. "Ben, the waiting room is full. Are you going to be much longer?"

"Is there anyone there who actually needs a doctor, or do they all just want to know what my career plans are?"

"They all know you're going back to Maine General. They want to say goodbye."

Hawkeye was very seldom stricken speechless. His mouth open, he looked at Mulcahy, glanced over his shoulder at the door to reception, looked back at Mrs Forrest, and finally nodded. "Well, I'm done here. I – " He looked at Mulcahy. "Do you mind – ?"

Mulcahy shook his head.

“Can you clear up here,” Hawkeye said. He was speaking to Mrs Forrest, Mulcahy realised after an instant’s confusion.

“Naturally,” Mrs Forrest said. “Go on, Ben.”

Hawkeye looked at Mulcahy. “Do you mind?” he asked again.

Stick with me, Father.

“Of course,” Mulcahy said after a moment, and followed Hawkeye out.

He recognised some of the people in the waiting room: they’d been in the diner yesterday. Hawkeye moved down the room, shaking hands. He still looked, to Mulcahy’s eyes, disconcerted and upset, but he was smiling. Some of them called him Ben: most of them called him Doctor Pierce.

Here, they said they were sorry about his father, what a good doctor he’d been, how greatly he’d be missed: here, they said how proud of him they’d been, how proud his father had been of him: here, they said how much he’d be missed.

Mulcahy couldn’t see what Hawkeye was saying. He followed close behind Hawkeye, close enough to feel tiny tremors in his back and shoulders. It seemed to take a long time.

It didn’t even end when they got outside: there were people talking to Hawkeye until they got to the car. Mulcahy had been watching Hawkeye’s hands. He had never seen them shake, but they were trembling now: tiny, almost imperceptible shivers. When the car keys appeared in Hawkeye’s hand, Mulcahy took them from him. He got into the car and held the door open for Hawkeye.

It was impossible to hold a conversation and drive at the same time. Mulcahy didn’t even try. It hadn’t occurred to him that he wouldn’t be able to ask for directions, and he had no idea how to go anywhere but back to the Pierce house. Hawkeye sat hunched in the passenger seat, elbows tucked in, hands in his lap. He wasn’t talking.

Mulcahy parked the car. Hawkeye stirred and looked at him. “I need a drink.”

Absently, Mulcahy took the keys out of the ignition and handed them to Hawkeye.

“I thought they’d want me to stay. They expected me to go.”

“Expected and wanted are two different things,” Mulcahy said, carefully. “I’m sure they would have wanted you to stay. But they could hardly have expected it.”

Hawkeye flipped the keys up and caught them. He showed his teeth, not quite a grin. “I really need a drink.”

There was the best part of a bottle of Scotch still in the house. There was nothing Mulcahy could think of to say.

“Yeah, okay,” Hawkeye said, as if answering what Mulcahy hadn’t said. “I don’t suppose you know the way to Levinetown from here?”

“I’m afraid not.”

“Let’s switch over then – I’ll drive.”

The Lobster House was a quiet, pleasant restaurant, on Levinetown’s main street. The chief decoration was large tanks with swimming fish and sea creatures inside down one wall. Hawkeye said something to the waiter: he showed them to a table in the far corner. Mulcahy sat down and looked around with pleasure: he hadn’t been into a restaurant like this in years.

Hawkeye picked up the menu, flipped it open, and said, with barely a glance at it, “Lobster, boiled, with plenty of drawn butter and napkins?”

Mulcahy nodded.

“String French fries?”

Mulcahy shrugged and nodded.

“Fresh coleslaw?”

Mulcahy nodded, by now amused.

Hawkeye glanced back up at the waiter. “We’re ready to order. What do you want to drink?”

“Iced tea,” Mulcahy said.

Hawkeye looked sharply back at him. Then he shrugged, and said to the waiter “Two iced teas.”

The waiter left: Hawkeye sat back, folding his hands on the table in front of him. “You really are in good shape,” he said. “Apart from your ears. You mind me asking – when did it happen?”

“In Korea,” Mulcahy said.

“Yes, but when? From the look of your eardrums, you didn’t get treated at the time. Did you?”

“No, not till I was back in the States,” Mulcahy admitted, incautiously.

Hawkeye frowned. “So when did you run into these unexploded munitions?”

“At an army base before I left Korea,” Mulcahy said, more carefully. “I was sent to Doctor Jonathan Lazar by my bishop when I was home in Philadelphia – he confirmed that there was nothing that could have been done.”

Hawkeye nodded, briefly. “Why weren’t you treated at the army base?”

“I assumed it would get better on its own.”

“You *assumed*?” Hawkeye was frowning harder. “You must have been seen by *some* doctor – ?”

Mulcahy swallowed. He was treading on fragile ground, and it wasn’t a situation he was happy with. *You never were much of a liar.* “I don’t really want to talk about it.”

Hawkeye’s head tilted to one side. He looked suspicious. “Sorry,” he said, without any appearance of remorse.

The waiter came back with two iced teas. Mulcahy changed the subject. “I like this restaurant.”

“Yes,” Hawkeye said, shortly.

“Are those tanks – ” Mulcahy nodded to the other side of the room.

“Dinner,” Hawkeye said, and seemed to give up his look of suspicion. He grinned. “Last time Dad and I ate here with Danny, he was naming every lobster in the tank hoping it would stop us from ordering them.”

“Did it work?”

“He thought it did. He didn’t realise lobsters change colour when they’re cooked. ”

Mulcahy glanced over at the tanks again and gave Hawkeye a deliberately blank, bewildered look. “They do?”

Hawkeye laughed out loud: Mulcahy could see him shake with it. “Haven’t you ever – ” He stopped and his eyes widened. “You’ve never had lobster before?”

Mulcahy kept his bland look on. “Of course. It comes in cans.”

“Oh well, it’s about the same here. Except that it comes in these little red lobster-shaped cans and you have to open them yourself at the table.” Hawkeye had recovered, whether his shock had been real or pretended. “They’re incredible animals, lobsters.

Amphibious crustaceans with big claws. I caught my first one when I was eight. Or rather, it caught me.” He lifted his right hand and shook it. “My thumb survived.” His eyes widened. “Oh no. Not now.”

Mulcahy glanced in the direction of his gaze. Bill Pierce was standing by the entrance, his arm round a brown-haired woman’s shoulders: he lifted his hand and waved back at Hawkeye. “Not now,” Hawkeye repeated. Slouchingly, he got to his feet: so did Mulcahy.

“We got a sitter,” the brown-haired woman said to Hawkeye. She was looking at Mulcahy.

“Francis Mulcahy,” Mulcahy said. “You must be Mrs Pierce.” It was a small revenge. He was sorry for it a moment later.

“Oh, call me Sarah,” Mrs Pierce said. Bill Pierce had steered her to the table: he was pulling out the chair beside Mulcahy. She remained standing. “Can we join you? We often come here for dinner. We got a sitter, you see...”

Mulcahy glanced at Bill Pierce, and saw him lift his hand to briefly cover his eyes in a strangely familiar gesture, half-mocking, half-despair at this particular example of the stupidity of the universe. He had seen Hawkeye make a like gesture countless times. He looked at Hawkeye, and saw an odd clenching of muscles around his eyes, as if Hawkeye also recognised the gesture, and didn’t like it.

“Mind?” Hawkeye said, apparently in response to something Bill had said. “Why should I mind? I came here for a quiet family dinner. After all, you got a sitter.”

Bill grinned – it was a disconcertingly familiar wide-mouthed grin – and pulled the chair further out, his hand on his wife’s shoulder directing her to sit.

Mrs Pierce didn’t move. She was gripping her handbag. Her face looked tense. Mulcahy swallowed. He didn’t like this. “We’d be pleased if you could join us, Mrs Pierce,” he said, though he was wondering if it would be better to suggest that he and Hawkeye leave.

“Thank you,” Mrs Pierce said after a moment. She sat down. Hawkeye dropped back into his chair as if his strings had been cut. The waiter came over again. Mulcahy settled back. He still didn’t like this. Four-way conversations were all but impossible for him to follow, but at least Mrs Pierce looked more comfortable, though her hands were still gripping the bag in her lap.

Bill Pierce made Mulcahy distinctly uneasy. Sarah Pierce, he thought he could deal with. He was going to ask her about her children when she said, probably in response to something Bill had said, “Yes, thank you, that would be fine.”

The waiter was gone. Sarah smiled at him, and said awkwardly, “You served in Ben’s MASH unit?”

“Yes, we were both there for three years,” Mulcahy said. “Hawkeye was telling me you have a son, Danny?”

“Yes.” Sarah’s gaze twitched across the table.

“And a daughter, Mary?”

“Yes,” Sarah said. She was trying to look at him and at the other side of the table at the same time.

“Hawkeye was telling me an amusing story about Danny and the lobsters in this restaurant,” Mulcahy began.

He was interrupted by a hand tapping the table in front of him: a narrow, ugly hand that he knew wasn't Hawkeye's. He looked up and caught Bill Pierce's gaze.

"Dinner tonight is on me," Bill said. "White wine okay with you?"

Mulcahy looked at Hawkeye, who was sitting, head down, fidgeting with his glass. "Thank you, I'll stick to iced tea," he said, definitely but politely.

"Now, I *know* Ben's not on the wagon," Bill said cheerfully, with an emphatic glance at his cousin. "We always have white wine with lobster, and you'll join us."

"No, thank you. I prefer iced tea," Mulcahy said, and briefly asked God to forgive the lie.

"Come on –"

Hawkeye looked up. "He said he prefers iced tea."

"Okay," Bill said, after a moment. He handed a wine list – the waiter must have left it – to Hawkeye. "Just you and me, then. Pick whatever you like, I'm good for it. Sarah, you'll have a glass."

Hawkeye handed it back. "Iced tea," he said, with a twist of his mouth.

Bill shook his head. He was looking at Hawkeye with both annoyance and affection – his face was easy to read. "Look, Hawkeye – let's try to get along."

"Let's just have dinner," Hawkeye said. "Miracles are in short supply around here."

Bill shook his head, but said nothing. After a moment, he turned directly to Mulcahy. "You have no idea how odd it is to hear a complete stranger calling Ben 'Hawkeye'. How did you pick it up?"

Mulcahy looked at Hawkeye, disconcerted.

"It's a family nickname," Bill explained. "From *The Last of the Mohicans*. My uncle Daniel's favourite book. Now, I know some of Ben's college friends called him by it, but – weren't you a corpsman?"

"Yes," Mulcahy said. He was caught in that lie. "Everyone at the 4077th – the MASH unit – called Doctor Pierce 'Hawkeye'. Well, almost everyone."

"Even the enlisted men?"

"Everyone."

"Must have been one hell of a rowdy unit," Bill said. "I was in the Coastguard, '42 to '45, and there's no way an enlisted man would have called an officer by his nickname. Not to his face, anyway." He laughed. "If half the stories Uncle Daniel used to pass on from Ben's letters home were true, I'm surprised you had time to do medical work."

Incoming wounded. Triage in the compound. Incoming wounded.

"Once a wounded man reached the 4077th, he had a ninety-seven or ninety-eight percent chance of staying alive," Mulcahy retorted. "It might have looked undisciplined to you, but the team spirit there was – something astonishing. When the wounded came in, everything else made way for them. The doctors – and the nurses – would work round the clock."

He caught Hawkeye's emphatic nod out of the corner of his eye and turned to look at him. "Everyone," Hawkeye said. "Not just the doctors and nurses. The corpsmen, the ambulance drivers, the chopper pilots, the chaplain – yeah, we were one *hell* of a unit, Bill." He lifted his glass and drank from it as if it were Swamp gin. "Best care anywhere."

Mulcahy smiled. He lifted his glass, briefly, to Hawkeye. "Finest kind," he said, and drank.

Sarah was looking from one of them to the other. She was half-frowning, half-smiling, but when she spoke she looked more relaxed than she had before. “Do you know you said that in unison?”

Hawkeye nodded, grinning. Mulcahy shook his head. “I’m sorry – ?”

“You said – about the survival rate at the 4077th.” Sarah looked a little embarrassed. “Both of you. At the same time.”

“Oh,” Mulcahy said. He was disconcerted. “I’m very sorry – I didn’t intend to interrupt.”

“You didn’t,” Hawkeye said. “I just tried to keep up with you. I particularly liked the bit about the heroic doctors.” Hawkeye was laughing, Mulcahy realised, and he wouldn’t have minded if this had been the mess table at the 4077th and he’d known everyone there.

He wouldn’t have minded if he could hear. But if he could hear he wouldn’t have made the mistake. He smiled and nodded, and was almost grateful when Bill Pierce said something that he couldn’t catch, but that got both Sarah and Hawkeye’s attention.

It might have been possible to follow the conversation between the three of them, with enough concentration: Mulcahy told himself he was taking a rest, and didn’t even try.

The waiter appeared with a big basket of fries and two lobsters: Mulcahy looked up to thank the waiter, and saw Hawkeye looking at him. “You okay, Father?”

“Yes,” Mulcahy said, with an automatic smile and nod.

Hawkeye’s face changed. He glanced back at Bill. “His nickname,” he said, as if replying to a question. “Because of his hair. So fair it looks grey.”

Mulcahy shifted, uncomfortably, and caught Sarah’s eyes. She looked discomfited, too. “It really doesn’t,” she said.

With an effort, Mulcahy managed a cheerful smile. “I really have no idea how to eat this,” he said, pointing at the lobster. “Hawkeye?”

The next two lobsters arrived in the middle of a crustacean anatomy lecture from Hawkeye, with demonstrations: twist off the legs, crack the claws, dig into the carapace, find the tomalley – Bill and Hawkeye had a brief half-incomprehensible argument about whether or not to eat it – and the coral.

It *was* good. Better than anything canned. Mulcahy was feeling too uncertain to interrupt a conversation and say so. The argument about the tomalley seemed to have defused a lot of the visible hostility between Bill and Hawkeye: and Sarah seemed to be more relaxed. Besides, Hawkeye liked to talk, and he liked to eat: the combination was bound to make him feel better.

Bill finished first. Hawkeye was still cracking the small claws on the legs, and Sarah – Mulcahy guessed – had politely slowed down not to leave Mulcahy trailing quite so visibly behind. Bill pushed his chair back from the table and finished wiping his fingers on his third napkin. “Want to talk about the house now, Hawkeye?”

Hawkeye was cracking a claw. His shoulders hunched up, his head dropped a little. “I don’t see that there’s anything to talk about.”

“You’re going to be up in Portland most of the time. You won’t want to leave it standing empty through the winter. So you’ll want to let it. We’ll take good care of it – hell, Hawkeye, you know I love the place as much as you do. Don’t you want Danny and Mary to get the same childhood you and I had?”

Hawkeye shrugged. “Which one of them’s going to be you, and which one of them’s going to be me?”

“What?”

“Which one of them’s going to end up getting dumped in the swimming hole and half-drowned and told it was *his* fault for being clumsy?”

Mulcahy’s nerves jolted. Hawkeye had said it without a change of expression, without even turning towards Bill: he was still sitting hunched over his plate, his fingers turning a cracked and empty claw over and over.

“What?” Bill sat up. He looked puzzled.

“You heard me,” Hawkeye said. He hadn’t moved. “I was wondering which one of your kids you want to be me, and which one you want to be you.”

Bill shook his head. “Kid, that must have been twenty-five years ago. You’re really going to carry a grudge that long?”

Hawkeye had lost his temper fast and easily in Korea: there was no one in camp who hadn’t, at some time or other, been the target of his wordy explosions. The times he had exploded physically *at* someone were few, but Mulcahy realised (and felt as if his heart were sinking fast into his stomach) that Hawkeye’s body was tensed and ready to leap.

Mulcahy looked down at his plate, and said, as if obliviously, “Oh dear. Hawkeye, what do I do next with the tail?” Then he looked up. Hawkeye was staring at him: so was Bill Pierce, much more suspiciously. So, a quick sideways glance told him, was Sarah. All too conscious of hot embarrassment, Mulcahy looked back at Hawkeye and said, trying to make his voice steady, “You did show me, but I can’t remember exactly what the trick was.”

Hawkeye leaned forward. “Okay, you’ve got it off the body. Now you crack off the fins – yeah, like that – and now if you poke at the narrow end, the tail meat just slides out whole. See? Best part of a lobster, except for the claws.”

“Thank you,” Mulcahy said. He glanced around again. “I’m very sorry – did I interrupt?”

“Hawkeye, are you seriously telling me you’re not going to let me have the house because twenty-six years ago, you tripped over your own feet and fell out of the boat, and I laughed at you? I was thirteen. I was an idiot. I’m sorry. But this is ridiculous.”

Hawkeye looked up from Mulcahy’s plate, directly at Mulcahy. His mouth twisted. “Get your own tail next time.”

Mulcahy shrugged, apologetically. Hawkeye’s shoulders looked less tense.

“Billy,” Hawkeye said, sitting back in his chair, still facing Mulcahy, “you told me, and my dad, and my mom, and *your* dad and mom, and all your friends, and all my friends, the story about me falling out of the boat because I was so clumsy. But it’s not twenty-six years ago. No one’s going to take you out behind the woodshed for pushing me in. How about you just own up?”

Bill shook his head. “Why does it matter? I didn’t push you, Hawkeye. You were a clumsy kid.”

“No,” Hawkeye said. “I wasn’t.” He still wasn’t looking at Bill. After a moment, he picked up another claw from his plate – one of the tiny claws at the end of the legs – and cracked it between his fingers. “You know I wasn’t.”

“Hawkeye,” Bill said.

Hawkeye dropped the claw on his plate. “Yeah? Got something to say?” He turned his head, cutting whatever else he said off, and looked at Bill.

“Kid, I honestly don’t remember pushing you out the boat. As far as I’m concerned, you fell in. If you want me to say I’m sorry, then I will. I’m sorry. But why are you raking all this up *now*? Because you think you’ve got me over a barrel? I’m not going to admit to something I didn’t do for the sake of getting Uncle Daniel’s house.”

Hawkeye pushed his chair back, abruptly and suddenly. “You have no idea,” he said. He stood up. “Okay. Have it. I’ll send you a rental agreement.” He put his hands on the table, leaned forward, and said – to Sarah – “Don’t worry, I won’t bleed you white. But don’t let Bill kid you. He pushed me in.”

Mulcahy glanced at Sarah. She was sitting on the edge of her chair, and she looked white and upset. Hawkeye straightened up again. He fished out two bills from his wallet and dropped them on the table. “Okay, let’s go.”

Mulcahy cast a desperate look at Sarah, at Bill – who was looking down at his plate – and back at Sarah. He wanted to say something to her, to take that look away, but Hawkeye was halfway to the door – and there was nothing he could think of to say. He got carefully to his feet. “God bless you, Sarah. Goodbye.”

She looked up at him, startled. “Oh. Goodbye. Francis.”

It had still been daylight when they got to the Lobster House: it was dark now. Hawkeye was standing just outside.

The light from the restaurant window was full on Hawkeye’s face. “Sorry,” he said. He looked miserable.

“I don’t think you owe *me* an apology,” Mulcahy said.

Hawkeye had turned away. He was walking down the street towards the car. Mulcahy followed him. He would have a hard time seeing what Hawkeye was saying in this light, and he couldn’t see what to say him now.

The car was parked under a streetlight. Hawkeye stopped where the light was on his face. “Can you drive back?”

“I think so,” Mulcahy said, surprised.

“Thanks,” Hawkeye said, and slapped the keys into Mulcahy’s hand.

It was an easy road back. Mulcahy parked outside the Pierce house and switched the car lights off. The country night closed down around him. A draft of cold air slid in: Hawkeye had opened his door.

“I’ll follow you,” Mulcahy said. “There’s a full moon. In five or ten minutes, I’ll be able to see.”

After a moment, the door closed again. Hawkeye sat back and glanced at him. His teeth showed white.

“If you’re saying anything,” Mulcahy said, “I can’t see you well enough.”

There was a brief pause. Hawkeye reached out and took hold of Mulcahy’s hand. He moved his forefinger on the palm: one vertical stroke, one horizontal stroke, one vertical stroke. A circle. Four slant lines. A curve, a line, a dot. Three letters and a question-mark.

“Yes,” Mulcahy said. He was touched, and surprised. It had occurred to him that if Hawkeye knew fingerspelling they could talk, but not this direct simplicity.

Hawkeye’s teeth showed again. A broken-circle, a small horizontal line, two circles, a half-circle, a vertical line. He paused, as if waiting for Mulcahy to say something, and went on. A river-bent line, a circle – S, O, R, R, Y.

“You don’t need to apologise to me,” Mulcahy said again.

Hawkeye shifted, as if he wanted to shrug, but didn’t want to let go of Mulcahy’s hand. Y, E, S, he wrote. C, A, L, L, D, U, F, A, T, H, E, R. S, O, R –

“It was a slip of the tongue,” Mulcahy said. He thought about it. “Does my hair really look grey?”

N, O. Hawkeye paused. T, O, S, A, Y, S, O, M, E, T, H, I, N, G.

“The person I thought you should have apologised to was Sarah,” Mulcahy said.

Hawkeye’s grip tightened on his hand. Mulcahy could see him shaking his head.

“Whatever’s between you and your cousin for what he did to you all those years ago, Sarah had nothing to do with it,” Mulcahy said. “But she was obviously very upset.”

N, O, T, M, Y, P, R, O, B

Mulcahy snatched his hand away. He stared at Hawkeye in the shadows. “You didn’t need to say that to her,” he said, and opened the car door to get out. His eyes had adapted, enough to get his bearings. He took the path up to the front door slowly, conscious – he couldn’t have said how – of Hawkeye very close behind him.

Hawkeye switched the light on in the front hall and turned to look at Mulcahy. “You didn’t get a chance to finish your lobster. Sorry. Make you a sandwich?”

“I’m not hungry,” Mulcahy said.

“Coffee?” Hawkeye offered. He paused. “Mrs Clark’s casserole?”

“I’ll take the coffee,” Mulcahy said.

“Good choice.”

It wasn’t until Mulcahy was sitting down that Hawkeye asked “How much of that were you following?”

“Only partly, I’m afraid,” Mulcahy admitted. “I don’t – I can’t follow a three-way conversation.”

“But enough for you to be sure I said something to Sarah I shouldn’t have?” Hawkeye said. “Look, this situation is family stuff.”

“And I couldn’t possibly understand?” Mulcahy looked down at his hands, then back at Hawkeye again. “Your cousin took you out in a boat and pushed you in the water, twenty-five – twenty-six years ago, and then told everyone that you fell in – tripped over your own feet. You were seven, he was thirteen, and everyone believed him instead of you. Now he won’t admit that he ever lied about it. Is that right?”

Hawkeye had put a pan of water on to boil for coffee. He sat down on the edge of the table and stared at Mulcahy thoughtfully. “You believe me,” he said after a long moment.

“Why wouldn’t I believe you?” Mulcahy asked. “I do know you quite well. You are perfectly capable of making up a story for – for mischief’s sake, but if you had, it wouldn’t *matter* to you. I thought – I was quite worried that you were going to…” his voice trailed off. “Hit him,” he added, doubtfully. *Or worse.*

“I was thinking about it from the moment they walked in,” Hawkeye said. “But I didn’t, thanks to you and your piece of tail.” He laughed, briefly, and shook his head.

“You believe me.”

“Why wouldn’t I?”

Hawkeye moved his shoulders in an uneasy shrug. “I didn’t know. That was the first time I’ve ever told anyone what I remember happened. Except for Sidney Freedman. I didn’t know if anyone else would believe me.”

“The first time? Surely you told other people when it happened?”

“No.” Hawkeye stood up, restlessly. “No. He helped me into the water, and I – I nearly drowned, and he pulled me out, and the first thing he said to me was – ” Hawkeye turned away. A moment later, he faced Mulcahy again. “He said ‘You’re so clumsy. If it wasn’t for me, you’d be dead.’ And I thanked him. For saving my life. I knew he’d pushed me in, but – ”

Mulcahy waited. Hawkeye jammed his fists against his hips. “But I – ” He stopped. “Water’s boiling. Coffee?” He turned away.

Mulcahy stood up and went over to him. “Hawkeye?” He put his hand on the thin shoulder, and Hawkeye turned.

“But I loved him,” he said. “I – Francis? I really loved him. I hate him.” He was standing close to Mulcahy, looking down at him. “And I never told anyone. Not ever. I never even thought about it. For years. And now – every time I see him I can’t stop thinking about it, but I couldn’t tell anyone – ” His hands, clenched into fists, were tapping silently against his legs.

“But you did tonight.”

“Yeah, and you want to know why?” The tempo of his fists beating against his thighs was picking up. Mulcahy caught at Hawkeye’s wrists and pulled his hands up. Hawkeye looked at him, mouth a little open.

“You want to know why?” he repeated, after a moment.

“Yes,” Mulcahy said. Hawkeye’s wrists were muscular. He wasn’t trying to pull himself free of Mulcahy’s grip, but he was shaking.

“Last night I told you – I thought I’d told you – about that damn bet. And I thought you’d forgiven me. I woke up this morning and I was happy!” Hawkeye stepped backwards, not managing to jerk his wrists out of Mulcahy’s continuing grasp. His head jerked forward. “Got that, Francis? I was happy! And you hadn’t even heard me because I was *drunk*.” He spat the last word. “Will you let go of me?”

Mulcahy shook his head. “Hawkeye, I – ”

“Shut up. How often have you wanted to tell me to shut up when you could hear me? I knew you for three years and I can’t remember that you ever shut me up the way you’ve been doing for the past two days. If you can tell me to shut up every time you get mad at me, I can tell you to shut up just once, can’t I? I had to tell you about the damn bet all over again – Look, let go of me!”

“I don’t want you to hurt yourself.”

“I’ve been waving my hands around since I was a drama-ridden adolescent, I’m not going to hurt myself doing it now.”

Mulcahy let go. Hawkeye jammed his fists back against his hips. “I kept thinking, tonight, if I could do that to you, if I could tell you that, I could tell Billy I remember about the swimming hole. Even if nobody believed me.”

“I had forgiven you,” Mulcahy said. It was true: there was still the small area of numbness when he thought about how helplessly he had reacted to Hawkeye intent on a bet, but his conscience told him that he shouldn’t feel that way.

Hawkeye brought his hands up, still clenched, and slammed them back down against his legs. “You couldn’t even *hear* me!”

“I forgive you,” Mulcahy shouted, and grabbed for Hawkeye’s wrists. “Stop doing that to yourself.”

“Doing what?” Hawkeye looked bewildered.

Mulcahy hung on to his wrists. “Stop hitting yourself.”

“I’m not hitting myself,” Hawkeye said.

Mulcahy didn’t let go. “Hawkeye, I forgive you. Now stop beating yourself up. Please.”

“Look, if I were hitting myself, I’d know it.” Hawkeye turned his hands inside Mulcahy’s grip, breaking his grasp. “And why aren’t you doing it for me, anyway?” He didn’t withdraw his wrists: they were almost holding hands. “Why aren’t you punching me? Why aren’t you yelling at me? Why don’t you hate me? What business do you have forgiving me for what I did to you?”

“I’m afraid it’s part of the job description,” Mulcahy said, smiling: anything else was too revealing.

“You’re not a priest any more.”

Mulcahy let go. Briefly, it was as if the small area of numbness had spread to encompass all of him. “I’m still a priest,” he said. “I don’t hate you. I don’t want to punch you or punish you. Whether you repent is between you and your conscience, but I won’t – I can’t beat you up for it. And I wish you’d stop. It doesn’t make me feel any better to see you punishing yourself.” He sat down at the table and took his specs off to rub his eyes. “It really doesn’t, Hawkeye. Please stop.”

His consciousness of Hawkeye close behind him was so strong that when Hawkeye’s hand closed over the back of his neck he didn’t even twitch. He put his specs back on and looked at Hawkeye, sitting down beside him, wishing he could still feel numb. Hawkeye’s hand was warm and heavy on his skin.

“There is a psalm that is often sung at ordinations,” Mulcahy said. “Psalm 109. It was sung at mine. *Iuravit Dominus et non paenitebit eum tu es sacerdos in aeternum*. The Lord hath sworn, and he will not repent: Thou art a priest for ever. Even when I’m laicized. There is something they can’t take back. I don’t know what it will be like – I’ve never met a laicized priest. But it wasn’t your fault: it was something in me. My bishop wrote –” Mulcahy swallowed, “that he wouldn’t have ordained me if he’d known I was afflicted with these tendencies. It wasn’t something that ever came up in my interviews before ordination, and it never occurred to me to mention it. I didn’t know that he wouldn’t have ordained me if I had, and I find I can’t regret that he did.”

“He wouldn’t have found out if it wasn’t for me,” Hawkeye said.

Mulcahy very nearly took his specs off again. “He wouldn’t have found out if I hadn’t said... what I said about those two women in the parish. Once he started to ask into it...” he summoned a smile, and a sliver of bravado. “Well, you were my last, Hawkeye, not my first.”

Hawkeye’s laugh was tangibly jolted out of him. It made the first words of what he said incomprehensible. “– hoped you didn’t have a baseline for comparison.” He stopped. “But I –”

“Hawkeye, what you did...” Mulcahy found, however selfishly, that he was drawing strength out of the touch of Hawkeye’s hand. “I thought at the time, you were just seeking... pleasure with a friend. Knowing you’d – you were impelled not by a feeling of desire for me, but by... because of a bet with Captain McIntyre –” He swallowed. “Any hurt feelings I might have... would be sinful.”

“Oh, damn,” Hawkeye said, as plainly heartfelt as if it were a prayer. “I never meant –” he swallowed. “I don’t know what to say. I don’t know why the hell I told you – Except

when I heard you crying last night, I couldn't stand to think you'd forgiven me when you didn't know what I'd done."

"I'm grateful for your honesty," Mulcahy said. "And for your help."

"Oh, damn," Hawkeye said again. His fingers moved briefly on Mulcahy's neck, almost as if unconsciously. His shoulders hunched up, and his head went down. It was a moment before he looked up again. "Telling me your hurt feelings are 'sinful' doesn't help. It doesn't take them away. I mean, what is sin, if it's not hurting someone else?"

"Hurt has nothing to do with it," Mulcahy said. Hawkeye was a surgeon. He was conscious – he realised he had been conscious for some time – of an odd smell in the air. "Ah – the water you put on for coffee?"

"What?" Hawkeye stared at him, then his head went up. "God – " he leapt up, and the rest of his speech went out of sight.

The pan had boiled dry. Hawkeye put it in the sink and put on more water. This time he stood over it.

Mulcahy sat, a little turned from the table, watching Hawkeye. For three years he had seen Hawkeye on a daily basis: for nearly a year, not at all. Hawkeye had written to him once, and Mulcahy hadn't written back, and hadn't kept the letter. He had no photograph of Hawkeye, and he had tried not to remember him physically, especially not during the months after he'd lost his temper in front of his bishop and the Monsignor.

He had known he'd failed. He hadn't realised how far he'd succeeded. Watching Hawkeye when Hawkeye wasn't watching him had been part of his life for three years. He'd memorised him: the curve of his heavy eyelids, the shape of his hands, the angle of his neck, even the way he walked. He'd managed to forget the flex of Hawkeye's wrists, the slouching way he sat, the way the heavy stubble seemed to shape his face, the way his eyes looked blue and hollow when he was tired, or drunk, or aroused. He hadn't forgotten – he had chosen to disregard – the impact Hawkeye had on him.

He would have to begin, all over again, tomorrow. One day at a time.

Hawkeye put a mug of coffee down on the table in front of him. "Cream?"

Mulcahy picked the mug up and cradled it in his hands. "No."

"Sugar?"

Mulcahy shook his head.

"Honey?"

Surprised, Mulcahy shook his head again. "No – "

"Sweetheart?" Hawkeye was grinning as he sat down on the edge of the table, his own mug of coffee in his hand.

That was another thing Mulcahy had almost remembered, almost forgotten about Hawkeye: his unerring talent for making the wrong joke at the wrong time to the wrong person. He managed, as usual, a polite smile, and drank his coffee. It was hot, and good.

"You mind coming through to the parlour?" Hawkeye asked.

"Of course," Mulcahy put his mug down, and stood up.

Hawkeye picked up the mug in his free hand. "There's some stuff there I want to pack up before Billy moves in."

The parlour felt chilly after the kitchen. There was a log basket beside the fireplace, half-empty. "May I light the fire?" Mulcahy asked.

"Sure. I'll get more wood," Hawkeye said. But he stood and watched as Mulcahy knelt down beside the fireplace. Mulcahy twisted his head round to look at him after a minute,

halfway through stacking the logs so that they would catch with the smallest amount of kindling. "I can manage," he said.

"You're better equipped to live here than I am," Hawkeye said, and went out.

He came back a few minutes later, with an armful of logs that he slid into the basket. The fire was ablaze. He held out his hands, casually, and let Mulcahy take them to pull himself to his feet. "Coffee's over there."

Hawkeye had put both mugs on the table by the sofa: Mulcahy let go of Hawkeye's hands and sat down. Hawkeye smiled, briefly, and went back out again. He came back with a sturdy cardboard carton and a stack of old newspapers. "Billy knows what this room looks like: I'm just going to take what I can fit in here."

"Why does it matter what Billy knows?"

Hawkeye looked around the room, with an odd expression on his face. "I suppose it doesn't." He dumped the carton and the papers by Mulcahy's feet. "Can you pack stuff?"

"Of course," Mulcahy said.

The carton was a third full before Mulcahy ventured to ask, "Hawkeye?"

Hawkeye had turned away to the bookshelves between the windows, but he swung back to face Mulcahy. "What?"

"You said I'd kept telling you to shut up. I have sometimes been very strongly tempted, but I don't recollect that I've ever told you to shut up."

Hawkeye looked away, looked back again, and glanced up at the ceiling. When he faced Mulcahy again, it was a moment before he spoke. "What do you call it when you turn away so you can't see what I'm saying, or you take your hand away like you did back in the car?" He picked up his mug, and drank from it. "Because what I call it is telling me to shut up." He wasn't smiling. "Either that or you just couldn't stand me touching you any more. But what did I *say*?" The emphasis on the last word was visible.

Mulcahy buried his face in his coffee mug. He couldn't stay there forever, and when he came up for air, he was going to have to look at Hawkeye again.

When he did, Hawkeye was still looking at him, eyebrows slightly twitched upward.

"Hawkeye," he began, awkwardly, and feeling very diffident, "you're kind, and compassionate. You care about people."

As he'd expected, Hawkeye's mouth twisted cynically.

"You're likeable, you're a delight to listen to – your exuberance, your cheerfulness, your humour –"

"Can it, Francis, you're making me blush."

"But you sometimes – don't seem to let yourself think about what other people are feeling. And when you don't think, you can sometimes be – can appear to be – quite cruel."

The corners of Hawkeye's mouth twitched upwards again. "Well, you didn't have to can it that fast."

"I'm sorry," Mulcahy said immediately, automatically.

Hawkeye shook his head. He looked a little rueful. "No, go on. You're not saying anything new. I'm a bastard." He sat down on the edge of the sofa. "Go on."

"I didn't say you were," Mulcahy said. "You have far more good qualities than bad."

Hawkeye shrugged.

"I said you could sometimes appear to be quite cruel – when you speak before you think."

Hawkeye shrugged again and grinned, a brief flicker of cynical humour. “Go on. I’m not arguing.”

Mulcahy swallowed. “I’m sorry, Hawkeye. I get very angry, and when I do... the easiest thing for me to do if I feel I won’t be able to control it, is to turn away. And when I do, you can’t talk to me. But I don’t intend to shut you up.” He added, with painstaking honesty, “At least, not primarily.”

Hawkeye seemed to be inhaling his coffee. He didn’t say anything for a while. “Okay,” he said at last. “Fair enough. But – what happened – in the car?”

“What you said about – what you said to Mrs Pierce,” Mulcahy said.

“What should I have said to her?”

“She didn’t want to be there,” Mulcahy said. “She was embarrassed when they arrived, and didn’t want to sit down with us, and was disturbed and upset by what her husband was saying – I assume by his pursuit of this house.”

Hawkeye was staring. He put the mug back on the table. “You hardly said six words to her – and she didn’t say more than two words to you.” He shook his head. “Okay, I’m not saying you’re wrong, but I’ve known Sarah for twelve – thirteen years – and *I* didn’t notice.”

“You were thinking about Billy,” Mulcahy said.

“Yeah?”

“No matter what Billy did to you all those years ago, Sarah had nothing to do with it,” Mulcahy said.

“No. Back then... I guess Sarah was in Vermont going to grade school.”

“She was upset already: you didn’t need to say what you said.”

“What did I say?” Hawkeye was frowning. “You know, I really don’t remember. Something about the rent.”

“I saw your face at an angle,” Mulcahy said. “You said something like: ‘Don’t worry, I won’t bleed you white. But don’t let Bill kid you. He pushed me in.’”

Hawkeye picked up his mug, and put it down again. “Yeah,” he said, briefly. “Sounds like something I might have said. But I honestly don’t remember. As far as I’m concerned –” Hawkeye shrugged again. He picked the mug up.

“You sound like Billy,” Mulcahy said.

Hawkeye slammed the mug down on the table. Mulcahy felt the force of the blow in his hands. Hawkeye was on his feet and his mouth open, as if vomiting noiselessly.

Mulcahy sat still and stared up at him, keeping his eyes fixed on Hawkeye’s. He could not read Hawkeye’s words, but everything about him shouted rage.

It seemed a long time before Hawkeye sat down again, and bent his head, rubbing at the back of his neck. He looked up. “Sorry.”

“That’s all right.”

“But I do not sound like Billy.”

“Billy denied pushing you in. He said he ‘honestly didn’t remember’, and also that ‘as far as I’m concerned’ his memory was the correct one. You don’t usually say things like that, Hawkeye, but you did just then.”

Hawkeye looked away, very briefly. “Right. You know, if you get any better at lip-reading, they’ll have you up on charges of wilful mindreading.”

“Sorry,” Mulcahy said again.

“Don’t apologise,” Hawkeye said. He looked tired. “Okay. So I said it. It wasn’t exactly the kindest thing to say. Especially if she was already upset. And you’re probably right, she was. That’s what upset you.”

“No,” Mulcahy said. “I’m sorry, I’m not very good at explaining these things. It was a thoughtless thing for you to say, but *you* were upset – you wouldn’t have said it if you hadn’t been caught up in what Billy did to you – ”

“Twenty-six years ago – ” Hawkeye said

“It doesn’t matter *how* long ago,” Mulcahy said. “But – it was when you said it wasn’t your problem – I’m afraid that’s what made me angry.”

“Because...” Hawkeye was frowning. “I don’t get it.”

“The worst part of you,” Mulcahy swallowed, “is the part that says, ‘It’s not my problem’ about something – *anything* – that you can’t deal with like a surgeon. That’s what makes me angry.” Having finally got to the end of it, he picked up his mug and drank from it: the coffee was no longer hot.

Hawkeye was sitting with his hands folded together in his lap. “How do you mean – like a surgeon?”

“You’re a very good surgeon,” Mulcahy said.

“How would you know?”

“Well, I watched you,” Mulcahy said, disconcerted. “For three years. I helped care for the wounded boys whose lives you saved. I don’t think anyone at the 4077th would have disagreed – not even Major Burns, God help him – that you were the finest surgeon there. But sometimes it seemed to me that you dealt with problems – and human relationships... as if you could deal with them by – by – ”

“By knocking them out, cutting them open, and stitching them up?” Hawkeye interrupted. “Yeah. I see what you’re saying. I want to fix it. If I can’t fix it, I let go of it. I’m a meatball surgeon. I just do – I do them fast and par.”

“That’s not – ” Mulcahy started to say, but Hawkeye overrode him.

“I told you I was the brightest bright young surgeon?” At Mulcahy’s nod, Hawkeye put his hands down on the sofa, gripping at the edge, and leaned forward. “I was lying. I *was* the brightest. I’m not. Not any more. There are men who were residents when I was there who are better than me now.” He paused, and said finally, “I’m not a good surgeon. And everyone at Maine General knows it.”

Mulcahy stared in disbelief. “Hawkeye – ?”

“Yeah? You want more coffee? Mine’s cold.”

“But this isn’t true,” Mulcahy said. “Who told you this?”

“No one. I did. I can *see* I’m not as good as they are. I was a good meatball surgeon, but I can’t do the kind of work they’re doing at Maine General now.”

“Have you talked to anyone about this?”

Hawkeye laughed and shook his head, simultaneously. “No.” His hands folded together on his knees, restlessly beating a silent rhythm.

“Is there anything you’ve tried to do that you *can’t* do?” Mulcahy asked. He was still feeling almost in shock. He was half-convinced Hawkeye was making it up for mischief’s sake: but the level of intensity was wrong.

“No, it’s not that – ” Hawkeye frowned and got up. “I’ll get you more coffee.” He came back a few minutes later with fresh cups and went back to the bookshelves. Mulcahy was carefully wrapping the last of five old-fashioned crystal tumblers.

Hawkeye came back to the sofa with eight books in the curve of his arm: he sat down and handed them to Mulcahy. "See if you can fit these in."

"No problem. There's still plenty of space."

"Listen, I had an idea," Hawkeye said. "About your teaching certificate."

"What?" Mulcahy was startled. He hadn't been thinking about that.

"Why don't you write to the Pennsylvania school board and ask them to re-issue you with a copy that doesn't say you're a priest? You're qualified to teach there, fair and square, right? You don't need to explain why you want it – for all they have to know, you want a job working undercover in a school for atheists."

"Yes, I suppose so. But –"

"Well?"

"They might say no."

"They might say yes! You won't know till you ask."

"I'll think about it."

"There's my dad's writing desk over there. Why don't you just do it?"

"Now?"

"Why not?"

"I – where could I ask them to send it? I don't have an address."

"Well, you could stay here, and ask them to send it here," Hawkeye said. He paused. "No?" and ducked his head, not quite grinning. "Okay. You could give them a post office address in New York, pick up your mail there. You could give them the address of the New York School for the Deaf. You could –"

Mulcahy was smiling almost involuntarily. "All right."

"Do you have their address?"

"Oh yes." It was printed on the certificate.

"There you go. There's stamps in the box with a salmon on the lid."

It took Mulcahy longer to write the letter than he would have thought: but then, he hadn't thought of writing it at all. He finished it at last, wondering that the odd gaps in writing it didn't show on the page, addressed it, and stamped it. When he turned round, Hawkeye was sprawled full length on the sofa, hands folded behind his head, watching him.

There was that same expression on Hawkeye's face that Mulcahy had seen once or twice before when Hawkeye was looking at Mulcahy, but more often when he was looking at someone else. He looked... intent. He looked like a predator who was fond of his prey.

Mulcahy shivered. "Hawkeye?"

"Cold?" Hawkeye glanced over at the fire. He swung his legs off the sofa and went over to put a couple more logs on it. Mulcahy stood still. There was an armchair by the fire, but the angle of light was wrong: it wouldn't be easy to read Hawkeye's face from there.

Hawkeye turned round from the fire and looked at Mulcahy. "Francis? You okay?" The look of hunger had gone from his face, as if Mulcahy had imagined it.

Mulcahy sat down on the sofa.

Hawkeye sat down at the other end, leaning back against the arm. He must have taken his shoes off earlier. He tucked his knees up, wrapping his arms around them, and looked at Mulcahy. “Do you know how specific you can make clauses in a rental agreement?”

“I don’t know,” Mulcahy said. “What do you have in mind?”

“This was my grandma’s room. Then it was my mom’s. I’d like it just to stay the way it is.”

Mulcahy glanced round the room. It was shabby, but pleasant. “I don’t see why you can’t write a clause in saying that.”

“I’d like to.”

The books Hawkeye had picked out were packed into the carton. Hawkeye looked round the room again. “I can’t even believe it belongs to me. The rest of the house, maybe, but this room? I can still remember my mom yelling at me for jumping on this sofa with my shoes on.”

Mulcahy smiled. “It seems to have survived.”

“I was pretty small at the time.” He got up again and went over to a shelf by the fireplace, coming back with a framed photo. “About this age.” He passed it over to Mulcahy.

The photograph was carefully posed, husband, wife, and son, all looking seriously at the photographer. The child was immediately recognisable. Mulcahy smiled at him, feeling a familiar tenderness. “How old are you?” he said, tapping the glass, looking back up at the familiar beaky nose and chin.

“Eight.”

“You hadn’t quite grown up to your face yet,” Mulcahy said.

Hawkeye tucked his hands behind his head and looked amused. “I was an ugly kid. Smart as hell, and smart-mouthed as hell, and ugly as sin.”

“Who told you that?”

“Mirrors,” Hawkeye said. “I hit puberty and a growth spurt and suddenly went from ugly to my current stunning good looks in the space of about two years. Can’t compete with Billy, but I don’t stop clocks any more.”

“You had very strong features for a child,” Mulcahy said. He glanced down at the photo again, and smiled. “I was so inconspicuous no one noticed I’m short-sighted till I was eight.”

“What happened then?”

“I was sent for an eye test,” Mulcahy said, “and the school nurse asked me to read the chart on the wall, and I asked her ‘Which wall?’”

Hawkeye laughed: Mulcahy saw it, not only in his face but in his hands and feet. It was something he’d never been in a position to notice before.

“None of my brothers were short-sighted, and nor is my sister. Mam said it was probably because I read too much, but –” Mulcahy smiled a little. “My sister read just as much as I did, and she didn’t need specs. Then again, she had her own room.”

“How many brothers do you have?” Hawkeye asked. “You never talked about them.”

“Five,” Mulcahy said. “All older than me.” He shrugged, feeling a rue so old it had worn the edges away. “To tell the truth, we’re simply not that close any more. If we ever were. I and my sister were the first two people in my family to go to college. When I was in the seminary, I used to go back for Christmas and Thanksgiving, but... But after Mam died, and when Mark and Gus were in the forces during the war – the world war – we just

never managed it for a few years. And then, after I was ordained – there was too big a gap. We were in different worlds. I'm closer to my sister. Or I was."

"Was?"

"She's a nun," Mulcahy said. "I haven't yet written to her about – this."

"Oh. Yes." Hawkeye moved his feet uneasily. "I guess there wouldn't be a formula in religious etiquette books."

"No," Mulcahy said. "It's not something that's supposed to happen. It's – the only times I've heard of it happening before are when a priest is unfortunate enough to become an alcoholic. I don't know how to tell her."

Hawkeye looked back at him soberly. "You could always tell her you became an alcoholic."

Laughing so hard and so unexpectedly actually *hurt*. Mulcahy choked and clutched at his ribs. He was helplessly doubled over when he felt Hawkeye's hands on his shoulders. "I'm all right," he tried to say out loud, but he wasn't sure it got out. Tears of laughter were leaking from his eyes.

He managed to stop eventually, and sat up, still hiccupping with giggles. Hawkeye's hand was warm on the back of his neck, and he was looking at him with puzzled amusement. After a moment, he lifted his other hand to Mulcahy's face. It was almost like when he was checking Mulcahy's eyes that afternoon: but not quite.

Hawkeye was looking at him very intently. Mulcahy swallowed.

"I'd like to kiss you," Hawkeye said. "You gonna run away if I do?"

"No," Mulcahy said. He tried to shift backwards, and realised that he couldn't. He wanted to feel horrified, but he was still warm with too much laughter. "No. But – please don't."

"Why not?" Hawkeye's fingers were moving on the back of his neck. Mulcahy no longer believed it was unconscious. He shivered. All impulse to laugh had fled.

"Because – " He closed his eyes. "If you let go of me. Please – "

Hawkeye let go of him. When Mulcahy opened his eyes again, Hawkeye had shifted to the other end of the sofa, and was sitting back up against it with his knees up. "And that's another way of telling me to shut up," he said.

Mulcahy rubbed the back of his neck. "Sorry," he said.

"What for?" Hawkeye was looking at him oddly. "I was out of line. Not you."

"I – " Mulcahy wanted to be under a cold shower. "I realise my behaviour – my weakness – may have given you the wrong impression – "

Hawkeye shook his head. His eyes were fixed on Mulcahy. "I get it. You're still a priest. I'm not – I shouldn't – I won't – " He stopped for the third time. "Okay, I am and I do. But I won't."

"Dear Lord, help me," Mulcahy said. He only knew he had said it out loud when he saw Hawkeye's eyebrows go up.

"You don't need to pray for help. I'm not going to do anything you don't want."

"I don't want – to want this."

"That I can't help you with."

"Just another 'not my problem'?" Mulcahy asked. He tucked his hands together, palms flat, fighting the urge to clench them into fists.

"You have feelings for me. I've got them for you, too. I don't see how they're sinful. Nor do you, from what you were saying."

“Love isn’t sinful,” Mulcahy said. He was still trembling, he realised, and tried to quell his body insurgent. “But what I meant, when I said you handled problems like a surgeon, is that – ”

Hawkeye opened his mouth.

“Please, let me finish. This is very hard for me.”

“For me too,” Hawkeye said, with a look that was humorous without being pleasant: Mulcahy froze.

After a moment, Hawkeye said “I’m sorry. I’ll shut up. Don’t take your glasses off at me.”

“Surgery is very hard to watch,” Mulcahy said. “It’s even harder to take part in it. The first time I had to assist you with an operation, when the nurses had been sent away, I was – petrified. All thumbs, as you said. A human body, naked, unconscious, being cut into and the inner organs exposed and stitched – I didn’t think I’d ever be able to get used to it. I don’t think I ever did, but I – but it didn’t stop me from seeing that a surgeon can somehow detach himself from feeling what would be natural to feel about cutting up a fellow human being, and that this is a good detachment, like the detachment a good priest is – is supposed to be able to achieve.”

Hawkeye was watching him, intently, his face as inexpressive as a mask.

“I – know that you’re a good surgeon. But you can detach yourself from feeling what it would be natural to feel about other things. You did it when you – accepted that bet from Captain McIntyre, to – to seduce me. You detach yourself from the – the feelings you arouse in others. You make yourself into a cruel person. I wish you wouldn’t, and not just because you make it very hard – very difficult for me to – resist you. Because I don’t believe you like yourself very much when you get like this.”

Hawkeye didn’t say anything. He lifted his shoulders, dropped them again.

“I’m suspended from the priesthood, an application for laicization in my name is on its way to the Vatican, and my bishop thinks he should never have ordained me,” Mulcahy said. “If it were only my priesthood, I – I think I would... surrender. I haven’t – that night was the only time since I was ordained, but I have – I have had moments of weakness before. But for you and I to – if we were to go to bed – ” They had gone to bed together last night, of course, Mulcahy remembered with a flush of embarrassment. He hadn’t the stomach to use the cruder language of the gym showers that he remembered from his teenage years, and he didn’t suppose Hawkeye had the Latin vocabulary of a priest. He settled for the simplest. “If we were to have sex – it would be a sin.”

Hawkeye didn’t move or say anything. He went on looking at Mulcahy for some time: the look of hunger was back, tempered by something else, some feeling that Mulcahy didn’t have words for.

“You didn’t think it was a sin for Sturges and his buddy. Or for these two lesbians -- ”

“Please, Hawkeye.”

“Sorry. These two women who were living together. If not for them, why for you?”

Mulcahy was silent for a moment. He was inexpressibly shocked, even though he could see it was a fair question by some lights. He had seen the feeling that Sturges and Lowry had for each other as the love of David and Jonathan: he had told himself that the mutual devotion of Ruth and Naomi had been praised down millennia of tradition.

No such comparison occurred to him when he thought of his own complicated feelings for Hawkeye: nor when he tried to imagine what Hawkeye might feel for him.

“Francis?”

It had been longer than a moment he had been staring at Hawkeye. “They loved each other,” he said.

Hawkeye’s face changed. He looked confused for an instant, and then something darker: hollow-eyed he stared back at Mulcahy. His mouth opened, but not in speech: he closed it again without saying anything. He stood up. The fire didn’t need another log, but he threw one on anyway, and moved sideways, his back still to Mulcahy, to the shelves from which he had taken the photograph. He raised his hands, elbows out, to his face – perhaps to reach up to a shelf at eye-level, but perhaps not.

Mulcahy’s first instinct was to go to him. He sat on the edge of the sofa and stared at Hawkeye’s back and knew he couldn’t: he could not trust himself to keep a comforting touch brotherly, not carnal. Hawkeye would stop, if Mulcahy asked him to: but he was not sure he had the strength of will to ask him again. For this reason alone, he should not be a priest. His bishop had been right.

His bishop wouldn’t have approved of any of this. He got up and went over. “Hawkeye?”

Hawkeye’s shoulders twitched, not quite a shrug. He was staring at the shelves: family photographs and knick-knacks, which must have been familiar to Hawkeye for years. His hands were resting on the edge of the shelf.

“I’m sorry,” Mulcahy said.

Hawkeye turned, looking startled. “For what?” There were wet marks around the corners of his eyes, and he had a wide uncheerful grin on his face. “I never knew you felt like that about surgery. Or surgeons. Look, I’m – just – in a mood this evening. No reason you have to take care of it. I’ve done enough to you. Look, let’s – finish up in here – ” He began taking photos off the shelves, one by one “ – and I’ll need to pack, but you don’t need to help with that. You want any of the books in here? They’re mostly old stuff, but some of it’s good. You can ignore any of the books on that shelf, they’re all school prizes. The school bought a job lot of Louisa M. Alcotts sixty years ago and they’ve been handing them out ever since. Unless you’re into *Little Women*? I won two copies for spelling, and my dad won three for arithmetic.” He handed Mulcahy a stack of half a dozen framed photos. “Can you fit all these in that box?”

“No,” Mulcahy said helplessly. He looked back at the carton. “I mean, yes. I should think – yes. Hawkeye – ”

“Did you ever get that letter I wrote you?”

Mulcahy nearly dropped the photos. He put them down in the carton, and stood up again, facing Hawkeye. “Yes,” he said.

“You didn’t write back.”

“No.” Mulcahy had no excuses, no justifications to give. He would never see Hawkeye again after tomorrow. “I was afraid of my feelings for you.” He kept his hands down by his sides and his chin up. He could not blame Hawkeye. “Those had nothing to do with – the bet.”

Hawkeye looked at him, speechlessly, for what felt like a long time. When his eyes glanced away, he spoke slowly and with plain difficulty. “Francis, I care about you. I may not be that good at showing it, and I’m never any good at saying the words, but – I do. Right now I’m angry and I’m horny and I want a drink, and I made a pass at you when I

shouldn't have. I'm sorry. I'm going to go upstairs and pack and write a note for the maid, and then – whatever you want. I promise – ”

“I'm sorry,” Mulcahy said again. “I should never have told you – ”

“Don't,” Hawkeye said it abruptly, with visible anger for the first time. “I did it. It was my fault. My stupid fault.” He stepped back, away from Mulcahy, and headed for the door.

“It wasn't – ”

Hawkeye turned round. “Don't,” he said. “Whatever you want to say to me – save it for later. Okay? Not – right now.”

“I wanted to say,” Mulcahy said, dry-mouthed, seeing now all the things that would never get said, “I care for you.”

Hawkeye looked at him. His eyes were wide and hollow. “Yeah,” he said. “And if you want to take a shower, cold water is one thing we have in unlimited quantities. Help yourself.”

It was dark outside, and cold. Mulcahy stood in the doorway, letting the cold air flood over him like the moonlight, until his eyes were adjusted. He went down the front steps, holding firmly on to the rail, felt his way along the front of the porch to a dry spot, and knelt down. He had rather be alone to pray.

“Dear God,” he said out loud when he could trust his voice, and then, deciding he couldn't trust his own thoughts, “*amo te super omnia proximum meum propter te,*” and went on, trying to focus on his feelings and not his body. *Dear Lord, I love you above all things, with my whole heart and soul...I love my neighbour as myself for the love of you... I forgive all who have injured me, and ask pardon of all whom I have injured.* It was cold. His body had gone from lustful to aching. He was finding it easier to focus on his conscience with every repetition of the prayer.

“...*In hac caritate vivere et mori statuo. Amen.*” He stared at his folded hands. “Dear God, you know I love Hawkeye. In your infinite wisdom, You know exactly *how* I love Hawkeye.” *Which is just as well, because I find it hard to put into words, even talking to you, dear Lord.* “Help me. If I sinned in coming here, forgive me my sin. Let me do no harm. Bless Hawkeye, and have him always in your keeping.” He paused a moment, and realised he could say it without forcing the words. “I thought you wanted me to be a priest. But whatever you want me to do, I'm here to do. Your will, not mine, be done. Amen.”

Now all he had to do was stand up, walk back into the house, meet Hawkeye in the same friendship they had always been able to offer each other before, and tell him... *You're a good surgeon. You're a good man.*

And tell him goodbye.

Mulcahy stood up, dusting off the knees of his trousers. His legs were stiff from kneeling in the cold: he rested his hands on the front of the house and did a couple of careful stretches.

When he looked along at the front porch, the door was open, and Hawkeye was standing at the top of the steps, looking round with a swift urgency in his movements. He was carrying something under his arm.

“Hawkeye?” Mulcahy said out loud.

Hawkeye's face turned towards him and his whole body seemed to relax. Mulcahy made his way towards the front steps: Hawkeye came to meet him, moving swiftly. The thing he was carrying was a coat: he shook it out and wrapped it round Mulcahy's shoulders. He waited for Mulcahy to shrug himself into it, and took hold of his hand. His finger traced three characters on Mulcahy's palm: O, K, ?.

"Yes," Mulcahy said.

Hawkeye grimaced. "Oh, damn you," he said, quite distinctly, and then something else. His hand holding Mulcahy's was warm. S, T, A, Y, O, U, T, ?, he traced. W, O, N, T, B, O, T, H, E, R, Y, O, U, I, N, S, I, D, E.

"It's all right," Mulcahy said, feeling awkward. "I was just coming back in."

Hawkeye shook his head, and Mulcahy saw a brief flash of teeth as he grinned. He let go of Mulcahy's hand, and stepped aside. He followed Mulcahy in.

In the brightly lit kitchen, Mulcahy said apologetically, "I'm sorry. I didn't mean to worry you."

Hawkeye had gone directly to the stove and put another pan of water on. He turned around. "I didn't mean to bother you," he said. "I heard you go out, I didn't hear you come back in. It gets cold at night around here, even in the summer. Figured you could do with a coat. When I didn't see you –" His face twisted, briefly. "I was standing there thinking how the hell do I find someone in the woods after dark who can't hear me calling his name?" He looked across the room at Mulcahy. "I'm sorry about what happened earlier."

Mulcahy shook his head. "I'm sorry," he said. "You're a good man, and a good surgeon. I shouldn't have said – everything I said."

Hawkeye turned back to the stove. After a long minute, he glanced over his shoulder. "Drive you up to Portland tomorrow morning, if you like."

"Thank you," Mulcahy said. It was warm in the kitchen, and he shrugged off the coat again. It wasn't Hawkeye's: it was made for a shorter man.

"My dad's," Hawkeye said. "I'd have taken it with his other stuff this afternoon if I'd remembered it. You might as well have it."

"I couldn't possibly –"

"Take it as a Catholic. The Protestants got their share. Coffee? Or there's cocoa somewhere."

"Thank you," Mulcahy said. He smiled. "Cocoa."

"Really? Okay." Hawkeye was moving quickly, speaking quickly, if distinctly. He was sober still: Mulcahy couldn't have mistaken that. He made the cocoa and handed it to Mulcahy. "Drink it and get warm. Sit down."

Mulcahy sat. Hawkeye sat down on the other side of the table, leaning forward. He looked around the kitchen, as if taking it in, keeping an eye on Mulcahy. He said almost as if to himself, "You know, this really is a great house for kids. Danny and Mary are going to love it."

"I'm sure they will." Mulcahy smiled. "It feels very comfortable." He consciously relaxed his grip on the mug, trying to make himself feel that the next comment was casual. "You should get married, Hawkeye."

"What?" Hawkeye looked directly at him, his eyebrows going up with surprise and a kind of amusement.

"You did say you were thinking about it. This morning."

“I did?” Hawkeye was frowning and smiling at once now. “Oh. Yeah. I remember.” He leaned back and folded his arms, and shrugged. “I shouldn’t have said that.” He still looked more amused than annoyed, which Mulcahy took with considerable relief. “Why do you want me to get married?”

Mulcahy drank his cocoa to give himself a moment’s breathing space. There were a number of more theologically sound reasons that he could give, but Hawkeye wouldn’t have listened to them. Nor was he sure he had the right to give them. “I don’t think you should live alone,” he said.

Hawkeye wasn’t smiling now. “I don’t want to talk about that,” he said slowly, as if he were thinking out the answer as he went along. His arms were still folded, and his hands were gripping his elbows.

“I’m sorry,” Mulcahy said, immediately. He felt uncomfortable. He wanted to be able to think of something else to say, something unconnected with anything that had transpired in the past few hours, but he couldn’t.

Hawkeye looked as if he too was struggling to find something to say. Finally he seemed to give up and leaned forward, planting his elbows on the table, leaning his forehead on his folded hands. He looked very tired.

Mulcahy finished his cocoa. “Hawkeye?”

Hawkeye lifted his head. “Yeah?”

“I should go to bed. Maybe you should too?”

The weariness on Hawkeye’s face broke into a grin. “Yeah,” he said.

Mulcahy decided to pretend he hadn’t seen that. “What time do you have to get back?”

“We should leave here about nine. I’m all packed. How about you?” Hawkeye wasn’t grinning any more.

“I never really unpacked.”

“No,” Hawkeye said. “Look.” He stopped. “I’m sorry,” he said, finally. “For – for running you ragged the past couple of days.”

“I was glad to help,” Mulcahy said, startled. “I always like to feel useful.”

“I’m sorry about what happened to you,” Hawkeye said. “But I’m grateful you came here.” His shoulders twitched, not quite a shrug. “If you hadn’t been here –” He stopped again. “I’d have hated to leave my dad’s room to be cleared out by Billy and Sarah. Thank you.”

Mulcahy swallowed. He would have given anything, at this moment, to be able to touch Hawkeye without fear of sin. He pressed his hands together, and said, “Hawkeye, what you said earlier –”

“What was that?”

“You said that you weren’t that good at showing it when you care about people,” Mulcahy said.

“Yeah?”

“You are very good at it,” Mulcahy said. “Thank you.”

Hawkeye looked at him a long moment. When he smiled, there was no cynicism in it. “You’re welcome.”

Hawkeye didn’t say much on the road from Crabapple Cove to Portland: he let Mulcahy drive the second half of the way, which cut off all conversation. Inside the city

limits, he gave directions by hand signals: Mulcahy had assumed he was being directed to the bus station, until they parked outside an apartment building.

"I live here," Hawkeye said. He paused. "I'm not going to ask you up. I'm due at the hospital in two hours."

Mulcahy nodded. He'd been trying to think of what to say to Hawkeye, and it was difficult. To tell Hawkeye not to give himself a hard time over this, or ask him not to drink too much, would hardly be effective.

"Write to me," Hawkeye said. "You know. Let me know how you're getting on."

"Of course." Mulcahy nodded. He wasn't sure what he'd find to say. "Hawkeye – there's something I wanted to say to you, before we part."

"Sure," Hawkeye said. He glanced at his watch. "Want to help me get the boxes inside?"

Hawkeye had put four cartons in the trunk of the car: they were none of them large or heavy, and it took only a few minutes for the two of them to get them inside the building. Hawkeye scribbled down his address on a scrap of paper, and handed it to Mulcahy.

They were standing outside the car. Hawkeye was juggling the keys casually from hand to hand, his eyes fixed on Mulcahy.

"I'm not a surgeon," Mulcahy said. "I'm not qualified to judge. But I know who is."

Hawkeye gave a slanting look up at the sky. "We're not on speaking terms."

Mulcahy half-smiled, half-amused. "I meant Major – Doctor Winchester."

"Charles?" Hawkeye raised his eyebrows. "Same thing, in his estimation. What about him?"

"I can't imagine Doctor Winchester saying he thought you were a good surgeon out of friendship or liking or kindness, Hawkeye."

"Neither can I."

"Well," Mulcahy said.

"Yeah, but he only ever saw me do meatball surgery."

"You may be a little behind on techniques that the other doctors were learning while you were in Korea, but that doesn't make you a bad surgeon. I'm sure Doctor Winchester would agree – he must be having some of the same difficulties, I suppose."

"He was there for less than a year," Hawkeye said in disgust.

"Well?" Mulcahy asked. "You were there for three."

Hawkeye looked both startled and relieved. He shook his head. "Is this what you were thinking about, all the way up in the car?" He was smiling.

Mulcahy smiled back. "Yes." Almost all.

Hawkeye opened the back door and reached in, picking up the small case he'd packed. He slammed it shut and tossed the keys at Mulcahy, who caught them, surprised.

"The insurance documents and everything else are in the glove compartment. I'm a terrible driver. You have it."

Mulcahy held out the keys. "I can't accept this."

Hawkeye grinned at him: a tired grin, but quite real. "I'm not giving you a choice. It'll be safer with you than with me. Drive it in good health."

"I *can't* accept this," Mulcahy protested more strongly. He went on holding out the keys.

"Come on, you've seen how I drive. You're a far better driver than I am. Take it. It's yours." Hawkeye stepped backwards, holding his case in both his hands, as if he was

trying to evade having the keys thrown back at him. “You can and you will. Take it to make me feel better. Take it to keep me off the roads. Take it for any reason you like, Francis, but it’s yours.”

Mulcahy’s hand faltered. He didn’t want to accept it: this wasn’t a handful of neckties or an old coat or a lobster dinner. But the determination on Hawkeye’s face was absolute. He wanted to give the car away.

Mulcahy put the keys into his pocket, and saw relief in the changed lines of Hawkeye’s body. He managed a smile. “Thank you,” he said, formally.

Hawkeye put the case down on the sidewalk and came closer. He was looking down at Mulcahy. For a brief moment, Mulcahy thought Hawkeye was going to kiss him, but the other man only looked at him, intently and closely. “Take care.”

“Goodbye.”

32 932 words
October 2004

Such As We

February, 1955

In good years, New York in February can be an early echo of spring. This was not one of those years. It was raining: it had been raining most of the week, off and on. The sky was grey and grim and low, hanging heavy between the skyscrapers.

Mulcahy's wallet and his keys were in the right-hand pocket of his overcoat, and his scarf was in the left-hand pocket. The overcoat was still hanging up in the hall, and the door was locked behind him.

He walked. Uphill was the right direction if he were going to work, though there was no chance he would be able to get there.

The letter was folded into the inside pocket of his jacket. The paper was stiff and heavy: he could feel the corners through two layers of cloth. It rubbed against him: it was impossible to forget it was there.

His trousers were wet below the knee already, and the shoulders of his jacket were soaked. He didn't feel cold, exactly.

He wasn't even sure what he did feel. He didn't want to think about what he felt.

The rain blurred his specs. For the first few blocks, he was walking against the flow of commuters, dodging them with the kind of instinct that short-sighted people develop in crowds. When the sidewalks were emptier, he walked, head down, seeing words on heavy paper, not stones beneath his feet.

Friday 8th October, 1954

One of the things Hawkeye liked about being a civilian was weekends. The army didn't do weekends. At best, it did 96-hour passes, and that just wasn't the same. He'd been out of the army over a year, and he still got a kick out of being able to leave work on Friday and know he wouldn't be back in till Monday.

Of course, the problem was that all the other civilians could do that too. Obviously it would have made sense to have set up an appointment in writing.

His stomach hurt.

It would make sense if he wanted Mulcahy to make up his mind what he felt about Hawkeye before he saw him. Or arrange a prior appointment half an hour after he'd arranged to meet Hawkeye. Or decide to be washing his hair for the next three months.

Or run a mile.

Hawkeye was kind of hoping it wouldn't come to that. For one thing, Mulcahy had always been able to beat him, either at a sprint or long distance.

The school was quiet. It didn't feel empty: it just felt quiet. Hawkeye's main plan was to walk in, look round, find out where Francis Mulcahy was teaching, and catch him as he left. After that he'd improvise.

It wasn't much of a plan, but he hadn't been able to think of a better one since July. He was on his third corridor now, and still no one had stopped him. It was as easy as putting on a white coat and a stethoscope and walking into a hospital.

On this corridor, there were voices, distant through the doors and the glass panels beside the doors. Hawkeye walked slowly down the hall.

Every man Hawkeye had fallen for had tended to be on the tall side of high. Mulcahy was a few inches shorter than him. Nicely built, though. Solid muscles. Boxer. Runner. Shy and quiet with a conscience a mile high, three miles thick, and made of steel: standing by the blackboard in one of the rooms Hawkeye had just passed. He took two steps back and looked again. He was in the right place.

Mulcahy's wire-framed glasses made his face look both fragile and plain: slide them off – Hawkeye's fingers twitched, wanting to do it – and you saw he had the kind of looks that come from good bones. He was well-proportioned, well-made: Hawkeye had never been able to hold him as he wanted to, and feel him rest against Hawkeye, head fallen back in the curve of Hawkeye's shoulder, his back relaxed against Hawkeye's chest and stomach, his strong legs nestled against Hawkeye's legs. Hawkeye stood in the corridor, empty-handed, and knew with a physical sense of surety what it would be like to take Mulcahy in his arms and kiss the back of his neck and feel him at rest.

Mulcahy was writing on the board. He turned away from it and out of Hawkeye's field of view: Hawkeye heard him begin to speak. "Who can tell me –"

Hawkeye opened the door. His stomach hurt. Mulcahy was standing with his back to him: he hadn't noticed the door opening, yet.

The children – boys and girls in their early teens – had noticed him. They were staring. In an ordinary classroom, they'd be whispering. Hawkeye grinned at them. Mulcahy glanced over, following the direction of their gaze, and saw him. His eyes went wide and his mouth opened. He came a few steps towards Hawkeye, looking as if he disbelieved his eyes.

"Hawkeye?"

"Last time I looked."

"What are you *doing* here?"

Hawkeye smiled. His stomach gave a twist. He didn't let himself react visibly. "It's a long story. Got time to see me after school?"

Blank astonishment faded into a smile: half-reluctant, unmistakably affectionate, still puzzled. "I suppose so. But you shouldn't *be* here. Go and wait for me in the receptionist's office, please."

Relief wasn't a long enough word for it. Hawkeye could have danced, except that it would have made him even more conspicuous than he already felt. His stomach had stopped churning.

"I could juggle," he offered cheerfully.

Mulcahy's smile faded. "Go *now*."

Hawkeye backed out.

It was twenty minutes after the students had left before Mulcahy appeared in the reception office. One look at him, and Hawkeye suspected the jumpiness had transferred directly from Hawkeye's stomach to Mulcahy's.

“You know, you really shouldn’t just come into the school and wander around,” Mulcahy said.

“You know, you’re absolutely right, and I never will again,” Hawkeye said promptly. “Can I buy you some coffee? We’ve got a lot to catch up on.”

Mulcahy looked uncertain. Hawkeye stood still and was careful not to smile. Switching on the charm would be for later. Much later, probably.

Mulcahy’s smile was polite, but at least it was a smile. “Well, I have some marking to do.”

“Do you have to start it right now?”

“No, I suppose not. Perhaps some coffee would be welcome.” Mulcahy’s smile was still polite.

“I saw a diner on my way from the station,” Hawkeye said.

“Yes, I know it.”

The diner was small, clean, and smelt pleasantly of coffee and fried food. It was well-lit. Hawkeye waited until they were both sitting down and Mulcahy could focus on his face. “How’s it been going?”

“Very well,” Mulcahy said. “I wrote to you last month – did you get my letter?”

“Yes,” Hawkeye said. “Sorry I didn’t reply to it – it’s been a busy month.”

“Oh, that’s all right,” Mulcahy said. “What’s your news? Why are you in this part of the world?”

“I have a job at Bellevue.”

Mulcahy put his coffee cup down and stared at Hawkeye. “In New York?”

“Yes.” Hawkeye nodded.

Mulcahy was looking wide-eyed, utterly startled, and very kissable. He picked up his coffee again and put it down without drinking from it. “How – when did you get the job?”

“I started on Monday. I’d heard I got it four weeks ago. I kept meaning to write to you about it, but I was so busy packing up the Portland apartment I never found the time. So I thought I’d just come up here and see you.”

“I was wondering why I hadn’t heard from you,” Mulcahy said.

Mulcahy had written to Hawkeye punctually – and, Hawkeye had felt, reading the letters, punctiliously – once a fortnight, regular as clockwork, since July. Hawkeye had usually managed to reply within a week. His letters in response had likely seemed as stilted and polite as Mulcahy’s were: there were too many things he was thinking about that he could not write down.

“Do you have to do the marking tonight?” Hawkeye asked. “It’s Friday. Do you have classes tomorrow?”

“No,” Mulcahy admitted. “But I like to get it over with. And there are quite a number of school activities I like to get involved with on Saturdays, which rather eat up my time.”

“I was going to ask you out for dinner. Celebrate my new job. Hear all the news about yours. How about tomorrow evening?”

Mulcahy picked up his cup and used it to shield his face. He was drinking from it, probably, but Hawkeye had never seen anyone who could use a coffee cup for masking purposes so effectively.

“Why Bellevue?” Mulcahy asked at last.

“I talked to Doctor Allen about moving away from Maine General,” Hawkeye said. “And he knows Doctor Cournand at Bellevue.” This was all perfectly true. “Have you heard of Doctor Cournand?”

“I’m afraid not.”

“Big name in thoracic surgery. He’s a heart man. Brilliant surgeon. He’s a regular pin-up in at least three medical journals. There are techniques in use in Bellevue that no one else is using yet, not anywhere in the world.”

The difference between a polite smile from Mulcahy and a genuine one was nothing measurable: but Hawkeye saw the one melt into the other and knew the difference.

“That’s wonderful, Hawkeye.”

In the past three months Hawkeye had read every paper Cournand had written on heart surgery: he could riff on them *ex tempore* for up to two hours. He knew because he’d done it when he’d been interviewed. He intended to use less graphic detail than he’d have used with another surgeon, but half-way through explaining Cournand’s technique of successfully catheterizing a cardiac vein to get a mixed venous blood sample from a ventricle of the heart, he realised that he’d lost track of his good intentions. “Sorry.”

Mulcahy was still smiling, and it was still genuine. “That’s wonderful,” he said again. “You wrote so little about your work at Maine General, and you sounded so despondent about it last time we spoke. But this man wants to work with you?”

“Well, more like I want to work with him. So far he thinks I’m ‘promising’. I haven’t asked him what he thinks I’m promising. So, want to come dissect a steak with me tomorrow night?”

“Where?”

Hawkeye put on a mock pompous accent. “I believe there are a number of fine restaurants in New York City.” He remembered who he was talking to, and laughed.

“What’s the joke?”

“It’s hard to do a silly voice to someone who’s lip-reading.”

Mulcahy’s smile got a quirk to it. “That’s true. Well, every affliction has its blessings.”

“Sir!” Hawkeye jerked his chin up. “Are you impugning my acting abilities?”

Mulcahy actually laughed. “I don’t think you should give up your day job.”

Hawkeye made a disappointed face. “You have wrecked all my hopes and ambitions.”

“I’m so sorry.”

Hawkeye planted his elbows on the table and grinned widely. “Could you be less apologetic if you tried? Listen, I don’t know about you, but I’m hungry – what’s the food like here?” His stomach had been hurting at lunchtime.

“It’s quite good,” Mulcahy said. “I usually have my meals up at the school, though, and – ” he glanced at his watch “ – I should be getting back.”

“See you tomorrow?”

“Certainly,” Mulcahy said. “Where?”

“Want to meet me at Grand Central? I’ll meet you there by the platform for the train that gets in at twenty past six, okay?”

“Okay,” Mulcahy said. He was still smiling. He finished his coffee and stood up. “It’s good to see you, Hawkeye.”

“Good to see you too,” Hawkeye said. “See you tomorrow.” He waited, all but holding his breath, but Mulcahy only nodded and lifted his hand goodbye.

It was going to work. If he had to sit on his hands for the next three months and then use all his considerable talents of wit, charm, persuasion...

"Ah, who am I kidding," Hawkeye said out loud. "Patience."

"What was that, bud?" The man behind the counter was leaning forward over it, eyeing Hawkeye with open curiosity.

"Nothing," Hawkeye said, and then "Did I see the magic words?"

"What?"

"Breakfast served all day."

"Sure. What do you want?"

Hawkeye squinted at the menu. "Two eggs, hash browns, side of bacon."

"How do you want your eggs?"

"Over easy," Hawkeye said, and grinned. His stomach didn't hurt. He was hungry. He had a guaranteed appointment with Francis Mulcahy in a little more than twenty-four hours. And breakfast smelt *fine*. Things hadn't looked this good in months. In years.

"Over easy. And a short stack of pancakes."

The man leaned his elbows on the counter and looked at Hawkeye with frank disbelief for a moment. Hawkeye gave him back look for look. He was all out of wisecracks for now.

He woke up at four in the morning, startled out of nowhere, and sat up, heart beating so hard he could feel it against his ribs. He didn't recognise the room – a hotel in Tokyo or Seoul – and no one was with him –

The moment passed, as it always did. At least the room looked unfamiliar because it *was* unfamiliar: he'd slept there for less than a week. It had been worst of all when it happened in the old house in Crabapple Cove. There was no one with him because he was a civilian again, and no one was dead.

Dad was dead.

"Four in the morning is not a good time for this, Dad," Hawkeye said out loud. "Do you have to be dead right now? Couldn't you wait?"

Push-ups sometimes helped, shoving him over into sleep with sheer physical weariness: a belt of Scotch usually did the trick, though he couldn't risk it if he were operating the next day: reading himself to sleep was pretty much infallible, but could take an hour or more.

Sex was a pretty good way of getting to sleep, too. But Hawkeye had been having more trouble even jerking off in the past three months than he had since he'd cracked the proximal phalanx in his right thumb and had a cast on his hand for six weeks. He kept thinking about Francis: and that distracted him in more ways than one.

Mostly in ways he didn't want to be distracted into when he just wanted to jerk off and go to sleep. It was as bad as it had been the weeks after Trapper left. No, worse. At least when Trapper had gone, Hawkeye had known – well, he had known when he thought about it – that after the war Trapper was never going to want what he had had in a tent in the middle of Korea.

If he'd thought about it when Trapper was there, he'd have known that, too.

He'd had a hard time jerking off when Carlye left him, but at least then he'd known three cruising places between their apartment and the hospital. Friendly hands and

mouths were a distinct improvement on his own right hand, especially when he couldn't think of anything but someone who didn't want him any more.

He wanted Francis. He was trying to do his thinking in advance for once, instead of doing it all afterwards.

The problem was, that hard as he thought, he kept coming up against the solid fact of Mulcahy's conscience. Mulcahy was kind-hearted, obliging, liked to be useful, and was as persuadable as the next man – unless you were trying to push him into doing something he knew was wrong. At which point, the pleasant, shy, soft-spoken man would turn into a pleasant but immovable wall of solid steel.

Persuading Francis to move in with him might have been possible if Francis didn't already know that Hawkeye found him attractive. Getting Francis drunk enough to be persuaded to have sex with him despite his conscience might have been possible but for two obstacles. Hawkeye had already tried it and had discovered it was a sure route to a one-night stand; and he had decided already that if anyone tried to do that to Francis Mulcahy again, Hawkeye was going to kill him. Even if it was Hawkeye himself.

Maybe especially if it was Hawkeye himself.

Neither wit, charm, persuasion, nor liquor would work. Patience might. It was just possible that, after Mulcahy had been formally laicized, he'd turn around and discover that it was okay to let himself be taken care of by a skinny stoop-shouldered doctor whose grasp on sanity felt, at times, perilously tenuous.

The one thing that made Hawkeye feel that this was not just a crazy plan was that Mulcahy *had* come all the way from Philadelphia to Crabapple Cove, four hundred miles or so, not exactly on the direct route to New York. He'd come not even being sure Hawkeye was *there*, let alone knowing that Hawkeye would need him. He'd come because he wanted something from Hawkeye – and Hawkeye wasn't even sure whether he'd got it.

He wanted Francis. In bed with him, eating breakfast with him, sharing a cup of coffee with him, smiling sideways at him with that almost invisible sense of humour. If he couldn't have him in bed – and Hawkeye wanted him there – he could at least have him living here. Waking up at four in the morning wouldn't be so bad if there was – “Someone,” Hawkeye said out loud. “God. *Someone*.” He laughed out loud, a cracked sound in his own ears. “God, I'll take good care of him,” he said. “Let me have him. I need him. You've got lots of priests, you're not going to miss one.”

Some prayer. Without quite willing it, Hawkeye called Francis to mind: smiling, kind, his blue eyes intent and focussed on Hawkeye's face – Francis's face a little fragile, very serious, infinitely vulnerable, and the steel-strength behind that.

“If I believed in you,” Hawkeye said, lying back, staring up at the ceiling, “I wouldn't believe you'd want to let him go.”

He wanted Francis, and he hoped it wasn't going to take more than three months to get him. Six months to laicization, Francis had said, and that had been back in July. Three months more.

Saturdays in October, 1954

Mulcahy had met Hawkeye at Grand Central, six-thirty, three Saturday evenings in a row so far: each time Mulcahy had been fairly sure it would be the last. Twice he'd told Hawkeye to leave a message with the receptionist at the school if Hawkeye changed his plans.

Hawkeye hadn't. He talked with his usual exuberance about his work, but hadn't mentioned his personal life – a silence that Mulcahy was perhaps too conscious of, given the circumstances under which he himself worked.

The first time, in a steakhouse, Mulcahy had returned the money Hawkeye had left when he gave Mulcahy his father's car. Hawkeye had taken it, raising his eyebrows, and opened it.

"You really think I'm worth this much?"

So long as Hawkeye was teasing like this, Mulcahy felt safe. "You left it in the glove compartment."

"Gas money," Hawkeye said. "I didn't want to see my dad's old car starve." And they'd talked of other things: but not about Mulcahy's work.

There was an abyssal difference between a priest who had been deafened, and a deaf teacher who was silent about his past: that he'd expected.

He liked his supervisor, Albert Moskowitz: he liked most of the other staff. Fred Sparks was a kindly and helpful man. He found it difficult to talk with them casually outside school hours, because there was so much about his past he could not talk about. He had told them the lie that Hawkeye had promised him was half a truth, that he had been a corpsman in Korea for the duration of the war. But he could not justify to himself expanding on that lie: the only thing he could do was to say he preferred not to talk about it.

They thought he had been a teacher in Pennsylvania before he had gone to Korea: but there again, though he was almost required to tell this half-truth, since he could not tell them he had been a priest, he could not justify building on it with further half-true constructions about a secular career in teaching.

He knew they found him quiet and dull. He wished it could be otherwise. He hoped that after a while, it would be less conspicuous that he didn't talk about his past before he came to Fanwood.

Standing outside the restaurant, Hawkeye turned to him and grinned. "I haven't had a Korean meal since the last time I ate in Rosie's."

Mulcahy smiled back. "Neither have I." Hawkeye was already pushing the door open: air filled with the smell of spices rushed out into the street. He followed Hawkeye in.

The smell wasn't quite what Mulcahy remembered: the menu looked only half-familiar. He glanced up and caught Hawkeye's eye: the other man grinned at him and said something. Mulcahy frowned. He didn't like asking people to repeat themselves.

Hawkeye said something more, and his head tilted sideways. Mulcahy smiled and nodded. He thought about getting out his notepad. He was startled when Hawkeye stood up and came round the table. When he was within a couple of feet, it was possible to read what he was saying: "The light's too dim. You can't hear me."

"I'm afraid not," Mulcahy admitted. "Sorry."

Hawkeye pointed to the door. Mulcahy shook his head and tapped the menu.

The waiter who appeared was young, and unmistakably Korean: he spoke to both of them. Glancing up, Mulcahy saw Hawkeye answer. The waiter smiled. Mulcahy felt for

his notepad, and thought about standing up and producing notepad and pen and asking the waiter and Hawkeye to write down what they were saying to each other. After a minute – no more, though it felt longer – Hawkeye and the waiter finished talking, and Hawkeye turned back to Mulcahy.

“Okay. I asked if he could turn the light up, and he said no. Then I asked if they deliver, and he said they could let us have take-out. You want to come back to my place and eat? Better lighting and it’s only fifteen minutes on the subway.”

“What?” Mulcahy – both startled and irritated – sat still and tapped at the menu again. “Let’s just eat here.”

Hawkeye’s gaze focussed on him: it was odd how definite the change was. He crouched down, bringing his face on a level with Mulcahy’s. “Sorry. Listen, I know you’d love the opportunity to lecture me without even having to tell me to shut up, but I’d like to be able to talk to you, too.”

“What about?”

Hawkeye shrugged. “Heart surgery. How the food compares to Rosie’s home cooking. Bar cooking. Whatever. Come on.” He wasn’t even turning on the charm: he was just – for Hawkeye – being reasonable.

Mulcahy nodded. “Fine,” he added, out loud.

In any case, he was beginning to think that any fears he had had about Hawkeye’s feelings for him had been egotistical and foolish. This ought to be a relief to him, and in a way it was.

Hawkeye’s apartment was near the steak house where they had eaten two weeks ago. It was a pleasant, modern building with an elevator: Hawkeye’s apartment was on the twelfth floor. “Sit down,” Hawkeye said, waving him to the dining table. “I’ll stick these in the oven for ten minutes, warm them up a bit.”

Mulcahy sat, and looked around. The table was in an alcove off the living room. Hawkeye had half-unpacked: there were still boxes stacked by the wall, but the single set of bookshelves was full. The couch and armchair both looked new. The paint on the walls looked scraped and battered. He looked back at the kitchen door: Hawkeye was standing in the doorway, leaning up against the jamb, watching Mulcahy. He was smiling, as if he was thinking of something that pleased him.

“Hawkeye?”

“What do you think of it?”

“Very nice,” Mulcahy said politely. It had a disorganised, only half at home feel to it. Compared to the Swamp, it was a palace: compared to the old Pierce house in Crabapple Cove, it was... small. “How do you like it?”

“Need to get the place painted up before I buy any more furniture. It’s handy for work – only about a mile to walk, and the subway’s only five minutes away. What do you want to drink?”

“Water would be fine,” Mulcahy said, cautiously.

“That I’ve got,” Hawkeye said, grinning at him.

The food, they agreed, did not taste quite like the food they remembered, from Rosie’s or from occasional forays into Seoul. It was blander, milder, and in many ways more like Chinese food. Some of the ingredients were obviously canned. The restaurant hadn’t

supplied them with chopsticks, and Hawkeye admitted he'd never caught the knack of eating with them anyway.

"I had more practice than you," Mulcahy said, chasing a last mouthful of rice with his fork. "Nothing but chopsticks to eat with at the orphanage." He smiled at Hawkeye. "The real knack is not minding when you spill."

"You could show me," Hawkeye said. "What about Chinese next Saturday? I'll try to find a better-lit restaurant this time."

Mulcahy hesitated.

Hawkeye shrugged. "Okay, no Chinese, what about Italian? Good lighting, spaghetti, meatballs? And no chopsticks."

Mulcahy shook his head. "Hawkeye, surely..."

"Seafood? There's a place down by South Street –"

"Hawkeye, I've enjoyed this, but you have – you must have – other people to spend time with."

Hawkeye tilted his head to one side. "Well, you know, there's –" He stopped. "No one that I can think of."

"The people you work with."

"I spend time with them through the week. Surgeons, nurses, interns, medical students. Great people. Terrible on Saturday nights. What's the problem? I like having a meal with you, once in a while. Is once a week too often?" Hawkeye grinned suddenly. "Or do you have a date for next week?"

Mulcahy brought his hands together under the table, palms flat, fighting the urge to make a fist. *Dear Lord, help me, it's Hawkeye.* He got no sense of God's concern, but so many of his prayers had felt as if they were going unanswered in the past few months.

"No," he said, and tried for a polite smile. "No, I was concerned about your social life, not mine. Perhaps I was too inquisitive. I'm sorry."

"No," Hawkeye said. "Listen, I'm sorry. You don't have to spend time with me, but I like having someone to eat with on Saturday evenings. A friend. We're friends, right?" He was smiling, looking hopeful.

Mulcahy swallowed, feeling his anger melt, his hands relax, a deep part of him wanting to sit back and bask in Hawkeye's attention. A small numb area was reminding him of something – of some other occasion when he had reacted just like this, when Hawkeye had said *we're friends, right?* – In a different tone of voice from the one his mind heard now, blurred with drink, smelling of gin – but mostly he wanted to sit back and smile at Hawkeye, smiling at him. And look forward to next Saturday, when it would – it could – happen again.

He could end up living from Saturday to Saturday. Wanting this, coveting it, beginning to think he had a right to it.

You and I, we're friends, right.

Mulcahy stood up. "May I use your bathroom?"

Hawkeye looked startled. "Sure. Door on the right."

There were two doors on the right in the hall: Mulcahy picked the wrong one first. An empty room.

He backed out, deduced which door was the bathroom, locked himself in, and used the facilities. The other room had looked very empty.

The other room *was* very empty: yet not quite unfurnished. A bed, brand new, with a mattress but no bedding. A wardrobe, battered and second-hand. There was nothing else in it: it was not being used for storage, neither was it being lived in.

Mulcahy walked into the middle of the room, half in a daze, looking round. He felt both chilly and light-headed. He wasn't surprised when he turned again and saw Hawkeye standing in the doorway of this room, watching him with a wary expression.

"Why did you rent a flat with two bedrooms?" he asked.

Hawkeye shrugged. He didn't move. In the caution of his face, Mulcahy read the answer: he was not surprised when Hawkeye opened his mouth at last, to say with ostensible calm, "I meant this one for you."

"You could have lied," Mulcahy said. He meant it for a joke, but he thought it came out too tired and sad for that. Certainly Hawkeye didn't laugh.

"Did you come to New York to work with Doctor Cournand?"

"No," Hawkeye said. "That's just good luck. I'd have taken any job I could get. I came to New York to see you."

"To see me."

"I want you," Hawkeye said. "I don't – I didn't know how you'd feel. If you'd want to never see me again. But if you did – if you didn't – " He stopped.

Mulcahy swallowed. "Hawkeye." He was almost afraid to say anything. "I told you – when we talked about it – "

"I love you," Hawkeye said.

The room was even colder: Mulcahy put his hands together, trying to warm them up. He didn't want to look at Hawkeye.

"Please don't – " Hawkeye said.

Mulcahy realised his hands were fumbling with his specs, and put his hands to his sides with an effort of will. That wasn't fair to Hawkeye. "No," he said, eyes unwillingly fixed on Hawkeye's face. "No, you don't. And even if you did – " He had to stop, to take a breath. "Hawkeye, this isn't something I can do, and you know it. I'm a priest. I'm supposed to be – " He couldn't say it. He didn't deserve that defence. "God knows I've sinned. But I can't – I'm a failure as a priest. But I won't do this. I hoped we could – I hoped you wanted to be friends. I shouldn't have – I'm sorry, Hawkeye."

"Hold on a minute." Hawkeye spread his hands. "First of all, you were a terrific priest. Best one I ever knew."

"No."

"Yes. You were. But the operative word, Francis, is *were*." It looked as if Hawkeye's anger was building. "It's not your fault they won't let you be a priest. If it's anyone's fault, it's mine, and I know it. And if you never want to see me again because of it, fine. But I do – " There was a crack in his defence. "I love you," he said again. "Don't tell me I don't. I want you to live with me. I'll wait – I meant to wait. I can wait."

"Don't."

Hawkeye stood still and looked at him. His eyebrows went slowly up. "Just 'don't'?"

"What else can I say?" Mulcahy was feeling grey all the way through. "It's a sin. A mortal sin. I can't – I *can't* – " He was going to miss Hawkeye. It felt as if he were missing him already.

"Steady," Hawkeye said. "Look – can't we pretend this never happened? At least until January?"

“January?” Mulcahy felt stupid. “What difference does the new year make?”

“Aren’t you due to be laicized in January?” Hawkeye said.

Numbness spread, and behind it, hiding a long way behind it, anger. “But what difference would that make? It would still be a mortal sin, whether or not I was a priest.”

“Living with me?”

“You know what that would mean.”

“I told you,” Hawkeye said. “I’m not going to do anything you don’t want. Any time you tell me stop, I’ll stop. You want to move in and live here tomorrow? You’re welcome. Don’t want to do anything but have dinner with me? I can live with that. I’d like to live with that. With you.”

“But I can’t,” Mulcahy said.

“What?”

“Hawkeye – I – *I’m* the one who’s deaf, so why – why can’t you *hear* me?”

Hawkeye fell back a pace. He lifted his chin. “I’m listening.”

Mulcahy swallowed. “Sex between men is a mortal sin.”

“Why?”

“It’s a crime against nature – ”

“What does that mean?” Hawkeye exploded. He had gone from stillness to frenetic action – a lightning transition Mulcahy had seen many times over the years. Arguing with Hawkeye in this mood was futile: even when Mulcahy could hear, he’d have made a poor job of it. About the only way to stop Hawkeye was to literally grab him and pin him: and that was the last thing he should do.

Hawkeye was pacing, talking fiercely: Mulcahy caught what he was saying in patches. It was an atheist’s defence, a scientist’s attack. Hawkeye knew more facts that Mulcahy had realised were to be known about homosexuality. Percentages and statistics, recent research and 19th-century ideas.

“Hawkeye – ?” Mulcahy said finally. “You said you’d listen.”

Hawkeye stopped. It was as abrupt a change from swiftness to stillness as the first change had been. “Okay.” He put his hand up, briefly, covering his eyes: a familiar gesture, as if Hawkeye were shielding himself from the stupidity of the world. “Okay,” he said, and glanced at Mulcahy. “Talk. I’m listening.”

“It’s a sin. Scripture condemns it and the authority of the church condemns it.”

“Why?”

“What?”

“Why do they say it’s a sin? What’s wrong with it? Who does it hurt? And anyway, didn’t you say that it wasn’t a sin if two people loved each other?”

“No,” Mulcahy said, startled. “I couldn’t have said that.”

“You did.”

“I *couldn’t* have,” Mulcahy said. “Love isn’t a sin, but it doesn’t – make a sin not a sin.”

“What about those two women in your parish? Or Sturges and his buddy? You said they loved each other, and you decided that it wasn’t a sin for them – ”

“No,” Mulcahy said. He must have said it more emphatically than he realised, because Hawkeye looked at him directly for the first time, his eyes widening, as if he too was seeing the abyss of misunderstanding between them. “I’m not condoning what they did – or may have done. I’m not empowered to decide that a sin’s not a sin. All I said – I felt –

was that God would feel their love for each other was a good in itself. That God might – that God could forgive them their sin, and that – I couldn't find it in myself to condemn them." He stopped. "And it might be that my failing – my weakness – is that I couldn't."

Hawkeye didn't say anything.

"If I moved in here," Mulcahy said. For a moment, he could see it. He wanted it: not just his desperate wanting of Hawkeye's body, the lust that he could not satisfy, but shared meals, and Hawkeye's teasing him with a glint in his eyes, and someone to talk to who knew him. It was a moment before he could go on. "If I moved in, I would – I want you. And I do get the impression that you," he swallowed, and went on diffidently, "that you feel the same way."

"Yes," Hawkeye said.

"So I can't –" He realised that Hawkeye was staring at him with something like disbelief. "I can't," he repeated, flatly. "Maybe you could. I don't doubt you have – more resources than I do. But I can't resist you. I want you too much. I don't believe you love me, but – but if you do, I'm sorry. I'm very sorry," he repeated. His voice felt unsteady. "I'd like to go now."

Hawkeye was still standing between him and the door. He didn't move. "I want you," he said. "Yeah. I do. I want to find out where you're ticklish. I want to make love to you till we're both too spent to fall over, let alone stand up, and then I want to do it all over again. I want – I want you to live with me. I want to make love with someone who matters to me, and –" He spread his hands. "I want – I hoped – it would matter to you just as much. And not because it's a sin, however you work that one out, either. Because I'm *me*, and you're *you*, and –" his hands jerked an emphasis.

Hawkeye had been moving closer as he spoke. Mulcahy stepped backwards. "I can't," he interrupted Hawkeye. "Please, Hawkeye, *listen* to me."

"I'm listening," Hawkeye said. He grinned, a wide-mouthed grimace that somehow lacked humour. "I didn't say I liked it. Or agreed with it. But I'm not going to do anything you don't want. Whatever reason you have for not wanting it. I never meant to have this conversation now. Dinner on Saturday nights. That can't be a sin, can it? Even saints have to eat. Right?"

"Hawkeye –" Mulcahy wasn't sure if what stopped him from saying more was a laugh or a sob. *I want to find out where you're ticklish*. Only Hawkeye. "Please don't --"

"I'm sorry," Hawkeye said. "Look. Let's just – let's not – Look, at least stay for coffee."

"I think I'd better go," Mulcahy said. It was beginning to feel like a refrain.

"Okay," Hawkeye said. He stepped to one side. "Go."

Mulcahy was putting his overcoat on before he realised that Hawkeye was doing the same thing. "Where are you going?"

"I'm walking over to the station with you."

"What?" Mulcahy stared. "I'm not going to get lost."

Hawkeye shrugged.

"I'm deaf, not helpless!"

Hawkeye shrugged again. His coat was buttoned up: he pulled a familiar woollen hat on over his head. "You don't have to talk to me or pay any attention to me," he said. "I'm just going to walk in the same direction as you at the same speed for the same amount of time, if that's okay with you."

“Would it make any difference if it wasn’t?” Mulcahy was conscious that what had come out of his mouth was nearer a snarl than a patient remonstrance.

Hawkeye looked at him. There was an immovable expression on his face: Mulcahy had seldom met it turned on him, but he had seen it before, often enough.

They didn’t talk on their way to the station, and Hawkeye stopped by the entrance as soon as they were in the main concourse. Mulcahy, who had been doggedly trying to ignore him all the way there, swung round and looked at him.

“Bye,” Hawkeye said. “See you next week, I hope.” He turned away before Mulcahy could say anything, pushed out the door, and was gone.

November, 1954

1. Monday, 1st November.

“You got a letter,” Moskowitz said. He handed it over: Mulcahy took it with a polite smile and put it into his jacket pocket without opening it.

“Don’t mind me if you want to read it,” Moskowitz said.

“Oh no,” Mulcahy said, and drank his coffee. “I know who it’s from. I’ll read it later.”

“How was yesterday?”

“Yesterday?”

“There was a Halloween party planned – wasn’t there?” From the smashed pumpkins on the drive, it had gone off as planned. Moskowitz had come in early, intending to catch Mulcahy at breakfast in the cafeteria: from the tired look on his face, Mulcahy had not had a particularly relaxing weekend.

“Oh. Yes.” Mulcahy smiled. “Yes. By the usual measure, it was very successful.”

“What’s your measure?” Moskowitz was amused.

“Oh,” Mulcahy’s smile quirked into a small grin. “The usual. Exhaustion of adults present multiplied by number of children having fun.”

Moskowitz laughed. “Speaks the voice of experience!”

Mulcahy’s grin faded a little: he shrugged and drank his coffee. Moskowitz had noticed that he never liked to be reminded about his previous life: his hearing life.

“Got time to talk things over with me?”

“Why?” Mulcahy looked startled and worried – more so than reasonable. His hand slid to his pocket, as if he meant to take out his letter and start reading it. “Is there a problem?”

“No,” Moskowitz said. “You’re a very good teacher.”

“Really?” The worried look faded: Mulcahy looked startled and pleased.

“Several of the other teachers who’ve observed you teach say you’re an excellent teacher, very patient with the children, though we know you’re qualified to teach at considerably above this level.” Mulcahy’s teaching qualifications for Pennsylvania were for high school mathematics: none of the children he taught were ever likely to progress above grade school.

“Oh, well –” Mulcahy shrugged, visibly more than a little embarrassed. “They’re making great progress. I enjoy teaching them.”

“You use signing, don’t you?”

“Yes, sometimes,” Mulcahy said. “I know the children are supposed to get practice speaking out loud, but after all – I’m deaf, and they know it.”

“But you’re very good at lip-reading. You could help them at that level.”

“I’m not sure I could,” Mulcahy said, after a moment. “Most of these children have been deaf all their lives: I learned to lip-read after I’d been able to hear for thirty-six years. I don’t think that the way I learned would be much help to them.”

“Just knowing that you can do it,” Moskowitz said. “Many of them don’t know any deaf adults. You could be a very useful example.”

“I hadn’t thought of that,” Mulcahy said. He glanced down at his plate, clearly taking a brief moment to think. He looked up again. “I don’t think it would be helpful to them to get an idea that it would be as easy for them as it’s been for me.”

“Well,” Moskowitz said, conceding. Mulcahy had literally no experience as an oralist teacher. “Try not to sign to them, though. They shouldn’t get into the habit of depending on it.”

Mulcahy looked back at him with a mild expression, blinking behind his round glasses. “I think I’m the only teacher here who knows signs,” he said. “How dependent can they get, if there’s only one teacher who *can* use signing in his classes?”

Moskowitz half-laughed. “Still, we do have rules for the children, and the teachers shouldn’t encourage them to be broken.”

“Point,” Mulcahy said. He smiled, briefly and mildly, and drank his coffee.

2. A letter not sent.

Dear Dad,

There’s something I never told you when you were alive, and I probably wouldn’t be trying to tell you this if you *were* still alive, but you’re not, and I wish you were, and I wish I could tell you this.

I know that makes no sense. I think I’m crazy.

I tried to write to you about this from Japan. Yeah, that’s right, from Japan. Not Korea. I spent a week or two in a mental hospital in Tokyo. I tore up all the letters I never sent you from there. I couldn’t find a way to say it: I thought they were going to send me home early because I’d finally lost my marbles.

We went to a picnic on July 4th. We went to the ocean – I’d never seen it in three years I’d been in Korea. We’d never have risked it before, but there was a lull on. The 8063rd agreed to take our casualties July 4th: we took theirs on July 3rd. There were hardly any, either day.

On July 5th I got ferried off to the evac hospital and from there to Tokyo. I tried to operate on a patient without anaesthetic. I thought the nurse was trying to smother him when she put the mask down on his face. I remember that now, and I know why, but I spent two weeks in a mental hospital in Tokyo and I didn’t know why I was there. I kept asking the doctor and he wouldn’t tell me, he said I had to figure that out for myself. You know how pesky doctors can be when they’re ill, Dad? Sure you do. I was pesky, testy, and restless.

I felt fine. I slept a lot. I ate a lot. I didn't have nightmares. The only problem was something I didn't want to tell him: the last thing I remembered clearly before waking up in hospital in Tokyo was the day at the beach. I remembered getting on to the bus to go home, and a couple of things like I was dreaming: yelling for a bottle – I thought it was whisky – and seeing this big colourful rooster on a woman's lap. After that, not a thing.

I thought I'd done it at last, Dad. Had my first alcoholic blackout. They say the first sign of alcoholism is drinking alone. Well, in Korea, I drank alone. I also drank in company. I drank a lot. But I was fairly sure I wasn't an alcoholic, yet, because I could stop drinking. I stopped drinking for a week a few times just to prove I could. Well, once. Twice if you count those two weeks in Tokyo.

I had a room to myself. A window, looking out on a garden, with chicken-wire over the glass. A doctor who visited me daily and tried to get me to talk. A friend who visited me twice. The first time I yelled at him: I was furious about being locked up. The second time I yelled at him louder: I was *really* furious about being locked up.

I figured if I spent two weeks being clean and sober, that would prove to them that I wasn't an alcoholic and they could let me go. I was even prepared to give up my still to prove I wasn't. My favourite room-mate, apart from BJ. Went with us every time we moved. I told you I drank a lot.

It wasn't an alcoholic blackout. It was classic memory suppression. I'd seen a lot of horrible things in Korea, but this was one too many. I'm not sure I'm ever going to forgive the doctor for making me remember it, either.

According to the doctor, I got over it. He asked me the right questions, and got my memory back for me – for which I was not so grateful as I might be. That was when I tried to write to you about it. Figured if I'd lost my marbles and the war was ending anyway, they might as well send me back to Crabapple Cove as send me home. Except that the doctor was obsessive about sending people back to where they lost their marbles to make sure they were okay again. He'd been yelled at about this before, so I knew yelling wouldn't do any good.

I think I tried pleading instead.

He sent me back to the 4077th. I got there just in time for the next round of shrapnel. Everything went fine. Well, you'd know that, because *I'm* fine. Apart from the losing my marbles thing. And then the war ended.

Dad, I was miserable at Maine General when I got back. I never told you that because I didn't see what there was to do about it. I didn't want to work in Crabapple Cove: I was afraid I'd start drinking again. There were doctors at Maine General who'd been in residency when I last worked there, and in three years they'd gone ahead of me. I told myself that was why I hated it. I hated it because I was lonely.

Yes, I saw you every weekend, and I really appreciate that. I know you wanted me to get married and have grandchildren for you, but it's never going to happen. There were only ever six people I thought I could live with, and two of them broke my heart, and two of them weren't interested, and one of them's dead, and the sixth one...

We never talked about that, but I figured you knew.

Actually, I have no idea.

I just like to think you did.

I used to imagine introducing this guy to you. You'd have liked him. He's quiet and he's smart and he's got guts. He'd have liked you too.

I don't believe it's a sickness or a phase or anything I can be cured of. I don't even want to be cured of it. I wish I could have figured out how to talk about this with you when you were alive, because I think you'd have been interested. Maybe not happy about it, but interested. I wanted to talk about it with someone.

And you'd have liked him. He's the kindest, smartest, most *decent* person I ever met, and the toughest. And I think I could talk to him about being crazy without him thinking I'd gone crazy.

The only problem is, I'm in love with him. And he doesn't want me to be. I think that's the problem. I mean, it couldn't be that he doesn't want a hard-drinking promiscuous half-crazed talkative surgeon with nightmares in his life. And I haven't even told him about the nightmares.

I wrote to you about him. I told you he was the sanest guy in the outfit. I remember cracking to someone – maybe it was you – that it was a wonder he didn't go deaf from the sound of all the commandments breaking. Doesn't seem quite so funny now.

He's a Catholic priest. The Church is kicking him out for reasons which pass my understanding. He's still trying to live by their rules, and their rules say once they've kicked him out he ought to be miserable and alone for the rest of his life, and he's the last person who deserves to feel that way, but what the hell can I do?

He won't even answer my letters.

Of course, neither will you, any more.

Love, Hawkeye.

3: All Souls: first Sunday after All Souls.

Any parish priest acquires something of a knack of spotting who's at mass and who isn't, even with his back turned. Father Saunders had never considered himself to be particularly expert: but at early morning Mass on a weekday, even on a festival, a new face stands out.

The man didn't come up to take communion. He stopped to light three candles on his way out. A stranger, passing through, Saunders concluded, and thought no more of it until the face reappeared again on Sunday morning.

A man in his thirties, new to the area, evidently a regular church-goer: not married. He didn't come up to take communion. Saunders hadn't seen him at confession.

This time, Saunders caught him at the door on his way out. Once again, he'd stopped to light three candles.

"Good morning," he said cheerfully, extending his hand.

The man took it, leaning forward a little, his expression curiously intent. "Good morning," he said pleasantly – and would have pulled back, joining the stream of parishioners leaving the church, but Saunders kept hold of his hand just long enough to discourage him.

"New to the area?"

"In a way," the man said. "I've been to mass here before."

"Yes – didn't I see you on Tuesday morning?"

"Yes," the man said.

“Is there something you’d like to talk about, my son?”

The man nodded, abruptly. His face stayed calm, but his voice cracked. “Yes – there is.” He stepped back: “I’ll – ”

“Please, just wait for me over there,” Saunders said. He didn’t want to let this man go, but there were several parishioners who’d expect a few words. “I won’t be long.”

The man was sitting by the confessionals, his head bowed. Saunders came over and stood beside him. “Do you wish to confess to me, my son?”

The man didn’t stir. His lips were moving. Saunders waited. The man came to the end of his act of contrition, and turned his head: he started and stood up.

Saunders turned towards the nearest confessional door. The man caught at his sleeve. “Father Saunders?”

It was the gesture of a religious, plucking at the cloth that covered his arm, not touching or taking hold of his arm: Saunders turned, surprised.

“I’m sorry, Father,” the man said. “I’m deaf. I can’t hear you unless I can see your face, and the light isn’t enough inside the confessional. Can we – ”

“Deaf?” Saunders said, surprised. “Are you sure you can’t – Yes, yes, why don’t we go over to the parish house?” The man stared at him, and it occurred to Saunders that the light probably wasn’t enough here, either. He pointed at the door, and the man followed him.

There was choir practice this afternoon, but Saunders was in the habit of keeping an hour free. If no one needed him after the morning services, he could have an hour to eat his lunch. It rarely worked out that way, but Mrs Reid had grown used to this system in the years she had been his housekeeper, and no longer made him anything for lunch on Sundays that couldn’t be held over till supper, if necessary.

Saunders had used his study for confession occasionally, though never for this reason. There were chairs by the window, in a good light. When they both sat down, he asked again, “Do you want me to hear your confession, my son?”

The man nodded. “Bless me, Father, for I have sinned,” he said after a moment. “It has been three weeks since my last confession.” He stopped. “My last confession was not a good one.”

“When was the last time you feel you made a good confession?” Saunders asked.

“June,” the man said. He paused. “Father, I’m sorry to take up your time on Sunday, but it’s a complicated story.”

“I have plenty of time, my son.”

The man smiled, almost invisibly. “Bless you for saying that.” He stopped. “Father, a few years ago, I met a man and worked with him for nearly three years. I -- ” He stopped again. “I have always been... I’m afflicted with – ” He literally, physically, shuddered. “I have... I’m a homosexual.”

“That must be very difficult for you, my son,” Saunders said. When the man said nothing, he prompted “Did you have a guilty relationship with this man?”

“I committed a mortal sin with him once,” the man said. “I repented it, and I confessed it. I avoided the occasion of sin afterwards. But I felt... I feel... he was, he is, a very good friend. I continued to have feelings for him.” The man stopped again, and seemed unable to go on.

“The temptation to commit sin is not itself a sin,” Saunders said. “Do you pray to be delivered from this evil affliction?”

“I used to,” the man said. “When I was a boy. I no longer pray to be delivered from this, but to be able to resist the temptation to act on these feelings.”

“But you know that this affliction is evil.”

“I am – I have been conscious that I have sexual feelings for other men since I was twelve,” the man said. “I prayed for years – for *years* that this – that these feelings would be taken away from me. But I now think that God gave me these... tendencies for His own reasons, and that I should accept – what God gave me.”

“You *must* pray that you shall be delivered from this,” Saunders said emphatically. “God can’t deliver you to sin.” He realised he was overriding what else the man had to say. “I’m sorry, my son. I shouldn’t interrupt your confession. Go on.”

“I met the man again in June.” The man stopped again, but this time Saunders didn’t prompt him. “I didn’t... I didn’t sin with him. But I wanted to. I – he asked me to live with him. He asked me several times. I wouldn’t – but we were friends. He asked me to write to him. I did. Then – five weeks ago – the man came to New York and – we met again. We had dinner together three times, and then he – I – found – ” He stopped again.

“You found you still had sinful feelings for him,” Saunders half-asked, half-prompted.

“Yes,” the man said. “No. I’d known that – since June. But I never – never expected him – never thought he’d still return these feelings – ” He stammered and halted.

“Have you committed a mortal sin with him?” Saunders asked.

“No.”

“Temptation is not in itself a sin, my son,” Saunders said. “Though temptation to commit such a dreadful sin is something you must pray to be delivered from. You must avoid this man – you must not meet him, nor correspond with him. You have resisted temptation, but you must do more than that – you should pray to be delivered from these feelings that afflict you. Fix your thoughts on that. If you have not committed any mortal sin with this man, why do you feel that your confessions since June have not been good confessions?”

“Because...” The man swallowed. “When I sinned with the man before, I felt true contrition. When I am... when I was tempted this time, I could not feel... I could not feel that. At most I feel attrition – I was conscious that I must not. I have been trying to achieve contrition, but... in my heart and my conscience, I cannot feel it. I have prayed to God to help me, but...”

“You have not committed a mortal sin,” Saunders said. He was trying to be patient. He guessed from the use of the terms contrition and attrition that the man was one of those scrupulous Catholics who ought to be regarded as a blessing. The difference between repentance through sorrow for having offended God and repentance through fear of God’s punishment was clear, but not something most Catholics would be conscious of in those words. Still, the man was clearly trying to fight off a terrible temptation, and he ought to be supported. “You cannot achieve contrition for a sin you have not committed.”

“I *want* what this man offers.” The man’s voice cracked. “Not only... not only what would be sinful, but – his friendship, his companionship – ”

“He is an occasion of sin for you, my son. And you may be an occasion of sin for him. You must not see him. You were aware of this when you avoided seeing him before, after you committed a mortal sin with him – ”

“I didn’t avoid seeing him,” the man said. “We were in Korea – in an army unit. I could have applied for a transfer, but I felt that – my work there justified the risk of remaining. He promised he wouldn’t – he promised ‘never again’, and he kept the promise.”

Saunders frowned. “What about you?”

“I’m sorry?”

“You say *he* promised. What about you? In June, did he get in touch with you, or you with him?”

“I did,” the man said.

“My son, have you told me the whole truth about your relationship with him?”

“Yes,” the man said.

“Why did you get in touch with him in June?”

“I was – ” The man shifted in his seat. His hand went up to his glasses and seemed to fidget with them for a moment. “I had just – I am a priest. I was suspended from the priesthood nearly a year ago. In June, my bishop – strongly advised that I should apply for laicization from the priesthood, and I did so. I was – I wanted to talk to someone.” His voice trailed off.

The advantage of the confessionals is that the sinner cannot really see the priest: not only does this allow the sinner to feel that he is confessing to God, through the priest his representative, but it enables any shock the priest might feel to be concealed. Saunders had never wished to be inside a confessional so much in his life. He thought he had managed to keep most of his real feelings from his face, but from the look on the man’s face, he knew that he had not been entirely successful.

“I’m sorry – ” he said, through lips that felt stiff. “Go on, my – my son.”

The man looked a little confused. “I wanted to talk to someone,” he said. “That was why I went to see him.”

Saunders nodded, pulling himself together. “You were ordained when you committed a mortal sin with this man in Korea?”

“Yes.”

“And you felt contrition for the act?”

“Yes.” The man spoke very softly.

“Yet you did not avoid him?”

“I – couldn’t.”

“You could have applied for a transfer, you said. You were company chaplain, I suppose?”

“Yes.”

“Why didn’t you?”

“I didn’t think it would happen again,” the man said quietly. “He’s a good man: he promised he wouldn’t – make any, any attempt like that again, and he didn’t – ”

“But what about *you*? You seem to be trying to put all the blame for what occurred on to him – didn’t you feel that as someone afflicted with these evil tendencies you should have avoided even a possible occasion of sin?”

The man went red. His mouth opened, but he closed it again without saying anything. After a long moment, he said “I’d tried. I’d succeeded, for – for many years. In not allowing such things to happen. God knows I don’t want to evade my own guilt, but I did try – I did *try* not to – to commit any sin with him, but I was...” His voice trailed off.

“God knows I tried,” he said finally. “And I felt true contrition. I had broken my vows, I had committed mortal sin, I thought I might have to leave my work there, with that unit, in that part of Korea – there was an orphanage I was closely involved with – and I didn’t want to. I didn’t want to have to go. We talked about it in private and he promised that he wouldn’t – do anything, and he kept that promise, most faithfully. Until – ”

“Did you really think that your work was more important than saving your immortal soul?” Saunders asked. “Or did you have sinful feelings towards this man?”

The man swallowed hard. He was still rather red in the face. “Yes,” he said. “Yes, to both, I suppose – I wanted to do my work, and I – had become accustomed to feelings that I knew would be wrong to act on.”

“And when you applied for laicization from the priesthood? Were you impelled by these sinful feelings?”

“No,” the man said. He sounded absolutely definite. “I didn’t want to apply for laicization. But my bishop had written to me, so strongly advising it – he said he wouldn’t have ordained me if he had known – ” His voice broke. He took off his glasses and wiped at them, seeming to take a long time about it. Saunders waited, realising that it would do no good to speak when the man couldn’t see him.

“ – if he had known,” the man finished, “that I’m... a homosexual.”

Saunders nodded. He folded his hands together and prayed silently for guidance.

“Does your regular confessor know you are a priest – ?”

“No.”

“I think you should go back to your bishop,” Saunders said, “and ask to be reconciled.”

The man said nothing.

“You’re not yet laicized?” Saunders asked, receiving the nod he expected. The Holy See never did anything in a hurry.

“You weren’t ordained in this diocese,” Saunders said.

“No. I came here, after I sent the letter of application.”

“On your bishop’s instruction? Did you tell him that this man lived here?”

“No.” The man looked startled. “No, he didn’t – then. He’s moved here.”

“Moved here?” Saunders was startled. “Did he know – I’m sorry, my son, you said that already.” He promised himself a penance for appearing to be inattentive in confession: the shock had distracted him from the details.

“I came here,” the man said, “because I had to get away from people who knew I had been ordained – ”

Saunders nodded. He had never, as far as he knew, met a laicized priest. The Church required that such an unfortunate person should break all attachments and move away to where no one knew he had once been a priest. “You should write to your bishop and ask for permission to be transferred somewhere else,” he said. “But if you are being laicized really against your will – how old are you?”

“Thirty-seven.”

Older than Saunders had thought, but still too young to make such a final step away from the Church. “My son, have you thought what being laicized means? You are not only barred from every duty of the priesthood, but even from the privileges every Catholic earns with baptism. You are rejecting a precious gift from God. Write to your

bishop, my son. If you'll give me your details, *I'll* write to him. I'll write to the Holy Father himself. You must not turn away from the Church."

"Father –" the man said. "I really wanted advice on what to do about –" He swallowed. "This man."

"Well," Saunders said, a little exasperated. "You mustn't see him or correspond with him again. You know that. And if you go back to your own diocese, and ask your bishop for reconciliation, to support your withdrawal from laicization, you won't. And you must pray for these evil feelings to be taken from you. What is your name, my son?"

The man pushed his glasses a little further up his nose. "John," he said.

"I'll hold you in my prayers, John. If you want to talk this through again, my door is always open to you, and I'd be glad to hear your confession at any time."

"I'm sorry," the man said.

"Come and see me again, John. Please."

The man nodded. "Thank you, Father." He stood up. "Goodbye. God bless you."

"God bless you," Saunders said, and stood up to walk with him to the door. "John, remember that feeling the temptation to commit a sin is not a sin. I think you're inclined to torment yourself over this, especially since you've separated yourself from the Church."

The man said nothing, but his mouth seemed to tighten a little.

"Write to your bishop, my son."

4. A prayer.

There was an unopened letter on the table beside the bed.

Know you not that the unjust shall not possess the kingdom of God? Do not err: Neither fornicators nor idolaters nor adulterers: Nor the effeminate nor liars with mankind nor thieves nor covetous nor drunkards nor railers nor extortioners shall possess the kingdom of God.

Dear Lord, I haven't seen Hawkeye for three weeks now: it feels longer. He writes to me every Saturday evening: he says he goes to Grand Central to meet my train, and when I'm not on it, he goes home and writes to me.

I don't write back. I sit here and I read the Bible and remind myself that I have Scriptural authority to ignore him. I even have the advice of a priest. Not to see him. Not to write to him.

I can't separate my love for him from my other feelings for him. I've tried. I've prayed. Once the priest knew I was being laicized, he wasn't very interested in my other sins: I should pray for these feelings to be taken from me, he said. I can tell myself that these feelings are evil, but I can't *feel* that they are, and you know I haven't prayed to have them taken from me.

Fly fornication. Every sin that a man does is without the body: but he that commits fornication sins against his own body. Or know you not that your bodies are the temple of the Holy Ghost, who is in you, whom you have from God: and you are not your own?

Dear God, help me. I go to Mass: I can't hear the priest, but I know the ritual: I know it by heart. I haven't been able to take communion in four Sundays: I want this too much,

and I cannot make an act of perfect contrition. But as Father Saunders pointed out, I can't confess to a sin I haven't committed: only wanted to.

I want to be with Hawkeye.

He says he loves me.

I wish I didn't believe him.

Love is patient, is kind: love envies not, deals not perversely, is not puffed up, Is not ambitious, seeks not her own, is not provoked to anger, thinks no evil: Rejoices not in iniquity, but rejoices with the truth: Bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.

Dear Lord, should I read Corinthians when I'm trying to remember that what he feels for me is a sin, and what I feel for him is a sin? No matter what I read, no matter how sound the scriptural authority, I find myself reading beyond the condemnation, and remembering more than I should. I read my Bible carefully, and I find that men like Hawkeye – men who fornicate with other men, myself as much as Hawkeye – are *filled with all iniquity, malice, fornication, avarice, wickedness: full of envy, murder, contention, deceit, malignity: whisperers, detractors, hateful to God, contumelious, proud, haughty, inventors of evil things, disobedient to parents, foolish, dissolute: without affection, without fidelity, without mercy* and instead of feeling rebuked, I think of Hawkeye: I cannot make this passage describe him.

If someone read it to him, and told him *Who, having known the justice of God, did not understand that they who do such things, are worthy of death: and not only they that do them, but they also that consent to them that do them*, he would laugh: and he would take the passage and apply each text to himself, finding some reason why it applied to him.

But it wouldn't. I can accuse myself, but I cannot accuse Hawkeye unjustly.

And it does seem unjust, dear Lord. Forgive me.

We see now through a glass in a dark manner: but then face to face. Now I know in part: but then I shall know even as I am known. And now there remain faith, hope, and love, these three: but the greatest of these is love.

He opened the letter.

5. Friday, 19th November.

Susan Dunsford taught fourth-graders: the children in her class would be in Francis Mulcahy's math class in a couple of years, assuming that he passed the state examination to teach in New York.

He seemed like a nice man, in her estimation, though woefully inexperienced at teaching deaf children – and practically speaking, she'd had her doubts about whether a deaf man was competent to teach an academic subject from the start. Mr Moskowitz, his supervisor, seemed to think he was doing well.

On Fridays in the winter, Mr Moskowitz left early. Mr Mulcahy's last two classes on Friday were unsupervised. Mrs Dunsford took the opportunity to stop by two or three times, and the third time was sure enough of her ground to speak to him.

The children had gone, shepherded to their dormitories. Mr Mulcahy had one of the dorm workers' bedrooms, in the oldest boys' dormitory, for sixteen and up. They were allowed to go from class to class, and class to dorm, unsupervised.

"Mrs Dunsford. How can I help you?"

"I wanted to talk to you about how you teach."

Mr Mulcahy looked startled. "I'm sorry, Mr Moskowitz isn't here – surely we should talk this over with him?"

"I've spoken with him twice about this already, in fact," Mrs Dunsford said. "You encourage the children to use signs in your class."

Mr Mulcahy's eyebrows appeared over the top of his glasses. He said nothing for a moment. "Mrs Dunsford, I don't allow the children to use signing to talk among themselves in class – I realise that's against the rules."

"But you sign *to* them," Mrs Dunsford said. "And you let them sign questions to you."

"Well, yes, I do, when I'm trying to explain a problem to one of the profoundly deaf children. It's quicker than trying to communicate in writing."

"But they have to learn how to communicate with normal people, Mr Mulcahy."

"Yes," Mr Mulcahy said. The expression on his face barely changed, but she felt rebuked.

"I'm sorry," Mrs Dunsford said. "But they have to learn – most people can *hear*."

"Yes," Mr Mulcahy said. "And most of their teachers can." He resettled his glasses, rubbing his ears, not smiling. "I can't." He looked back at her, diffident. "But I do believe – that I can teach them mathematics."

"Mr Mulcahy, I am truly sorry," Mrs Dunsford said. "I didn't intend to be offensive. But not allowing the children to use signs among themselves isn't just a rule – they have to learn how to communicate in *English*, not by making signs with their hands. If they're encouraged in the use of signing instead of learning how to speak, their lives will be very limited. A deaf child *can* learn to speak, can make the most of what hearing he has, and can leave this school with the ability to work in a normal environment." Mrs Dunsford had worked at the New York School for the Deaf for thirty-seven years. She had seen many teachers, at about this point in their first term, seem ready to give up in sheer frustration. "I'm convinced of that. I never give up on a child, no matter how little hearing he has left, and I don't like to see any teacher giving up on *any* child. These children deserve all the help we can give them."

Mr Mulcahy was a skilled lip-reader: when he paid attention, it was almost as if he were listening intently. He nodded. "Yes, I see." He paused. "Mrs Dunsford, were you aware that I'm profoundly deaf? Even my hearing aid doesn't help me very much – I have tinnitus in both my ears. I find I can't lip-read the children very well, not those who were born profoundly deaf: and I'm afraid many of them don't write English very well. But they can communicate with me in signs."

"You can't tell what the children are saying to you?" Mrs Dunsford picked that up with some shock. It was vitally important, in oralist teaching, for a teacher to be able to understand what the children were trying to say, and respond appropriately. If Mr Mulcahy couldn't do that – if his lip-reading failed him at this important point – he should have told Mr Moskowitz well before this.

"I can," Mr Mulcahy said. "I have some difficulty with those who don't – they don't speak English, I think, quite as you or I do. But –"

“I need to think about this,” Mrs Dunsford said. She managed a smile. “I’m sorry to have spoken so bluntly, Mr Mulcahy.”

“Perhaps we could talk about this on Monday, when Mr Moskowitz can be present?”

“Yes, perhaps we should.” Mrs Dunsford smiled again. She didn’t want to be impolite. “What are your plans for the weekend?”

Mr Mulcahy took off his glasses and rubbed the bridge of his nose. He looked unexpectedly tired. “I don’t quite know.”

Saturday 20th November, 1954

Each Saturday for the past three weeks Hawkeye had decided there was no point going to Grand Central: if Francis Mulcahy was going to show, he'd have written. Each Saturday he'd concluded that it didn't take more than fifteen minutes to walk down to the station, and he might as well. Each Saturday, walking back, he'd realised that fifteen minutes walking to the station, twenty minutes waiting around waiting for a train to come in and making sure that Mulcahy wasn't on it, and fifteen minutes walking back, added up to nearly an hour.

But then, what else was he doing with his time?

He could visit the school. That was a last resort, since he'd said he wouldn't. But there had to be a legitimate reason to get inside.

He could write more persuasive letters. He hadn't tried writing in blood yet.

He could call Radar and see if he gave lessons in mindreading.

He could –

"Pray for a miracle," Hawkeye said out loud. Walking up the platform towards him, his hands tucked into the pockets of his coat – *Dad's* coat, Hawkeye suddenly realised – a miracle, in round glasses.

"Hi," Hawkeye said. He was grinning too widely to be more articulate.

Mulcahy dug his hands more deeply into the coat's pockets. "Hawkeye."

As they had done three Saturdays in a row, back in October, they headed out of the station without trying to talk.

Once they were clear of the crowds, Hawkeye stopped. "Where shall we go?"

"Somewhere we can talk," Mulcahy said.

"That steakhouse near my place?"

"Fine."

"Okay." Hawkeye had stopped grinning, but he didn't feel any more articulate.

"So," Hawkeye said. They'd both ordered with hardly a glance at the menus. "What have you been doing recently?"

Mulcahy started. "Teaching," he said. "How about you?"

"Doing surgery."

They both looked at each other, and Hawkeye was relieved to see a small, real smile.

"I'm sorry," Mulcahy said.

"For what?"

"That I didn't write back."

"Oh, you got the letters." Hawkeye picked up a napkin and twisted it in his hands.

"You didn't have to write back, you know. I mean, if you didn't have an answer. Which I assume you didn't. Though I admit a telegram to let me know you'd *got* them would've been nice." The napkin ripped.

"I'm sorry," Mulcahy said again.

"No, that's okay." Hawkeye crumpled up the remains of the napkin into a ball and fidgeted with it. If he had two more of them, he could juggle. "What did you want to talk about?"

A waiter appeared beside them with another napkin and two glasses of water. Mulcahy glanced at him. "Something else, for the moment?" he suggested.

"Sure." Hawkeye could talk non-stop about anything for hours: he'd done it in OR with shells crashing nearby. He could riff on any topic under the sun. He could... right now, he couldn't. "Sorry. Talk amongst yourselves. What have you been teaching recently?"

"Math," said Mulcahy, with a brief, slightly disbelieving look. Hawkeye shrugged.

Mulcahy began to tell him about his lesson plans for next term. Hawkeye listened, nodded, smiled. He didn't care *what* Mulcahy told him: he wanted to be here, to be listening to Francis like this, knowing – at least – that Mulcahy wasn't mad at him.

The steaks arrived. Coleslaw. Sauce.

"Go on," Hawkeye said.

They were in a booth, which was well-lit enough for Hawkeye to talk and Mulcahy to listen: the well-lit booths were why Hawkeye had chosen this restaurant for the first evening.

"I'd like to talk about what was said the last time we met," Mulcahy said.

"Yeah." This was a pretty good steak.

Mulcahy went on cutting up his steak with hands that didn't shake. "Can I move in to your apartment?" he asked.

The glass on Hawkeye's side of the table spun round, landed on its side, and launched water all over the table and his plate. Hawkeye realised he had knocked it over seconds before a waiter appeared with a cloth. He retrieved the plate – there was only a little water on it, and he'd eaten worse – and let the waiter mop up the table. A few minutes later, the waiter gone, he realised he still hadn't answered the question – and that Mulcahy hadn't eaten a mouthful since then, though he'd been manipulating the food on his plate with his knife and fork. "Yes," he said. "Yes – if you want to. I mean, I've got the spare room..." His voice trailed off. "When do you want to?" *What do you mean by move in? Live with me, or live with me?*

"I have an arrangement to do dormitory duty at school, in exchange for room and board," Mulcahy said. "I should give them notice. I haven't talked to them about it, but I suppose the end of this term. Is that all right?"

"Yes," Hawkeye said again. "Francis – ?"

Mulcahy looked at Hawkeye. His face was quite still. "We should talk about rent, I suppose. And whatever else matters – I really don't know: I haven't ever – " he smiled, but it didn't make him look happy, " – lived like this before."

"Sure. I'll draw up a sub-let agreement. No loud noises, no pets, no children, no trombones after midnight – " Hawkeye broke off. "Francis, is this what you want to do?"

Mulcahy pushed his plate away and folded his hands together in front of him. "Did you change your mind?"

Hawkeye shook his head violently. "No. Oh no. *I* didn't change my mind. What I can't figure out is why *you* have. Or if you have."

"Hawkeye – " Mulcahy sounded genuinely distressed.

"Because you don't *look* happy."

"This is very difficult for me – "

"Oh, yeah? Well, the last four weeks haven't exactly been a bed of roses for me, either!"

They looked at each other. Mulcahy's hands were clenched together so hard the knuckles were white. He *didn't* look happy.

"I'm sorry," Hawkeye said. He was, but he didn't think he sounded like it. He hoped he looked more convincing. "Listen – you want to come up to my place for coffee? We could talk better. I really mean coffee. Talk."

Mulcahy smiled, briefly, almost invisibly. "All right." He looked as if he was about to get up.

"Finish your steak," Hawkeye said.

Mulcahy gave him a look. "If you finish yours."

"Oh." Hawkeye looked down at his plate. "Yeah."

He hadn't done much with his apartment in the four weeks since Mulcahy had been there last. He'd been working and going out to drink or play poker, and coming home and switching off: he hadn't wanted to think about what to do with the too-large apartment.

He made a pot of coffee and poured them each a cup. He remembered how Mulcahy took his: he wondered, without wanting to ask, if Mulcahy remembered about Hawkeye's.

Mulcahy accepted the cup and sat down at one end of the sofa: Hawkeye sat down at the other end. They looked at each other.

"This is what I want to do," Mulcahy said. His voice was grave and level. "I love you. I want to be with you."

Hawkeye shook his head before he could stop himself. "Sorry," he said. "I keep feeling I've flipped over two pages at once. Last time we talked, you just kept saying it would be a sin if we did *anything*. Now you want to move in? How did this happen?"

Mulcahy drank from his cup. "I thought you'd be pleased," he said. His voice was still level.

"I'm stunned, surprised, astonished, startled, taken aback, taking fright, and wanting to take advantage," Hawkeye said. "*Pleased* doesn't quite cover it. Did – did you just say you loved me?"

"Do you believe me?"

"It would serve you right if I said I didn't, wouldn't it?" Hawkeye asked. He saw Mulcahy's hands twitch, as if reaching for his glasses, and said, immediately. "No, don't tell me to shut up. I believe you, I just –" He hesitated. "I just don't understand." To his own ears his voice sounded lost and uncertain: he wished he knew what Mulcahy could read on his face. "I love you. I want to make you happy. I want to –" He swallowed, terrified and dry-mouthed suddenly, and drank from the mug he was holding. "I want to make you happy," he said lamely. "I don't get the feeling that you are."

Mulcahy was silent for a moment, looking down at the coffee in his mug. He looked up with a small, embarrassed shrug. "Do you mind if I ask –?"

"Sure. Anything."

"Did you say 'taking fright' or 'taking flight'? I'm sorry, they look very similar, and I couldn't tell –"

"Taking fright," Hawkeye said. "Running scared."

Mulcahy nodded. His mouth twitched. "Are you scared of *me*?" He sounded almost amused.

Hawkeye's mouth had gone dry again. He drank more coffee. "I'm terrified," he said finally, flippantly. "You haven't even moved in yet and already I'm terrified you're going to leave me." It was more true than he wanted Mulcahy to know. "I thought it was going to take longer to – to persuade you –" He grinned, hoping to get back at least that amused twitch of the mouth. "You're going too fast for me. Give me a chance to catch up. Two hours ago I didn't even really expect you to show up this evening, I thought I'd be writing you yet another letter asking you to at least write back, and now we're talking about you moving in next month. And you're still –"

He broke off.

Mulcahy looked up and nodded. "Yes," he said. "I'm still a priest. But... I've lost my vocation. Or had it taken away from me." He spoke as of a physical thing that had been removed, quite matter-of-factly.

"When –" Hawkeye stopped. That probably wasn't his business. "How –" He wasn't sure he'd understand the answer. "Did you just say you love me?"

"Didn't you know?" Mulcahy looked genuinely startled.

Hawkeye opened his mouth, shook his head, and ran his hand through his hair. *Why would you?* "Like me, lust after me –" He meant to run with it, but the next word out of his mouth wanted to be *Lick me*, and he didn't think Francis would find that funny. He didn't think *he* found that funny. "Francis, do you really want to move in with me? You don't know the first thing about me."

"I think I know you quite well," Mulcahy said.

"The first thing about me is, I have nightmares."

"I snore," Mulcahy said.

"I have really bad nightmares."

"I snore so loudly I was once thrown out of my dorm at the seminary."

Hawkeye blinked. It would make him feel very stupid to ask *You mean it, we're going to sleep together?* but if Mulcahy didn't think they were going to, why would it matter if he snored?

All the other questions he could think of to ask began with *when* and *how* and he didn't suppose Mulcahy had an answer for him, or at least not one Hawkeye would want.

When did you decide this was okay? How have you squared this with your conscience?

When is your conscience going to get up and tell you to leave me?

How much is it going to hurt when you do?

A lot. It was going to hurt a lot.

"Hawkeye?"

"A lot," Hawkeye said, and then caught himself. "Yes, what?"

"I'm sorry," Mulcahy said. "I didn't think – you'd need more time to think about it." He was running his finger round the edge of his coffee cup. He looked embarrassed. "I took it for granted – I'm sorry."

Hawkeye put his coffee cup down. He reached forward and removed the cup from Mulcahy's hands, getting a surprised look.

"Okay," Hawkeye said, "Just – let me –" For the first time in his life he wasn't sure what to do with his hands. "Please." He moved closer, putting his arm round Mulcahy's shoulders, settling his other arm across Mulcahy's front, making his hands still, not roaming. Mulcahy cooperated, neither active nor resistant. Hawkeye leaned his head against Mulcahy's head, rubbing his cheek against the soft fine hair. He remembered

curving his hand against the curve of the skull, feeling the hair with his fingers, teasing Francis's lips with his tongue. "Okay." He swallowed. "Move in. Anything. Anything you want."

Then it occurred to him to move his head so that Mulcahy could see what he was saying, and said "Sure. I didn't change my mind." He let go and moved back a little, making it easier for them to talk. "You want to move in next weekend?"

Mulcahy gave him an odd look. "I can't until the end of term."

"Oh yeah, right, you said." Hawkeye rubbed his hand across his eyes. "Well, whenever," he said, taking his hand away. "Listen, it's Thanksgiving next week, you doing anything?"

"I – No," Mulcahy said. "Not really."

"Come to dinner. Stay the night. I mean – I can fix up the other bedroom. You can stay the night – if you want. We can talk about – about you moving in."

"I could buy a trombone," Mulcahy said.

Hawkeye laughed. He knew he was laughing harder than the joke deserved, but he couldn't stop. He felt Mulcahy take hold of his hands, and bent his head, looking at their hands joined together. He looked up and caught Mulcahy looking at him, with mingled compassion and tenderness. *He said he loved me. Loves me. He does, he said it, he doesn't lie: he loves me.*

"I'm sorry," Mulcahy said. "I'm not happy, right now. But this is – what I want."

Hawkeye shook his head. "You don't need to apologise," he said. He curled his hands round Mulcahy's. "Just tell me you're coming for dinner next Thursday."

"Yes."

"And staying the night?"

Mulcahy smiled, but it didn't make him look any happier. "Yes." He looked down at their hands. "Hawkeye?"

"Yeah?"

"You still have nightmares?"

Hawkeye shrugged. "Sometimes." He let go of Mulcahy's hands and reached for their coffee cups. "Don't you?"

"I probably do," Mulcahy said. "But I've – I generally don't remember my dreams." He accepted his cup.

"Wish I didn't," Hawkeye said cheerfully and flippantly. "Except for the ones about nurses."

Mulcahy gave Hawkeye a small polite smile. "Of course." He drank his coffee.

"Mine's gone cold." It was lukewarm, at least. Hawkeye stood up again – he was feeling restless all over, his muscles twitching – and took both cups through to the kitchen to rinse them out and pour a fresh cup from the pot.

If he'd asked Carlye to marry him, maybe she'd have stayed with him. If he'd asked Trapper to leave his wife and live with him after the war, maybe at least they'd have broken up before Trapper left.

Marry me, he heard himself saying to Francis, and got in response the same small polite smile.

If he didn't say anything – Francis had already agreed to move in – there was no possibility of rejection.

Yeah, and look how well that worked out the last two times.

“Francis?”

Mulcahy accepted his coffee cup. “Thank you,” he said.

“There’s something I want to say to you about you moving in,” Hawkeye said. He was finding it more difficult to say than he’d expected, and he’d expected it to be difficult.

“Yes?” Mulcahy looked as if he expected it to be something to do with the rent. Or possibly the chores. He had a practical expression on his face, down-to-earth, awaiting instruction.

“I love you,” Hawkeye said. “How does it go? Love, honour, cherish. I love you, honour you, and I want to cherish you – as much as you’ll let me,” he added. “I do. Do you?”

Mulcahy had gone from practical to grim without moving a muscle. His voice, when he spoke at last, was on the edge of anger. “I don’t find that kind of joke amusing.”

There was a hideous sinking hole somewhere not far beneath him. “I’m not joking,” Hawkeye protested. It was a last-ditch defence: no one ever believed him if it got that far. “I’m *not*. I want you and no one else. No matter what I say about nurses. Or anyone.”

“Hawkeye – ”

Hawkeye got to his feet, impelled by twitchiness. “God. Why does no one *ever* believe me when I say I’m not joking?”

Mulcahy had stood up. Hawkeye stared at him. “Why don’t *you* believe me?”

“Hawkeye – ”

“I haven’t had sex with anyone else since May!”

Mulcahy smiled. “Well, that *is* a long time,” he said, and somehow the anger seemed to have dissolved out of him. He put his hands out and took hold of Hawkeye’s hands. “If you mean what I think you mean, I do appreciate the sentiment – ” his grip was firm and solid “ – I hadn’t even begun to think about that.” He sounded genuinely amused.

“I mean it,” Hawkeye said. “Look, I’m not – ” *a hard-drinking promiscuous half-crazed talkative surgeon with nightmares* – “Look, I don’t – ”

Mulcahy’s hand on his shoulder. Hawkeye twitched. “Look. I’m not such a terrific catch. I know that. But you wouldn’t believe how much I want this. I’m not going to foul it up. I promise.”

Mulcahy still looked amused. “You don’t need to make these kind of promises.” His hand was still resting on Hawkeye’s shoulder.

Hawkeye shivered. He remembered asking *Are you going to run away if I kiss you?* and watching Mulcahy shut him out by closing his eyes.

“Don’t tell me to let go of you this time,” Hawkeye said.

Mulcahy blinked. “You’re not holding on to me,” he said.

His mouth tasted of coffee. After a moment, Hawkeye put his arms round Francis’s shoulders, and went on kissing him. After a longer moment, Francis was kissing him back: his mouth was awkward, gentle, over-tentative, sweet. Hawkeye slid his mouth across Francis’s cheek, feeling the stubble rasp lightly at his lips, and used his tongue on the sensitive patch of skin right under the ear. He was nuzzling down the other man’s neck before he realised that something was wrong.

Mulcahy hadn’t let go of him or moved away from him or even closed his eyes. But something was wrong.

“You okay?” Hawkeye realised he was going to have to step back in order to ask the question. He repeated it.

Mulcahy stared at him, looking ruffled and red in the face. After a moment he took his glasses off and rubbed his hand across his eyes. He put his glasses on again and opened his mouth to say something, then seemed to think better of it and sat down.

“Francis?” Hawkeye sat down at the other end of the sofa.

“I’m sorry,” Mulcahy said.

“Did we just – ” Hawkeye stopped. “Did *I* just turn over two pages at once?”

Mulcahy laughed: it sounded awkward. “I suppose so.” He stopped. “No. Hawkeye – ” He stopped again. “I have a confession to make.” He seemed to brace himself. “My reasons for accepting your offer were very selfish.”

“Oh?” Hawkeye was feeling dazed. Was this a *no*, an *I’ve just changed my mind*, or another attack of the *we can’t because it’s a mortal sin*? “Selfish?”

“I’m lonely,” Mulcahy said. “I’ve missed you.”

“Good.” Hawkeye stopped. “I mean, not good you’re lonely. Good you missed me. I missed you. Is this a problem?”

“I shouldn’t – ” Mulcahy looked away. “I kept thinking – ” He looked back. “That I’d like to have someone to talk to.”

“Talk,” Hawkeye said. “Right.” He nodded. “Okay. Just... talk?”

“I meant – ” Mulcahy was fidgeting with his hands. He wasn’t sitting still. “I’ll – I’d – I’m sorry. I’m not very good at dealing with this kind of affair.”

Hawkeye bit his tongue. Mulcahy looked up and caught his eye. He laughed without awkwardness. With considerable relief, Hawkeye kicked his shoes off, leant back against the cushioned arm of the sofa and tucked his knees up, wrapping his arms round them. That kept his hands out of the way. “*Any* kind of affair,” he said lightly. Mulcahy looked more relaxed. Hawkeye waited till he was looking at him again, and asked “What did you want to talk about?”

“What?”

Hawkeye shrugged. “A trained observer, such as myself – ” He was putting on his detective voice, even though Mulcahy wouldn’t notice, because it comforted him. “ – notices that these things.” He dropped his voice. “Unless you just meant in general you’d like someone to talk to, but right now you don’t have anything to talk about.” Mulcahy could make him more nervous, faster, than anyone had been able to... since Carlye. “Do you?”

“Hawkeye, are you all right?”

“Worried,” Hawkeye said.

Mulcahy’s eyes widened. “About what?” He sounded alert and concerned.

“About you.”

“Why?”

“Why did you come here tonight?”

“To see you,” Mulcahy said.

“Yeah, but – ” Hawkeye shifted his feet. “Why now? What happened?”

Mulcahy gave him a defensively cheerful look. Hawkeye gave him a look back. After a moment, Mulcahy shifted a little and said, mildly, “It’s really not very interesting.”

Hawkeye tilted his head. “Well?”

Mulcahy clasped his hands together, as if he were trying not to move them. “I use signs to communicate with some of the children I teach,” he said. “There’s a rule against the children using signs in class, but I’d assumed it was because the teachers think the

children might be talking about them, if they use signs to speak to each other freely in class.” He smiled, very faintly. “And of course, sometimes they’re right.”

Hawkeye laughed. “Beats passing notes.”

“I can’t lip-read the profoundly deaf children very well, but often they’re the best signers, so I reasoned that if I confined our communication by signs to questions they asked me or I asked them, it wouldn’t really be a breach of the rules.”

“Makes sense.”

“Apparently I shouldn’t be using signs at all, because they need to learn how to communicate by speech. It’s supposed to be very bad for them to think they can communicate by sign. But I’m not sure I can teach them – not all of them – if we *don’t* use signs.”

“Well, were you hired to teach them how to speak?” Hawkeye asked.

Mulcahy gave him a brief look of surprise, and looked away. He didn’t turn his head back to look at Hawkeye for a minute or so. “Numbers are a universal language,” he said. “I’ve taught arithmetic to Korean children who spoke and understood no English at all. I feel that I am of some use there, even if I can’t encourage the children to learn how to speak.”

“And that’s what you were hired to do? Teach math?”

“That’s what I told Mrs Dunsford,” Mulcahy said. “But, after all... I don’t know anything about teaching deaf children. Maybe she’s right.”

“Who’s Mrs Dunsford?”

“She’s been teaching at the school for over thirty years, I think. Very good teacher. Devoted to the children. She’s really excellent at her job...” Mulcahy hesitated.

“You just don’t like her very much?” Hawkeye asked.

“I didn’t say that,” Mulcahy protested.

“You didn’t have to,” Hawkeye said, and grinned. “You never do.”

“But what if she’s *right*?”

“What if she’s not?” Hawkeye tilted his head back and looked up at the ceiling. He was trying to think of the right thing to say. He knew less than nothing about teaching deaf children, or teaching children at all. And Mulcahy knew it. Putting on a confidence-building front was a standard medical trick, but it didn’t work when the patient *knew* the doctor didn’t know any more than he did. Or less.

“When you were hired, they knew you were deaf?” Hawkeye asked. At Mulcahy’s nod, he speeded up the questions. “They hired you to teach math, right? They didn’t hire you to teach the kids to learn to speak, right? You’re doing a good job, right?”

Mulcahy’s small smile had broadened to an outright grin. “You’re trying to make me feel better,” he said. “Right?”

“You got me,” Hawkeye agreed immediately. He added, more seriously, “But I’m right, you know.”

“That’s what you always say.”

Hawkeye made a clownish face. “That’s because I’m always right.” He stopped. “Where do you learn signs, anyway? I tried to find a book, but all I could find was a guide to fingerspelling.”

Mulcahy started. “Why would you want to learn how to sign?”

“I’ll show you,” Hawkeye said. He unfolded his legs, stretching them out. “Come here. Come on.” He reached for Mulcahy, getting him to turn round and lean back: after a

minute's manoeuvring, he had them both lying back on the sofa: himself with his head resting against the arm, and Mulcahy resting against him. Francis was tense. Hawkeye put his arms round him, and waited for him to relax.

"Hawkeye, what are you doing?"

Hawkeye settled himself comfortably, and took Francis's hand in his. He began to trace letters on Francis's palm: S, H, O, W, I, N, G, Y, O, U, W, H, Y, I, N, E, E, D, T, O, L, E, A, R, N, S, I, G, N, S.

He heard, and felt, Francis chuckle. "You're crazy," he said, but he relaxed, momentarily. Then he sat up again, breaking Hawkeye's light grip, and turned round to look at Hawkeye. "Did you manage to learn fingerspelling?"

Hawkeye lifted up his hands. Carefully, he spelt out "A, L, I, T, T, L, E."

Mulcahy frowned a moment, then nodded. "I see..."

"Did I get it wrong?"

Mulcahy lifted his hand and tilted it from side to side. He was smiling, almost invisibly. "Perfect, actually."

"You –" Hawkeye laughed.

"If you know fingerspelling, why did you – why did you use –" He touched Hawkeye's hand, briefly.

"I like it," Hawkeye said, grinning.

"It's slower."

"More fun."

Mulcahy went on looking at him: Hawkeye felt his grin fading. Mulcahy's expression was terribly serious. When Mulcahy leaned forward, Hawkeye thought the other man meant to say something – almost until the moment Mulcahy's lips touched his.

Hawkeye pressed his hands down against the sofa. Not to move too fast, not to make Francis run a mile –

He stopped worrying about it. Francis's mouth tasted good. All the awkwardness and gentleness and sweetness said *Francis*, said *he loves you*, said *he wants you*.

"Hawkeye?" Francis was looking at him, less ruffled than before but more uncertain.

"Francis." Hawkeye sat up.

"I –" Mulcahy put his hands together again. "I'm sorry – I don't –"

Hawkeye leaned forward, feeling an urgent need to stop Mulcahy putting any doubts into actual words. "No. Don't say *anything*. Just come to dinner. Next Thursday. Okay?"

Mulcahy looked back at him. He looked half-amused, half-relieved. "Dinner. Next Thursday." He paused. "I can manage that."

Thursday 25th November, 1954

It was the first time Hawkeye hadn't come to meet him at the station. Of course, it was broad daylight – just after noon – and Mulcahy knew the way to Hawkeye's apartment perfectly well.

It was disturbing not to be sure if the doorbell was working, no matter how long or how hard he rang it. On the other hand – Mulcahy glanced at his watch – it was past the time Hawkeye had asked him to come, and –

He knocked, hard and long, and waited. No answer.

An emergency at the hospital, then. Or something. Mulcahy stood still a minute, thinking. The restaurant on the corner where he and Hawkeye had eaten before was open: and most likely Hawkeye would think to look there.

He turned away and went back down to the elevator. He was about to step inside when a hand closed on his shoulder.

Hawkeye was wearing nothing but his red towelling dressing-gown. His hair was flopping into his eyes. He looked half-awake, and furious. He opened his mouth but didn't shape any words: instead he jerked his thumb, violently, back at the open door of his apartment. Mulcahy started back up the hall. Hawkeye went with him, not taking his hand off Mulcahy's shoulder.

Hawkeye switched the light on before he kicked the door shut. "You were just going away," he said.

"I thought you weren't in."

"Of course I was in!" Hawkeye still looked angry. "Do I look as if I'm not in? You were going away without even leaving a note."

"I rang the door bell," Mulcahy said. The door to Hawkeye's bedroom was standing open. "When did you go to sleep?"

Hawkeye blinked at him. "You're not going away again," he said.

"No," Mulcahy said. "What was the emergency last night?"

Hawkeye shook his head. "Not an emergency. Not a real one. Complications. One of Cournand's patients. Doctor Cournand asked me to stay on with him in case he decided to operate again and wanted another surgeon to assist. And we operated. *God* he's a good surgeon. Did I say that already? Anyway. And we stayed on until the patient started coming round – bp normal, pulse normal – and –"

"So the patient's all right?"

"Great," Hawkeye said. "Did I say all right? I meant *great*. I rang up this morning and he had a good night's sleep."

"How much sleep have you had?"

"I couldn't sleep when I got back," Hawkeye said. "Started cooking instead. After a while it felt like not worth going to bed." He yawned, obscuring the next thing he said. " – what are you doing here this early?"

Mulcahy looked at his watch. Hawkeye caught hold of his wrist and turned it slightly. "Oh." He stood with his mouth slightly open. "Okay, wait till I get some coffee –"

"I don't think you need coffee," Mulcahy said.

Hawkeye looked at him, eyebrows up. "Who's the doctor here, you or me? I need coffee. If I don't have coffee, I'm going to go to sleep. And I find it really difficult to eat dinner in my sleep. If I have coffee and a hot shower I'll wake up. Not a hot shower of coffee. Just water. Hot water. Have you ever thought about how wonderful hot water is? I mean really thought about it? So. Coffee and hot water. Are you okay with staying here until I've had coffee and a hot shower?"

"You need to go back to bed," Mulcahy said.

"I'd love to," Hawkeye said. He started to giggle. "I'd love to. But I don't think –" He was giggling too much to be understood.

"Hawkeye?"

"Bed. Sure. Why not?"

Mulcahy took hold of Hawkeye by the elbow and steered him towards the bedroom door. Hawkeye went cooperatively. Last night's clothes were strewn across the floor. The bed looked like Hawkeye had exploded out of it.

"Don't go away," Hawkeye said. He lay down on the bed, catching at Mulcahy's forearm. "I really mean it, don't go away."

Mulcahy sat down on the edge of the bed. Hawkeye's eyes were sliding shut again. He said something, yawned, and slid his hand up Mulcahy's arm. "Don't go away," he said again, quite clearly.

Mulcahy sat still. He didn't want to move. Hawkeye's grip on his arm slackened only some time after he seemed to have gone to sleep.

There was plenty of space on the other side of the bed. More than room enough for another man to lie down next to Hawkeye.

Dinner was three-quarters prepared in the kitchen, and the dishes were three-quarters not done. Mulcahy slid off his jacket, rolled up his sleeves, and set about the dinner and the dishes. He was unhappily conscious that while he was doing what he ought to be doing, he would rather be on Hawkeye's bed, watching Hawkeye sleep.

He wanted Hawkeye.

It terrified him, how *much* he wanted Hawkeye. It had been fifteen years – more than fifteen years – since the last time he had stood in the public showers at the gym where he trained, and let himself want another man. A man whose name he'd never known. It shamed him still, that he could recall the feeling of that man's mouth on his dick far more vividly than he could bring to mind that man's face.

The turkey was probably an eight-pounder – it would take three hours. No matter how he spun out washing the dishes, it couldn't take him more than an hour.

He managed to find things to do for nearly two hours, but Hawkeye was still fast asleep when Mulcahy wandered back through to his bedroom to check on him. He was tangled in bathrobe and sheets, twitching a little as he slept. A blanket and a comforter had fallen to the floor. Mulcahy picked the comforter up and tucked it over him.

If I move in...

Mulcahy went round the bed and spread the blanket on the other side, half over Hawkeye. The other man stirred again, turning on to his face. Mulcahy lay down on the blanket, pillowing his head on his arm. Hawkeye was a huddled shape next to him, ruffled hair and half-hidden face.

When I move in...

He couldn't remember the faces of most of the men he'd had sex with. He'd never learned their names. It had been easier to repent what he'd done with them.

I want you to live with me. I want to make love with someone who matters to me. Because I'm me, and you're you, and I wanted it to matter to you just as much.

He couldn't confess to a sin he hadn't committed: Father Saunders was right about that. But he could never confess the sin: he could not persuade himself that he would feel contrition for wanting Hawkeye...

For wanting Hawkeye to make love to him, as if he mattered.

For wanting to be with Hawkeye.

He could remember exactly when Hawkeye had separated out from the unit of Hawkeye-and-Trapper: one lunchtime when he'd been sitting over a dull bland meal.

He'd been assigned to the 4077th for three months by that time, and was close to concluding that he was useless here. No one came to his services: no one came to confession: he hovered in the operating room, trying to find things to do, and tried to find ways to talk with the patients who stayed in post-op long enough to be talked to.

He told Hawkeye this: he couldn't remember why. At the time, he'd been wary of Hawkeye, who had already acquired a reputation for cruel practical jokes outside the OR and cruel verbal jabs inside the OR. Feeling that his prayers were inadequate was a problem he might have taken to his confessor, but he wouldn't see a priest to confess to without getting leave to go to the orphanage, if it happened there was a priest there, or Seoul, if he could get a 24-hour pass to go there.

It was his first memory of Hawkeye separate from Trapper. Separate from anything else that Hawkeye had done or said before. Hawkeye had looked at him, oddly vulnerable, and said *I'm able to do a lot of things in surgery that I'm not really good enough to do.*

Hawkeye turned over restlessly in his sleep, his hands shifting and jerking under the covers. Mulcahy pushed himself up on his elbow and watched him: he was still asleep, just dreaming.

Nightmare?

Hawkeye's mouth was twitching, opening, closing: if he were speaking, Mulcahy couldn't understand what he was saying. Better not to wake him: it was easier to forget dreams if you slept through them. It made Mulcahy uncomfortable to watch him like this without intervening, but it couldn't help to wake him.

Jokes about marriage aside, Hawkeye wanted him, and liked him, and wanted him to be happy. Loved him, however awkward that made Mulcahy feel.

It wasn't as if this would be forever. Hawkeye needed someone who remembered Korea, right now: someone he liked and wanted and wanted to take care of. A year, two years, a few years, and Hawkeye's resilient spirit would recover: normality was still an option.

Hawkeye rolled over again. He was facing Mulcahy now, and he looked as if he were saying something out loud. Mulcahy put his hand on Hawkeye's chest, hoping to be gentle enough not to wake him. He caught the vibration of speech, a second before Hawkeye's eyes flickered open, and his mouth fell open. He said something again, incomprehensibly, closed his eyes, and then his muscles relaxed. Mulcahy's hand retreated, reluctantly.

A long moment later, Hawkeye's eyes opened again. "Morning, Francis." He blinked. "Or is it afternoon?"

Mulcahy smiled. "If we were in Korea, I think it's still last night."

He saw Hawkeye laugh without showing it on his face: like a ripple through his whole body. "Is that turkey I smell, or is it my imagination?"

Mulcahy glanced at his watch.

"You should know that ordinarily I hate people who do that when they're in bed with me."

Mulcahy didn't quite manage to suppress a laugh. He said, trying to be sober, "The turkey's been in for two and a half hours, nearly."

"Ah. Should be nearly done, then." Hawkeye looked at him. "I didn't plan for it to be this way, you know."

“I didn’t mind.” And he didn’t, though he’d minded before. He smiled and said brightly. “You know I always like to feel useful.”

“I didn’t ask you over to be useful,” Hawkeye retorted, and his grin acquired a teasing edge. “Just decorative.”

Mulcahy laughed out loud, this time: he couldn’t help it. “You needed to get some sleep.”

“I don’t know what’s wrong with me – I’ve stayed awake for seventy-two hours at a stretch before.”

“When you had to,” Mulcahy said. “You didn’t have to. When did you get to sleep this morning?”

“Did I tell you about last night, or was that just a dream I had?”

“You had to operate on a patient who’d developed complications?”

“Courmand operated,” Hawkeye corrected. “I just assisted.” His face went thoughtful. “Did I tell you he’s a terrific surgeon?”

“Twice, so far. When did you get to sleep this morning?”

“Sometime after six,” Hawkeye said. “I called the hospital sometime just after six, and they said the patient was doing fine. I meant to just catch a nap till it was time to put the turkey in the oven, but I must have gone right out. Why were you going away without even leaving a note?”

“I thought you were out,” Mulcahy said. “I’d rung the bell, and knocked, and I thought – ” He felt apologetic at the accusing look on Hawkeye’s face, even though he hardly felt it was his fault. “I didn’t realise you were fast asleep, or I’d have knocked louder.”

“I must have slept right through it,” Hawkeye said. “I didn’t even know what woke me up. I’ll get you your own keys tomorrow. But not even a *note*?”

“It didn’t occur to me,” Mulcahy said. “I – just thought you must have an emergency at the hospital, and I’d wait for you in the restaurant down the block.”

Hawkeye closed his eyes again, and made a face, shaking his head. “Yeah. Sorry. I got twitchy. You must be starving.”

“I’m used to fasting for longer than this,” Mulcahy said.

“Not when you’re waiting for Thanksgiving dinner,” Hawkeye said. “Look – I should get up and peel the potatoes – ”

“No need, I can do that. Why don’t you have a shower – ”

“Are you implying I smell bad?”

Mulcahy kept his eye on the target and plunged towards it. “Why don’t you have a shower, I’ll make some coffee, and see what else has to be done?”

“Coffee,” Hawkeye said, with sudden enthusiasm. “You’ll find a bag of good stuff – Italian grind – in the cupboard to the right of the sink. I’ll love you forever if you make me a big mug.” He sat up, and grinned, showing all of his teeth. “Of course, I’ll love you forever anyway. But if you make me coffee, I’ll love you forever *twice*.”

Hawkeye liked his coffee milkless and sweetened: Mulcahy found the biggest mug in the kitchen and handed it to Hawkeye when he appeared in the kitchen.

“Thanks,” Hawkeye said. He tasted it, smiled to himself, and drank. “You cleaned up the kitchen,” he said, looking round.

“Is it all right?”

“It’ll take me some time to get used to it,” Hawkeye said. “I didn’t ask you over...” The sentence trailed off in the middle. “I just meant to ask you to dinner.” He was fully dressed, and he’d shaved: his hair still looked damp, but neatly combed. “Why don’t you have yourself some coffee and I’ll do the rest?”

“I mixed up some biscuits – ”

“You did?” Hawkeye opened the oven. Mulcahy had put the pan with biscuits under the turkey. He stood up and turned round. “You did. Okay. I need to make the succotash.”

“Is there anything I can do?”

Hawkeye took a deep breath. He seemed to consciously relax. “You want to get the potatoes on? Or get the pickled vegetables out of the fridge?”

“No reason I can’t do both,” Mulcahy said. He smiled. Hawkeye smiled back.

After the potatoes were boiling, Mulcahy investigated and found a tray for the pickled vegetables in the cupboard Hawkeye had absently pointed out. At the back of the cupboard there were five bottles: three unopened, one three-quarters full, one half-full.

Mulcahy straightened up. He supposed it was none of his business. Hawkeye was chopping a whitish meat to mix with the onions. Spontaneously, Mulcahy said “Salt pork?”

Hawkeye turned his head. “What else would you put in succotash?”

“Don’t you make it with bacon?”

“Bacon?” Hawkeye looked visibly incredulous. “Bacon?”

“I never heard of anyone making succotash with anything else.”

“In tourist restaurants they make succotash with lobster,” Hawkeye said. “Flatlanders will eat anything. But *bacon*?” His mouth gave the emphasis to the last word. He turned his head back to the chopping board, and went on slicing, neat and fast. Done, he turned his head again, and eyed Mulcahy. “You want to make it with bacon next year?”

“Thanks,” Mulcahy a little dryly.

“Just a thought.” Hawkeye added the salt pork to the onions, and reached out two cans from the same cupboard where Mulcahy had found the tray. He seemed to stop a moment, but he said nothing.

Mulcahy checked the potatoes again. “Can I ask a personal question?”

Hawkeye turned towards him. He looked exasperated. “You want to move in with me. You can ask any personal question you like.”

“I wondered – I haven’t seen all that much of you, I know, but still, I wondered – if -- ” Mulcahy came to a halt.

Hawkeye waited.

Mulcahy said, finally, “I’ve had dinner with you four times, and you didn’t drink. Not even a glass of wine or beer. So I wondered if you’d given up drinking altogether. I wasn’t going to ask – but I saw what you have at the back of that cupboard.” A bottle of gin, three-quarters full: another of Scotch, half-full: two bottles of beer, and another of red wine.

“Ah.” Hawkeye looked down at the pan. He looked uneasy when he glanced sideways. “Well.”

“I’m sorry.” Mulcahy said. “I shouldn’t have asked.”

“No,” Hawkeye said. He went on stirring. “No, I guess – we should talk about it.” He didn’t look happy. “Can we wait till I’ve got this done?” He turned his attention back to the pan, and his face away from Mulcahy.

Mulcahy stood still. Finally, he said “I should mash the potatoes.”

If Hawkeye said anything, it was invisible. He didn't turn his head.

“Perhaps we can talk over dinner.” Mulcahy didn't dare say anything more: it was grossly unfair to be angry with Hawkeye simply for keeping his head turned in the wrong direction.

It didn't take long to get the meal on the table. Hawkeye had prepared alarming amounts of food: from the boat of gravy to the bowl of cranberry sauce, it all looked like too much for four people, let alone two, even if neither of them had eaten all day.

Hawkeye sat down and looked at Mulcahy. “You want to say grace?”

Mulcahy stared. “You're agnostic...?”

“You're not.” Hawkeye folded his hands together on the edge of the table. “Better say it fast – that turkey's been calling to me for a quarter of an hour.”

Mulcahy crossed himself. “Dear Lord,” he said, and realised that he had no idea what to say next. He felt self-conscious, which he usually didn't when he prayed. He was still feeling angry. He had no feeling of connection with God. To pray out loud at an agnostic's invitation at a dinner when they intended to discuss a relationship in mortal sin?

He couldn't reject Hawkeye's invitation. He took a breath, and crossed himself again. “Thank You, dear Lord, for this good food.” He lifted his eyes: Hawkeye was watching him, intent, focussed. Mulcahy heard himself say “Thank You for bringing us together to share this food, and bless us, dear God, and our friendship. Amen.” He didn't feel angry any more.

“Amen,” Hawkeye said, and picked up the carving knife and fork. He grinned. “Are you a breast man or a leg man?”

“Both, thank you,” Mulcahy said. “Hawkeye, you said we could talk – ”

Hawkeye was carving neat slices off the breast. The look he gave Mulcahy was odd and wary. “I guess.” He handed Mulcahy a plate of turkey and stuffing. “You want to help yourself to the trimmings?” He started to carve himself a plateful. He wasn't looking at Mulcahy, but his face was turned towards him enough to read what he was saying. “It's not so much I gave up drinking. I don't like to drink around you.”

Mulcahy was in the middle of helping himself to succotash. He stared at Hawkeye. “What? Why? Do you imagine I'll disapprove?” He added more than he'd meant to.

“No.” Hawkeye was scooping mashed potato out of the dish. He looked uneasy. “You remember that night I – I was trying to talk to you, and I was too drunk for you to understand what I was saying? I decided I was never going to put you – or me – in that position again.”

“Oh.” For the second time in ten minutes, Mulcahy had no idea what to say next. “Hawkeye – I don't think that's a very good reason – ”

“That's up to me, isn't it?”

“Well – ”

“You hate telling people when you don't understand them,” Hawkeye said. “You'd rather nod, smile, and shut up. Well, I don't want you to have to treat me like that.”

“But...” Mulcahy swallowed. “Hawkeye, the reason I didn't understand you that night wasn't – wasn't just because you weren't sober.”

“That was the main reason, wasn't it?”

“You woke me up,” Mulcahy said. “I was tired and I couldn’t find my specs at first, and even when I found them I wasn’t focussing very well. I had no idea what you might be saying to me. It didn’t help that you were... weren’t sober, and you were exhausted, but it wasn’t the only reason I couldn’t understand you. It certainly doesn’t mean you can’t have a drink.”

“But why didn’t you tell me you couldn’t understand what I was saying?” Hawkeye demanded. He put his knife and fork down on the table and glared at him. “Why didn’t you *tell* me?”

Embarrassed, Mulcahy looked down at his plate. He looked up again a moment later. Hawkeye was still not eating. “Well, I’m not sure I could have – ”

“Right, I was drunk.”

“You were tired,” Mulcahy said. “You were upset. And *I* was tired. There were all sorts of reasons why I just – I just thought it best to let you go to sleep. I had no idea -- ”

“You *never* tell people you can’t understand them,” Hawkeye said. “When we went to that restaurant with the dim lighting? Did you tell me you wouldn’t be able to hear me? You were just going to sit there and nod and smile at me all evening, weren’t you?”

“Well – ” Mulcahy stopped.

Hawkeye didn’t say anything. He was sitting with his arms folded on the table, staring across it at Mulcahy.

“Hawkeye?”

“Weren’t you?”

Mulcahy stared back.

“Oh, damn,” Hawkeye said finally, looking as if his lack of sleep had caught up with him all at once. He put his face in his hands and rubbed at his eyes. After a long moment, he took his hands away. “I’m sorry,” he said. “You asked, I told you. You don’t like to say when you stop understanding me, so I don’t want to drink around you. You hate being deaf, do you think I don’t get that?”

“But – ” Mulcahy was fumbling for words. “But I don’t want to give people the trouble of repeating themselves...” He trailed off.

Hawkeye looked as if he were trying to think of something to say in response. Then he shrugged, widely, and grimaced. He looked down at the food on his plate. “Okay.” He picked up his fork and fidgeted with it. “You’re not eating.”

“Neither are you.”

They both started to eat at the same time: Mulcahy was hungry enough that the food still tasted good.

Refusal to admit when he couldn’t lip-read had nothing to do with not giving people trouble, Mulcahy recognised. Or not enough. Pride was the root of it.

“How’s the succotash?” Hawkeye asked.

Mulcahy ate another mouthful. “Delicious.” It was good – surprisingly good: Mam had always made it from scratch, not from cans.

“These are great biscuits,” Hawkeye said.

It was a moment before Mulcahy remembered he’d made them. “Thank you.” He hesitated. “I’m sorry.”

“For what?”

Mulcahy said, with difficulty, “When I have to admit I couldn’t tell what someone was saying, I’m embarrassed. It shouldn’t stop me from doing what I should – but – sometimes – it does.”

Hawkeye lifted his hand briefly to cover his eyes. “Francis – ” He stopped. “You know, this is ruining one of the best meals I’ve had in a long time? I’m sorry.”

“I asked.”

Hawkeye grinned. It looked more like a grimace. “Can’t we just forget I asked...?”

“I asked.”

“I forgot.” Hawkeye grinned again, this time with more feeling. “Come on. How’s the succotash? What would it taste like with bacon?”

Mulcahy managed a smile in return. “Different. Do they really make it with lobster, in Maine?”

“In tourist restaurants,” Hawkeye said. “They make *everything* with lobster.”

“I like the stuffing. It’s unusual.”

“Cornbread,” Hawkeye said. “Try the cranberry sauce.” He looked cheerful, but not relaxed: his free hand was tapping on the table.

“In the Korean restaurant – I’m sorry I didn’t tell you I couldn’t see what you were saying,” Mulcahy said.

Hawkeye froze. “We weren’t going to talk about that any more,” he said stiffly.

“I try very hard not to let my being deaf be an inconvenience to anyone else,” Mulcahy said. “But – ” *dear God, help me say it* “ – if I need to – ”

Hawkeye stood up. Mulcahy broke off what he was saying, and stared after him. When Hawkeye came back with the bottle of wine in one hand, and two glasses in the other, he said nothing.

Hawkeye sat down, put one glass in front of Mulcahy, and the other in front of him. Solemnly as if he were performing a rite, he filled them each with red wine. He lifted his glass. “What shall we drink to?”

The words Mulcahy had meant to say were caught in the middle of his mouth. He looked at Hawkeye, speechless for a moment. “Finest kind.”

Hawkeye nodded. “You and me.” He drank, before Mulcahy could say that wasn’t what he’d meant: he wasn’t sure what he *had* meant.

The flavour wasn’t like sacramental wine. Less sweet, more complex. Sacramental wine was red, transubstantiated blood. It had occurred to him more than once, standing in O.R., that the red wine that became the blood of Christ was nothing like the startling bright red of the blood that splashed the floor and painted the surgical whites and the surgeon’s hands.

“Should be white, not red,” Hawkeye said.

Mulcahy stared.

“The wine,” Hawkeye said. “If I’d thought about having wine with dinner tonight, I’d have bought a bottle of white.”

“Oh.” Mulcahy tasted the wine again. “It seems fine to me.”

Hawkeye grinned. “Don’t tell me, you never drink... wine.”

Mulcahy almost managed to suppress a laugh. He glanced at the window. “Ah, the children of the night, what sweet music they make.”

Hawkeye's mouth fell open. He tilted his head back, and Mulcahy saw the full-throated shout of laughter. He stopped, wiping his eyes, and looked at Mulcahy with an expression of affection, and admiration, and amusement. "You saw that movie!"

"Was there a movie? I read the novel," Mulcahy said. He kept his face straight. It wasn't easy: he couldn't remember anyone ever looking at him quite like that before.

"Is it true what they say about vampires and crosses?"

"Like snakes and ladders?"

Hawkeye laughed again. He reached out across the table, and caught at Mulcahy's hand. "I love you," he said, and took his hand back. He went on eating.

After a moment, Mulcahy started to eat again. They didn't talk for a little while: Hawkeye was looking at Mulcahy as if something too good to be true had happened. The expression on his face made Mulcahy feel strangely both happy and uncertain. If he had done something, he had no idea what it was.

"You know I love you too," he said.

Hawkeye's face broke into a grin. "You know I don't think I'd ever get tired of hearing you say that?" he said.

"I think you would," Mulcahy protested.

"No. Tell you what, I bet you. We can sit down on the couch after dinner and you can tell me you love me, and if I get tired of hearing you say it, I lose."

"What are you going to bet?"

"A lifetime lease on this apartment," Hawkeye said, and grinned wider.

Mulcahy laughed. "Now, be serious," he protested again. "We were going to talk about... about rent, and shared costs, and so on. You're going to find me rather inexperienced –"

Hawkeye's eyebrows went up. "Really?"

Mulcahy had learned to how to deal with the insinuation Hawkeye could put into one word, but nothing seemed to fit: nothing fitted because he had none of his defences left. He wasn't entitled to them any more.

He was left with nothing but the resource he'd used when he first encountered Hawkeye: pretending he hadn't heard it. "I've lived in several parish houses, in a seminary, in a college dorm... but I've never shared an apartment like this. What rent should I pay? How do you pay for the utilities?"

Hawkeye started to explain, and Mulcahy paid attention. It wasn't quite as new to him as he'd made it sound, but it was true he'd never been a tenant in his own right.

"So half that would be my rent?" It would take a large chunk out of his new salary, but he thought he could manage on what was left.

"Wait a minute," Hawkeye said. "How much do you get paid?"

"At the moment, I'm paid as one of the deaf instructors," Mulcahy said. "But at the beginning of January, I'll be paid as a teacher, and that will be two thousand seven hundred a year."

Hawkeye stared, opened his mouth, and then – visibly – changed his mind. He looked as if he were thinking of something else to say. "I got paid more than that in the army. *You* got paid more than that in the army. Look..."

"I want to pay my share," Mulcahy said hastily, cutting off what he was afraid Hawkeye was about to say.

"Well, fine, but –" Hawkeye stopped. "Look, how –" He stopped again.

“How much do you get paid?” Mulcahy asked.

Hawkeye shrugged and grinned. It looked false. “I was hoping you wouldn’t ask.”

“I’m sorry,” Mulcahy said, immediately. He suppressed the impulse to snap “But I told you mine.” He was the tenant.

Hawkeye shrugged again. He looked embarrassed, which was not an expression Mulcahy was used to seeing on his face. “Twenty-three thousand.”

Mulcahy nodded. It was a moment before it sank in. “You did say twenty-three thousand?”

“Are you asking me if you heard right?” Hawkeye raised his eyebrows.

“But how on earth do you spend it all?” Mulcahy asked. He was still blank with astonishment.

He realised it was a stupid question even as the words came out of his mouth, and was relieved when Hawkeye only shrugged, picked up his glass and fidgeted with it. “This and that. Look, do you – look, you don’t want to pay half the rent on this place.”

“I’m paying my share and that’s that,” Mulcahy said, emphatically.

“Sure. But if you pay half, that’s going to be over half what you take home. And it’s –” He stopped. “I don’t – I don’t *want* –” his mouth twisted, so that Mulcahy only got the word from context “– to take all that from you.”

You’ve already taken my soul. What more can you take? Mulcahy heard himself thinking it, and knew in the same moment of thought, it wasn’t fair. He couldn’t resent Hawkeye for a decision he himself had made.

There was no reason to argue with Hawkeye over something like this. He managed a smile, and lifted his own wine glass. “Well, you’re the landlord. You set the rent. I’ll pay it.”

Hawkeye’s eyes widened. He looked very much as he had looked when Mulcahy had asked *Can I move into your apartment?* He didn’t spill his wine, though. After a moment, he smiled, a cheerful, almost theatrical gesture. “Fine.”

“Fine,” Mulcahy echoed.

“What do you mean, you’re being paid as a deaf instructor? Aren’t you a teacher? What difference does it make that you’re deaf?”

“I’m certified to teach in Pennsylvania, not New York,” Mulcahy said, a little breathless from the subject-change.

“What difference does that make?”

“Well, none, so long as I’m working at Fanwood. They can hire any deaf instructors they see fit, and I’m certainly qualified in that area,” Mulcahy said dryly.

Hawkeye nodded, a faint edge to his smile.

“The certification course takes two years,” Mulcahy said. “Mr Moskowitz told me this Monday that they’re willing to have me work there from January, officially under Mr Moskowitz’s supervision – providing I’m working towards getting my New York State teaching certificate.”

“Okay.” Hawkeye nodded. “No problem with that lady – Miss Dunswick?”

“Mrs Dunsford.”

“Whatever.” Hawkeye shrugged. “No grief from her?”

Mulcahy hesitated. “Not exactly.” Mrs Dunsford had formally apologised, in front of Albert Moskowitz, for “anything she might have said that was hurtful” – and for all the formality, he’d got the feeling she meant it. “I don’t think she approves, but she’s –

willing to wait and see.” He got the further impression that she and Moskowitz had argued it out before Mulcahy arrived at the meeting: Moskowitz had taught at Fanwood for many years, if not for quite as long as Mrs Dunsford. “I’m ... I think I’m something of an experiment.” He smiled. It *was* amusing, in its way.

Hawkeye didn’t look amused. “How do you feel about that?”

“Well, Mr Moskowitz said – he said I was a good teacher, and I really don’t think I’m doing the children any harm, and I do need the job – ” That didn’t taste good: he was conscious, all over again, of the difference between a priest and a lay teacher. He looked down at his plate. Somehow he’d got through most of the food on it. “I do think I can teach them math, even if I am deaf.”

“Sure you can,” Hawkeye said. “I don’t get it. What’s the problem? Why shouldn’t you?”

“Well... if it were going to cause the children problems because we couldn’t communicate, I would have to resign.” *And do what?*

“But – ” Hawkeye looked tired and exasperated – a familiar expression, comforting in its very familiarity. “What makes you think you’re causing them problems? You’re – you’re about the kindest, smartest guy I ever met. I bet you’re a great teacher. And it doesn’t sound like your ever-awake instinct for seeing your own failings saw a problem till this schoolmarm started telling you she thought you ought to be having trouble. Want some more – ?”

Hawkeye was reaching for the carving-knife.

Mulcahy shook his head. “No – no thank you. Do you really think that?” He wasn’t sure whether to be puzzled, pleased, or worried, but mostly confusion was winning out.

“That you’re a great teacher? Sure. If I’d had you for math classes in high school, I might be able to add up a bar tab today. If you hadn’t distracted me.”

“Distracted you?”

Hawkeye grinned. “I was very easily distracted when I was in high school. Half the football team and all of the swimming team. One cute math teacher...”

“Hawkeye,” Mulcahy protested.

“I had to go into pre-med when I graduated. It was the only place I was more interested in the coursework than the distractions. Look, help me out here. We have more turkey than I can eat.”

“Really, I’m quite full.”

“I bought a pumpkin pie for dessert. And a pint of ice cream.” Hawkeye looked hopeful.

Mulcahy laughed. “I have an idea – ”

“Yeah, what?” Hawkeye put his hands on the table and looked at him.

“Mam used to have a pie course a couple of hours after dinner, on Thanksgiving and at Christmas. Why don’t we clear up the table and have your pumpkin pie in an hour or two? I don’t believe I have room for it now.”

“Sure,” Hawkeye said. He picked up a piece of biscuit, swirled it through the gravy on his plate, and popped it into his mouth. “Coffee? Don’t worry about the leftovers, we’re never going to finish them all.”

Hawkeye had finished making the coffee well before Mulcahy had finished putting the leftovers away. When Mulcahy glanced round, he was propped up against the doorway, watching him.

“You’re pretty thorough.”

“Waste not, want not,” Mulcahy said, brightly. It was true that even in a strange kitchen, in a situation Mam would not have been able to comprehend, he could feel her looking over his shoulder with instructions on putting leftovers away to be eaten later. It was also true that, once this task was complete, he and Hawkeye were going to sit down on the couch together, and he was finding it easier to focus on the task at hand.

“Come here,” Hawkeye said, the next time he looked round.

Mulcahy wiped his hands on the dishcloth and hung it up. He came over.

Hawkeye put his hands on Mulcahy’s shoulders, and kissed him, gently, so briefly that Mulcahy had hardly time to think about it before Hawkeye had pulled back and handed him a mug of coffee. “I’m glad you came,” Hawkeye said, picking up his own mug. “I didn’t mean you to do so much of the work. I wanted it to be perfect.”

“It was delicious,” Mulcahy said. The coffee was good. He sat down on the couch at one end, and Hawkeye sat down at the other. He kicked his shoes off and folded himself up, watching Mulcahy with that odd predatory look, fond and intent. Mulcahy buried his face in his mug and drank.

When he looked up again, Hawkeye hadn’t moved. He was still nursing his coffee, still watching Mulcahy.

“Do you have to work tomorrow?” he asked, making conversation.

“What?” Hawkeye stared a moment. “No. Cournand told me I had the whole weekend off. You?”

“Yes,” Mulcahy said. “Some of the children have gone home till Sunday evening, but not all of them. I’m expected back tomorrow.”

Hawkeye nodded. He looked relieved. “I made up the bed in your – in the other bedroom,” he said.

Mulcahy nodded. He drank more coffee. He had wondered what Hawkeye would do – how Hawkeye would begin – and he still had no idea. He smiled at Hawkeye again, trying to think of something else to say.

Hawkeye put his mug down. Mulcahy was conscious of more relief than anything else: without waiting to be asked, he put his own mug safely out of the way. Hawkeye leaned forward. “Can I ask you to do something?”

“Anything,” Mulcahy said. It was truer than he wanted it to be.

“Hold me,” Hawkeye said.

“What?” Mulcahy was half doubtful, half bewildered.

“Hold me,” Hawkeye repeated. “Hold me, put your arms round me, hug the stuffing out of me – ”

“The cornbread stuffing?”

Hawkeye jerked his head back and laughed as if Mulcahy had tickled him. He had shifted along the sofa while he was speaking, and he was within arm’s reach. Still not sure it could really be himself doing it, amused despite himself, Mulcahy put an arm round Hawkeye’s shoulder, and Hawkeye leaned in against him. He didn’t do anything else: he stayed there, warm and solid, a lovely astonishing weight. Mulcahy could feel him breathing: if he looked sideways he could see him smile. Neither of them said anything.

Hawkeye had slid down against the back of the sofa so that Mulcahy's arm fitted comfortably across his shoulders. His hands were folded together in his lap. His head was resting solidly against Mulcahy's shoulder.

It was almost a fraternal embrace. Except for the intention behind it. Hawkeye's. His. It would have been permissible to hold him like this to comfort him – to comfort anyone. Almost permissible. He would have been trying uncomfortably not to think about what he was thinking about. He would have retreated, and tried not to be in this situation again.

Not thought about how it would feel to have this solid weight against him if they were both naked, in the same bed.

Of course, he *was* in this situation. In the middle of it. For a while, for as long as Hawkeye wanted him to be here: he could hold Hawkeye like this.

"Hawkeye," he said, and Hawkeye lifted his head to look at him.

"Mmm?"

"Can you move a little?"

"Sure," Hawkeye said, though he looked regretful.

"No," Mulcahy said, "not like that – " He heeled off his shoes, and shifted himself round, tugging Hawkeye into position. He was propped up against the arm of the sofa, and Hawkeye was all but lying on top of him, an angular warm weight. Mulcahy could put his arms round his chest, and did, hugging him a little closer for the pleasure of feeling Hawkeye sigh a breath out and relax. They couldn't talk like this – he couldn't even see if Hawkeye were smiling – but he didn't care. For the time being, it felt as if he didn't have to care about anything.

After a while, he realised Hawkeye was probably asleep. He lay still, looking at Hawkeye's black hair, salted with white, feeling Hawkeye against him, all the way down. Hawkeye could rouse him to sudden fierce lust with a touch or kiss. He wasn't feeling that now: what he was feeling was... desire. Nothing that would wake Hawkeye. Nothing that overwhelmed him the way Hawkeye had overwhelmed him last weekend. In another life, he'd have tried to retreat, to go somewhere by himself until the feeling went away.

He didn't have to do anything about it, not right now. Hawkeye was lying in his arms. Four years ago, when he'd first met Hawkeye, his hair had been pure black. Three years in Korea had changed them both. He was deaf, Hawkeye had nightmares.

Mulcahy yawned. Hawkeye was warm and sleeping peacefully. The first winter in Korea, Mulcahy had longed to be warm, warm and clean, more even than he'd wanted good food or enough sleep or a friend to talk to...

Dear Lord, thank you for bringing me to this place....

He woke up abruptly because Hawkeye had sat up and where he had been was cold.

"Damn," Hawkeye said, and rubbed his hand over his eyes, as if he was trying to wake himself up. "Who's that?"

"What?"

Hawkeye stood up, glancing at his watch. "Someone at the door. If it's anyone from the hospital I might need to go on over, but if it's anyone else, I'm giving them the bum's rush. Either way..." He yawned again. "Don't move. I'll be back in a minute."

Thanksgiving, 1954

Afterwards, it occurred to Sarah that she should have been worried Ben would be out for the evening. At the time, she was so tired she just stood, waiting, for the door to open, and when it didn't, she rang the bell again.

A minute or so later, the door opened. Ben stood and stared at her.

"Hello," Sarah said.

"Hi," Ben said. He looked more bewildered than unwelcoming.

"I'm sorry – can I come in?"

He blinked and stepped backwards. "Sure. Come in. Is – should I be expecting Bill now or in half an hour?"

"I'm sorry, I should have called you –" Ben's apartment was small, and smelt wonderfully of food. Sarah's appetite fluctuated, but right now she was hungry. "You're having people over to dinner?"

"No. Had a friend to dinner, and we both dozed off afterwards. I – I really just woke up. Didn't get enough sleep last night. Is Bill half an hour behind you or just coming up the stairs?"

The sitting-room was brightly-lit. There was someone else there. Ben's friend. He looked familiar, but she couldn't think where from.

"Mrs Pierce? Are you all right?"

"I'm fine," Sarah said automatically.

"Good," Ben said. He didn't make introductions. "Sarah, where's Bill?"

"He's in Crabapple Cove. Or maybe Florida." More charitably, Sarah added, "Or in Vermont."

"Oh." Ben stood looking at her. He rubbed his hand across his forehead, a gesture so like Bill's that it gave her a cold shiver. "Sarah –" His face twisted into a bewildered, crooked smile. "What are you doing here?"

"Hawkeye," the other man said. He said it quietly, but there was an odd edge to his voice.

Ben looked at him, then at Sarah. His face changed. "Sarah, do you want to sit down? Can I get you anything?"

"I'm fine," Sarah repeated. About to die of embarrassment, but fine. "I need to get to my hotel –" a cab driver ought to be able to find her one " – but I wanted to tell you –"

"Sarah," Ben said. He took her gently by the arm and steered her to the sofa. "Sit down. When did you eat last?"

"I had a sandwich when the bus stopped. I'm fine, Ben." What she wanted to ask was "Who's your friend? And when is he going to leave?" but in fairness she couldn't. She was the uninvited guest, not him.

"I have a fridge full of Thanksgiving dinner. Turkey? Stuffing? Potato? Succotash? Biscuits or dinner rolls?" Ben grinned. "Say you want some. I was wondering how I'd get through it all."

"I'll fix you a plate, Mrs Pierce," Ben's friend said. When he smiled, she recognised him.

The door in the other wall must lead to a kitchen of sorts: Sarah could hear the sound of a fridge door opening and the clatter of dishes. She lowered her voice and said to Ben, "I remember him now – he's deaf, isn't he?"

Ben sat down in the armchair. "Yes," he said shortly.

"I've left Bill," Sarah said. "And I wanted to tell you I believe you about him pushing you into a pond when you were six."

"Seven," Ben said, as if automatically. "What?" His face twisted again. "You've left Bill? You mean like – like *permanently* left him? Where is he? What happened? Where are the *kids*?"

"They're with my mom and dad," Sarah said. "They invited us for Thanksgiving. But Mrs Pierce – I mean, my mother-in-law – I mean –"

"Aunt Ellen came up from Florida," Ben said. He sounded entertained.

"You don't like her either?"

Ben leaned forward. He looked very serious. "Can't stand her," he said, as if confidently. He grinned like a whip. "So you really left Aunt Ellen? You know she'll head back to Florida as soon as she remembers how cold it is in Maine in the winter."

"No," Sarah said. "I left *Bill*. We had a – he *knew* we'd been invited to Vermont for Thanksgiving, we'd planned to go, Danny and Mary were so excited about it – I *know* he knew about it –"

"Steady," Ben said. "Wait – what?"

"My mom and dad have a big party at Thanksgiving," Sarah said.

"Yes, I know," Ben said. "My dad told me they invited him, when I was in Korea. Thanksgiving for the big party, just family at Christmas." He smiled: he looked younger when he smiled. "I'm really sorry I never thanked them, when they came to the funeral. It was nice of them to have him for Christmas, those years."

"He never came," Sarah said, bewildered. "They asked him, but he always said he couldn't come."

"What?" Ben frowned. "He wrote me about how your parents had invited him to Christmas in Vermont –" His head jerked back and he laughed, an abrupt, almost painful sound. "Oh, I get it."

"What?"

Ben was shaking his head. He was still laughing. "Dad said he'd been *invited*, and he said Christmas in Vermont was something to look forward to, and he said your parents were really friendly and he liked them, but he never said he'd *gone*." He had stopped laughing. "He didn't want me to worry about him. He never wanted me to worry about him. You know when he had that operation on his kidney three years ago he wrote to me so late I only knew he was going into hospital the day he went in? He – when he –" He leaned back in the chair and rubbed his face again. He didn't look at all like Bill, just at that moment.

Ben was a year or so younger than Sarah, but except when he was smiling, he looked older: sometimes he looked older than Bill, who was six years older than him. He'd been away at medical school, or practicing in Portland, and for three years he'd been in Korea: she'd known him mostly through Uncle Daniel's stories, or Bill's. In Bill's stories he was a good kid, the little brother Bill never had: and you could always tell where Ben was at gatherings by looking for a circle of people who were chuckling and having a good time. Ben would be in the middle of the circle. She'd never had a conversation with him, nor ever noticed that she hadn't, until Uncle Daniel began sharing letters from his son, from Korea.

Bill and Danny and Uncle Daniel all had the Pierce face, long-nosed, long-chinned, large-smiled, but Ben had it to an almost clownish exaggeration. At least Mary looked like a Pargeter.

“Sorry,” Ben said, leaning forward again, elbows planted on knees. “What’s wrong, Sarah?”

“We don’t go to Vermont every year,” Sarah said. “We didn’t last year – you were home from Korea – ”

“Yes, I remember that,” Ben said.

“Mom wrote to me earlier this year to make sure we were definitely coming *this* year, and I mentioned it to Bill – I know I did – and Danny was so excited because he was old enough this year to sleep in the hay barn with the other boys – There aren’t enough beds in the house for all the children,” she found herself explaining, “so all the boys who are old enough sleep in the hay barn, and all the girls sleep on mattresses on the floor in the attic – ”

“Sweet setup,” Ben said, and grinned. “Yeah, go on. So you were all set to go to Vermont – ?”

“Then Bill’s mom wrote him and said she’d be visiting us over Thanksgiving. And Bill wrote back and told her fine, and then he told me, and I said no problem, we’d write my mom and they’d fit her in somehow – and he said – ”

The betrayal was still raw in her mouth. Ben was watching her very soberly.

“He said, ‘Don’t be ridiculous, we can’t go running off to Vermont when my mom’s visiting.’ And then – he kept saying that we’d never planned – I’d never told him we were going to my mom and dad’s this year, and I couldn’t just make plans like this when his mom was visiting, and what difference did it make...” Her nose was full of phlegm, and her eyes were heavy with tears. “He *did* know. I *did* tell him. He *lied*.”

Ben leaned forward. “And just like that, it turns into a fight you’re having about what you told him, not a fight about whether or not you’re going to Vermont, because you *lost* that one.” He spoke with a kind of vicious recognition. “Neat. Very neat.”

“Mrs Pierce?” Ben’s friend was standing beside the sofa, holding out a very large, very clean handkerchief. It was a relief to bury her face in it and blow: but she was intensely aware that she needed to pee. Another woman would have already asked her if she wanted to see the geography of the house: she wished Ben were married.

“Thank you,” she said to the man. He smiled at her: he had a nice smile. “Ben, I’m sorry, but I have to wash my hands – ”

“Sure,” Ben said. He stood up, holding out his hand to her, letting her use it for leverage rather than pulling her to her feet. Then he let go and pointed. “Out that door, second on the right.”

Ben’s bathroom was small and shiny-clean, sparkingly modern. The Pierce house in Crabapple Cove already felt like home, but she had a distinct pang of envy over this bathroom. There was a mirror over the sink. Pregnancy always made her look ugly, but she looked worse than usual. She had walked into Ben’s home looking like a hag. A few minutes’ work with face powder at least took off the shine and grease of tears.

When she came back the table had been set: Ben held out a chair for her. Slices of grilled turkey, a mound of mashed potato reheated with butter, pickled vegetables, succotash, a biscuit split open and toasted, a dinner roll, cornbread stuffing – it looked like the stuffing Uncle Daniel had always made –

Ben poured her, without asking, a glass of wine. The two men were sitting with coffee in front of them.

"I'm sorry," Sarah said. "I remember you, but not your name."

"Francis Mulcahy," Ben's friend said. He smiled at her. "Please, call me Francis."

"My name's Sarah."

"Yes." He held out his hand. A little awkwardly, they shook.

"Now we've got that sorted," Ben said, "How's the turkey?"

"Aren't you going to have anything?"

Ben laughed. "We ate ourselves *silly* about three o'clock. We were going to have pie and ice cream about now. It can wait till you're done, if you eat fast."

"Please eat slow," Francis said. He was smiling a little. "I'm not sure I have room yet for pie."

"This pie?" Ben protested. "You'll love it. Remember the army version of pumpkin pie? Sweetened cardboard inside floppy cardboard with cardboard soup that I think they called ice cream?"

"Oh, the ice cream wasn't soup." Francis's smile got a little wider. Sarah wondered how deaf he was: he seemed to be understanding what she and Ben were saying. Surely he couldn't have heard what she'd told Ben when he was in the kitchen? "It was too solid for soup."

"That made it exactly like army soup."

"Point."

They were talking back and forth about Thanksgivings in Korea: it was a few minutes before Sarah noticed that Francis's eyes were focussed intently on Ben's face. He wasn't *listening* to what Ben was saying: he was, visibly, hearing with his eyes. She clacked her knife against the edge of her plate, and Ben's gaze twitched towards her: it was a moment later before Francis reacted, following the direction of Ben's gaze, not the sound she'd made.

They were both looking at her. She hadn't meant to say anything, but Francis, at least, obviously thought she had. "Do you work in the same hospital as Ben?"

"No," Francis said. He was looking at her now with that same intent focus. "I teach at Fanwood – at the New York School for the Deaf, out at White Plains."

"You're a teacher?" Sarah said, surprised. "I thought you were an orderly."

"I was a corpsman in Korea," Francis said, a little shortly. "I was a teacher in Philadelphia, before the war." The way he said it seemed to cut off further questions.

"I used to teach school, before I was married. I taught third and fourth graders, mostly."

"I teach math," Francis said. He smiled. "Mostly to older children, though the classes at Fanwood can be very mixed."

"Do you find it difficult, keeping control in the classroom, being deaf?" It was no sooner out of her mouth that it occurred to Sarah that Francis might take offence at it. "I mean –"

"I know what you mean. It's certainly different, not being able to hear what my students are doing. I sometimes wish I really *did* have eyes in the back of my head." Francis was smiling. "But they're very well-behaved children, on the whole. And of course they're deaf too: they understand how to get my attention if they need to ask me a question."

Ben moved his hand sharply, and Francis's gaze flicked back to his face. Ben said, audibly amused, "You mean teachers *don't* have eyes in the back of their heads?"

Francis looked almost as if he wanted to laugh, though his voice stayed sober. "They're specially implanted. I had mine taken out when I went to Korea."

"Why?" Ben spread his hands. "Didn't you want to keep an eye on us?" He was smiling.

"The army wouldn't provide me with two pairs of specs."

"My God. There was no limit to their limits. Sarah, you want seconds?"

"No, thanks."

"Sure? You're eating for two, and I think Francis only cooked up enough for one and a half."

Francis leaned forward a little. "When is it due, Mrs Pierce?"

"Christmas Day, would you believe? I couldn't believe it when the doctor told me."

Francis did laugh, a little. "Well, it would mean no one would ever forget when his birthday was."

"Or have to go to school on her birthday. And she'd never get a birthday present," Ben said. He was cheerfully flippant. "Or a birthday party. Or a birthday cake." He wrinkled his nose. "Let's hope the doctor was wrong. Doctors usually are, you know."

"He was right about Danny, almost. Wrong about Mary by a couple of weeks."

"Yeah? She was exactly one month old when I got the letter from my draft board. I don't have any problems remembering her birthday." Ben got up, collecting Sarah's plate. "Seconds? Or will you join us for pie and ice cream?"

"Pie and ice cream," Sarah said. "Thank you."

"Coffee?" Ben had turned so that he was squarely facing Francis.

"Thank you," Francis said. He handed Ben his cup.

Sarah was curious enough about Fanwood, but before she had a question formulated, Francis asked "What brings you to New York, Mrs Pierce?"

"Oh... I just came to visit Ben," she said, knowing it sounded lame. She should have anticipated this question. "For the holiday."

Francis nodded. He had a curious expression on his face – somehow both serious and inquisitive. "I see." He propped his elbow on the table and smiled at her.

Sarah opened her mouth to tell him about Bill, and caught herself. He was a very good-looking man, but she shouldn't be *that* susceptible to a charming smile.

It came over her with a rush of embarrassment: the position she'd put herself in. She was alone with two men, one of whom she hardly knew. Of course Ben was her brother-in-law – sort of – but if she were going to divorce Bill –

The word sat down on her with crushing force. She wanted never to see Bill again – never to have to deal, again, with the way he turned things around, so everything was always *her* fault if their life wasn't arranged how he wanted it –

But when she thought of telling her parents – telling the children –

Of course she couldn't do it.

"Mrs Pierce, are you all right?"

She couldn't possibly burst into tears now. She swallowed very hard and pressed her fingers against her upper lip. After a moment, she let go again.

"Please, call me Sarah." Her voice sounded perfectly level and normal.

Francis wasn't smiling. "All right. Sarah. Did you come from Maine today?"

“No – Vermont,” Sarah said.

“That *is* a long way. Did you come by bus?” When she nodded, he went on in the same thoughtful, pleasant, not quite casual voice, “That’s quite a trip, in one day. Though you pass through some beautiful countryside, don’t you think? I’d never visited Maine before last summer, and I found it very lovely.”

“It is nice – in the summer. We get a lot of tourists.”

“I imagine you do.” Francis leaned forward a little. “Sarah, is there anything I could do to help?” He seemed to catch himself then, realise what a strange thing it was to say, and added “I mean, I would *like* to help, and I’m sure Hawkeye – ”

Bill called Ben ‘Hawkeye’ in the best of his stories: when Uncle Daniel talked about his son, he had used ‘Hawkeye’ as often as Ben’s given name: and there were still a couple of men in Crabapple Cove who’d been pals with Ben when they were boys in the town school. It *was* strange to hear Ben’s family nickname like this: it somehow pointed up for her again that the man was a stranger – charming, good-looking, and *odd*.

“Everything’s fine, really,” Sarah said, cutting him off. She heard the kitchen door being shoved open, and Ben put a plate with a generous slice of pumpkin pie on it in front of her, and another in front of Francis. A large scoop of ice cream was melting into the browned top.

When they were all sitting with pie and ice cream, and fresh coffee, Ben said “Did you say you’d booked a hotel room?”

“I was going to stay at one of the women’s hotels,” Sarah said, gathering her wits together. She knew there were several in New York, and the cab drivers would know where they were.

Ben shook his head. “I’ve got a spare room.” He glanced across the table at Francis – a strange look, as if he were unsure of the other man’s reaction. “Stay here.”

Francis didn’t look shocked, if that was what Ben had expected. He said, matter-of-factly, “I’m sure that’s the best thing to do, Sarah.”

“I really mustn’t,” Sarah said, disconcerted.

“You really must,” Ben said. “I have all these Thanksgiving leftovers in the fridge, and only me to eat them up.”

They had the strangest conversation over pie: Ben was pressing her to stay, persistently but with a lack of enthusiasm that Sarah didn’t find at all odd. To be landed with a pregnant, tearful houseguest wasn’t something that any man would want. But though she demurred politely, Ben kept on: it didn’t seem to occur to him that anyone could see anything improper in the arrangement, and from the comments Francis kept dropping into the conversation, neither did he.

There was no denying that she would prefer not to have to go out again, and flag down a cab, and tell the driver to find her a respectable hotel, and then explain herself all over again to the desk clerk. If Bill decided to make a stink over this, she supposed he could. But that seemed too embarrassing to mention.

“That’s settled, then,” Ben said. “You’re staying.”

Francis glanced at his watch. “There’s a train back in forty minutes, and then there won’t be one for two hours. I should go in twenty minutes, I suppose.”

Ben tilted his head to one side. “You looked up the train times?” His voice sounded odd.

Francis lifted his coffee cup and drank from it. "I thought I'd better," he said mildly. "The trains run on a different schedule on holidays."

"Right." Ben finished the last of his pie. "I'll walk over to the station with you."

"That's really not necessary."

Ben's face took on a stubborn look.

Francis looked at Sarah, "There's some nerve damage to my ears. I have had a problem with my balance, if I'm careless. But I haven't fallen because of that in months, I don't have a problem if I can see my surroundings and don't move too fast, and the streets here are *very* well lit." He sounded amused and matter of fact. He glanced back at Ben.

Ben opened his mouth, and closed it again. Finally, he said, "There could be a power cut."

Francis chuckled. "If there is, I'll stand still and wait for you to find me."

There was a bustle of departure: Sarah stayed where she was. Getting up was the awkward part: once she had made herself comfortable, it was always a strain to move. She heard the front door close, and it was a few minutes before Ben came back into the room.

He came across to the table and sat down where Francis had sat. He picked up Francis's coffee cup by mistake for his own, and turned it in his hands, looking at her. "Sarah, not that I'm not pleased to see you – but why did you come here?"

"I thought Bill might follow me to Vermont," Sarah said. It sounded foolish when she put it into words. "And I didn't want to have a fight with him in front of my parents."

Ben nodded, eyebrows going up. "Why?"

"They love him," Sarah said. She was close to tears again. "They'd believe him. You're the only person I know who knows Bill and who – isn't – who *doesn't* like him. And I – I wanted to tell you I believed you about the pond, because that's what Bill does, he turns things around, he's always doing things like that."

Ben fidgeted with the cup he was holding. When he met her eyes again, he laughed, awkwardly, as if he were faking it. "We should start a club. The Bill Haters."

"You and I would be the only members," Sarah said. It was sort of a joke.

"If there's two of us, there might be more. We could run an ad in the *Courier*."

"And to thank you for the house."

"The house?"

"You put my name on the rental agreement."

"Oh..." Ben's mouth twitched. "Nothing personal. Everything Bill said about renting the house made sense. And the more he said it, the more I didn't want him to have it. Solved the whole problem by letting *you* have it."

Dampened, Sarah swallowed any further spoken gratitude. Even after Bill had gotten grumpy about it, she still liked knowing it was *her* name on the agreement.

Ben put the cup down with a click. "Do your kids know where you are?"

"They think I'm in Crabapple Cove," Sarah said. "So do my parents." She'd meant to go back there: she had got out by telling herself that she was only taking Danny and Mary to their grandparents, letting them have a family holiday, that she would go back and be hostess, be a good wife, just as soon as she'd seen them settled in –

And then there was the bus to New York. It had been almost a spur-of-the-moment decision. Not quite, of course: she could have, she'd meant to, sit and wait for the bus

back to Portland. She'd even been toying with the idea of calling Bill and asking him to meet her there so she wouldn't have to take the bus back to Crabapple Cove. He'd have done it, no matter how mad at her he was, but the moment she thought of going to New York instead, all the screwed-up tension uncurled. It was a blissful feeling. Not having to have that fight with Bill. Not having to be the polite hostess to Bill's mother, who would complain all weekend that her grandchildren weren't there. Not having to hear her parents explain all weekend why Sarah's husband wasn't there, and how much they missed him. But there was the bus to New York, and instead of having a fight with Bill, she was... being a nuisance to Ben.

"I meant to go home," she said. "But there was a bus to New York, and I..."

"You went AWOL," Ben said. He had the oddest look on his face, as if he were trying to stifle a laugh.

"I'm sorry," Sarah said.

Ben did laugh then – a nearly hysterical laugh. It wasn't the kind of mirth that's for sharing. He bent over and laughed, loudly, wildly, and almost frighteningly. When he sat up again and wiped his eyes, he was smiling, but it looked... unreal. He looked at her for a long moment as if he didn't recognise her at all. His hand moved to Francis's coffee cup and he picked it up without looking at it and drank the cold dregs. It seemed to sober him.

"Sorry," he said, finally. "Just – a thought I had." He glanced round. "The spare room's the first door on the right, if you want to make yourself at home. I should do some clearing-up in the kitchen."

"Can I help?"

"No," Ben said, cutting her off. "Just... make yourself at home."

The guest room was mostly unfurnished, still: just a double bed, a wardrobe, and a bookcase. The carpet was good quality, and all the walls needed were a lick of paint. The bookcase and the wardrobe were empty, but at some point during the evening Ben had made up the double bed, turned down the top sheet, and even put out a toothbrush and a cake of soap – both still in their wrappings from the pharmacy – and a couple of towels. Sarah sat down on the bed. She felt both welcomed and touched. She couldn't imagine Bill doing something like this for any guest – not even his own mother. Of course, Ellen wouldn't mind: she'd just take over.

The bookcase wasn't quite empty: there were three books in it. The sort that migrate to spare-room bookshelves: a couple of detective novels and a copy of the Bible.

Ben was busy in the kitchen: he refused her offer of help, again, but told her there was a virtually-infinite supply of hot water.

"You want a t-shirt to sleep in?" he added, and didn't wait for an answer. The t-shirt was faded Army green, and made for someone much taller and wider than Ben.

She never slept well in the third trimester, nor in a strange place. But she was tired enough tonight that the moment she laid her head down on the pillow, she was out.

There was a note taped to the bathroom door. Ben had terrible handwriting, but she thought it said *Had to go out. Back before lunchtime. Help yourself to anything for breakfast.*

When Ben cooked a Thanksgiving dinner, he certainly didn't cut corners. Judging by the size of the turkey carcass, he'd bought an eight-pounder. He hadn't mentioned anyone else coming to dinner – just himself and his friend Francis Mulcahy. Well, he probably didn't know very many people in New York yet.

She'd washed her underwear and hung it discreetly over a radiator in the guest room last night: it was dry, if rather creased, this morning. It was strangely pleasant, getting herself up with no rush, no one wanting breakfast or wanting to know why she wasn't ready yet, or demanding that she find his shoes or boil two eggs or iron a shirt. She didn't even have to make herself a proper breakfast: slices of turkey between two slices of stuffing, spread with cranberry sauce, made a pleasant kind of sandwich.

When Ben came back, she had put together a turkey meatloaf for lunch, and had properly disjointed the turkey carcass so that the remains would take up less space in the fridge. Ben came in smiling: he handed her a set of keys. "Sorry I had to go out."

"To the hospital?"

Ben shrugged. "We had to operate on someone late Wednesday." He said no more.

"I made lunch," Sarah offered tentatively. She put the keys down on the table. "And then I should go find a hotel. Thank you for putting me up last night."

"Stay here over the weekend anyway," Ben said. "It'll be hopeless trying to find a hotel room in New York for the holiday weekend."

With a sinking feeling, Sarah realised that he was probably right. She had another trickle of worry about how expensive a hotel room in the city was likely to be. She had her pin money savings, but even the bus rides had bitten a painfully large chunk out of them.

"I have to go back Sunday," she said. It was the first time she'd admitted it even to herself.

"Well, you should at least enjoy New York while you're here. Let's go out for lunch."

"I made meatloaf."

"Turkey meatloaf?"

Sarah nodded, startled. Ben made a face. "Let's go out for lunch. I had turkey yesterday."

"The turkey needs eating up," Sarah said, slightly shocked.

After a moment, Ben's mouth curled up. "Waste not, want not," he said dryly. "Let's go out after lunch."

Ben ate the meatloaf with appetite. Halfway through he said, waving his fork at the dish, "You know, I thought the army version had put me off meatloaf forever, but this is good."

"What was the army version of meatloaf like?"

Ben chuckled suddenly. "Trust me, you don't want to know."

"Why not?"

"BJ used to tell me it puts everyone else off their food if I describe it accurately." He went back to eating meatloaf, looking amused.

"BJ was one of the other surgeons?" Sarah said tentatively.

"That's right. How did you know?"

"Uncle Daniel used to read us your letters."

"That must have been fun," Ben said. He no longer sounded amused.

"You had a lot of good stories. He was proud of you."

Ben tilted his head to one side. “What do you want to see in New York?”

Ben took her to a Korean restaurant for dinner. It wasn't too different from Chinese, she decided: a little spicier, but still good.

She wasn't nearly as tired as yesterday, but the room didn't feel as strange. She went to sleep almost as soon as her head hit the pillow, and didn't wake up till four in the morning. Four in the morning had a tired kind of familiarity in the third trimester: bladder the size of a pea. Stupid joke.

She was on her way back from the bathroom when she heard Ben yell. At first she didn't even know it was Ben: but it had to be, who else was in the apartment? The sound came from behind Ben's bedroom door, a string of harsh wordless noises like nothing Sarah had ever heard before. When they stopped, it should have been a relief, but the silence that followed was almost as terrifying.

Sarah stood frozen, looking at the door. She ought to do something. But she couldn't just walk into Ben's bedroom. But the silence behind the door – the *howl* –

After what felt like a very long time, Sarah heard dragging footsteps and the door pulled open. Ben was wearing only his bathrobe, sloppily pulled round him. He saw her and wrapped the bathrobe closer, staring at her with a blank look.

“This is not good,” he said finally, leaning back against the wall, his head tilted backwards, looking as if someone had shoved him. “Sarah, we're in New York, right?”

“Yes,” Sarah said.

“Good, because I couldn't think what I'd be doing in Levinetown.” He swallowed very visibly. He was shaking, Sarah saw, and sweating heavily. “Did I wake you?” he asked in a half-mumble.

“No, I was awake already,” Sarah said, once she'd figured out what he was asking. “Ben, are you all right?”

He looked at her then, and there was a tremor in his voice that somehow she could tell would have been laughter in other circumstances. “You mean aside from the nightmares? Just fine.”

“Is there anything I can do?”

“I was heading for a belt of Scotch. Want to join me? I hate to drink alone.” He pushed himself away from the wall. “Sorry,” he said after a moment. He was still trembling. He was sweating so heavily that he was actually a little stinky, and swaying a little. “Just go back to bed, Sarah, I can pour my own liquor.”

“You don't need a Scotch,” Sarah said. “Take a hot shower – make it *really* hot – and I'll make you a cup of hot milk. That should put you back to sleep.” Without thinking about it, she spoke as she would have done to Danny or Mary, if they'd woken with a nightmare.

Ben stared at her for a long moment. His face twisted in a swift, unpleasant-looking grin. “Just go back to bed, Doctor Sarah.” He turned away and went through to the living room.

It was only then that it occurred to Sarah that she had been standing in front of Ben wearing only a t-shirt, which perhaps didn't expose her indecently, but only just. Horrified and embarrassed, she retreated to the guest bedroom. Yesterday she'd bought a few things to wear, but knowing she would have to go back, she hadn't bought more than a minimum. She didn't have a bathrobe. She hadn't bought a proper nightgown.

She sat down on the bed. With the door closed, she could still hear when Ben slammed his own bedroom door shut behind him.

Sarah was sitting at the dining-table, drinking coffee, when she heard Ben come out of his room. She was conscious – edgily conscious – of where he was: showering in the bathroom, dressing in the bedroom. She hoped he would be fully dressed. She was.

“Morning,” Ben said.

“Good morning,” Sarah said. She looked down uncomfortably.

“I hope there’s more coffee,” Ben said.

When he sat down on the other side of the table with a large cup of coffee, she had to look at him. He was fully dressed, complete with tie and jacket, clean-shaven, and his hair was clean and neat. He wasn’t smiling.

“About last night,” he said.

Sarah gripped her coffee cup.

“I have nightmares sometimes,” Ben said. “I should have warned you. I’m sorry. I didn’t think I’d wake you, through two doors.”

“No, I was awake anyway.” Sarah managed a small smile. “I was in the hall when I heard you...”

Ben rubbed his face. He shrugged a little. “I just... I know you were trying to be helpful, but... Hot milk?”

“It works for Danny and Mary when they have nightmares.”

“Bad dreams,” Ben said. “They don’t have nightmares.”

Sarah was about to protest – Danny had woken up screaming only a month ago, scared of the boogeyman he was convinced was hiding in his closet – but she stopped. Danny’s screams had been heartrending, but nothing like the noise out of Ben’s throat last night. She didn’t know what to say. Trite phrases like *war is terrible* or *I’m so sorry* didn’t really cover it.

“People say things like ‘War is hell’” Ben said after a moment. He put down his coffee cup and rubbed at both his eyes. “But it’s worse than that. War is war. Worse things happen in war than anyone wants to say. Things that – you don’t know, you can’t imagine, because until you’ve seen it you can’t – you can’t conceive how bad it can be.”

He dropped his hands and looked at her. “I told myself I stopped writing the bad stories to my dad because he’d write back, and he’d always find something to say – but it would take ten days, at least, and by the time he’d read my letter and written back I had more stories that were even worse – but that wasn’t it. I used to really admire Hemingway. You read Hemingway?”

“Yes,” Sarah said, bewildered.

“He wrote about war and he left all the bad parts out. I used to wonder about that – decide I couldn’t admire him any more. And then I realised nobody could. Nobody could write about the worst of it, because if you haven’t seen it you won’t believe it, and if you have seen it, you don’t want to remember it. I couldn’t write the bad stuff down. No one could.”

Sarah had stopped drinking her coffee. After a minute’s silence, Ben leaned forward. “I’m sorry,” he said again. “I told you. Aside from the nightmares, I’m fine. What do you want to do today?”

Sarah stared down at her coffee. She wanted to be able to say something, and couldn't. "Do you still have – how long do you think the nightmares – your nightmares will last?"

Ben shrugged. "I don't know. I talked to a psychiatrist about them when I was in Korea, he seemed to think they'd go away when I got home. I don't have them as often as I used to. And differently." He rubbed his face. "What do you want to do today? Francis is coming for dinner tonight, by the way."

"Your friend Francis?" Sarah had wondered for an instant if Ben was talking about a girlfriend.

"We usually have dinner together on Saturday nights," Ben said. "He works Monday through Saturday." He sat back and looked at her. "I'm thinking of renting my spare room to him – he's got to study for his New York State teaching certificate. You thinking of going back to teaching?"

"I can't," Sarah said.

Ben raised his eyebrows.

"If I'm married to Bill, he won't want me to go back to work. Especially not with..." Sarah's hand moved over the shape inside. The third trimester was strange in another way: the baby was becoming real to her, moving, kicking, sometimes almost visible. But only to her. no one else. "Especially not with this."

"And if you dump Bill?"

"Who's going to hire a divorced woman to teach children?"

Ben raised his eyebrows. "Who needs to tell them you're divorced?"

Francis appeared promptly at seven with a bottle of wine. It was Californian white, not expensive, but Ben's appreciation was on the enthusiastic side of polite: he was, as Uncle Daniel had been, an appreciative host.

"We're having turkey soup, turkey bake, and turkey ice cream," Ben said cheerfully, opening the bottle. "If you hadn't bought this, we'd have had turkey soda, too."

Francis laughed, a little awkwardly. He looked as if he were amused by Ben, but not sure how to respond to the teasing. "Then I'm twice as glad I brought it."

The soup was succotash and turkey, thickened with potato: Sarah had layered turkey, gravy, stuffing, and cranberry sauce into a deep dish, a kind of oven casserole Mom called Thanksgiving Sunday roast. Francis and Ben were both more than politely complimentary about the meal. It turned out that Francis, though he'd been working out at White Plains since the middle of June, hadn't yet been properly into the city: Sarah told him about the Empire State Building and the Staten Island ferry ride.

"There's a shrine to the first saint born in America down by Battery Park, I believe," Francis said. "Did you see it?"

Sarah shook her head. "Are you Catholic?"

"Yes," Francis said.

They went on talking about the New York sights Sarah and Ben had seen over the past couple of days. When Ben got up to clear the table, he waved at them both to stay.

"What, you think I can't handle the dishes? I'm a surgeon, I know how to do a scrub in seven and a half minutes."

I married the wrong cousin. It wasn't the first time Sarah had thought something like this, but it was the first time it had come through so distinctly. Watching Ben stack the dishes, his narrow ugly hands moving with quick surety, he wasn't attractive – she had

never found him attractive – but she *liked* him. When she thought about it, she couldn't remember the last time she'd felt she liked Bill in this way – comfortably, humanly.

“What are your plans for tomorrow?”

Sarah managed a bright smile. “Oh, I've got to catch the bus early to get back to Vermont. And then I suppose we'll be heading back to Crabapple Cove on Monday. Danny will miss a day of school, but he won't mind that.”

Francis nodded. He was looking at her intently. Serious and inquisitive. He looked kind.

“What do you think of divorce?” Sarah asked abruptly.

His expression didn't change, but he leaned forward a little. “Is anything wrong?”

“No.”

“Oh.” He nodded.

“I can't leave my husband,” Sarah said.

He didn't even look taken aback. He tilted his head a little. Not a nod, or a shake.

“My parents don't approve of divorce. Neither do I. I suppose if you're Catholic you won't either.”

That got a sudden smile. “I'm not a very good Catholic, I'm afraid,” Francis said.

“Oh,” Sarah said.

Ben was still in the kitchen. He'd bought a pint of ice cream and some fresh fruit earlier in the afternoon: he was probably making a fruit salad. Or coffee. Ben could take longer over making coffee than anyone she knew. Francis was still looking at her.

“He lied to me,” Sarah said. “It wasn't about anything important. Though it mattered to Danny,” she justified herself.

“And to you,” Francis said, quietly.

“But it wasn't the first time. It was just the first time I *knew* he was lying, not just misremembering – I used to think I kept forgetting things, and then I knew it wasn't me, but I still kept telling myself he forgot, he didn't remember – ” This couldn't make any sense at all to Francis. “I don't know why I'm telling you this. I'm sorry.”

Francis smiled again, very briefly. “I'm a good listener.”

It was a moment before Sarah was sure it was okay to laugh, and then it was several moments before she was sure she could stop. She was almost in tears again. When she looked up, Francis was offering her another handkerchief.

“Thank you,” Sarah said, mopping up. “How many of these do you have?”

Francis didn't answer. Sarah put the handkerchief down and repeated herself.

“Oh, you remember what it's like being a teacher. You can never have too many hankies.”

“I washed out the one you gave me before – it's in Ben's guest-room.”

Francis nodded.

“Ben said you'd be studying for your New York state teacher's certificate?” Sarah said.

“Sarah, God knows I'm not the best person to advise you,” Francis said, “but if you were Catholic, and went to your parish priest, he might tell you that you don't have to live with a man you can't trust.”

Sarah stared at him, astonished. “I shouldn't have – ” she said weakly, and then, more strongly, “He's a good husband, he really is.”

She had almost got used to the direct, focussed gaze: she understood it wasn't personal. It was noticeable, though, when Francis dropped his gaze. He looked down at his folded hands for a long moment, and when he looked up, his smile looked diffident, as his voice was shy. "I'm sorry. I'm *not* the best person to advise you. You were asking about the teacher's certificate?"

Ben came back with a bowl of fruit salad and a pot of coffee, as Francis told her about the basic requirements for someone with a college degree. They sounded overly-stringent, and she said so.

"They're very thorough," Francis said mildly.

"I suppose it stops most people who don't already live here from trying," Sarah said. It wasn't that she could have moved here anyway. Or wanted to. "How are you going to manage in your classes at night school?"

Francis shrugged. "I'll try to sit in the front row. I always did." He smiled, but not happily. "And I expect I can borrow someone's notes." He looked away from her.

"Do you remember that canned fruit cocktail we used to be so grateful for in Korea?" Ben said.

"With the cherries?"

To Sarah's surprise, both men started to laugh. Francis quietly, Ben nearly hysterically. He slapped at the table. "Artificially coloured – artificially flavoured – modified –"

"– in heavy syrup –" Francis got out, though it was hard to see how he could understand what Ben was saying.

"– on Klinger's spring hat!"

Francis stopped laughing after a minute: he took his glasses off and wiped at them with yet another clean handkerchief. Ben was still laughing. "Oh dear," Francis said. "Hawkeye –" he slid his glasses back on.

Ben swallowed down his laughter. "What is it –?"

Francis said nothing. Ben picked up the coffee pot and poured them each a cup. He drank his black and sweet. Francis was adding milk to his, still with an odd small grin. He was an odd man altogether, Francis Mulcahy.

Father Mulcahy. She nearly spilled her coffee, and set it down hastily.

The Roman Catholic priest who'd been chaplain in Ben's unit in Korea – surely his name had been Father Mulcahy? Could it have been *Francis* Mulcahy? She couldn't remember that Ben had ever mentioned the chaplain's Christian name in his letters home. Or Uncle Daniel hadn't.

Didn't Roman Catholic priests wear white collars?

They tried desultorily to explain the joke to her, but it was clearly one of those things you had to be there for. The fruit salad was good: the ice cream was rich and creamy.

"What time's your bus tomorrow?" Ben asked, after Francis had left.

"Quarter of eight."

"Ugh." Ben made a clown face of disgust. "I'll book a cab." He stopped and looked at her. After a moment he said, in a different voice, "You don't have to go back, you know."

"I miss Danny and Mary," Sarah said. For twenty-four hours it had been a relief not to have to think about them, but the relief had long since worn away: missing them was a physical ache.

“But not Bill?” Ben had an edge of humour in his voice.

“He’s my husband,” Sarah said.

“Yeah.”

“About your friend Francis?”

“Yeah?” Ben asked. He sounded challenging.

“Isn’t he... wasn’t he a priest? ‘Father Mulcahy’?”

Ben picked up his coffee cup and turned it in his hands. “Not any more.” There was still an edge in his voice, but it wasn’t humour. He looked at Sarah. “I don’t understand it myself, but apparently he got into an argument over doctrine with his bishop, and his bishop recommended he stop being a priest, and – so he sent in a letter asking them to fire him.”

“That’s crazy,” Sarah said, in blank astonishment.

“I’m glad I’m not the only one that thinks so,” Ben said. He put the cup down. “But he’s still playing by their rules, and their rules say he’s not supposed to talk about it. And not let anyone else find out.”

“Oh.”

“So. Don’t tell anyone he’s former Father Mulcahy.”

Sarah was still astonished. “Why would I?”

Ben shrugged. “No reason. But don’t. He’s had a hard enough time fitting in here, I’d hate for him to have to pick up and move again.”

“Well, I won’t say anything,” Sarah said. She couldn’t think of anyone she would say it to. “It’s very nice of you to let him stay here while he’s studying for his teacher’s certificate. Two years night classes, when he’s already qualified!”

Ben shrugged. “I like him. He’s no trouble to have around.”

Sarah wondered if Ben would find it difficult to let his room to a normal tenant: he hadn’t said how often he had nightmares, but if Francis were really very deaf, he’d never hear them.

“You didn’t set the rent on the Crabapple Cove house very high...”

“So?” Ben sounded defensive.

“Do you need the money?”

When Ben grinned, Sarah knew before he could say anything that she’d said something foolish. But the grin slid away when he said, sounding serious, “I’m not going to play heavy landlord if you owe me the rent for a few months. If you have to.” He smiled again, openly amused.

“I’m not leaving Bill.”

“Whatever you say.” Ben propped his chin on his hand. “Thanks for coming all this way just to tell me you believe me about the pond when I was seven.”

“Thank you for having me.”

When Ben laughed this time, it was a swallowed, choked-off laugh, not wild hysteria. He sat back in his chair and grinned sideways at her. “You’re welcome. But next time – for God’s sake call ahead.”

Thursday 23rd December, 1954

1. Day

Mulcahy was sitting on the edge of the bed, his chin on his fists, staring at the carpet. It was blue, thick-piled, and soft underfoot. He had come back from the bathroom in his pyjamas, barefoot, and the feel of the carpet on the soles of his feet had been an unexpected sensual pleasure: like walking on warm dry grass over warm dry moss. Of all the things he'd expected to be unexpected, this carpet wasn't one of them.

He had kept himself busy all day. Now he'd run out of ways to be busy. He couldn't sit here all night thinking about the carpet.

"Hi," Hawkeye said cheerfully. He was grinning widely. "Breakfast?"

Mulcahy nodded. Hawkeye took the second suitcase out of his hand. "This everything?"

"I travel light." It was difficult to talk when they were walking. Hawkeye turned his head to share another wide grin, but said nothing.

They ate breakfast at a diner the next block over from Hawkeye's apartment. It was busy enough that no one was paying attention to either of them. "Some of your stuff from Pennsylvania got here safely."

"Some of it?"

"Three cartons and a suitcase."

"That's all of it."

"And a letter."

"I don't remember packing a letter," Mulcahy said.

Hawkeye didn't look amused. "You've got one, though. Looks official."

It couldn't be from the Vatican: it hadn't been ... it had barely been six months.

"Where was it postmarked?"

"Pennsylvania," Hawkeye said.

Mulcahy shrugged. Hawkeye was looking wary, not worried, and the last thing Mulcahy wanted was to worry him. "It's probably a reminder about overdue library books."

Hawkeye opened his mouth in a sudden visible laugh. "Francis, have you stolen some library books?"

"No," Mulcahy said, "but that wouldn't necessarily stop the library sending a notice. I got a notice from them once in Korea for a book I returned in 1949."

"By the way," Hawkeye said, "I got a call from Sarah."

"Oh? How is she?"

"She wants me to come visit them for Christmas."

"Oh." It was a moment before the full meaning of that sank in. "Oh," Mulcahy said again. "Are you going?"

Hawkeye's gaze shifted away. "She called me yesterday. I got a letter from her two days ago. I don't want to spend Christmas with her and Bill, but when I started trying to say that she thought I was talking about Bill –"

"They're still together, then?" Mulcahy was relieved. He'd wondered, whenever that conversation came back to him, if he'd said the right thing. "You should go."

"I knew you'd say that," Hawkeye said. "I don't want to go."

"Oh." Mulcahy picked up his coffee. He wondered what – or if – he should say to Hawkeye to persuade him to go: it was undoubtedly the right thing to do.

"Only I said I would."

Mulcahy put his coffee down again. "Oh." If Hawkeye left tomorrow, he would be back Monday or Tuesday, surely? That wasn't so long.

"Can't you say anything else but 'oh'?" Hawkeye looked exasperated.

Mulcahy fidgeted with the cup. "Ah –" he said, and caught himself. It was funny. He looked back at Hawkeye, expecting him to laugh.

Hawkeye didn't look amused. "I'm heading up to Maine first thing tomorrow and I can't see how I can get back till Sunday night at earliest. All you can say is 'oh'?"

"I'll miss you?" Mulcahy offered, not sure what Hawkeye was getting at.

Hawkeye did grin then. "Yeah, well, you don't have to. You could come with me."

"But I haven't been invited."

"I invite you. It's my house."

"Hawkeye, what possible reason could you give for bringing me?"

"I just need to tell Sarah you don't have anywhere else to go at Christmas, and she'll invite you."

"But I do." Mulcahy said. "There's a party at the school on Christmas Day for the children who don't go home."

"You can't go back to school on Christmas Day."

"I can't come and stay with your family," Mulcahy said.

"Why not?"

Mulcahy shook his head. "I'm a stranger. And – if things aren't going well, the last thing they'll want is a stranger about the place. Getting in the way." Especially a deaf man for whom allowances would have to be made. It made him wince to think about it.

"I'll miss you," Hawkeye said finally. He had his chin propped on his hands, and he was looking at Mulcahy in a way that made him wish they were alone. And reminded him that there was another reason why he shouldn't go with Hawkeye.

Mulcahy glanced at his watch. "Shouldn't we get moving?"

"Yes," Hawkeye said. He got up briskly, and was paying for both breakfasts before Mulcahy caught up with him, too late to protest.

"I'll buy you breakfast tomorrow."

"Only if you come to Maine with me. I'll be leaving early."

Mulcahy was wondering what the letter was, but he put it out of his mind. Hawkeye had insisted that as Mulcahy's landlord he had to buy his tenant a desk to work at, and in a furniture salesroom on the Lower East Side Mulcahy picked out a solid wooden desk in good condition, and a chair to match, delivery after Christmas.

Somehow it seemed natural enough, on their way back, to stop in at the neighbourhood stores and buy bread, eggs, milk, apples, a few staples, a few extras. Following a short and quiet but vehement discussion on the sidewalk, Mulcahy paid for the fresh food – Hawkeye won on the staples. It wasn't as if the rent Hawkeye was charging him could possibly cover the cost of meals as well, and Hawkeye wasn't going to be home for the next few days.

Hawkeye was ahead of Mulcahy at the apartment's front door, but glanced at Mulcahy and stepped back. "Try out your key."

It turned smoothly in the lock. It was the first time it had occurred to Mulcahy to think that this apartment was – would be – his home.

"Read your letter, I'll make lunch," Hawkeye said.

The cartons and the suitcase were piled together in the middle of the spare room floor. The letter was conspicuously on the corner of the bed. Mulcahy picked it up. It was too light to be any kind of official letter, and in any case it really had been barely six months since he had written that letter at his bishop's behest. January was more likely. Or even February.

After he'd tried to think of the worst that it could be, the letter was actually funny, in a way. He took it through to the living room, and found Hawkeye in the kitchen.

"What is it?"

"I seem to have caused a little trouble in the diocese," Mulcahy said.

The corners of Hawkeye's mouth curled up. "Yeah?"

"I didn't ask my... the bishop's direction where to go, or what to do. They didn't know where I was." Mulcahy was trying to feel repentant, and failing. "Apparently this has caused the diocese some administrative headaches."

Hawkeye looked as if he were chuckling. "Good."

"I'm afraid it's going to cause them some more headaches, too, because they say they've been paying my Social Security for the past six months, and Fanwood's been paying it since August."

"Send them two aspirin and tell them to call me in the morning," Hawkeye said. "Are you going to get into any trouble over this?"

Mulcahy shrugged. "What are they going to do – defrock me?"

Hawkeye laughed, wide mouthed, propping himself back against the counter. "No, I mean with the government. I don't understand Social Security, but are you supposed to get it paid twice?"

"I doubt it," Mulcahy said. "I'll write to them." He was unable to stop himself from smiling. From the pained opening to the incongruous conclusion of *yours in Xto*, the letter was like a cold breath on the back of his neck. It shouldn't amuse him as it did.

But it couldn't touch him. Couldn't touch him.

Because of Hawkeye.

He had an impulse to step in and hug Hawkeye. He only recognised the impulse when he knew he wasn't going to do it. He might have done it without thinking about it, but the moment he thought about it, he couldn't do it. He hadn't done it except when Hawkeye had asked him to. He was afraid of doing it, and embarrassed about being afraid.

"Can I help you get lunch?"

"Soup and sandwiches," Hawkeye said. He pointed at a can on the counter. "You want to make the soup?"

"If you explain the recipe," Mulcahy said.

Hawkeye twisted his head round to look at him direct. "It involves a can opener and a chicken. Or there's another can in the cupboard that I think involved a cow." He handed Mulcahy the can opener.

"Can I help you unpack?" Hawkeye asked.

“I don’t really need any help,” Mulcahy said. He held the door open for Hawkeye.

“Well, I could sit here – ” Hawkeye sat down on the edge of the bed “ – and assist.”

“How were you planning to assist?”

“By not getting in your way.” Hawkeye heeled off his shoes and folded his legs up, elbows on his knees. “Unless there’s anything else I can do.”

Mulcahy started with the suitcase: it had what clothes he’d owned last June that he hadn’t packed to take with him when he left. Winter clothes, mostly.

“What were you supposed to do?” Hawkeye asked. “I put some hangers in the wardrobe, but if there’s not enough, we could go out and pick up some more.”

Talking like this was episodic, more than awkward. Well, it might be awkward for Hawkeye, remembering not to talk when Mulcahy had his back to him.

“Is this difficult for you?” Mulcahy asked.

“What?” Hawkeye blinked at him.

“You can’t talk to me if I’ve got my back to you.” Mulcahy had been putting shirts on hangers, preparatory to hanging them in the wardrobe. He looked up to let Hawkeye reply.

“That’s okay, when you’ve got your back to me I think about kissing the back of your neck.” Hawkeye was looking at him with a grin that was fading fast. “Well,” he added, “I do.”

Mulcahy swallowed. He was used to Hawkeye teasing: he’d always liked it, once he was sure it was done with goodwill. He was used to the feelings he had around Hawkeye. He wasn’t used to this. Hawkeye knew; and he knew Hawkeye knew; and Hawkeye knew he knew Hawkeye knew... Unexpectedly, Mulcahy laughed. He suppressed it almost immediately, but Hawkeye’s grin brightened again.

“There’s more than enough hangers,” Mulcahy said. He felt breathless and on edge. It was the easiest thing to say.

“Oh. Good.” Hawkeye nodded.

Mulcahy was halfway through hanging up the winter clothes from the suitcase when Hawkeye managed to catch his eye again. “I got a maid comes in three days a week. Any ironing you want her to do?”

“You didn’t mention a maid.” Mulcahy stopped. It should have occurred to him.

“Didn’t I? Mrs Bradford. Mondays, Wednesdays, Fridays. You should have noticed that this place doesn’t look like it would if I were doing the housework. She also irons shirts.”

“Won’t she notice I’ve moved in?”

“I should think so. She seems like a pretty observant woman. You’re hard to miss.”

“Will that be all right?”

“Why wouldn’t it be?”

“Will she be in this Friday?”

“Christmas Eve?” Hawkeye looked a query. Mulcahy had forgotten what the day was: he’d only remembered Hawkeye wasn’t going to be there. “I never thought of that. No, she’s not coming in till next Wednesday. I’m usually out when she’s in, but she’s supposed to come in at nine-thirty for three hours. If you want her to iron your shirts, put them in the laundry basket. When do you go back to school?”

“Not till the third.” Mulcahy realised he had been distracted from hanging up clothes. He went back to it.

His breviary was at the bottom of the second case. He hadn't used it to read the daily office since June. He put it in the drawer under his shirts. His rosary was under his socks.

Two of the cartons were packed with books. The other... well, leave that for now.

"You need another bookcase," Hawkeye said.

"I'm sure they'll all fit in." There were three books already on the top shelf: the Bible, King James version, and two paperback detective stories: Mulcahy pulled one off the shelf. "Isn't this the one BJ got, the winter of 52?"

Hawkeye had got off the bed and was crouching down beside the bookcase. Mulcahy glanced sideways at him.

"Yeah, I tracked it down when we got back – I couldn't stand not knowing how it ended."

"Was it good?"

"Well, it was bugging me. Can I help you with these?"

"If you like," Mulcahy said. He pushed the third carton a little further back, out of Hawkeye's reach: he saw Hawkeye look, but the other man said nothing.

When he glanced at Hawkeye again, he was looking at one of the Jowett translations. "You *did* steal a library book. Several."

"They've been cancelled," Mulcahy protested. A few years ago there had been a book sale at the public library he'd gone to when he was a child: he'd done without lunch for a week to pick up the familiar, battered books.

Hawkeye grinned at him. Mulcahy realised he'd been blindsided.

"Where do they go – under P for Plato or J for Jowett?" Hawkeye let him off the hook.

"I think all the English translations should fit on that shelf," Mulcahy said, pointing.

"Okay. What were you supposed to do?" Hawkeye was sorting out the English translations from the rest, glancing down at the books and up at Mulcahy.

"What?"

"When they told you you couldn't be a priest and you had to go: you left. What were you supposed to do?"

Mulcahy guessed at an indignant tone in Hawkeye's voice. "I should have waited for instructions," he said. He should have, undoubtedly: he just hadn't wanted to. "Until I'm formally laicized, my diocese is responsible for me."

Side by side, on the floor – the carpet was unexpectedly soft – they unpacked the books and shelved them. Mulcahy had accumulated nearly seventy books that belonged to him, rather than to the parish or the diocese: it had seemed like too many for poverty's sake, the last time he had packed up these cartons, when he'd got rid of everything he could bear to let go.

Mulcahy was kneeling: Hawkeye was in a kind of ungraceful sprawl, as inelegant as a cat washing itself. He didn't comment on the books as he shelved them, but Mulcahy got the impression that he was memorizing each title.

"You like the Greeks," he said finally, taking the last book out of the second carton and passing it to Mulcahy – a Korean-English dictionary, too big even for the lowest shelf. "You read Korean?"

"Very badly," Mulcahy said. He leaned the dictionary up against the side of the bookshelves. "Yes – when I was a boy, my two heroes were Plato and – and a boxer my father took me to see when I was twelve. Plato means 'broad' in Greek – it's thought that he was probably a wrestler."

“I know.”

Mulcahy was startled.

“I treated your hero for a stroke. Gentleman John.” Hawkeye wrapped his hands round his upmost knee.

Mulcahy looked back, astonished. “Gentleman Joe Kavanaugh. How – how did you know?”

“Well, mostly because I’ve never seen anyone’s face light up the way yours did when he showed up.” Hawkeye rocked himself back, eyeing Mulcahy thoughtfully. “You were even rude to Margaret when she said she didn’t think much of him.”

“Was I?” Mulcahy was discomfited.

“Well, not terribly rude. You shut Margaret up, but I think it was mostly the shock of the unfailingly-polite Father Mulcahy saying something like that. I’d have had to be much ruder to get her to shut up.”

“What did I *say*?” Mulcahy could barely remember.

“Now, let me think. Did you cast aspersions on General MacArthur, or Florence Nightingale? I forget.”

“You’re making it up,” Mulcahy accused.

“No, I swear. You said something very impolite about Florence Nightingale.”

Hawkeye shifted position. He was kneeling facing Mulcahy. “So that was when you took up boxing? When you fell for Gentlemanly Johnny? I mean Jimmy?”

“Joe Kavanaugh,” Mulcahy corrected again. “Did everyone know?”

“Well, there were a whole lot of reporters there who never noticed anything that wasn’t pushed under their noses on a notepad, and a few patients in post-op who weren’t in a state to notice anything much, and I don’t think Klinger sent any memos to I-Corps about it, but...”

Mulcahy took his specs off and rubbed his hand across his eyes. “Hawkeye, did I really make that much of a fool of myself?” He had to put his specs back on to get an answer, but he didn’t especially want one. “He was such a splendid man. I suppose I did fall for him... but I didn’t think anyone knew.”

He put his specs on and pushed himself to his feet, both at the same time, putting his hand on the wall to support himself through the brief wave of dizziness. When it passed, Hawkeye was standing facing him, looking concerned.

Mulcahy managed a smile. Of course Hawkeye had been teasing him. He nodded, smiling, expecting the familiar *gotcha* look, but Hawkeye didn’t grin. He looked worried. He lifted his hand to rub at his mouth, and said something. “– okay?”

“Yes, I’m fine,” Mulcahy said, trusting that the first words that he hadn’t seen were *Are you* – “We’re done here. I’m unpacked.”

Hawkeye had always had a knack for making the wrong joke at the wrong time to the wrong person. Mulcahy walked into the living room and over to the window: the short December day was already over for those at the foot of the canyons, but up above the last light of the sun reddened the skyscraper peaks.

When he was a boy he had imagined that Joe Kavanaugh might do an afternoon’s training at the gym where Francis was learning how to box. Even in his mind he had never done more with Gentleman Joe in the showers than offer to pass him the soap.

You fell for him.

And watch him, of course. The way he’d learned how to watch.

Hawkeye materialised by the window. Mulcahy glanced at him and looked away.

The way he'd learned how to watch so that it wasn't his fault. He couldn't imagine that Hawkeye had ever done anything like that; Hawkeye had been direct and open about what he wanted.

"I'm sorry," Mulcahy said, still looking out of the window. He turned his head reluctantly and looked at Hawkeye.

"...sorry?" Hawkeye shook his head. "For what?"

"I'm not very good company right now."

"I hadn't noticed." Hawkeye shrugged. "You're always good company. Even when you look as miserable as you do right now. Anything I can do?"

"No," Mulcahy said. Hawkeye was still looking at him, and still with an unhappy question written on his face. It was disturbing to see it, and to feel so personally responsible; Mulcahy wanted to do something to remedy it – anything except –
Anything.

"I – " Mulcahy's hands stayed obstinately by his sides. "I know I'm not very good at this. But it is what I want."

Hawkeye shrugged again. He didn't move either. "You being here is what I want. You don't have to be good at anything except just – being here. And you seem to be managing that better than I am, so far." He smiled, but it didn't change the look in his eyes. "I'm sorry I'm heading off like this tomorrow. I have to get back for rounds on the 27th – I'll be home by Sunday night. Be here when I get back, okay? Unless you get invited to a really good Christmas party, in which case just pin a note to my pillow and try not to make too much noise when you get in."

"I'll be here," Mulcahy said, feeling a familiar warmth at the casual teasing. "We'll manage it better next year, but we could have a late Christmas party. I'll put up some decorations."

To his surprise, Hawkeye was looking definitely happier. The sad query had left his eyes, and he was grinning so widely that his first words were incomprehensible. " – a tree!" He seemed to realise that he hadn't been understood, and repeated, "We'll get a tree. And decorations. Where do you find a good spruce in New York – Central Park? Get your coat on. Let's go. I'll get my hatchet."

He was joking about the hatchet.

It was well past dark, and freezing, when they got back: balancing a tree between them, clutching carrier bags in cold hands. Mulcahy fished the door key out of his pocket without thinking about it. "I want a big mug of cocoa," he declared. "Can I make you one?"

"Coffee," Hawkeye said absently. He lifted the tree like a dancing partner. "I'm going to get this set up in front of the windows."

In fact it took both of them, and nearly an hour, before it was straight enough to suit Mulcahy. It would never have occurred to him to buy a tree just for himself, let alone one this size, but now it had been bought, it would certainly be wasteful not to display it properly.

"Have we got enough?" he inquired, looking at the decorations Hawkeye was heaping on the table.

“I could always go back to the hospital and liberate some thermometers,” Hawkeye said. He was eyeing the tree assessingly. “The golden baubles are going there, where they’ll catch the light from the window.”

“If they do, only your window cleaner’s going to see them.”

They argued up and down and sideways out to the tips of the branches how best to decorate it: several times Hawkeye simply took a bauble that Mulcahy had placed on the tree and moved it to somewhere else. After the third time, Mulcahy simply stole them back and replaced them where they should be. It took all evening: they stopped to eat, but Hawkeye seemed determined to fit every piece of sparkle he’d bought on the tree. He’d bought quite a lot of it.

They both collapsed on the couch to look at their handiwork: it was actually a few moments before Mulcahy remembered. He glanced at Hawkeye, and saw Hawkeye watching him.

There was a long moment when neither of them said anything. Hawkeye shifted on the couch, as if he meant to reach out to Mulcahy, but he stood up instead, abrupt and awkward. “First dibs on the shower,” he said. “Good night.”

He couldn’t sit here all night thinking about the carpet, now he’d run out of ways to be busy. He had kept himself busy all day. Of all the things he’d expected to be unexpected, this carpet wasn’t one of them. The feel of the carpet on the soles of his feet was an unexpected sensual pleasure that made him think vaguely of thick dry moss. Coming back from the bathroom barefoot, in his pyjamas, Mulcahy walked slowly to the edge of the bed, and sat down, chin on fists, staring at the carpet. It was blue, thick-piled, and soft, and undoubtedly expensive.

Hawkeye had been signalling, as widely as he could, that he wasn’t even going to ask. Which was fair: Mulcahy had known all along that he would have to make this decision at some point, and better have it clear in both their minds that it *was* his own decision.

“Dear Lord, if what I am doing needs your forgiveness, of your mercy grant it to me,” he said out loud, and pushed himself to his feet.

He was almost at the door when it occurred to him to add, “If what I am doing deserves your blessing, of your grace, grant it to me.”

2. Night

This article in the surgical journal was probably interesting enough: Hawkeye was finding it hard to focus. He’d promised himself to give Francis all the time and space he needed. Not to make a pass. It was making Hawkeye twitchy.

Hawkeye couldn’t stop himself from teasing him: not even when it was obvious that his best gambits were falling flat. He kept hoping that *something* would make Francis laugh and relax and sit back and let himself be... be happy.

Francis had looked happy exactly twice today; when he was telling Hawkeye about the letter from his bishop and while they were decorating the Christmas tree. Hawkeye had spun that out as long as possible, but it had to end sometime. Plus one stifled laugh when Mulcahy was hanging up his shirts, but Hawkeye wasn’t sure that counted.

Oh, what the hell: he needed all the points he could get. It counted.

He wanted Francis to live with him. He'd promised he could wait. And he could. He *could*.

The door opened, quietly. He looked up from the journal and thought for an instant he was hallucinating: Mulcahy was standing silently in the doorway, hands by his sides, looking – Hawkeye grimaced – looking polite.

"Need something?" Hawkeye asked out loud. He closed the journal, using his finger to mark the place where he was looking at the diagram of a stranger's heart.

Mulcahy took two steps into the room, and closed the door. He sounded as hesitant as he ever did when he was about to say something that he thought might be discourteous.

"I don't quite know how to put this."

"No?" Hawkeye's heart thumped.

Mulcahy came across the room. He glanced down at the journal. "I'm sorry, I didn't mean to interrupt."

"What do you want?" Hawkeye's voice started out at a bark and trailed off as Mulcahy sat down on the edge of the bed. Hawkeye dropped the journal beside the bed.

Francis put out his hand and took hold of Hawkeye's hand. He smiled, a little oddly. "I don't quite know that either," he said. "But I know I want –"

He seemed to have got stuck.

Hawkeye slid his hand up Francis's arm. The other man was trembling – his face was calm, his hand was steady, but his muscles were taut and vibrating like wire.

"Hawkeye –"

"Francis," Hawkeye started, and then decided it wasn't a moment for words. He shifted sideways a little, tugging the other man on to the bed, and slid down, shrugging off the bathrobe he had wrapped around his shoulders. He wrapped his arms round Francis, sliding his hands down to the small of his back. As if an echo, Francis's arms came round him: solid and warm. He was tense, Hawkeye could feel how tense he was, but he was in Hawkeye's arms.

We don't have to do anything, Hawkeye was all set to say; but then one or other of them moved a little – and he could feel the hard warmth of an erect cock, trapped inside smooth fabric, pressing against his thigh. He was getting hard himself, and the rush of arousal made him breathless for a moment.

Francis's pupils were dilated. His breath was coming fast. He was tense as hell, but turned on. For that diagnosis, Hawkeye had an effective operational technique, swift and smooth. They could talk afterwards.

He kissed Francis's mouth, teasing his lips open, sliding one hand to the waistband of his pyjama bottoms; moving to kiss the sensitive spot just under the ear. He unbuttoned Francis's pyjama jacket one-handed, just enough to slide that hand inside – he felt the catch in Francis's breathing as fingers made contact with nipple – and began to plant distracting, almost tickling kisses along the line of his jaw as he tugged down Francis's pyjama bottoms.

Francis was holding on to his shoulders, hands clenched, breath coming as hard as Hawkeye planned to have him come in the next few minutes. When his hands slipped down to rest palm-first against Hawkeye's shoulders, Hawkeye assumed it was an accident.

Hoped it was an accident.

Not an accident. Hawkeye became aware of this as if his bedroom was getting colder. Francis was trying to push him away. In a cold split second he wanted to ignore it, to claim he hadn't felt it – afterwards would be afterwards, Francis couldn't say he hadn't wanted it –

He wanted years with Francis, not a night.

He lifted his head and looked Francis in the eye. “Okay,” he said. He heard his voice cracking. With difficulty, he moved himself away. “Okay. What’s going on?”

Francis was red, shivering, and breathless. He didn't say anything for a minute. “I'm sorry.”

“Yeah, well, what next? ‘We can't because it's a mortal sin'? You could have thought about that before you came *in* here!”

It dawned on Hawkeye slowly that it had been a cruel thing to say. Francis had looked away, as if involuntarily, a quick flinching of his eyes.

“I'm sorry,” Francis said again, looking back at him. “I don't – I'm not very good at saying this – ”

“Just spit it out,” Hawkeye said. He caught what he said and laughed: that hurt his throat. He was knotted up with tension.

“Do we have to go so fast?”

“I've waited since June. How much slower can I go without breaking into a full halt?”

“I'm sorry,” Francis said a third time. “I mean – more slowly *now*, in – in bed. Is it possible? I don't have much experience...” his voice trailed off. He was looking at Hawkeye, his eyes wide behind his glasses.

When Francis took his glasses off, it usually meant *I don't want to listen to you now*. He put them down on the bedside cabinet, and pushed the covers aside. He tugged at Hawkeye's pyjamas, accomplishing what he wanted far less deftly than Hawkeye, but just as quickly. He went down on Hawkeye's erection with his mouth open: more a determined act than a skilful one.

One of Hawkeye's personal touchstones was *Any blowjob is a good blowjob*.

Mulcahy's mouth was wrapped round his dick and he was doing something with his tongue that felt almost right and he was almost close to coming –

He'd been determined that the first time he got to make love to Mulcahy was going to be perfect –

This wasn't it. He was so close, though, so close that even though he couldn't summon a clear fantasy he was going to come –

He wanted Francis to stop so they could talk. There were things he hadn't asked Francis he should have.

He didn't want this to stop till he came. He'd been on edge, *needing* this, needing *this*

–

It wasn't perfect, but he came. Semen splashed white on Francis's face: he must have jerked his head back when he felt Hawkeye beginning to come. Francis put his hand up to wipe it away, looking at Hawkeye with wonder and accomplishment. It was better than coming, seeing that. Dazed weariness was pulling him down – he'd wanted to make Francis come *first* – “Don't go away,” he said, trying to say the words clearly enough, reaching out to hold on to Francis, wanting him there.

“How long did I sleep?” he asked, and repeated the question without yawning in the middle of it. Francis was lying on the bed beside him, head propped on one arm, watching him; his hand warm on Hawkeye’s chest.

“I’m not sure,” Francis said. “Not long.”

“I wish you hadn’t done that,” Hawkeye said. “I wanted it to be perfect.” He half-laughed. “Don’t tell me it was delicious.”

Hawkeye felt Francis’s hand move on his chest as he looked away. Hawkeye lifted his hand and put it over Francis’s, and tugged.

Francis landed against his chest and his breath went out in a gasp. “Hawkeye – ” At least he was looking at Hawkeye now.

“We need to talk,” Hawkeye said.

“You need to sleep; you’ve got to drive to Maine tomorrow,” Francis said.

“Today.”

Francis looked over at the clock. “Tomorrow.”

“Fine. Tomorrow.” It felt later. “Francis – Can I tell you something?”

Francis’s shrug and nod were amused. “You can tell me anything.”

“I’m not joking,” Hawkeye said. “I’m not crazy. At least, not about this. I love you. The real thing. When I came up that Friday after Thanksgiving to hand over the keys, I knew I’d only get to see you for five minutes and never get a chance to touch you, but I had to see you – I *had* to. But if you tell me you never want to see me again, I can deal with that. If I have to. If you wanted to move in here and never lay a hand on me, or me on you, I can deal with that. I can. If I have to. But now I don’t know what’s going on – you don’t want me to make love to you, but you’re happy going down on me? How does that fit into your rules? Who makes these rules? Why wouldn’t you let me make you come?” He was sitting up and Francis was staring at him from inches away. Hawkeye wanted to kiss him.

Francis swallowed. “I didn’t mean to stop you from... from having sex with me. Just... to slow down. I wasn’t sure – ” He looked away, for only an instant. “I knew – I wanted – I want – to have sex with you. But I don’t – ” he had managed to wipe his face roughly clean of come while Hawkeye was asleep, but his hand went up to touch his face as if he thought the marks were still there “ – when you – ” He was going bright red. He spoke as if both embarrassed and unsure of himself. “ – when you went at me like that, I felt like – like I – like it wasn’t my decision.”

Hawkeye reached out for him without thinking. The curve of his hand fitted the curve of Francis’s neck. He was no longer angry – he no longer even wanted to be angry. “Did you come?”

He knew the answer even before he felt Francis shake his head. “It really doesn’t matter. You’re tired – ”

“Not so much,” Hawkeye interrupted. “I go to sleep after I come. It doesn’t matter whether I’m tired or not. I can stay awake if I’m standing up, but if I’m anywhere near horizontal, I – it’s a typical physiological response to orgasm – I could probably draw you a diagram.” He stopped and thought about it. “Or not, because my drawing’s never been up to much. That was why I wanted you to come first. We could have snored together.” He was leaning closer. “Anyway, I’m awake again.” Habit made him lower his voice to a purr. “What can I do for you?”

That wasn't the right question. "I don't know," Francis said. "I don't – know. I'm sorry, I – I –" His neck muscles were so tense they felt rigid. "Maybe we should just go to sleep?"

Hawkeye shook his head. "You can't sleep like this. If it was okay for you to go down on me, how about vice versa?"

"I can get to sleep," Francis said. He gave Hawkeye a defensively cheerful look. It was incongruous. "I've had a lot of practice."

"I can't sleep with you like this," Hawkeye said. "Look, what else am I good for? You've been miserable all day, I won't be seeing you for at least three days, can I at least try to make you feel good?"

"I haven't been miserable all day!" Francis protested.

"Then you need to sue your face for a liar. The only times you looked happy was when we were decorating the tree and when you were telling me about that letter from your bishop. And I didn't have anything to do with either one. I kept trying, but nothing I could do was good enough – but I'm good enough at this, if you'll just let me." He was speaking out of terrified need, and he knew it. He hadn't meant to let Francis know how much – how very much – he needed him.

Francis stared at him, looking wide-eyed and stricken. "Is that what you think?" Then he did move towards him. "Hawkeye? Can I – can we lie down –"

Inside the curve of Hawkeye's arm, he was easing them both down to the bed. When they were lying down. Francis's head was on Hawkeye's shoulder, his arm across Hawkeye's chest. There was no way Francis could see Hawkeye's face.

"I have always been..." Francis's voice was uncertain, shy. "At least, since I was twelve, I've known..." Hawkeye felt him shudder as if kicked. "I'm a homosexual."

Hawkeye wanted to laugh and wanted to kick himself for wanting to laugh. He tightened his arm round Francis's shoulders. He understood that Francis had positioned them like this precisely so that he couldn't interrupt. He even understood why.

"I said you weren't my first," Francis said. "But I'd never..." He paused. After a while, he said, carefully, "I had never done anything myself. I used to – when I was in the showers at the gym – I found I could sometimes look at a man who was looking at me, in a certain way, and he would –"

Francis stopped speaking for so long that Hawkeye wanted to prompt him. If Francis had been able to see his face, he would have.

When Francis began again, he sounded as if he had steeled himself to say it. "He would offer to suck my dick. I would say yes, and he would... and there was never any... reciprocation expected. I would repent and confess to a priest, and it would all be over – until the next time it happened. I told myself that I wasn't doing anything, that it wasn't really my fault, and while I never lied in confession, I never made it clear that this was something I did... regularly."

How regularly? Hawkeye wondered. He was full of a fierce half-amused half-appalled tenderness. If he'd been showering with Mulcahy, and not in those separate wooden boxes the army had provided for the benefit of the nurses, he'd have been tempted to... *look at him in a certain way.*

"Two or three times a year," Francis said. "From when I was twelve to when I was twenty-two. Even after I'd felt my vocation as a priest. Only when I was about to enter the seminary, by the grace of God I was able to be honest with myself and accept that I

couldn't divide my nature like this. I couldn't keep praying for God to change me and keep ... enjoying these incidents. I had to stop. And I did. But you were the first person I ever lay down with."

Francis stopped again. "I knew moving in with you would mean having sex with you," he said at last. "And I did... do want that. But I didn't know, even when I'd consented, it would mean feeling so overwhelmed by you. I'm sorry. I'm just not... not used to this. It's my fault, not yours."

Hawkeye reared up on one elbow and looked down at Francis. "Your fault," he said blankly, conscious of a cocktail of feelings so intense he'd get drunk just breathing in the fumes. "*Your* fault?" The water from his eyes felt hot on his face.

"I should have told you earlier." Francis reached up and touched Hawkeye's face. "Or not at all, I suppose. I'm sorry. I don't know what to do."

Hawkeye turned his face and kissed the palm of Francis's hand. Only for a moment, but he was conscious of the shiver and tremble of the other man's reaction.

"I'm used to doing it fast. Turning the other guy on before he's got time to *think* no. Or getting it done before we go on... and do something else. Or just..." Hawkeye swallowed. "I wasn't expecting you tonight. You'd gone all day not touching me – looking as miserable as if someone shot your puppy – "

He felt Francis laugh before he saw it. A lot of the tension went out of him: Hawkeye felt himself relax a little.

"Okay," Hawkeye said, abandoning as futile ideas of making it perfect. "Let me lie down with you and hold you. Till you go to sleep."

He slid off Francis's glasses and folded them, putting them down carefully on the bedside cabinet. The other man blinked at him, vulnerable and dazed and kissable: Hawkeye pantomimed turning off the bedside light, and Francis nodded.

Then they held each other, in the easy dark. Hawkeye didn't try to kiss him. He rubbed his hands up and down the other man's back, pressing tension out of his muscles. He could feel he was winning when Francis's neck muscles loosened and his dropped head brought his mouth against Hawkeye's shoulder.

"Hawkeye?"

Hawkeye's mouth twitched. Francis had spoken sleepily, almost as if he expected an answer. Hawkeye slid his hand further up and ruffled the hair at the back of Francis's head: it was the best he could do without switching the light back on.

"I meant to tell you about the letter from my bishop's secretary."

"Uh huh," Hawkeye said out loud, amused. He wondered if Mulcahy could feel that he was speaking. "Well, I'm a captive audience." One that couldn't answer. He slid his hands down again, sliding Francis a little closer. Francis's arms tightened around him.

"I just meant to tell you," Francis said. "It wasn't a very kind letter. But it was okay to get it... because I had you."

Surprise stilled Hawkeye's hands. He felt as if his heart had stilled an instant, too.

"I'm not very happy right now. I'm sorry. But you make me feel at home with you. Thank you."

Hawkeye swallowed. His arms tightened almost convulsively. "You make me feel like you could perform heart surgery on me without anaesthetic," he said out loud, hoarsely. Not sure if Francis would understand it, or even if he were writing correctly, Hawkeye traced first *you're welcome* and then *I love you* on Francis's back.

Francis's laugh was half a grunt: he *was* falling asleep, even without coming. How he did it, Hawkeye had no idea: in this state, Hawkeye would have had to jerk off before he could hope to sleep, no matter how tired he was. Francis said sleepily, "I love you too," and it was a few minutes before he said anything else.

"Hawkeye – ?"

Hawkeye had the angle right, between his thigh and Francis's hard-on: pretty much all Francis had to do was breathe and he'd come.

"I – I –" Francis sounded awake again, unexpectedly so. He jerked, twitched, and came: he didn't make much noise about it, but the difference between the feel of his muscles before and after was astonishing. Hawkeye lay still and enjoyed it, his hands still tracing long lines on Francis's back. He wrote again *you're welcome*, and reached for the box of tissues beside the bed, mopping up.

"Hawkeye," Francis said after a moment. He sounded more amused than anything else. "You're *devious*."

Hawkeye nodded, grinning. He could sleep now, too.

Francis hadn't been kidding about snoring. Once he went to sleep, he sawed wood. Hawkeye slept and woke and slept again: each time he drifted to the surface of sleep he woke abruptly, knowing where he was, who was making the noise in his ear.

He woke to the alarm thinking *earplugs*, but the next breath's thought was *tonight, tomorrow night*. No need for earplugs: no Francis. He levered himself out of bed and tried not to wake him.

He'd left a gift under the tree last night. It lurked there, looking terribly obvious and lonely to Hawkeye.

He was halfway down his mug of coffee when Francis appeared, looking sleepy, wearing – Hawkeye smiled – the faded red bathrobe.

"You were just going without saying goodbye?" Francis sat down at the table. Hawkeye pushed the coffee pot at him.

Francis smiled at him: he looked tired. A little awkward, but mostly tired. He poured himself a mug of coffee and added milk.

"I'll be home Sunday night."

"How are you getting up to Maine?" Francis asked.

"Rental."

It looked as if it took a moment for that to sink in. "You could have had your father's car back."

"It's your car," Hawkeye said. "It was easier to fix up a rental, anyway. I just pick it up this morning, return it Sunday night." He finished his coffee, and stood up.

Francis stood up. They looked at each other, and then Francis put out his hands and caught hold of him, pulling him into a hug.

"Goodbye," Francis said. "Drive carefully."

Hawkeye found himself grinning. When Francis let go of him and he could step back from the hug, he said "You bet. You too."

Christmas Day, 1954

1. Letter from Maine

Dear Francis,

I miss you. It's been a whole day since I last saw you and it feels like forever. It feels like twice forever till I see you again. Writing to you is better than nothing. Not much better though.

Fortunately, three years in Korea taught me to regard any Christmas on which I don't have to operate on half a dozen wounded soldiers as a good Christmas. And wounded soldiers are scarce in Crabapple Cove, unless we count the armies of lobsters. If they ever cut a deal with the Pentagon, we're all doomed.

What am I talking about – we're safe so long as the Pentagon realise all lobsters turn Red when things heat up.

Got into Crabapple Cove at quarter of six, and discovered Mrs Godden trying to persuade Danny and Mary to eat her tuna casserole. Without much success. Not enough ketchup. Not in the house, and probably not in the world. Sarah's labor pains started at noon Christmas Eve, and it looks like the kid's determined to arrive dead on schedule: sometime early in the morning Christmas Day. Danny and Mary said their mom told them they were getting a baby for Christmas. Danny wants a puppy instead, and Mary wants a Ginny. (It's a kind of doll. Looks sort of like a baby girl with metal implants in her hips so you can move her legs back and forth and pretend she's walking. I know this because I bought one for her. Sarah's suggestion. Danny's getting a fishing-rod.)

I got Mrs Godden to leave – she had to go home and poison her own family – and cooked up plain spaghetti with butter for the kids. After I'd got them off to bed – Danny needs to be shown the inside of his closet and assured there is no boogeyman in Crabapple Cove, Mary just wants eight pages of a storybook about talking mice dressed up in little tiny ball gowns. I'm not kidding. That's her favorite story right now. Enough to strike Klinger green, in his frilly period.

So I read Mary her story, lied to Danny – very convincingly – and settled down for a pleasant Christmas Eve by the telephone. Wrapping presents for Danny and Mary, Bill's, Sarah's, and Santa's. Santa gives the best presents, but he didn't buy Mary a Ginny. He has taste. Mine is all in my mouth.

I wish you were here. Right here, sitting on the sofa beside me, probably doing a better job than me on wrapping presents. I miss you.

You may not have noticed, but it's now twelve hours later. Bill rang me up from the hospital at five in the morning – it's a boy. Sarah and son both doing well, Bill said. But he's not. When Sarah was in labor she told Bill she wants a divorce. That would be OK –

lots of women in labor tell their husbands they want to murder them, that's why midwives make the big money, reassuring anxious fathers that mommy doesn't really mean the death threats – but Sarah's still saying she wants a divorce, and Bill can't figure out why.

I drove Danny and Mary to the hospital so they could see their baby brother. Then I drove them back again while Sarah and Bill were still being polite to each other. The hospital are keeping Sarah in overnight – I think they hope she'll wake up tomorrow and say everything is just fine. Bill's coming back tonight. Or he is if he has any sense. What do you think? Should I tell Bill why Sarah wants to divorce him? Or just tell him why I'd like to push him in the swimming-hole? I miss you. We went out for a walk after we got back from the hospital, while it was still light, and Danny and Mary went sliding on the pond. It's shallow water, deep mud. Freezes hard every winter. It's beautiful up here in winter – especially after a hard frost. I'd like you to see it.

I'm sitting in the kitchen writing this while Danny and Mary drink hot cocoa and eat cookies. They asked me who I was writing to and I told them my friend Francis, in New York. They wanted to know why I was writing to you, and I told them because I wanted you to come visit Crabapple Cove in winter and see how beautiful it is. Danny said I should tell you that he's made a snowman. Mary says she's made a snowman too, but actually it's more like a snowblob. Don't tell her I said that.

I think they've had too many cookies

Okay. Following the cookie emergency there was the Too Full To Eat Dinner emergency, and then the Too Excited To Go To Sleep emergency. I don't know why I call them emergencies. Nobody died. I only shouted at them once. Danny still has to be convinced the boogeyman isn't in Crabapple Cove before he'll go to sleep. He says there was one in Levinetown that lived in his closet, and he thinks it might have followed him here. Not a chance, I told him: boogeymen have better sense. Besides, they're very territorial. It's nearly 10 and there's no sign of Bill. He'd better come home tonight, because I'm leaving tomorrow morning.

Mary liked her Ginny. Apparently what you do with it is take it by the ankles and hit your brother with it. The body swings round and increases the force of the blow. I hadn't realised. Now it makes sense. Danny says he isn't sharing his fishing rod with rotten little sisters, so it looks like I have to buy another one, Mary-sized, before summer. I'll see you tomorrow. I miss you,

Hawkeye

2. Feed the hungry

Mulcahy went for a walk after breakfast on Christmas Day. It was good weather for walking: warm for December, clear sky, no wind. Central Park was nearly 20 blocks away. He passed six churches on the way. Three of them were Catholic.

There was a party at the school, as he'd told Hawkeye, but he couldn't face the explanations necessary if he showed up for it. There were churches nearby where he could have gone to Mass. There were undoubtedly charities within walking distance that would be providing a Christmas dinner for the homeless, or something else where he could have made himself useful, but he hadn't looked for them.

He had nothing to do. He had nowhere to go. He missed Hawkeye.

Central Park was greyed brown and tired green. Mulcahy set out walking uptown along the first path he came to.

He could not go to confession. He wondered – he had been wondering since yesterday – how the two women in his last parish had managed it. They had lived together, and loved each other, and gone to confession, and taken communion at mass on Sundays and festivals. Had they been celibate? Had they decided that since in their minds their love for each other was not a sin, they need not struggle to repent and confess it?

He had told himself that it was the mutual devotion of Ruth and Naomi. He hadn't asked himself how they saw it.

He was certain, remembering how they had been together, that they had not repented or felt guilt. He wished that he had talked to them. Perhaps, even then, he'd been afraid of what they would say to him.

He still wished he could have talked to his bishop. The letter his bishop had sent him was long-ago ashes in the Pennsylvania school's incinerator, but he often remembered sentences from it, suddenly and abruptly.

I would not have ordained you if I had known you had these tendencies.

Homosexuals are bound to celibacy by natural law.

Suffering from this affliction, you cannot be a good candidate for the priesthood.

I would ask you to consider seriously your vocation.

If you choose to apply for laicization, I will support your application.

He stood by the pond and took his specs off to rub at his eyes. He had managed to be a priest for nine years. He had managed to be celibate for fifteen years. He had failed at both. It ought to feel as if he had failed God, but he had felt since Thanksgiving – since falling asleep on the sofa with Hawkeye in his arms – that God was still there: still very much with him, as He had always been.

The Church was not. He could not pretend anything else. He could go to Mass – even if he never took communion, never went to confession, never tried to feel contrition, he could go to Mass. But it would be a pretence: if he spoke to anyone, even under the seal of the confessional, about how he lived, with Hawkeye, they would know he was living in a state of mortal sin.

Unrepentant. Uncontrite. Unreconciled.

Even knowing this, he could not feel that God condemned him. And that made him a heretic.

“Heretic,” he said out loud, and glanced round: no one at all seemed to be in earshot. He was above the pond, walking on a tree-lined path. He stood still, digging his hands into his pockets. His scarf was in one – he didn't need it today; his gloves in the other.

Hawkeye's father's coat was warmer than his own winter coat, and comfortable: he'd pulled it on without thinking about it when he left the apartment.

Take it as a Catholic. The Protestants got their share.

Hawkeye needed someone. He ought to be married: Mulcahy knew it, and wished he could make himself want it, instead of wanting Hawkeye. Even if Hawkeye needed someone now who remembered Korea, in a year, maybe two years –

If – when – Hawkeye met the right woman, someone he could marry, it would hurt. But it would be the end of this. And the end in a right way, an end that would mean –

Being lonely. He had come to Hawkeye that weekend five weeks ago because he was lonely. Because he had been unable to feel that sitting alone in the small room at the school, trying not to think about Hawkeye, while Hawkeye was alone a few miles away, alone and in need, was in any way the right thing to do.

But if Hawkeye was with someone – a woman for whom he felt passionate, loving friendship –

It would hurt, being alone. But it would be an acceptable pain. *Bless us, dear God, and our friendship. Help me never be less than a friend.*

The coat hugged itself around him. "Hawkeye," he said. "I wish you were here."

A man had come round the corner, and was staring at him. Mulcahy stared back, embarrassed at having spoken out loud, wondering how loud he had spoken.

The man was wearing jeans and a jacket: he stuck his hands in his back pockets, leaning back a little. He was looking at Mulcahy now in a way that Mulcahy recognised, nerve deep, bone deep.

He turned quickly and walked away.

3. Anatomy of a divorce

Bill drove between Crabapple Cove and Levinetown every day. He knew the road even in a hard frost on a moonless night. He was literally unaware of anything that had passed between leaving the hospital and walking up the path to the front door.

The kids had to be asleep. Bill closed the door quietly.

"Good evening," Ben said. He was leaning against the doorway to the old parlour. "How's Sarah?"

"Oh, she's fine," Bill said.

"How's my newest nephew?"

"He's fine."

"Danny and Mary went off to bed about eight. They're fine. So that just leaves you and me. I'm fine, too. Thank you for asking. You look terrible." His voice had an edge to it that Bill didn't like.

"I'm fucking exhausted," Bill said.

"I had a terrific Christmas," Ben said. He sounded mocking. "Thanks for inviting me."

"Sarah invited you. Right now I can't imagine why. She's been acting kind of crazy recently," Bill mocked back.

Ben glanced up. He lowered his voice. "Bill, if either of your older kids happen to be awake, they can hear what you say if you talk loud in the hall."

Bill went past Ben, down the hall to the kitchen. He wasn't hungry, but he hadn't eaten since breakfast this morning.

"When do you have to go back to New York?"

"Tomorrow." Ben turned a chair round, sat down, and propped his chin up on his hands over the chair back. It was so familiar it made Bill grin.

"No chance you could stay on another day? It's been good having you here, Hawkeye."

"I'm doing rounds on Monday morning," Ben said, quickly. "I have to get back for Sunday night."

"Did you ever deal with pregnant women?"

Ben's mouth twisted into a grin. "I'm a surgeon. A thoracic surgeon."

"What does that mean?"

"Means 'no'."

"They keep telling me at the hospital that women say all kinds of irrational things when they've just given birth."

"She didn't sound irrational when I was visiting her this afternoon."

"She wants a divorce!"

"She doesn't sound crazy to me," Ben said, and grinned: sudden, swift, and nasty. As if he actually meant what he'd just said.

"Sarah's been acting irrationally for weeks. This time's been hard on her." Bill knew what he was saying was true. "She'll get over it."

Bill had put together a plateful of food. He sat down at the table, facing Ben: Ben was looking past him. When his gaze switched back to Bill's face, he spoke abruptly. "What if she doesn't?"

"She will. She doesn't want a divorce. We've been married nine years. This is just some crazy thing she's come up with because she's mad at me about Thanksgiving." Bill picked up a forkful of beef and sniffed at it. The icebox had needed cleaning out, but the meat smelt okay. He ate it. "She's *still* mad at me," he added, "and dammit, *she* was the one who ran off and spoiled the holiday."

"She ran off?" Ben's eyebrows went up. "*Ran?*"

"Mom came up from Florida for the holiday, and the moment Sarah heard the news, she started making plans to go to *Vermont*."

"Visiting her folks?"

"Sure. But she can do that any time. Mom doesn't visit from Florida every year." The lettuce looked wilted, but it smelt fine. "I tried to argue her out of it, but she packed herself *and* the kids on the bus to Vermont the day before Mom got here, and didn't get back till Monday. Mom had to head back to Florida on Wednesday, she only got two days with her grandkids, and Sarah acts like the whole thing was *my* fault."

Ben grunted. He was watching Bill eat with apparent fascination. "You know, in all the time BJ complained, I never realised how disgusting it looks to see someone sniff his food before he eats it."

Bill put down his fork. "What's the problem?"

Ben lifted his hands and widened his eyes. "I'm just passing a remark."

"I appreciate your helping out, Hawkeye, but not your snide comments."

"Be glad that's all."

"What's that supposed to mean?"

“Have you seriously considered what you’re going to do if you can’t persuade Sarah she doesn’t want to divorce?”

“Come off it,” Bill said. Ben was looking at him as if quite serious. It was disconcerting. Hawkeye had always been a joker, and sarcasm was only what Bill expected from him. “Quit joking around.”

Ben stood up. He opened his mouth as if he speak, but he looked twitchy. “Ah, the hell with it. I’m going to bed.” As he turned, he muttered “Why does *no one* ever believe me when I say I’m not joking?”

“Ben – ” Ben didn’t turn. “Hawkeye!”

Ben turned round. “Look. Bill.” He rubbed the back of his hand over his forehead. He sounded tired. “If things aren’t going your way, if you think you might get into trouble, you make up a story, and you *stick* to it. I don’t know whether you believe the stories you make up, but I don’t really care any more. I don’t care about you any more.” He sounded surprised. “I really don’t.”

“What are you talking about?”

“Oh, you know. You pushed me into the swimming-hole when I was seven, and then you lied about it to everyone for years.”

Bill had a mouthful of beef: he nearly choked. “Hawkeye, you’re back on *that*?”

“Just you and me. I’ll never tell.” Ben came back to the table and leaned both his hands on it. His head jerked forward. He looked almost like a stranger. “Just as a matter of interest: how do *you* remember that day?”

Bill got up. It felt as if a shred of beef had caught at the back of his throat. He took a glass from among the clean dishes, and filled it from the tap. He’d always liked the water here. It tasted like home. He drank, deep, and refilled the glass. “I went out in the boat with you, and you got up when you shouldn’t have and fell in,” he said. “As far as I’m concerned, that’s all that happened. And you’re wrong – I *did* get into trouble. Dad seemed to think I should have kept more of an eye on you.” He looked up, directly into Ben’s eyes. “Whatever way you remember it, that’s the way it happened.”

“Oh, right,” Ben said, softly. He was smiling, crookedly. “Right. Well, you’ve had twenty-seven years for that story: how about this one? You knew about Sarah’s plans to go to Vermont for Thanksgiving, you just decided to claim she’d never told you because that meant you didn’t have to tell Aunt Ellen she’d either have to go to Vermont or change her plans.”

“What?” Bill stared. “You’re making it up.”

Ben’s smile was more like a smirk. He shook his head, slowly.

“You have to be making it up.”

“You’re forgetting something,” Ben said. “Twenty-seven years ago it was just you and me in the boat. And I bet you think it’s just between you and Sarah now. But when you start making stuff up here and now, you’ve got to allow for Danny. He knows when his mom told him the four of you were going to Vermont for Thanksgiving. He remembers because his mom told him he could sleep in the barn with the big boys this year, and two years ago he was too little. He bragged about it at school.”

“He’s only seven,” Bill said. He was fumbling for a better rejoinder.

Ben’s smile was definitely a smirk now. “So was I, and *I* remember. You’ve only had six or seven weeks to forget – do *you* remember?”

“Of course I – ” Bill looked down at the plate of food. He pushed it away. “You’ve got a hell of a nerve, standing in my house making crazy accusations – ”

“Your house? *Your* house?” Ben laughed. He didn’t sound amused, but angry. “Bill, this house is *mine* – and it’s leased to *Sarah*. It’s not yours. It’s never going to be yours.”

“I pay the rent on it.” Bill was trying to keep his temper. “What does it matter to you? That business about the boat was when we were both kids – why keep raking it up?”

“You really want to know why?” Ben tilted his head to one side. “Because that was the first time I knew I was going to die. That’s not the kind of thing you forget.”

“Why keep raking it up *now*?”

Ben didn’t answer. He was looking over Bill’s head. Finally, he said, “Bill, I can believe you remember your version of what happened at the swimming-hole... like you said, it’s been twenty-seven years. But this Thanksgiving story is only what, six, seven weeks old? You’ve got to remember how it really was.” His eyes slid to Bill’s face.

“Don’t you?”

“You’re making stuff up.”

“You keep saying that. But unless you’re actually psychotic – ”

Bill lifted his head, disturbed.

“ – and I don’t think you are, you’ve got to remember. On some level. You’ve *got to*.” Ben leaned forward. “You want to convince Sarah she doesn’t want to divorce you? Head back to the hospital and the minute she wakes up, tell her you’re sorry you lied about Thanksgiving and you’ll never do it again.”

“What? Ben, you’re *nuts*.”

Ben laughed. He went on laughing for some time. Bill stood up. It was the first time in this conversation that he had genuinely thought Hawkeye might be crazy: he didn’t sound either amused or angry, just... hysterical. He straightened up, wiping at his eyes. “The consensus is *in*. Okay. I’m nuts. Look, I really do have to get back to New York for tomorrow night. But I’ll hang around here till noon if you want to go back to the hospital tonight. Or I’ll go through Levinetown on my way home tomorrow morning and tell Sarah I’ll give her six months off the rent as my Christmas present to her if she wants a divorce.” He spoke casually, half-seriously: it was infuriating.

“Get out,” Bill said. There was an angry, sick feeling in his belly. “Get *out*. If you go near Sarah, I’ll – I’ll – ”

“Yeah?” Ben tilted his chin up. “What are you going to do?” He stood still, his hands at his sides, in the same cocky hit-me-if-you-dare stance, as if he were still ten, as if this was a matter of stolen apples or a fishing-rod borrowed without permission.

“Don’t you understand – this isn’t a joke, this isn’t a game – this is *my marriage* we’re talking about, this is *my life*. Grow up, Hawkeye!”

Ben shrugged. He turned to go again. “I’m tired,” he threw over his shoulder, “and I’m as grown up as I want to be. You decide about your marriage. Good night.” There was a mocking twist in his voice, though he did sound tired. The door closed behind him.

For a long moment, Bill wanted to go after him, and tell him – something, anything, about the swimming-hole. He barely remembered it: that whole day was a blur. He remembered telling people *about* what had happened much more clearly than he remembered the day itself.

The moment when he could have done that passed. He sat down again and finished his tasteless meal.

Ben had left the door to Danny's room open: Bill closed it gently. The door to Mary's room was shut, and so was the door to the spare room where Ben was sleeping. It faced the door to the room where Bill and Sarah slept. The house was silent, but for the creaking of the eaves. Bill went into their room and closed the door.

Sarah slept on the right of the bed, convenient to the door if the children cried in the night. It always seemed to take longer to get to bed when she wasn't there. Bill was desultorily getting into bed when he heard Ben's door open.

He heard Ben go down the stairs, moving quietly. Bill opened his own door. From the top of the stairs he could see by the light that Ben was in the kitchen.

Ben's hair was tangled across his eyes; he looked bewildered and dazed and only half-awake. He was standing in the kitchen pouring himself a shot of whiskey. Despite his look of being half-asleep, his hand was steady.

"Hawkeye?"

"What – ?" Ben looked at him and set the bottle down. He lifted the glass and looked at it. "What do you want?"

"What are you doing?"

"Drinking," Ben said with candour, and drank as if for a bet. The empty glass was rinsed out and left beside the sink: the bottle went back in the cupboard.

"What if I did – maybe say something different about Thanksgiving? It wasn't like it was important."

"Something different?" Ben raised an eyebrow. "Yeah?"

"It wasn't *important*. But say I did. You really think if I apologised to Sarah, she'd give up on this divorce idea?"

"How would I know?" Ben looked exasperated. "But you know what I'd do? I wouldn't just apologise." He went across the room, brushing past Bill as if he wasn't there. He was at the door when Bill asked, "What would you do?"

For once, Ben didn't sound as if he were joking. "I'd crawl." He turned round. His face was a familiar clown's mask, mouth open and grinning, but his voice was serious. "I'd crawl all the way to Levinetown. I'd promise anything." He reached out for the door handle, without looking. "That's what *I'd* do. Right now, I'm going to sleep."

Disconcerted, Bill said, "Good night."

4. Letter to California

Dear Sis,

Of course anything you send to me at the school will reach me, but I've moved. I'm only ten minutes walk from the railway terminus – it takes me less than an hour to reach the school in the mornings, and it's more convenient for the evening classes I have to take.

Also, while the youngsters I was looking after at the school are fine young people, I did miss having someone to talk to in the evenings. The apartment belongs to one of the doctors I knew in Korea – he's working at Bellevue now. He's up in Maine over

Christmas, visiting his family, or I'm sure he'd ask to be remembered to you – this is the Dr Pierce I wrote about.

There is something I have been meaning to write to you about for some time now.

When I went on retreat last year, ~~it wasn't entirely my idea~~ I was instructed by my bishop to take the time to prayerfully consider my vocation. He was disturbed by a disagreement I had had with him over a point of doctrine. He suspended me from the priesthood, so I was in the retreat house as a lay brother.

When I left the retreat house, it wasn't on the instructions of my bishop: I am afraid that I felt I had spent enough time considering, and it was time to go back to work. He wrote to me at the school for the deaf, strongly advising me to apply for laicization. And I did. Next month or perhaps in February, I'll hear from the Holy See.

I'm very sorry. I know I should have written to you about this before: I couldn't somehow bring myself to do it, though I wanted you to know. I wish I could have seen you face to face.

Although it wasn't my idea, in the months since then I have had time to consider what he wrote to me, and though I think (though I don't like to be critical) he advised me for all the wrong reasons, he was right.

Do you remember the nun you wrote to me about, years ago, who talked about how having a vocation feels like the finger of God, touching you, or like a thread, pulling you? I've always remembered what you said you'd felt – not a finger or a thread, but like Mam grabbing you by the scruff of the neck and shoving you into the kitchen and saying 'There's your work, get it done!'

That's how I felt. Even after I was deafened in Korea, I felt it. Only then God took His hand away. I lost my vocation.

It's taken me all these months to get used to being an inactive, invisible priest. Even when I was at college everyone knew I was there on a Jesuit scholarship, I was aimed for the priesthood. It's still very strange sometimes when people don't "Father" me all the time – "present company excepted, Father", "excuse my language, Father" – but then I thought it was very strange sometimes when people *did* "Father" me all the time.

I feel now that when I finally hear from the Holy See, it will come as a relief – like a long operation over.

Please forgive me. I'm sorry for the pain this letter must cause you. I love you very much: your understanding has meant more to me over the years than I'll ever be able to tell you.

I hope you had a good Christmas. Pray for me.

Yours,

Francis

5. Sunday, 26th December

Green branches set with gold baubles. *What if I could have written to her about Hawkeye...*

Mulcahy woke. He had a cramp in the back of his neck: he had gone to sleep on the couch. The tree smelled of forests only in his dream.

Hawkeye moved into his field of vision: Mulcahy sat up. Hawkeye handed him his specs. Hawkeye came into focus, and the world seemed to settle into place.

"I went to sleep with them on," he said.

"Yes." Hawkeye sat down on the couch beside him. "I took them off when I came in." He sat with his hands on his lap. "About half an hour ago," he added, before Mulcahy asked. "It's nearly midnight. I left Maine late."

"Is everything all right at home?"

Hawkeye's grin was crooked. "Home?"

Mulcahy looked a query; Hawkeye went on, smoothly, "Good news and bad news. The good news is, I have a new nephew. A healthy nine-pounder with all his fingers and toes. Good voice. Born Christmas Day. Sarah says she wants to name him after me."

"That's – that's *splendid* news, Hawkeye." Mulcahy would have been more delighted, but there was an odd look in Hawkeye's face. "Sarah's well? And the others?"

"Sarah's doing fine. Danny and Mary are fine." Hawkeye shrugged. "Sarah wants a divorce. I last saw Bill – still digging."

"Digging?" Mulcahy was confused.

"He was in a hole," Hawkeye elaborated. "And he was still digging." He leaned back and tucked his hands behind the back of his neck, still watching Mulcahy. "You didn't open your present."

"I was –" Mulcahy was trying to think of a polite excuse. He looked at Hawkeye, and gave up. "I was unhappy," he said. "I... didn't really want to."

"Oh." Hawkeye shrugged. "I didn't mean to get back this late. We could just... I have rounds tomorrow. Later."

"Couldn't you open yours tonight?" Mulcahy asked. The small parcel had slipped down from the back of the sofa and was wedged between two cushions: he dug it out and handed it to Hawkeye. "Happy Christmas," he said. "I'm sorry I didn't wrap it before you left."

Hawkeye looked down at the present, with a small, cautious smile. "Hey." He looked up. "You want yours?"

The other parcel was still under the tree. Mulcahy got up. He'd picked it up before, registered that it felt like a couple of books, and put it down again. He sat down next to Hawkeye. "It isn't much, I'm afraid," he said.

Hawkeye's smile broadened into a grin. "That was what I was going to say." He turned the gift over in his hands. "I thought you'd be better at wrapping presents than me," he said. His fingernails were always clipped very short: it took him longer to untie

the tidy knot Mulcahy had made in the coloured string than it took Mulcahy to peel the tape from the paper without tearing it.

The books were old leather-bound volumes, the covers red, the pages edged in gold: the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*. Not translations: the original texts. Mulcahy opened the *Iliad* to Book XXIII, and ran his eye down the verses to find *You sleep, Achilles, and had forgotten me...* He had never owned such fine books. He looked up.

Hawkeye was turning the penknife over in his hands: a single blade and a corkscrew. Mulcahy had asked to have B.F.P. engraved on one side and the outline of a hawk and an eye on the other. Hawkeye looked up.

“Thank you,” Mulcahy said.

Hawkeye swallowed. There were tears standing in the corner of his eyes, Mulcahy saw. “You haven’t got them,” he said. “I wasn’t sure when I bought them...” He didn’t finish his sentence. One hand came up and knuckled at his eyes and he smiled. “Thanks.” He tossed the penknife up, and caught it. “Thank you. In case I ever forget who I am, right?”

“I missed you,” Mulcahy said. He put his hand on Hawkeye’s shoulder, then curved his grip round the back of Hawkeye’s neck. The lightest pressure, and Hawkeye was leaning in towards him for a kiss.

New Year’s Day, 1955

Mulcahy woke. Hawkeye was behind him, lying so that the shape of his body made a kind of cradle for Mulcahy: he could feel him breathing. It was the sixth morning he had woken with Hawkeye holding him. It had almost stopped feeling like a luxury he shouldn’t indulge in.

Even without any need to get up early, he was still awake. He got up.

He was showered and making coffee before Hawkeye appeared. He still looked sleepy: he propped himself up against the wall by the kitchen door, and watched.

Mulcahy filled the big mug, sweetened it, and handed it to him. He filled another mug for himself, and added milk. Hawkeye drank. “You know I’d love you forever even if you didn’t make me coffee,” he said, coming up for air. “It’s just that with coffee I’m awake enough to know it.” He yawned again. “French toast?”

“What?”

“Breakfast,” Hawkeye said. He was smiling. “What do you say to a big pile of French toast with maple syrup and crispy bacon?” He made a wide gesture with his free hand that somehow ended up with his hand curling round the back of Mulcahy’s neck. “We can eat it and then go back to bed. Or we could take it back to bed and eat it there.” His smile had slid into a crooked grin. “Or we could just skip the French toast till later.”

His hand was moving on the back of Mulcahy’s neck. Mulcahy realised he was moving closer to Hawkeye, without even thinking about it. He put his mug down on the counter: they were standing almost too close to talk.

“Hawkeye?”

“Mmmm?” Hawkeye’s coffee mug was gone. His mouth tasted of coffee.

“I love you,” Mulcahy said. He didn’t know what Hawkeye said in reply. Something: he felt Hawkeye’s mouth moving against his face, a dart of tongue and twitch of lips, not a kiss. Hawkeye’s kisses were tingling against his skin.

Mulcahy put his hands on Hawkeye’s back, feeling the sharply-defined bones through the soft towelling of his bathrobe. It was easier standing up than lying down: he was tense and aroused, but he wasn’t defenceless –

He shouldn’t need to defend himself. Hawkeye wasn’t attacking him. He was kissing him. Hawkeye’s hands were at the small of his back. He hadn’t thought of this. They had sex at night – they didn’t stand in the kitchen kissing like this –

It seemed they did.

Hawkeye had twitched open Mulcahy’s bathrobe. He was down on his knees so quickly that Mulcahy nearly staggered, but Hawkeye’s hands steadied him, and he looked down to see Hawkeye flash a grin up at him before –

mouth hot and wet around his dick

Mulcahy’s mouth opened: he thought he made a sound. He clutched at the man’s shoulders – Hawkeye’s shoulders – trying to think of Hawkeye, trying to protest. He couldn’t find it in him to protest. He’d forgotten – he always forgot – how good it felt, to feel the man’s mouth, lips, tongue, even the teasing nibble of teeth –

Hawkeye.

He could never bring himself to make the man stop once he’d begun. He couldn’t now. The man – *Hawkeye* – was lapping at his dick, even his balls, not just a suck but enjoying him like a meal –

After a while it was impossible to think about anything but the man’s mouth. After a while, he came, in a shock of pleasure. He felt the mouth movements of the man swallowing. He leaned on Hawkeye’s shoulders, shivering.

I want to make love with you because I’m me, and you’re you.

“Oh, my,” he said stupidly, looking into Hawkeye’s grinning face. “I... do you want...”

“Sure, if you want,” Hawkeye said. “Why don’t we take this back to bed?” He got up. “You may be used to all that kneeling, but –” his grin got broader “– I’m out of practice.” He kissed Mulcahy. His mouth didn’t taste of coffee, but something half-familiar – not Hawkeye’s semen: his own.

“I’m out of practice too,” Mulcahy said, numbly. He was trying to find words to apologise, but Hawkeye’s head tilted and his mouth opened: he was laughing. Even though he was still visibly aroused, he looked satisfied – happy and satisfied.

I want to make love with someone who matters to me.

“I wanted you to have what you want,” Mulcahy said. He felt oddly distanced, almost as if he were in shock. Hawkeye had never looked this satisfied before. If this was what Hawkeye wanted. He went down on his knees, parting Hawkeye’s bathrobe, sliding his mouth down on Hawkeye’s dick. *Hard* was Hawkeye’s word for it: it didn’t seem exactly the right word to Mulcahy, whenever he felt it in his mouth. Wet-velvet quivering, tasting like nothing else in the world, his lips and his tongue and his mouth and his nose all experiencing it together. Impossible not to know this was Hawkeye: this was the most intimate way of experiencing Hawkeye’s arousal that Mulcahy could imagine.

Hawkeye’s hands on his shoulders, then his head, quivering and jerking – those steady, strong hands –

I wanted to make love with you. Mulcahy felt the stiffness of Hawkeye's dick increase, overwhelmingly, and he had learned that meant Hawkeye was about to come. Always before he had been unable to overcome the reflex to jerk his head back: this time he fought to keep it there, accepting Hawkeye's semen as Hawkeye had taken his. *I want to make love with you.*

He could let go now, and did. He couldn't stand up yet. He didn't think he could look up at Hawkeye and smile at him yet. He knelt on the kitchen floor looking down stupidly at Hawkeye's bare feet, his own knees. He had never reciprocated any of the – brave, he now thought – offers to give him pleasure. He had accepted pleasure from mouths he had done his best to think of as anonymous, and he had retreated, repenting as best he could, refusing to recognise a familiar face if he saw the man again. Had any of them felt as he now felt? *Dear Lord, if you're trying to teach me a lesson...* His thoughts broke off in sheer astonishment.

Hawkeye was kneeling down beside him, retying his bathrobe. Mulcahy didn't look up. Hawkeye took hold of his hand, as if he meant to say something to him, but pushed a mug of coffee into it instead. It was barely even warm. Hawkeye folded his hand round Mulcahy's and tilted the mug towards his mouth. Surprised, Mulcahy drank. He blinked past the edge of the cup: Hawkeye was looking at him soberly.

"I didn't expect you to do that," Hawkeye said. "Thanks."

Mulcahy said nothing. The taste of coffee mingled with and overwhelmed the taste of semen. When he stopped drinking, he said "You did it for me."

Hawkeye grinned. "Yeah, but I'd been wanting to do that for a week. For months. For years. You hadn't." His hand went to the back of Mulcahy's neck. "You don't look –" This time his hand was comforting, not arousing. "You usually look... happier." His grin didn't look very cheerful. "Of course, I'm usually asleep."

"I'm all right." Mulcahy found his centre of balance, and stood up carefully. Hawkeye's hand slipped away from the back of his neck. He felt oddly disarrayed and alone. Every time they'd had sex before, it had been in bed. Limbs tangled together in the dark, unable to speak clearly to each other, but so close he could feel Hawkeye breathing – it was easier, somehow. And he wasn't usually – he wasn't usually this upset by –

Hawkeye's face, below him, was oddly distorted. "I thought you liked it?" Hawkeye stood up. All humour had fallen away from him. "What's wrong?"

"Nothing's wrong." Mulcahy managed a bright smile.

"Something's wrong," Hawkeye said.

"I love you," Mulcahy said.

"Yeah, good, right, that's nice, what's wrong?" Hawkeye was reaching out to him and Mulcahy nearly turned away.

It was difficult to meet Hawkeye's gaze. He did not want to remind Hawkeye about the showers. "I don't seem to like it when one of us is standing up." It wasn't the full truth: he thought he could learn to like it – kneeling: knowing this was Hawkeye. He could not bear it, standing, if he forgot.

"Oh." Hawkeye's face expressed bewilderment. "Okay. You know you can have me any way you want me, lying down, kneeling, sitting, bent over, doing the splits, just name it and if I'm flexible enough we'll do it. Okay?" He was leaning forward, focussed, intent. His mouth parted, and he showed his teeth in an eager smile.

Mulcahy wanted to bury his face against Hawkeye's shoulder. He knew so many ways of suppressing the wish, that it was a moment before it occurred to him that he didn't have to. He stepped forward, and Hawkeye's look seemed more bewildered than ever, but Mulcahy wrapped his arms round Hawkeye's body and pressed his face against Hawkeye's shoulder. (Even the same *bathrobe*.) The world narrowed down to an extremely small focus: he was holding Hawkeye, and Hawkeye was holding him. Their bodies pressed against each other. Not in bed, but standing up, in the kitchen, with the smells of coffee weaving round them. "I love you," Mulcahy said again. Hawkeye's arms tightened round him. He turned his head and nuzzled at Mulcahy's hair.

Hawkeye said something: Mulcahy reluctantly disengaged and looked at him.

"I just said I didn't want to let go of you," Hawkeye said. He grinned and held out his arms again, tilting his head to one side. "More?"

It felt as if some part of him that had been cold was melting-warm. Mulcahy put his arms around him again. Hawkeye's laugh was an internal shake that could be felt all the way down his body. He said something else. Mulcahy stepped back again and looked at him.

"Oh come on," Hawkeye said. "All I said was –" he was smiling so widely it was hard to read his lips "– or French toast?"

"French toast?"

"I'm wounded. You'd rather eat my French toast than cuddle me?" Hawkeye lifted his eyebrows. "Then again, my French toast is perfection itself. And we can always go back to bed afterwards, right?" He turned away to the fridge, letting go of Mulcahy, turning back and reaching out again. His hand caught Mulcahy's in a brief squeeze, half handshake, half caress. "Happy new year, by the way."

Last night Hawkeye had mentioned something about a party on Saturday evening: before he'd got very far talking about it, they'd gone to bed, and stopped talking. At least, stopped talking coherently.

Hawkeye's version of French toast *was* good.

"About this party tonight," Hawkeye said.

"What party?"

"Doctor Cournand's party."

"Oh." Mulcahy picked up another piece of French toast that he wasn't sure he wanted, and bit into it. After he'd swallowed, he said "Well, you should go." He'd already heard enough about Doctor Cournand. "I don't mind at all. You *should* go."

"I want you to come with me."

Mulcahy shook his head, not quite astonished – he'd seen that coming – but still, startled. "I'd be out of place."

"Look, it's not just for surgeons. It's not even just for medical staff. I have to go, and I'd like you to come too." Hawkeye put out his hand. "Wait a minute, before you tell me to shut up – the party's starting at eight. We get there about eight-thirty, stay an hour or two, and then we can go."

"But why would you have brought *me*?" Mulcahy was disturbed.

"You worked with me in the MASH unit in Korea," Hawkeye said. "Cournand's said a few times he thinks that was excellent training. He'll probably want to talk about it with you."

“But – ” Mulcahy protested again. “But I wasn’t – they’ll think I was medically trained, and I wasn’t.”

“You saw enough operations,” Hawkeye said.

“I couldn’t discuss them with a surgeon,” Mulcahy said. “I can see you have to go, but – there isn’t really a reason for *me* to be there.”

“You live with me,” Hawkeye said. “And you were in the 4077th. It doesn’t matter what you did – Cournand’s never going to have time to talk about heart surgery with you. But he won’t mind you being there.”

“How do you know?”

“Because I asked him,” Hawkeye retorted. “When I got the invitation. I told him someone else from the MASH unit would be staying with me then, and was it okay if I brought him along? And he said yes.”

“Oh.” Mulcahy fumbled for words. “Don’t you think... you should have asked me?”

“This was the Monday before Thanksgiving,” Hawkeye said. “I was hoping you were going to be staying with me. I still wasn’t sure. I didn’t want you to...” He trailed off. “I didn’t want you to run a mile,” he said at last.

“From a party?”

“From me assuming you were going to live with me.” Hawkeye looked down at his plate for a moment. Crumbs of toast were scattered on it. “I just don’t want to go without you,” he said, looking up again.

“How big a party will it be?”

Hawkeye shrugged. “Hundred or so, I guess.”

“White tie?” Mulcahy saw an exit.

“Sure. I can lend you my old tux,” Hawkeye blocked it. He glanced at Mulcahy. “It’ll fit. And a bow tie.”

Mulcahy had rather hoped that Hawkeye’s old tux *wouldn’t* fit, and that would settle the question, but it did. It must have been bought for Hawkeye before he got his full height.

Conscious of being watched, he turned to the doorway: Hawkeye was dressed for the evening, leaning against the doorpost, holding a white bow tie in one hand.

“Need any help tying this?”

“I can manage,” Mulcahy said, a little irritated. He reached for the tie, and realised he was being stupid. He managed a smile. “No, I can’t, actually.” A regular necktie he could have managed: but he’d never worn a bow tie in his life.

Hawkeye tied it neatly and swiftly. He was smiling, it seemed with simple pleasure: he finished with a swift kiss. “You look great.”

Cournand’s apartment faced east across Central Park: a succession of large high-ceilinged rooms that were, when they arrived, crowded with people. Mrs Cournand greeted them at the entrance with the kind of absent kindness that someone who has just said hello to over a hundred people in the space of less than an hour is capable of.

“Not sure if she even recognised me,” Hawkeye said, turning to face Mulcahy. He glanced round the room. “I’m not sure I recognise half the people here.”

They made their way towards the bar. It was months, Mulcahy realised, since he had been in any such large gathering of people who could all hear and who had no idea of making adjustments for a deaf person.

Hawkeye was stopped a dozen times on their way to the bar: as far as Mulcahy caught what they were saying, by people who called him “Doctor Pierce”. Mulcahy had been used to keeping a smile on his face: he was out of practice, he supposed, because it felt stiff and awkward. Hawkeye looked as if he were enjoying himself.

“Hawkeye,” he began, and then as Hawkeye didn’t turn to look at him, realised that Hawkeye was worse than deaf: in this crowd Mulcahy didn’t dare raise his voice, because he’d never know when he was shouting over the noise. He was relieved when it was clear Hawkeye had never heard him.

Hawkeye did turn when they got to the bar. “Scotch? Or a Martini?”

“I’ll have wine, thank you,” Mulcahy said. When Hawkeye leaned forward, looking at him, eyebrows raised, Mulcahy lifted his hands and spelt W, I, N, E.

“Oh.” Hawkeye nodded. “Red? White?”

R, E, Mulcahy spelt.

“Red it is,” Hawkeye said, before Mulcahy could finish. He got the barman’s attention quite quickly, while Mulcahy stood, feeling awkward, trying to keep his eyes all around him. He could not recall feeling like this in any other crowd – not even at the 4077th, the first days after he realised his hearing was almost wholly gone and his balance was somehow changed. There were more people in this one room than at the whole 4077th, but he was far better adjusted to his change in balance now than he was then.

Hawkeye turned back with a glass in either hand, and looked at him. “You okay?”

“I – ” Mulcahy swallowed. He pointed at the wall where there was a clear stretch between two crowded sofas. “Can we go over there?”

Someone brushed past him, a man on his way to the bar, and Mulcahy flinched. Hawkeye’s eyes narrowed. “Why are you talking so quietly?”

Mulcahy headed over to the wall. He got there safely, and turned, feeling better with his back to it. Hawkeye had followed him. “You’re not okay.”

Embarrassed, Mulcahy shrugged. “Too many people,” he said, smiling, making it a joke, “and they can all hear.”

Hawkeye seemed to hear him. “Why didn’t you tell me?” He looked exasperated.

“I didn’t know,” Mulcahy said, equally exasperated. “I haven’t been to a party like this for – years.” He was trying to project his voice a little, not too much.

“Ah.” Hawkeye said. He looked at the glasses. “This was a stupid idea, wasn’t it? Shall we just go?”

Mulcahy took the glass of wine out of Hawkeye’s hand. “I’m fine. I just need to get used to this.”

“You look like you need to sit down.”

“I’m fine,” Mulcahy repeated. He drank from his glass. “Do all these people work at Bellevue?”

Hawkeye glanced round. “No. About half of them are in private practice, I should think.”

“Are they all doctors?”

“I think the women mostly aren’t.”

“Oh.” Mulcahy turned the glass in his hands. Hawkeye looked uncertain, and it made Mulcahy feel uncomfortable: the only time Hawkeye had ever looked uncertain was when he felt he had done something he needed to apologise for, and Mulcahy couldn’t see that this was something Hawkeye needed to apologise for. “We were going to stay a couple of hours. Why don’t you... mingle, and I’ll stay here?”

“Mingle?” You could all but *see* the inverted commas as Hawkeye repeated the word. He looked at Mulcahy, and took a quick drink of his Martini. Whatever he saw, seemed to decide him. “Okay.”

For the next little while, Mulcahy could track Hawkeye’s movements round the room by looking for a ring of people with a single focus at their centre: that would be Hawkeye. He had seen the same thing happen at parties in the 4077th mess tent, or summer parties outside in the compound: except usually the focus had been double. Hawkeye and BJ, or Hawkeye and... Captain McIntyre.

A woman in her thirties, who had been talking with a couple of people sitting on the sofas, turned away and smiled at him. They fell into conversation; she was married to a physician at Bellevue, and taught in a small private school for gifted children: she had heard of Fanwood, and was interested by it.

“Are you a friend of Doctor Cournand’s? I saw you talking to Doctor Pierce.”

“No,” Mulcahy said. “I’m...”

The woman smiled suddenly and brightly. “Doctor Pierce.”

Mulcahy glanced round. Hawkeye had reappeared.

“Mrs Dreher. Can I get you a drink?” He was still holding the Martini glass, and it was half full.

“I would love –” She had turned away a little from Mulcahy, and he couldn’t get the rest of the sentence. She smiled up at Hawkeye, and handed him her empty glass. Hawkeye was smiling, looking down at her. “Your usual?”

She said something – must have said something: Hawkeye laughed. “Whatever you say.” He turned and went across the room to the bar. Mrs Dreher turned back to Mulcahy, her face flushed and smiling. “He’s such a delightful man – you know each other?”

“Yes,” Mulcahy said. “We used to – we were in Korea together.”

“Oh,” Mrs Dreher said. “You were in the MASH unit? Are you Doctor Hunnicutt, by any chance?”

“No,” Mulcahy said. He introduced himself. “I’m not a doctor,” he added.

“Claudia Dreher,” she said. “I’m not a doctor either.” She laughed. “There’s a weekly poker game – not a club, just a regular circulating Thursday night game. My husband hosts it every six weeks or so. Do you play poker?”

“I’ve been known to.” Mulcahy was amused despite himself.

“They spend three hours in the den playing cards, and when they surface they hardly remember to say goodbye or thank you. But Doctor Pierce does, though it may be because he’s new.” She smiled at Hawkeye, reappearing with her drink. “I was just saying to Mr Mulcahy that after you’ve played poker long enough with my husband, you’ll be as bad as all the rest.”

“Are you saying he’s a bad influence?” Hawkeye twitched his eyebrows and grinned. He handed her the glass.

“Poker! I don’t understand the appeal. Now if you had *girls* in there, instead of cigars and cards –” She was laughing.

Hawkeye put his hand on his heart. “Are you accusing *me* of flirting with other women? Why would I do that when I could flirt with you?”

A man – her age, a little older – appeared at her elbow, and said something: Mulcahy didn’t catch it, but both Mrs Dreher and Hawkeye laughed. The new man put his arm round Mrs Dreher’s shoulders and glanced at Mulcahy.

“Francis Mulcahy,” Hawkeye said. “Friend of mine from Korea. Francis, this is John Dreher.” They shook hands as Hawkeye was talking: Dreher kept his arm round his wife and his eyes on Hawkeye. “E.N.T. physician, and husband of the loveliest woman in the room.”

Mulcahy nodded, smiled, and sipped at his wine glass.

Doctor Dreher said something to Hawkeye, glancing briefly at Mulcahy – Mulcahy caught the name Cournand, and Hawkeye nodded. “Yes, he did.” Dreher responded, and Hawkeye shrugged. “Why not?” He turned away, and Claudia Dreher dragged at her husband’s hand on her shoulder.

“– hear you unless you’re looking at him,” she said.

Dreher smiled, his eyes for the first time focussing on Mulcahy. “Is that true, you’re deaf?”

“Yes,” Mulcahy said.

“You manage very well: I’d never have guessed.”

Mulcahy shrugged. He was conscious of a strange feeling, like free-floating anger, and he wasn’t sure where it had come from or why.

“So, you knew Doctor Pierce in Korea? What was he like?”

There were too many images – Hawkeye unshaven and shambling with exhaustion, Hawkeye laughing louder than anyone else over a joke, Hawkeye bright-eyed and fierce in the OR, Hawkeye’s gaze meeting his over the mess table or the body of a dying man or a game of poker or – Mulcahy shrugged and said, truthfully, “He worked very hard.”

“Yes, we heard something about the pace in these MASH units, even over here. Incredible numbers. One hundred patients in twenty-four hours?”

“Sometimes more,” Mulcahy said. “We all got used to working long hours.”

“Longer than residency?”

“Seventy-two hours at a stretch, sometimes, when the wounded just kept coming”

Dreher made a face, looking impressed despite himself. “Pierce doesn’t talk about it much. You’re a doctor?”

“A corpsman,” Mulcahy said. “I teach math at the New York School for the Deaf now.”

“Ah.” Dreher nodded, apparently a little confounded.

Hawkeye was coming back across the room, half a pace or so behind another man: Dreher turned, deference in the set of his shoulders.

Doctor Cournand, Mulcahy guessed: even before the man in his fifties, short-clipped hair going white and thin, shook his hand – a surgeon’s strong grip – and introduced himself. “So you worked with Doctor Pierce in Korea?” He smiled broadly. “What was he like in theatre?”

Mulcahy blinked. It was a moment before he grasped what Cournand must mean. “He worked very hard,” he repeated.

“From what I heard, you all did. What was Doctor Pierce like?”

Mulcahy had been conscious, since he put it on, of the tux Hawkeye had leant him. It fitted him surprisingly well. It dawned on Mulcahy, conscious again of the different weight against his throat, the absence of any signal that he was a priest, that Hawkeye had bought this for him. It fitted him *too* well to be anything else. Bought it, had it washed a couple of times so it wouldn't look absolutely new, and lied to Mulcahy about its origins.

"He used to sing," Mulcahy said. "He'd imitate a radio."

Cournand laughed. He said something in the middle of the laugh, but Mulcahy didn't get it. Hawkeye put his hand up to cover his eyes, briefly: Mulcahy realised that there were several other men – all surgeons, Mulcahy supposed – in a ring surrounding himself, and Cournand, and Hawkeye. It was impossible to follow what the others were saying.

"– sing?" Cournand said. "What did he sing?"

"Just... popular music," Mulcahy said. "Or tell jokes." *Or flirt.*

"Sing," Cournand said, shaking his head. "He's a talker, but..." He turned his head away to glance at Hawkeye, and looked back again at Mulcahy. "– excellent training. Perhaps we should send all our surgeons off to the front lines if they come back with this kind of expertise." He laughed: it was a joke. Mulcahy's face felt frozen: he looked at Hawkeye, expecting a furious outburst, and got a shrug and a half-grin, as if Hawkeye was inviting him to share the joke.

Mulcahy stepped back from the group, lifting his empty glass as a passport. It was easy enough to walk away: he felt hollowed out inside by anger, quite unafraid that someone would bump into him and make him lose his balance.

The maid found him his coat: he decided not to wait for the elevator.

Hawkeye was waiting for him in the apartment building's entrance. He was standing by the front door, arms crossed in front of him, wearing his topcoat and hat: Mulcahy hesitated, not sure if he could believe his eyes.

Of course, he hadn't rushed to get down the stairs, even well-lit as they were. If Hawkeye had been watching and had seen Mulcahy leave the room – if he had realised Mulcahy was leaving the party – he had time to disengage from the group around Cournand, say goodbye to their hostess, which Mulcahy had failed to do, get his own coat, and take the elevator down.

The concierge was looking at them with glassy uninterest. "Share a cab?" Hawkeye said.

They didn't talk in the cab going cross-town, either: Mulcahy stared at the back of the driver's neck, conscious of Hawkeye watching him.

Hawkeye paid off the driver before Mulcahy could make a move. It was a familiar pattern, one Mulcahy had meant to start breaking: but his mind was too full of other things, and he didn't even know where to start.

Hawkeye had left the hall light on. He closed the door and Mulcahy turned to face him. He had been bracing himself on the way up to begin, at least, with an apology – he shouldn't have left the party like that, all but forcing Hawkeye to leave at the same time just to find out that nothing was wrong.

"I'm sorry," Hawkeye said. He ran his hand through his hair. "I didn't think. Are you okay?"

“Yes,” Mulcahy said. “I’m sorry – I shouldn’t have walked out like that. Do you want to go back to the party?” Hawkeye had been having a good time, if not for Mulcahy.

Hawkeye looked back at him, his face set in stubborn lines. “No. What’s wrong?”

“Nothing,” Mulcahy said. He saw Hawkeye’s eyebrows go up and his mouth twitch, and before he could see any more, he turned away, went into his room, and shut the door.

He took off the tux, and the white tie, and the shirt – he had been wanting to divest himself of it for what felt like hours. He was – angry, in a tired kind of way. He hadn’t slept in this bed yet.

Hawkeye was watching him from the doorway. When he saw Mulcahy face him, he said “You know, what you need is a doorbell with a light attached.”

Mulcahy supposed he must have looked as bewildered as he felt.

“See,” Hawkeye pointed. “We put a light up there, and wire it up, and it flashes when I press the button. Then you can come in here and shut the door and I can press the doorbell and you’ll know I know you’re ignoring me.” He frowned. “Actually, that would work for the front door, wouldn’t it? Not for ignoring me, for letting people in. Right?” He came a step further into the room. “We could put a light up in the living room and a couple more in the bedrooms, and maybe one for the hall? Want one in the bathroom, too, or would it just distract you from the important things in life?”

Mulcahy bundled the clothes together, and handed them to Hawkeye. “Please don’t do that any more,” he said.

“Do what?” Hawkeye was holding tux and all in his hands, a crumpled mass of black and white.

“Give me things,” Mulcahy said. *And lie about them.*

Hawkeye’s face froze. After a moment, the freeze cracked again in a grin. “I wondered when you’d figure it out. I thought it would either be when you were putting it on or taking it off. It’d never fit me.”

“Actually, I worked it out at the party.”

“Oh.” The grin on Hawkeye’s face crumpled. “Sorry. I guess that upset you. Look, I’m sorry I didn’t – all right, fine, I’m sorry about the whole damn thing. I wanted you to come to the party, and I didn’t want to have a fight with you about getting you a tux on top of talking you into coming to the party, and – ” He stopped short. After a long moment, he said, “Francis, I’m really sorry. Believe me. Work with me here.”

“I don’t want you to give me things,” Mulcahy said.

“Oh, come on,” Hawkeye said. “You mean you don’t want me to give you stuff and lie about it. You mean that, don’t you? I’m really sorry I lied. I won’t do it again. Not even to get my own way.” He smiled again, looking hopeful.

“No,” Mulcahy said. “You – ” He swallowed. “Hawkeye, I don’t earn very much compared to you. But I want to pay my own way. I don’t want you to give me things I can’t afford.”

“Oh.” Hawkeye shifted his weight from foot to foot. “Look, maybe this isn’t the best time to talk about this again, but – Can I put this down somewhere? I can’t take it back, so either you have to keep it or I have to rip it up and use it for dusters, but either way, do I have to keep holding it?”

Despite himself, Mulcahy smiled. Hawkeye smiled back, looking greatly relieved. He came over and dropped the mess of clothing on the bed. “You know, you have great

shoulders,” Hawkeye said, and put his hand on the back of Mulcahy’s neck. “Want to help me get out of this?” He was still in full evening dress.

Yes, Mulcahy nearly said. “I want to know you won’t do this any more.” He kept his hands by his sides. He was only wearing his undershirt, and he could *feel* Hawkeye’s eyes on him.

“Francis, you know I won’t – ” Hawkeye’s hands went up to his necktie and pulled it off. “Francis, look, what’s yours is mine. I mean what’s mine is yours. Either way. Both. I meant it. You and me. We’re a team. We’re a pair. We’re – we’re – marry me.”

“What?” Mulcahy stared, for a moment not believing his eyes, but he could *see* what Hawkeye had just said, especially when Hawkeye repeated it.

“Marry me,” Hawkeye said.

Mulcahy was almost too astonished to be angry. “Hawkeye, I’m not your *wife*.”

“Fine, I’ll be your wife. You okay with your wife earning more than you?” Hawkeye was trying for a laugh. Mulcahy wasn’t amused. “Francis, I’m not joking. I’m not – I’ve been thinking about this. You’re right, I can’t keep giving you things. But we could set up a joint bank account.”

“We can’t do that.”

“We can, you know. The bank won’t ask why. What, you don’t trust me with your money? I’d trust you with mine.”

“But we can’t – ” Mulcahy was feeling trapped. “We don’t talk about this, but – you’re a normal man.”

Hawkeye laughed. He sat down on the bed and bent over and shook with laughter. When he looked up again he was wiping tears out of his eyes. “You’re probably the only person in the world who thinks I’m normal.”

Exasperated, Mulcahy shook his head. “You know what I mean.”

“No, I don’t,” Hawkeye said. He looked sober now. He put his hands on the bed behind him and leaned back, looking up at Mulcahy.

“You’re a normal man,” Mulcahy said, “and I’m *not*. I told you – I’m not. I’m a – you have the capacity to have a normal relationship. And I – ” It hurt more than he’d expected to say it, with Hawkeye right there in front of him, on his bed, his eyes fixed on him. “I hope someday you do. In a year or two – we won’t – we won’t be together any more. I hope you’ll – ”

Hawkeye stood up. “What did you just say?” His face had drained of all expression. “Tell me you didn’t just say that.” He took a step forward, stooping, his face close to Mulcahy’s. “How long have you been thinking that?”

“What?”

“That we won’t – that in two years we’ll have split up.”

“I’ve always hoped – ”

“Always?” Hawkeye’s body had gone tense: he looked as if he were ready to leap. “Always?” He took two stumbling steps backward, away from Mulcahy. “When you asked to move in, this was a strictly time-limited offer, two years and then you’re going to walk?” He jabbed his finger forward, though he was out of reach. “You know, if you’d told me that up front, I’d probably have said yes anyway? I’d – ” He jerked his hand back and shook his head, becoming incomprehensible for a moment. “ – break my legs?”

“What?”

Hawkeye shook his head again. “Don’t look at me like that,” he said, strangely calm. “Don’t look at me at all. Get out. I mean it. Get out. I don’t want you hanging around here waiting to break both my legs.”

Mulcahy stood still. There seemed no safe place to move. He was trying to digest what Hawkeye had said, and trying to think of something to say. He couldn’t. He took a step closer to Hawkeye, and the other man lunged.

The room spun catastrophically. For a few long moments he could not tell which way was up or down.

He was flat on his back on the bed, Hawkeye on top of him, hands gripping at his arms. Hawkeye’s face was buried in the crook of his shoulder. He was saying something, monosyllabically, over and over again, two words each ending on a plosive of air at the tip of his tongue, lower jaw thrusting out for the first, biting in for the second.

Get. Out. Get. Out. Get out get out get out.

Hawkeye was pinning him so that he couldn’t move; he was having trouble getting his breath. Hawkeye was trembling so hard it felt as if he were being shaken by an outside force. The force of his words against Mulcahy’s skin slowed, softened, stopped.

After a while, Hawkeye shifted all his weight to his left hand and pushed himself up. His right hand was over his face, his palm shielding his mouth: he looked at Mulcahy through his fingers and went backwards, turning away as soon as he got off the bed.

Mulcahy got his breath back. “Hawkeye?”

No answer. Hawkeye got to the door and kicked it forcefully shut behind him.

It was a little while before Mulcahy could move. When he got up, he began changing for bed by rote. He hung up his clothes – even the tux – in the wardrobe, carefully. He sat down on the edge of the bed and looked at his bookshelves. The *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* glowed from their position of honour. *Get out.*

“Dear Lord,” he said out loud.

So long as he hadn’t thought about it too hard, it had felt like an acceptable compromise. Love Hawkeye, live with him, but don’t stand in his way, don’t stop him from finding someone else –

Never think that when Hawkeye said he loved Mulcahy forever he meant it.

“Dear Lord, I didn’t mean to – ”

No prayer that began *I didn’t mean to* was valid. Mulcahy dropped his head into his hands and tried to think.

It was still relatively early in the evening. For all he knew, Hawkeye *had* gone out again. But his bedroom door was uncompromisingly shut.

Mulcahy knocked on the door, and opened it. Hawkeye was a blanket-wrapped huddle on the bed, his hair showing at one end. He did not move or turn his head as Mulcahy came in.

“Hawkeye, I need to talk to you. We need to talk.”

Hawkeye was lying facing the wall. He must have heard Mulcahy, but he didn’t stir. Unless he was asleep. But Hawkeye curled up in his sleep: he didn’t lie rigidly like this.

Mulcahy hesitated. “Perhaps in the morning?”

No response.

Mulcahy got into bed on his usual side. Hawkeye hadn't left very much of the covers for him. He used his bathrobe for an extra blanket, and thought about using Hawkeye's, thrown as usual over the back of the chair. He left it there.

"Good night," he said out loud, before he lay down, and got no answer. He took his specs off and put them on the bedside table.

Hawkeye wasn't even touching him, nor he Hawkeye, but he was terribly conscious of the other man's body: the weight distorting the mattress, the warmth he could feel from here. He could touch him, put his arms round him, kiss him, but he had no idea how Hawkeye would react: whether with anger and pain, or worse yet this same cold indifference.

Or worst of all: *Get out.*

It felt as if he couldn't sleep, though he must have dozed. He was certainly not quite asleep when Hawkeye thumped him in the back. He sat up, reaching for his specs. Hawkeye was lying spread out over most of the bed, the covers kicked off, his arms twitching and jerking. His hands moved as if they had a life of their own. His mouth opened – he was saying something, but Mulcahy couldn't read it.

Hawkeye twitched and half-sat up, head jerking back: he opened his mouth and said something, fell back on to the bed, and said quite clearly, "Francis." Then he sat all the way up as if impelled by some force, and his head went back, his mouth opening wide, and all his muscles went rigid. There was a sudden smell of fresh urine, mixing with the reek of sweat. His eyes jerked open.

Sunday 2nd January, 1955

The OR was full, and there was a queue outside. It had been that way for a long time. Hawkeye was bent over a bowel resection, exteriorised and clamped guts spreading their special stink in his nose. He was all but done when he looked up and saw that BJ's table had a patient but no surgeon.

"Close for me," he said to the nurse. "Where's BJ?" he asked the room.

"He's dead, Pierce," the Colonel said, tired and impatient. "You have to operate."

Hawkeye nodded. He was too tired to feel anything but impatience with himself. He knew he had two tables at once this shift, he'd known that all along.

Shrapnel. Bowel resection. Broken arm with bone fragments. Hawkeye was working fast but well: he always did. He was working between two tables, somehow managing. Bowel resection. Broken legs. His hands and his scalpel and his eyes and his nose: he was tired, but everything was fine. People died all the time here.

The torn-up shattered bodies rolled on to his tables and he operated. He didn't look at their faces. His hands were fine. Broken bodies could be fixed.

"Close for me," he said again, and looked up. The Colonel's table had a body on it: no surgeon.

"He's dead," Winchester drawled. "You're Chief Surgeon, Pierce, *you* operate."

"How can I do three tables at once?"

"Better get started. They're waiting for you."

“How can I operate on three of them at once?” He had to do it. He could do it. He must. “Margaret, you take this table – ”

She wasn’t there. She had never been there, all through the long night. Hawkeye stared, stupidly, at the nurse across the table from him. Margaret was dead. He’d known that all along. People died all the time.

“Okay, *you* take this table – ” He had no idea what her name was. He looked around again. He didn’t know any of the nurses. Charles wasn’t there any more. Four tables, four patients, and only one surgeon. The bodies were bleeding: he could hear the droplets falling from the tables, tiny splashes on the cement floor.

“Where is everyone?”

“They’re all dead,” the nurse said. She spoke tiredly, impatiently. “People die here all the time, Doctor.”

“Where’s Francis?”

“Who?”

“He means Father Mulcahy,” one of the other nurses said. “The priest.”

“Francis,” Hawkeye said.

“He’s gone,” the nurse said. “You need to operate, Doctor. They’ll die if you don’t operate.”

“But – ” Hawkeye stared from table to table. It was impossible. He couldn’t do it. He had to do it. They were still alive. He had to operate. He couldn’t cover four tables, even though he had to. “Who do I start with? Where is everyone?”

“This one’s already dead,” one of the nurses said. She turned, and he saw her face. The mask hid most of it.

“So is this one.” The other nurse lifted her hand. The state she was in, she couldn’t be sterile: Hawkeye’s mouth gaped open, mouthing a protest that didn’t seem to be finding voice.

“And this one.” All their voices sounded odd.

The nurse who had been operating with him looked at him, across the table. She had been like this all along. “Dead.”

He was sitting up in bed in a strange room, covered in sweat, a traitor warm wetness at his groin. Father Mulcahy was kneeling on the bed beside him. “Hawkeye?”

The room was a hotel room – Seoul or Tokyo? Who was really dead and who had he just dreamed dying?

“Who’s dead?” he asked, through lips that didn’t seem to work.

Mulcahy shook his head. “I can’t understand you,” he said, and Hawkeye remembered he was deaf.

“We’re not in Korea,” he said, confirming, not asking a question. When he looked round again he knew this room, and understood he had been dreaming. No one was dead. He hadn’t been operating with dead nurses. It was three in the morning. His joints felt sore and creaky, and his head wasn’t sure how far it was to the floor, but he levered himself up off the bed and began, clumsily, to strip off his pyjamas. The fabric was clammy to the touch, and he reeked. It wasn’t the OR smell.

“Let me help,” Mulcahy said.

There was some reason not to let him, but Hawkeye couldn’t remember what it was. Aside from being a disgusting sight, which was reason enough. But he was too tired to

protest very hard. He let Mulcahy slide his bathrobe round his shoulders, helping his arms into the sleeves, and tie it in front of him.

“Thanks,” he said, when he could catch Mulcahy’s eye. He was trying to speak distinctly. “I’ll be fine. Sorry I woke you. Just go back to sleep.” He turned away and shambled towards the door. A shot of whisky. A *big* shot of whisky. Sleep, and no dreams.

Mulcahy’s hand on his shoulder steered him towards the bathroom. “No,” Hawkeye explained, or thought he did: “through there. That way.” The whisky wasn’t in the bathroom.

Mulcahy turned on the shower over the tub, and got Hawkeye to stand under it. Hawkeye sat down, simply letting his legs fold under him, and stared up at Mulcahy. Francis. “I remember now,” he said, feeling slow. “You’re leaving me.” The hot water running down his face blurred his vision. He bent his head forward and let the water drum on the back of his neck. He rested his arms on the edge of the tub and put his face down against his arms.

He wanted Francis. Going to sleep with the two of them nested like a pair of spoons. Making love with him, however awkward and clumsy it was. Sharing French toast and bacon. Being greeted in the morning with a big mug of coffee and Francis’s smile that looked like it was invented just for him.

He wanted all of that, years of that, the rest of his life.

Francis wanted to leave. A year. Maybe two. After that...

He could have it for the rest of his life. Providing he made the rest of his life very short. That was funny, and Hawkeye laughed.

He lifted his head and looked at Francis, who was leaning on the edge of the tub. He looked very worried and very determined and very endearing, and it hurt just looking at him.

“Your pyjamas are wet,” Hawkeye said, in lieu of saying anything else.

Mulcahy looked down at himself. He’d been quite thoroughly splashed by the shower. “Yes, I suppose they are.” He smiled a little: he still looked worried.

“I’ll be all right,” Hawkeye said. “It’s just a nightmare. I told you I have them. Just go back to bed. Your own bed. I’m all right.”

“Let me help.”

“No,” Hawkeye said.

Mulcahy reached for the shower controls, getting splashed again, and turned the water off. There was silence, filled only with the sound of droplets splashing on tile. Hawkeye shuddered. Mulcahy helped him out of the tub and dried him off. It was like getting pushed around by a nurse: Hawkeye found himself being tugged inexorably out of the bathroom. He only resisted when he realised Mulcahy was pushing him in the wrong direction.

“Wait a minute. This is your room. That’s my room.” It was hell trying to have an argument with someone who was deaf and ignoring you.

“The sheets are clean,” Mulcahy said. They were: and cold. Mulcahy threw back the covers, pushed Hawkeye into bed, and tucked him in. Then he left.

Hawkeye dropped his head back onto the pillow and looked at the ceiling. He was tired, clean, and more or less comfortable. He wanted a shot of whisky: he just didn’t want to move.

No one was dead.

Not an emergency. *What am I going to do next?*

Resign from Bellevue. Tell Cournand what he really thought about the war as surgical training. Go back to Crabapple Cove. Go to California.

Go to hell.

Join the army.

Always. I was always going to leave you.

The ceiling blurred from water in his eyes. Carlye. Trapper. BJ. Francis. *It's not the war that stinks. It's me.* He normally had to be much more drunk to feel this much soggy self-pity, but if he started going crazy again, he could feel it at all hours. Nothing to do then except lie on a bed looking at a wall and a window with chicken wire across it, and relapse into a fug of sorry-for-himself-Hawkeye.

I'll leave a note. Before I go, I'll leave a note.

One of the other officers could play the guitar and made up songs. He'd been transferred away, but his songs had stayed: Hawkeye tried to remember the words of one that had been popular in the officer's club, in a morbid kind of way, for quite a while. The tune had stuck in his head forever. He was singing it softly to himself when the door opened. "...and I can take or leave it if I please –"

Francis came in. He was carrying a mug.

Hawkeye broke off singing. "Coffee? You shouldn't have."

"Cocoa," Francis said. He sat down on the edge of the bed and put the mug down on the table. With the expertise of a nurse, he got Hawkeye to sit up, and pushed the mug into his hand. Hawkeye looked down at it.

"Francis –" His voice creaked. *I'd crawl. That's what I'd do.* "If there's – can I – Anything I can do to change your mind?"

Francis gave him a worried look. "I really think we should talk about this in the morning. Can you drink this, please?"

Hawkeye drank. He didn't like cocoa. He said so. "Are you going to be here in the morning?" He finished the cocoa and put the mug back on the table, staring at Francis. "I know I told you to get out. I didn't mean it. I did mean it, but I'd never – You can stay as long as you like. Whatever you like. Rest of my life. All of it." He put his hand out and caught Francis by the wrist, feeling the pulse of the blood close to the skin. "I love you."

"I love you," Francis said. He usually said it back, if Hawkeye said it to him. It was nice hearing it. Hawkeye slid down into the bed.

Francis must have found himself a fresh set of pyjamas. He was dry and clean and warm, and got in next to Hawkeye just like usual. He put an arm round Hawkeye.

"I guess you're going to be here in the morning," Hawkeye thought he said, but he might have gone to sleep in the middle.

For once, he woke before Francis. He'd gone to bed naked: Francis was still in his pyjamas. Francis was pressed up against him, solid, almost protective warmth, head down against Hawkeye's shoulder, snoring like a small buzz saw. He'd had no earplugs in last night. If he was tired enough he really could sleep through anything.

Mulcahy's arm was a solid weight across Hawkeye's chest. His hand was resting on Hawkeye's other shoulder. He didn't feel like someone who was going away.

“Stay here,” Hawkeye said out loud. He lay still, squinting down at the fair head on his shoulder. He never wanted to move.

Francis sighed out a breath, and stopped snoring. After a moment, he lifted his head.

“You don’t need to move,” Hawkeye said.

“Good morning,” Francis said. He smiled. It wasn’t his usual morning smile: slightly awkward. He shifted himself up and rubbed one hand over his eyes; the other hand was fumbling over the surface of the bedside table. His glasses were perched on the far edge. Hawkeye sat up, reached for them, and slid them on to Francis’s face.

Francis blinked at him. It felt like Hawkeye could almost see himself coming into focus in Francis’s eyes. “Thank you.”

“You’re welcome.”

“About last night...”

“Yeah. Well, I did warn you I had nightmares.” Hawkeye felt tired already. “You won’t hear a thing if you’re in here and I’m in there, so don’t think about it.”

“That wasn’t what I wanted to talk about.” Francis looked at him uncertainly. “Unless, that is, you want to talk about it – ”

“What else is there to talk about?” Hawkeye pulled his knees up to his chest and wrapped his arms round them. “I’m not going to kick you out this morning, don’t worry about it. Take your time.”

“Last night you were trying to talk to me, after you woke up, but I couldn’t understand most of what you were saying. I’m sorry I didn’t tell you I couldn’t understand, but it didn’t seem – I wasn’t sure how much you were taking in.”

“Oh.” Hawkeye tried to remember what he’d said. “It doesn’t matter. I understood you just fine, earlier.”

Francis was looking unhappier than ever.

“Look, it’s okay...” Hawkeye tried to find words. “It’s not that I don’t l- ” His tongue tripped. “ – like you any more. It’s just... I don’t – if you’re going to – better if you leave now than if you leave in a year. Or two years. Been there. Done that.”

“Hawkeye?”

“No.” Hawkeye lifted his hand. “I don’t really want to know why.” He didn’t want to hear. He understood, watching Francis, that if Francis were to ask “Can I stay?” he would say yes. Eventually. He might resist for all of five minutes. He’d tell himself that he had a year or two to persuade Francis to stay for longer. He’d believe it. He was having a hard time telling himself not to believe it.

Francis looked at him, and looked away. He took off his glasses again to rub at his eyes, and put them back on again, and looked back at Hawkeye with an expression at once vulnerable and puzzled. Hawkeye wanted to kiss him. He felt like an idiot. Why tell him to get out? *When I could have two years of this, it’s better than nothing, it’s a whole lot better than nothing?*

“Francis – ”

“Please – will you let me say this?”

“Okay.” Hawkeye shrugged.

“I love you,” Francis said. “I tried to tell myself, when I was a priest, that I loved you like a brother, like a friend, like – like a priest is *supposed* to love, with the love I give to God. I found – I find loving you very confusing, but you give me – you make me feel extraordinary happiness. I knew that we – we wouldn’t be – I could be assigned

somewhere else. So could you. And when the war was over, you would go home, I would – be reassigned to other duties, and I’d learn – I’d try to forget what you looked like.” He smiled at Hawkeye, a little awkwardly. “I’d made sure not to have any photographs of you.”

“You’re telling me it’s physical,” Hawkeye said. It was an effort to keep his face turned in Mulcahy’s direction.

“No,” Mulcahy said, almost crossly, “it’s *not*. I did manage to forget what you looked like. Mostly. But I still wanted you. I still loved you.” He stopped and looked away. “I still knew... you loved me.” He reached out, without looking, fumbling, and caught hold of Hawkeye’s forearm, sliding down to take hold of his hand. His eyes were fixed on Hawkeye’s face. “And I was very lonely, and I couldn’t – I knew you were lonely too. I promised myself that when you met a woman you could – could marry, I wouldn’t – I’d take myself off without further ado, and you could have a normal life.”

“And you figured this wouldn’t take more than a year or two,” Hawkeye said. He leaned back, removing his hand from Mulcahy’s grasp. “You – ” His voice dried up. He got off the bed, awkwardly and clumsily, and leaned on the edge of it. He stared at Mulcahy for a long moment. “Were you even going to ask if I *wanted* to marry this woman before you left me? Was this going to happen the first time you saw me flirt with someone eligible? Any warning? I’d just come home and find you gone? Would you have even left a *note*? You’d better have planned on leaving a note, with directions to the last girl I flirted with, otherwise how the hell would I have known you were leaving me so I could marry her?”

Mulcahy looked back at him. He looked uneasy. “I must confess... I hadn’t thought at all about the practicalities.” The smile that surfaced was plainly amusement at himself. “If I had – I can see certain difficulties already.”

Hawkeye let out a bark of laughter. He was still angry, and he wanted to pin Francis down and kiss him. “You don’t say.”

“I thought I was doing the best I could,” Francis said, solemn again. “It didn’t occur to me till last night how very arrogant my behaviour was, and how much it would hurt you. I never meant to hurt you. I’m very sorry.” He slid off the bed on the other side. “That’s – that’s really all I had to say. Shall I start the coffee?”

“No.” Hawkeye scrambled to get round the bed and grab at Francis’s arms. “No. That had *better* not be all you have to say. I mean it’s not like I have any right to complain about *you* being arrogant and thoughtless, though I’ll save it up and use it against you the next time – ” He shook Francis. “I just need to know there’s going to be a next time. A whole lot of next times. A whole lifetime of next times. Not just two years. Two years isn’t enough. Ten years won’t be enough. I want you – ”

“Hawkeye – ”

“*Forever*,” Hawkeye said. “Promise.” He was only conscious of how hard he was gripping at Francis’s arms when he saw the other man wince. Even then it was a struggle to relax his hands.

“I love you,” Francis said again, and his arms went round Hawkeye, holding him firmly, his face buried against Hawkeye’s bare shoulder. “But – ” His voice was muffled, but quite audible. “I don’t know if I *can*.”

Hawkeye held him, feeling a wave of tenderness and exasperation that seemed nearly strong enough to knock them both down. He was at least as exasperated with himself.

“You already made lifetime vows once, didn’t you?” He felt Francis trying to pull away from him to see what he’d said, and shook his head, holding him tightly. “Okay.” He kissed the other man’s hair. “Dad always told me, wait at least a year after divorce before proposing to a married man.” He could keep telling himself not to ask. Dad would have said *no time to be in a hurry*.

“Hawkeye, I can’t hear you if I can’t see you,” Francis said, and managed to tug himself away to look Hawkeye in the face.

“See, *that’s* why you should be naked more often,” Hawkeye said, and grinned. “More skin area to write on.”

“Hawkeye,” Francis said. “What were you saying?”

“That was I was an idiot for trying to rush you into promising me the rest of your life,” Hawkeye said. “But I get first dibs, okay? No fair promising anyone else.”

Francis looked reluctantly amused. “I think I can agree to that.”

“Where’s my bathrobe? And my pyjamas?”

“I put them both in the laundry last night,” Francis said. “Why don’t you get showered and dressed and I’ll start the coffee?”

Hawkeye glanced at the clock. It was later than he’d thought. “You get showered and dressed. I’ll catch up. You want to meet up for breakfast at Ted’s, after Mass?” That was the diner two blocks east that was convenient for Hawkeye on the way over to Bellevue: it was also just half a block from the nearest Catholic church. Ted’s did good coffee.

Francis looked blank: he hadn’t looked at the clock. “It’s quarter of nine,” Hawkeye pointed out. “They do second shift at Mass at half past, don’t they?”

“Hawkeye – ” There was the oddest expression on Francis’s face. “You haven’t – ” He shook his head. “I’m not going to Mass.” He turned away.

For three years, even when it had meant going directly from an all-nighter in the OR, Father Mulcahy had served Mass every Sunday in the mess tent. He’d served Mass when anyone else would be dropping, exhausted, onto an army cot or into a Martini. He’d served Mass when no one came. He’d said once to Hawkeye, after a ninety-six in Tokyo, that the blessing of taking a few days leave was the chance to hear someone else say Mass, and that hadn’t even been four days that included a Sunday.

Francis handed him his mug of coffee. Hawkeye clutched at it like a refuge.

“Shall we have scrambled eggs for breakfast?” Francis asked.

“Are you all right?”

Francis had made himself a mug of coffee, and was drinking it. He looked startled. “We don’t *have* to have scrambled eggs – do you want something else? Are you all right?”

“All right? I’m disconcerted, disturbed, distressed...” Hawkeye stopped talking. He had told himself that questions in this area were none of his business, and assured himself that he wouldn’t understand the answers anyway. “Can I ask you a question...?”

Francis looked at him. “I think I’d rather you didn’t.”

“Oh.” Hawkeye stopped talking again. The coffee was good. Francis looked as if he were using his cup as a shield for his face. “Okay, let me put it this way: why aren’t you going to Mass?”

“Because I’m...” Mulcahy looked away again. “I’m living with you in what the Church says is mortal sin,” he said. His voice was flat.

Hawkeye could remember exactly how it had felt when Mulcahy had told him – warned him – that he was going to apply for a transfer out of the 4077th. The gulf opening up underneath him was horrifying.

“Are you all right?”

“Francis – ” Hawkeye swallowed. He would have preferred to be drunk before he asked a question like this. He would have preferred to be well past drunk. Unconscious would be best. “Do you think you’re going to hell for living with me?”

Francis seemed to inhale his coffee, rather than drinking it. “What kind of question is that?” He was spluttering. “You’re agnostic!”

“You’re *not*.” Hawkeye leaned forward. “Just tell me?”

“Is this a joke?”

“No.” Hawkeye wanted to howl, but managed to keep his voice down. Howling would do no good, anyway. “No. I want to know – If you think it’s a mortal sin, how have you squared this with your conscience?”

Francis looked at him, still a little dubious. “The teaching of the Church is that it is a mortal sin. I can’t confess it and be absolved, because I can’t repent it, and I’ve no intention of avoiding a future occasion of sin. I could go to Mass, but I could never take communion. I realised some time ago, that I couldn’t feel that God condemned me, but I can’t pretend – I know what the authority of the Church says.”

Hawkeye sorted through that. He set aside for later secret comfort *I can’t repent it and no intention of avoiding you*, and asked “If you don’t think God condemns you, why are you bothered about what the Church thinks?”

Francis looked wryly amused. “Because I’m not a Protestant.”

“Oh.” Hawkeye wanted to ask *So you’re sure you’re not going to hell?* but would have felt like an idiot. “If you can go to Mass without taking communion, why aren’t you going?” He glanced at his watch. Francis would have to dress and run like greased lightning to make it on time now.

“Because,” Francis finished his coffee. He looked as if he would rather be somewhere else. “Because everything I said – anything I said, about how I was living – would be a lie.”

Hawkeye put his coffee down unfinished. “Is this why you were planning to leave me in two years?”

Francis looked down, briefly. “You have a knack,” he said, and didn’t finish the sentence. He looked up again after a moment. “I used to think you’d be a very good priest,” he said.

“What?”

“You have a gift for asking... good questions.”

“What?” Hawkeye was bewildered.

“I suppose I did think that separating from you would be so painful I might be able to repent ever being with you.” Francis’s smile was brief. “Of course, if I’d thought about it, I’d have known true repentance doesn’t work like that.”

Hawkeye let out a long breath. He was shivering. “Francis – ” *you swapped your religion for a hard-drinking half-crazed arrogant manipulator with nightmares* – “I’m not – ”

“Are you all right?”

“If we didn’t – ” Hawkeye remembered what he was giving up with a rush of physical detail “ – if we didn’t make love, if we just – if we didn’t sleep together – ” Francis, solid and warm, in his arms “ – Would that be okay? Could you still go to Mass?”

There was a pause. Francis seemed to be having trouble meeting his eyes. “Is that what you want?” he said, finally.

“No,” Hawkeye said. He was too on edge to be anything but honest. “Even if you do give the worst blow-jobs I ever had. I want you. I love sleeping with you. I love making love with you. I love everything about you. But – ” He shifted his feet. “I didn’t know – I didn’t think – I don’t want you deciding – ” *I’m not worth it.*

Francis looked away again. “Perhaps you could do that,” he said. “I couldn’t. I mean, I could if – But I couldn’t change my feelings. I came to realise that I couldn’t make myself believe God condemned you. If I couldn’t believe God condemned you, I couldn’t believe He’d condemn me.”

Waiting for Francis to turn his head and look at Hawkeye again was the longest thirty seconds of Hawkeye’s life, and it wasn’t long enough. He was trying to think of the right thing to say. He was certain he couldn’t.

“I separated myself from the Church over this,” Francis said finally, looking at Hawkeye. “If you’re blaming yourself, you mustn’t.”

“I started this,” Hawkeye said. “Back then. And you want to be a priest the way I want to be a surgeon, and you’re not, and I ought to be sorry. I am. Kind of. But I got *you* out of all of this – and what did you get?”

Francis took his glasses off and began to clean the lenses. They might even have needed cleaning. “Do you know, I used to try to sit next to you, or across the table from you, in the mess tent, just to be able to look at you?” He put his glasses back on.

“You did?” Hawkeye remembered. “You *did*...” He felt his mouth open in an involuntary smile. “But – ”

“Shall we have scrambled eggs for breakfast?”

Hawkeye looked at him. After a moment, he said, “Sure. You scramble the eggs, I’ll burn the toast.”

When Francis had his back turned, there was not only no fun talking to him, there was no point. Hawkeye finished cutting the bread and wrapped his arms around him from behind, planting a kiss on the nape of his neck. He wanted very much to feel Francis settling back against him, the way he did in bed at night when Hawkeye held him.

Francis tensed up when Hawkeye took hold of him, but not for long: between Hawkeye’s lips touching his skin and taking leave, he seemed to relax. He was still stirring the eggs, but he seemed to fit himself into Hawkeye’s arms as if an egg could make space for itself in an egg box. Hawkeye pressed his mouth against the back of Francis’s head. He was too wrung-out to get an erection, even with Francis’s body pressed up against his all the way down. All he wanted to do was stand here and hold him, with the good smell of eggs cooking in butter and the even-better smell of Francis in the morning, for the rest of his life. They could arrange to have coffee piped in.

“Hawkeye. Toast.” Francis’s voice sounded as if he too were half-dreaming.

“Never mind,” Hawkeye said into Francis’s hair. “Who needs toast when I have you?”

“You were going to make toast,” Francis said. He sounded a lot crisper. Crunchy. Half-burned. Hawkeye let go of him, surprised, and stepped back. “Okay. Toast. Yeah. Okay.”

“What do you want to do today?” Hawkeye asked. The eggs were good, though he wasn’t very hungry.

“I ought to look over my plans for this week’s classes,” Francis said. “And I need to do some laundry.” He was looking at Hawkeye with a mild and neutral expression that made Hawkeye instantly suspicious. “What do you want to do?”

“Go back to bed,” Hawkeye said,

“I think that’s a very good idea,” Francis said.

“You do?” Hawkeye raised his eyebrows, surprised. “Sure, if you want.” He propped his chin on his fist and grinned at him.

There was an instant where Francis clearly didn’t know or didn’t believe he’d heard what Hawkeye had just said. Then there was an instant when he did, his blue eyes looking startled behind his glasses, and he was becoming extremely embarrassed.

It had once been a goal of Hawkeye’s to trip Mulcahy into that state between disbelief and embarrassment: even though Mulcahy had always recovered in the space of seconds, still the look on his face for those few seconds was worth it.

Now it wasn’t. Hawkeye realised it well before the first few seconds were up: but the look on Francis’s face didn’t fade into the usual teasing amusement or irritating serenity.

“I didn’t mean it like that,” Francis said, still looking embarrassed. “You didn’t sleep well last night. You have to work tomorrow.”

“I’m sorry,” Hawkeye said, overriding him. “That was a dumb thing to say.”

“No, it wasn’t,” Francis said. He sounded quite forthright, and he met Hawkeye’s eyes, though with embarrassment. “We’re...” He stopped, as if trying to think of the right word, and seemed to give up. He shrugged and smiled at Hawkeye, and ate another forkful of scrambled egg, his eyes still on Hawkeye’s face.

Hawkeye reached out and took hold of Francis’s other hand. “Lovers,” he said. “Living together. Partners, friends, best friends, paired off, spliced, shacked-up – *married*.” He hadn’t meant to say all that – in fact, he’d given himself stern prohibitions against mentioning it – but it came out with a passionate rush. “I’m sorry,” he said. “I love you. I know –” He swallowed. *I didn’t know. I didn’t want to know. I didn’t think about it.* He said, thinking it through almost as he said it, “I want to be there for you. Whatever you want, whatever you need, if I can give it, it’s yours. For as long as I’m alive.”

Francis put his fork down. He was staring at Hawkeye even more intently than usual. His free hand came out to take Hawkeye’s by the wrist. “I love you,” he said. “But I –”

“Don’t,” Hawkeye said, panicked by the conviction that the next words were going to be *can’t do this*. “You don’t need to promise me anything.”

There were tears starting in the corners of Francis’s eyes. Hawkeye froze, appalled.

“You’re such a generous man,” Francis said, after a moment. He was holding his face very still, and the tears weren’t spilling over, though Hawkeye could hear them in his voice. “You give and you give – you give me so much, and the little you get back you don’t seem to want very much. I can’t even –”

He let go of Hawkeye’s hand. “I’m sorry,” he said. He sounded really, flatly ashamed now. “Every morning for the past week I’ve woken up thinking that I don’t deserve this, and I don’t. I don’t want to be dependent on you. I thought I could live with you and pay my share and just be your tenant, separate from – from this, but I don’t think I can afford

to do that. I want to give you something in return for all you give me, but I don't seem to be able to do that."

Hawkeye's mouth was dry. He swallowed. *All you have to do is stick around.* He swallowed again, trying to generate saliva, trying to find something to say. *All you have to do is be here and you've given me more than I'll ever give you.*

"If I gave up my job –" He was almost talking at random. "If we moved somewhere that cost less –"

"What?" Francis sounded shocked. "What – ?" He was staring at Hawkeye, mouth open, eyes wide, a picture of disbelief. "You're not serious?"

"No," Hawkeye admitted. "But –"

"Give up your *job*?" Francis had moved from shocked to the edge of anger. "What on earth for? Why would you want to do anything else?"

"I don't," Hawkeye said. "I – don't. But –" He was trying to speak coherently. "I don't – I think about you leaving – and I think I'd rather live in a rat hole in Harlem with you and work as a janitor than live here and work with Cournand without you."

"You can't be serious," Francis said.

"*Don't say that to me.*" Hawkeye's heart was pounding. "Don't. Don't *ever* say that to me. Don't ever *dare* say that to me again. *I'm* not the guy who says he's hoping we split up."

"No," Francis said. He sounded angry enough to make Hawkeye blink. There was a raw scratch in his voice like tears. "*You're* the – the guy who says I don't need to promise you anything. Or give you anything. Or *do* anything – It seems to me that you don't want anything from me except –" His voice shook, and spilled the tears he'd been holding. "It seems I can't even give you a good – good *blow-job* –" He rubbed at his eyes with the sleeve of his bathrobe. He glanced back at Hawkeye.

"I'm sorry," Hawkeye said. He was lost. "I shouldn't have said that."

"I expect it was true." Francis managed a smile.

"No, it wasn't." Hawkeye put on a wide grin that stressed the corners of his mouth. "The worst blow job I ever had was from Sue Ellen Norton when I was fourteen and she nearly vasectomised me."

"What?"

"Never mind. I don't want to give you ideas." Hawkeye looked down at what remained of the eggs on his plate. He pushed it to one side. His stomach hurt. He felt his voice was flat with despair, but Francis wouldn't be able to hear that. "I just don't want you to leave me. Ever. I love you. I don't know what way to tell you that and have you believe me, but it's true."

Francis pushed his plate to one side. "I was never thinking of leaving you," he said.

"You said –" Hawkeye blinked, his mouth falling open. "And you said – And besides, there's the thing with the church –"

"I assumed that you would – quite naturally – transfer your – your affections to someone else." Francis glanced down, looked up, awkwardly. "After all – you have before. You mentioned half a dozen others. You were thinking of someone else as recently as last summer."

Hawkeye shook his head. "The only person I was thinking about then was you."

"But you said..." Francis's voice trailed off.

“I probably talked about you, to you, hoping you’d pick up on it, and you thought I was talking about someone else,” Hawkeye said. “Which was stupid of me, but you know me: deviousness, misdirection, and stupidity are my middle names, on at least three of my fake IDs.”

Francis didn’t laugh: it was more like a hysterical hiccup. He swallowed and rubbed his face again. “Oh, Hawkeye.”

They sat there looking across the table at each other. After a moment, Francis said, tentatively, “You didn’t eat your eggs.”

“I’m not hungry,” Hawkeye said. He propped his face on his hands, staring at Francis, and then took his hands away when he realised that they blocked his mouth. “You know what’s funny? I’d give anything if you promised me forever. But I don’t think I’d believe you. Not knowing what you gave up for me.” He had lost. He knew it.

Francis was frowning. “I didn’t,” he said. He sounded soft and reluctant, and Hawkeye took it at first hearing for kindness.

“I didn’t,” Francis said again. He still sounded reluctant, but Hawkeye remembered he had never done kindly lies, even when anyone else would have without the slightest shame. “Hawkeye, I’m sorry, but I didn’t give anything up for *you*.”

Hawkeye opened his mouth to contradict, caught Francis’s eye, and shut up.

“I love you. And I ... And I like living with you.” He swallowed. “In ways... I never expected. I care for you a great deal, and I find I like being able to – to care *for* you, as well as – to experience your care for me so directly. But... Hawkeye, I’m very sorry, but – even if I had known, this time last year, how *much* I would... would like this... I would still have tried to stay a priest. It was only when my bishop told me that my feelings – my desires – made me unfit to be a priest, that I – ever considered going to you. Even then...” He glanced down. “It became clear to me that my bishop was right. About me. I’m not fit to be a priest. I felt my vocation go. I didn’t give my priesthood up for you, Hawkeye. It gave me up.” He looked up again, for a silent moment. Hawkeye didn’t venture to say anything.

“And then it became clear to me,” Francis said, “after – during November – that I couldn’t bring myself to believe – what the Church required me to believe. Not just for people like Gary Sturges – but about – ” it still cost him a visible effort to say the word “ – homosexuals. I did try to keep myself within the bounds of Church doctrine, but I couldn’t, and by the time I wrote to my sister, I saw it had really all been one thing – my inability to accept the ruling of the Church, this time last year, and my inability to accept that we ought to – I ought to – obey the Church now. I’m – I’m a heretic, I suppose.” He smiled, as if he expected Hawkeye to find it funny. When Hawkeye didn’t smile (he couldn’t: he felt as if his face was freezing) Francis said, with discomfort, “But I didn’t – do that for you, either.”

“Who did you do it for?” Hawkeye asked. He was fairly sure the last word and the first were distinct enough to be understood, but the rest came out as a mumble.

Francis put his hands together in front of him. He sounded awkward, but quite certain. “God, and my conscience.”

Hawkeye laughed, half-cracked, half-embarrassed. “How did He let you know?”

Francis said nothing for a while. He didn’t look away from Hawkeye. “I prayed,” he said.

“I’m sorry,” Hawkeye said. “It was a dumb thing to say.” He felt as if he were repeating himself. He felt as stupid as he felt when a nurse said, counting sponges as he closed, *you’ve left one inside*.

“No.” Francis was rubbing the back of his neck now, sounding ever more awkward. “I’m aware that my faith does look rather foolish to you. I should have explained this to you some time ago, but I knew you would find it funny, and it’s – it’s a rather painful topic for me.”

“I’m sorry,” Hawkeye said. He was feeling struck with a kind of absolutely appalled stupidity. “You shouldn’t – I was over the line.”

Francis stood up and came round the table. He held out his hands to Hawkeye, who looked at them, and then up at Francis’s face. “I think you should go back to bed.”

“I’m fine.” Hawkeye stood up. “No, really, I’m fine. What do you want to do today?”

“I want to look over my plans for this week’s classes,” Francis said.

“Okay. I’ll – I’ve got a surgical journal to read. I’ll do that. Take you out for lunch?”

The bed in his room was stripped. Hawkeye stood looking at it, knowing where the clean sheets were, somehow not even wanting to start. He wandered back through to Francis’s room, surgical journal in hand, made the bed sloppily and fast, and lay down on top of it, trying to look as if he were only there by chance. He picked up the journal and turned to the article. In the middle of the introduction, the page fell on to his face and the print swallowed up his eyes.

He opened his eyes again a moment later: the light had changed in the room. Francis was sitting at his desk, not looking at Hawkeye: his face was intent and focussed, bent over his work. Hawkeye rolled on to his side and watched him.

He was able to look at him for some time before Francis sighed and looked up, catching Hawkeye’s gaze. There was a smile that began almost invisibly, tucked into the corners of his mouth and glinting in his eyes, as if Francis were trying to suppress it – and failing, every time. It always looked as if Francis had never smiled like that before.

“What shall we have for lunch?” Francis asked.

“Lunch?” Hawkeye twisted himself round to look at the clock. “Oh.” It was after noon. “I was going to take you out.” He sat up. He was feeling better, after even a couple of hours sleep, and quite startlingly hungry. “Italian?” He liked the pasta at Dino’s, and it was only two blocks away.

“I could make spaghetti,” Francis said.

“Let’s go out.”

“I don’t want you to buy me lunch,” Francis said. “I meant what I said. I don’t want to fight with you about it.”

Hawkeye eyed him. “Talk about it?”

“You mean talk me into it? Nothing you can say is going to change my mind.” He stood up. “I mean it,” he added, heading for the door. “I’ll start the spaghetti while you shower.”

“That’s not fair,” Hawkeye said, to Francis’s back. He was grinning, not even sure why he was happy. “I can’t talk you into anything if you keep turning your back on me.”

Francis made a sauce from a couple of tomatoes, a slice of bacon they hadn’t had for breakfast yesterday, an onion, and bits of hard cheese. It tasted great.

“Let’s go out,” Hawkeye said.

“Where?”

“Central Park? Buy me coffee?”

Francis glanced out of the window. “I need to get some laundry done, and then we could go.”

“Mrs Bradford can see to that tomorrow.”

Francis looked at him. “No,” he said.

“No,” Hawkeye said. “Look – not letting me buy you stuff is one thing. But I’m going to pay Mrs Bradford to do this *anyway*. What difference does it make if she does it just for me or does it for you too?”

“I don’t pay her to do it,” Francis said.

Hawkeye stood up restlessly. The Christmas tree still smelt very faintly of pine forests: the needles were falling, more every day. He ran a finger along one twig, disturbing the silver bauble that hung from it, watching as it shivered and swung. Needles fell easily from the dead wood. The decorations that had sparkled on the trees he and Dad had cut down and brought home for Christmas, year after year, were stored in a box in the attic in Crabapple Cove: he’d tell Sarah where they were for next Christmas, if she and the kids wanted them. On Thursday night he and Francis would pack all this glitter away, carefully, and come next Christmas they’d take it out again and decorate another tree. Each year, every year. From now on. *Please*.

He turned round. “Do you still think we’re going to split up in a couple of years?”

Francis was still sitting at the table. He got to his feet, looking uneasy. “I – don’t know.”

Hawkeye wouldn’t have believed anything more. *I don’t know* was still better than *I hope so*. “Can we be partners till then?”

“Partners?”

“I’m not your landlord. You’re not my tenant. You didn’t move in with me because I had a spare room at a rent you could afford. Why do we need to pretend anything different?”

“What does this have to do with getting my laundry done?” Francis asked.

“Why should you spend time indoors washing your socks when the sun is shining, it’ll be sunset in a few hours, and you can get your socks washed tomorrow?”

Francis looked back at him. The uneasiness on his face was genuine distress, Hawkeye realised. He put out a hand without looking, brushing the dry twigs, feeling the light needles fall. “Okay,” he said. “Lead me to your socks.” The sooner they got whatever Francis wanted done, the sooner they could go out.

He was heading past Francis on his way to the door when Francis caught at his arm. He looked at Hawkeye and said, though with some difficulty, “Let’s just go out.”

It was cold out, but they both walked fast. Talking and walking meant both of them walking with their heads cocked to one side: it had felt awkward at first, but Hawkeye was getting used to it, at least on the empty paths in Central Park. Francis seemed to have an instinct for not bumping into people.

Hawkeye was meditating a question on the lines of *This is better than washing socks?* when Francis asked “Do you often have nightmares?”

“Only when I eat cheese too late at night,” Hawkeye said. He looked straight ahead, rubbing the back of his neck as if he had a crick in it. Francis wouldn’t leave him because he had screaming nightmares – not even if he wet the bed. Of all the reasons he hoped Francis might have for staying with him, pity for the nightmares was definitely last on the list.

On the other hand, it was definitely on the list.

“I did warn you about the nightmares,” he told Francis, catching his eye.

“I knew you used to have them in Korea,” Francis said.

“You did?”

Francis’s mouth twitched. “Sometimes you were pretty loud.”

“How loud?”

“You remember that plane that used to drop propaganda leaflets?”

“Sure.”

“Well, sometimes after you had a nightmare they’d drop complaints about the noise,” Francis said. “In Chinese.”

Hawkeye stopped. Francis came to a halt, looking at him with a wide-eyed expression of absolute innocence. It made Hawkeye want to kiss him.

“You don’t mind about the nightmares?” he asked instead.

Francis tilted his head to one side. “The same way you mind about me being deaf.”

Hawkeye pushed his hands down by his sides, to remind himself not to grab Francis. Or kiss him. It felt like he’d been hit by a large soft blow to the chest. *You love me*, he nearly said out loud. *You really love me*. He said out loud, almost stammering, “About once a week – or ten days. Or less often. Usually. I don’t know – I can’t tell you when I’m going to have one. When I’m afraid I’m going to – I sometimes have a slug of booze before I go to sleep, and then I generally don’t. It doesn’t really have anything to do with cheese.”

Francis nodded. He was looking at Hawkeye now with such depth of acceptance that Hawkeye twitched from not looking over his shoulder to check there was no one standing behind him. For once he was lost for words. *When you look at me like that I know I don’t deserve you*. After a long moment, he said “Do you dream about Korea?”

Francis started to walk uptown again, and Hawkeye fell into pace beside him, head cocked on one side.

“I don’t remember,” Francis said at last. He glanced sideways. “I don’t remember what I dream.”

He sounded unhappy. They had passed six churches on their way to Central Park, at least two of them Catholic, but even the Baptist church had given Hawkeye guilty twinges. “You have quiet dreams, anyway,” Hawkeye said, almost at random.

“I snore,” Francis said.

“I use ear plugs,” Hawkeye said. “Did you snore like that when you were a kid?”

Francis looked startled. “I don’t know. My brothers never mentioned it.”

“Did you ever get hit in the face when you were a boxer?”

“Sometimes.” Francis shrugged.

“Maybe you have a deviated septum,” Hawkeye said. “I know an E.N.T. man who might be able to fix that.”

“I couldn’t –” Francis started.

Hawkeye caught his eye. “I’m the one who has to sleep through your snoring.”

There was a pause. They both went on walking.

"I suppose so," Francis said at last.

Hawkeye opened his mouth to argue some more, and closed it again, since he seemed to have won. "Really?"

Francis looked as if he were smiling almost despite himself. "Really," he said. "I got thrown out of my seminary dorm once for snoring so loudly. I suppose it would be an act of charity to fix my ...septum, if that's possible."

Hawkeye walked on, shooting a sudden wide grin at the trees ahead. "Buy me some coffee before we go in?" he said, turning his head again.

With an effort of will, Hawkeye said nothing when he saw Francis sorting his laundry for Mrs Bradford: he kept his mouth shut and didn't start singing till he was in his bedroom, re-making his bed with clean sheets.

He was still singing – something from *Così fan tutte*, with words that fit the tune, he'd never learned Italian – when he realised Francis was standing in the doorway. He didn't look disapproving: but he didn't look happy.

"I didn't mean to interrupt," Francis said. Now he was smiling: the kind of cheerful look that was a careful mask. "What shall we have for supper?"

Let's go out, Hawkeye nearly said. He swallowed it. "What have we got? I should cook. You made lunch. *And* breakfast." He headed towards the door and Francis retreated into the hall.

"You didn't eat breakfast."

"You still cooked it," Hawkeye said, wrapping an arm around Francis's shoulders and turning this into a close hug. He rubbed his face against the fair hair, and said, feeling the curve of his skull with one hand, the bones of his back with the other, "I only burned the toast."

Francis pulled away. He went through into the sitting room. When Hawkeye followed, Francis was sitting on the couch looking at the surgical journal Hawkeye had left there yesterday. He looked as if he were studying it closely. He looked as if he were telling Hawkeye to shut up.

Hawkeye stood still. "What did I do?" he said out loud, knowing Francis wouldn't even know he was talking.

This might be the first Sunday in years – in decades – that Francis Mulcahy hadn't gone to Mass. If he wanted to randomly sulk in all directions, he was entitled.

Hawkeye stood and thought about it. He couldn't imagine Francis behaving like that. *He* might, but Francis wouldn't.

He sat down on the couch and neatly twisted the journal out of Francis's hands. As Francis looked up at him, he asked "What did I do?"

"What?"

"Why are you telling me to shut up?"

Francis looked at the journal. He opened his mouth, as if to protest that he had been reading it, and shook his head.

"I'm sorry," he said, and smiled. He started to get up, and Hawkeye put a hand on his shoulder.

"No, really, what's wrong?" Hawkeye felt the muscles under his hand tense and relax. Francis shrugged. He was still smiling, a little awkwardly now.

“Really, it isn’t anything, I shouldn’t – ”

“What did I do?”

“You’re making me feel like an – an idiot.” His voice wasn’t level.

“Good, so it’s mutual. What did I *do*?”

Francis’s shoulder muscles moved again, as if he were thinking about getting up. He looked away. Finally he said, in a rigidly controlled voice, “I hate it when you say something to me when you know I can’t hear you.” He glanced back. The control was cracking. “It’s – it’s grossly unfair to be angry with you just because – I can’t hear – but I can’t *hear*.”

Hawkeye stared, astonished. He had been consciously – almost over-consciously – speaking only when they were face to face, even when it meant walking with his neck twisted round and the wind blowing right into his ear. Francis had walked in on him singing, but surely he didn’t mean that. “But – ” he was going to protest, when he remembered. *I burned the toast*, he’d said, and his mouth had been touching Francis’s hair. “But – it wasn’t *important*.”

“No,” Francis said. He smiled again. The rigid control was back in his voice. “I don’t suppose it was.”

An echo of disaster was rolling around inside Hawkeye’s head. “I’m sorry,” he said. “I shouldn’t have – look – let me – ” Crawl, he was going to say.

“I know if it was important you’d make sure I could see your face,” Francis said. “I shouldn’t – I’m sorry. I shouldn’t have let it make me angry.” He stood up, taking hold of Hawkeye’s hand. “Let’s make supper.”

Crawling wouldn’t do any good. They made supper together, moving around the kitchen, and Hawkeye thought Francis glanced at him too often, and he knew he was uncomfortably conscious of the need to make sure Francis could see his face. He hadn’t felt this uncomfortable, working with Mulcahy, in... years.

He could promise not to do it again. And Francis would politely accept the promise. And he’d still think he ought not to be angry. He’d beat himself up. He wouldn’t yell at Hawkeye. Whether because he really felt Hawkeye didn’t deserve it or because he was – Hawkeye looked at it uncomfortably – feeling that he owed Hawkeye too much to tell him off when he deserved it; he wouldn’t.

Hawkeye said finally, over the table, “I’m sorry.”

Francis took another forkful. “Tastes fine.”

“I’m sorry I say things when you can’t hear.”

Francis smiled. “It doesn’t matter.”

“Yes, it does.” Hawkeye went determinedly on with his meal. “You should be – you should be yelling at me or punch me or something – ”

Francis’s control slipped. He half-laughed, looking tickled and embarrassed. “I don’t think I could.”

“Or teach me signs.”

“What?”

“Teach me how to use signs.”

Francis put down his fork. “I don’t think I could.”

“Sure you could.”

“I’m not – I’m not nearly good enough. Besides, they use signs rather differently here than they did in Philadelphia. Anyway, why would you *want* to learn?”

“To talk to you,” Hawkeye said. He grinned.

“We’re talking now,” Francis said after a moment.

“Yes,” Hawkeye said. “But – ” He could think of a dozen protests, but none of them seemed likely to convince Francis. He watched Francis watching him, intent and focussed, and was aware of the degree of concentration that Francis brought just to be able to hear Hawkeye talking nonsense. If he mumbled or laughed or turned his head away or his face was in shadow or any of a dozen other things, all Francis’s concentration went for nothing, and he was left guessing. “Okay, where can I learn?”

“I suppose at the local Deaf Club,” Francis said, almost as if reluctantly. “That’s how I learned, at first.”

“Do I have to fake being deaf to join?”

“If you wrote and asked, someone might offer to teach you,” Francis said. He picked up his fork and started to eat again. “I’ll find the address for you when I go back to school.”

“Okay,” Hawkeye said. “How do I say ‘I burned the toast’ in signs?”

Francis stared at him with unusual concentration. “Is this something you’re going to want to say often?”

“Probably.” Hawkeye grinned.

Francis lifted his hands, and, his fingers crooked in a V, tapped one side of his hand, then the other. “Toast.” His left hand had dropped to his lap. His right hand jabbed back towards his chest, “Me,” and lifted again to his forehead, almost as if he were going to salute Hawkeye. He drew a line across his forehead just above his eyebrows with his forefinger. “Black.”

Hawkeye frowned. “Do that again.”

Francis repeated the hand movements. He didn’t look comfortable, even though the signs looked quick and assured. He didn’t repeat the words.

“Why ‘black’ and not ‘burned’?”

Francis frowned, lifting both his hands, fingers tilted upwards, and shook them, his fingers moving. “I suppose because ‘burn’ seems too much – ” he looked down at his hands, briefly, almost as if surprised, and his hands fell to his lap again. “It’s not as if the toast is in flames.”

“It might be,” Hawkeye said.

Francis looked at him without taking the joke. “I don’t know what the sign for ‘char’ is.”

Hawkeye lifted his hands and made a V shape with his fingers. He followed what he remembered Francis doing: it felt odd, but precise and satisfying.

They did the dishes. Hawkeye stopped Francis as he was about to leave the kitchen, putting both his hands on Francis’s arms: Francis looked up at him, without visible impatience.

“I don’t mean to say something when you can’t see me.”

“I know that.”

“You don’t have to hit me if you don’t want to, but can you do *something*?”

Francis looked down. When he looked up again, it seemed as if he were keeping down his exasperation. He lifted one arm, breaking Hawkeye’s grip on it easily, and took hold of Hawkeye’s forearm. Without looking at him, as firmly and as deftly as a nurse, he

steered Hawkeye to the couch in the sitting room. “I want to hold you,” he said, still without looking at Hawkeye.

Hawkeye felt as if his joints had gone loose. He sat down on the couch by Francis, and shifted his weight as the other man’s hands directed: he lay back and felt Francis solid and warm behind him, Francis’s arms round him. He felt enfolded.

“I love you,” Francis said at last. He sounded tired, but matter-of-fact, as if speaking of a concrete reality. “I don’t want to be angry with you.” His arms tightened round Hawkeye’s chest, not for long. “I know you’d make sure I heard you if it was important.”

Hawkeye put his hands over Francis’s hands, trying to press communication through: he couldn’t even write the words at this angle. Held like this, he wanted to be held forever: and he wanted, badly, to *talk* – to give Francis anything. If he’d stay. If he’d keep on loving him.

Promising Francis anything and everything wasn’t making him happy. Hawkeye lay still, looking up at the ceiling, trying to think, wanting to sleep inside the circle of his arms.

After a while, Hawkeye sat up carefully and turned round, keeping contact with Francis. “What would you like to give me?” He felt uncomfortable asking the question, and was relieved when Francis did not immediately laugh and turn it away.

Francis tilted his head back and looked at the ceiling light. His glasses reflected it, making his eyes invisible. He said, after a moment, “Can you tell me how – ” he swallowed “ – how to give you a better – better blow-job?”

Hawkeye felt heat run up into his face. He wanted to protest *not that*, he wanted to smile glibly and say something smooth and confident: nothing came to mind. He had talked more men – and women – than he could think of right now through a blow-job: he could riff on it for hours, or at least for as long as his self-control held out. He wanted to protest he couldn’t, because he didn’t believe he could: he couldn’t talk to Francis like that – or at all – while the other man’s mouth was on his cock, because Francis wouldn’t be able to see him.

Francis sat up. He was smiling, a little awkwardly. “I never thought I could make you blush.”

“I’m not – ” Hawkeye protested.

Francis put the palm of his hand against Hawkeye’s face. He was still smiling. His hand felt cool. Hawkeye leaned forward before Francis could say anything and pressed his forehead against Francis’s, feeling the cool metal and glass against his face, warm skin, warmer breath. He had knocked Francis’s glasses askew, he saw when he drew back. Francis put up a hand to settle them. His lips were firmly set together, not nicely parted.

It doesn’t matter, Hawkeye nearly said, and swallowed it down. It did. “Let’s go to bed.”

Francis had dibs on first shower. When Hawkeye came back from the bathroom, he was lying on the bed – on top of the covers, not under them. He was wearing his pyjamas: Hawkeye was naked under his bathrobe. They had always managed to manoeuvre around pyjamas before: Hawkeye shrugged his robe off, dropped it over the chair, and sat down on the bed.

“Okay?”

Francis nodded. He sat up and began to pull his pyjama jacket off.

“Hey.” Hawkeye caught hold of his wrists. “I want a kiss first.”

Francis looked at him oddly, but tilted his head forward and sideways, meeting Hawkeye’s mouth. He had brushed his teeth; his mouth tasted of toothpaste. Hawkeye put everything he’d got into kissing him: his hands knew the job he wanted them to do.

He got Francis out of his pyjama jacket, and was starting to unpeel the lower half, when Francis pulled back. His tongue came out briefly to touch his upper lip: he looked – Uncertain and unhappy.

Hawkeye’s hands were still. He stared down at Francis.

“This isn’t something you have to do,” he said, though his cock was insistently demanding otherwise.

“Please don’t keep telling me that,” Francis said.

“There isn’t a final exam. And if there was, you could cheat. Or just bribe the examiner. I’m open to all offers.”

Francis went on looking at him, his eyes wide behind his glasses. Usually, even if the light was still on when they started making love, he took them off. To save them from getting bent or cracked, Hawkeye had assumed: to stop himself from being able to see what they were doing?

“I want,” Francis said. He didn’t finish the sentence. “I don’t want,” he said, and didn’t finish that sentence either. He swallowed. “I know... you must find me very... not very good at any of this. I would like to... I really would prefer if you could show me how – to do – to do this better.” His eyes were still fixed on Hawkeye’s face, with a visible effort of will. “And I thought,” he stopped again. “I thought we could start... with a blow-job,” he didn’t quite stutter when he said it, “but just as you prefer.”

Hawkeye put his face down against Francis’s shoulder and locked his arms around him. “Okay,” he said at last, and lifted his head. “Okay. Listen.”

“I’m good at that,” Francis said gravely.

Hawkeye stared at him, speechless. He put his head down again and laughed, unable to stop himself. It was a short, painful fit: he lifted himself, propping himself up on his elbows. “Look...”

“I can do that, too.”

“When I was a freshman I met this guy, name of Tommy. He was a senior. We hung out together for a year. He showed me... Well, by the end of the year I could have graduated *summa cum laude*,” he put Tommy’s punning slur on the Latin, “if I’d majored in male anatomy.”

Francis nodded. He didn’t seem to have picked up on the pun. Hawkeye briefly thought about making it again, but only briefly. BJ would have thought it was funny, if Hawkeye had ever told him about Tommy.

“Sometimes,” Hawkeye said. He was getting to the painful nub of it. “Sometimes you... I used to make it with Tommy wherever he... we wanted. I loved everything we did. He showed me a whole new world. He sent me over the moon. I’d love to do that with you. But sometimes you... you look as if you... as if whatever I’m doing, no matter how much pleasure I think I’m giving you, you’re not happy about it.” He grinned, though it wasn’t funny. “And sometimes, of course, I’m asleep.”

Francis didn't say anything for a minute. "I'm sometimes not happy," he said. "There wasn't... there isn't anything you can do about it, but it's not caused by anything you do. I wish I didn't have to tell you that so often."

"What about after we make love?" Hawkeye stared down into Francis's face. "What about yesterday morning?"

"That wasn't..." Francis stopped. He looked away. His throat was working. "I'm sorry," he said. "I don't really – " He stopped again, and looked back at Hawkeye. He was smiling, but it looked both painful and vulnerable. "I remembered how often I'd taken pleasure without giving it, and it upset me." He curled his hands up around Hawkeye's shoulders, holding on, not pushing away. "You... you can overwhelm me. It makes me feel – I feel so incompetent. Show me how to do what you do."

Hawkeye nodded. He was still not sure he could talk. He cleared his throat. "Okay."

He didn't want to let go of Francis, or feel Francis let go of him, but he got them both rearranged on the bed, lying on their sides facing each other.

Francis put his arm over Hawkeye. He still looked as if he were on the edge of tears, but his voice was teasing and amused. "You're the expert, but isn't this the wrong position – "

"No," Hawkeye interrupted. He was feeling rough himself, but he'd had an inspiration, if he could carry it through. He lifted his hand, forefinger and middle finger pressed together, the other two fingers curled round to meet his thumb, and touched the tips of the first two fingers against Francis's mouth. "This is my dick."

Francis's eyes nearly crossed. His mouth parted in an odd grin. "Yours is bigger than that."

Hawkeye heard himself laugh. "Start small, work up." He slid the tips of his fingers between Francis's lips. "This is the head of my dick. You can feel the foreskin covering the head of the glans, and on the underside, you can feel a ligament – it's like the one that joins your tongue to the underside of your mouth – that's called a frenulum." He knew he was talking like an anatomy lecture. This wasn't like murmuring hot instructions to someone whose mouth was already filled with his cock. Francis looked serious and focussed. He had always made Hawkeye feel he could do a little better than his best. "If you kind of swirl your tongue round the foreskin and lick at the frenulum – "

Francis's eyes were fixed on him. Hawkeye felt his tongue against the tips of his fingers. He almost lost his breath: if not for the necessity to keep talking, to focus on what he was saying, it felt as if he could have come only from the look in Francis's eyes and the feel of his mouth against Hawkeye's hand.

Friday 21st January, 1955

1. Peg

Peg put her hands on BJ's shoulders and pushed. He closed his mouth and backed out of the room. In the hotel corridor, she looked him over, and straightened his tie.

"Erin will be fine."

BJ glanced back at the room door, and said “You didn’t let me ask her if she knew what to do if there was a fire.” He didn’t mean Erin, who was as solidly asleep as a three-year-old could be.

“The instructions are posted on the back of the door, and the hotel said she was one of their most reliable sitters.” Peg let herself sound patient.

“I just want to make sure she’s all right.” There was an abrasiveness in BJ’s voice that Peg didn’t like.

“I just want to go out to dinner with my husband,” Peg said. She looked him over again. They were alone by the elevator in the hallway. “You look beautiful.”

BJ smiled, a sudden flash of teeth. “Isn’t that supposed to be my line?”

“I was beginning to wonder.”

BJ’s face relaxed. “You look beautiful.” He lifted her hand to his mouth, and kissed her fingers. “Especially in that dress.”

“I want to go shopping tomorrow,” Peg warned him.

“Shopping for....?”

“Clothes,” Peg said. “I want to buy a dress from a New York boutique.”

BJ nodded. The abrasiveness was gone from his voice. “Well, that shouldn’t take long,” he said. Smooth and a laugh buried deep.

“You can look after Erin all day,” Peg suggested. The elevator was arriving. “What if New York was attacked by – by squid-riding bandits from the ocean? You’d want to know she was all right.”

They stood side by side in the elevator: a sideways-up glance at BJ’s face showed Peg he was bottling up a fit of laughter. She looked straight ahead, keeping her own giggles in. They could not arrive in the foyer of the hotel looking as if they were drunk and disorderly.

It was five to, and BJ had arranged to meet with his friend from Korea at eight: but the moment they stepped out of the elevator, a voice said “Beej?”

“Hawk.”

The man’s face looked as if it had more bones in it than the usual run, and they stood out more: he had a beaky nose, a big mouth, and lines scored into his cheeks and his forehead. He had black hair, going grey in flecks and splatters, and although – she realised as he reached them – he was taller than her, almost as tall as BJ, he stooped – he seemed naturally to walk with his head held forward. She’d seen photographs of him, and hadn’t realised how the features would look in real life. He was ugly.

BJ took his hand off her arm, and took hold of the man’s arms. They looked at each other for an instant, before BJ pulled him into a hug.

They hugged like brothers. It wouldn’t have looked so odd if they *were* brothers: they held each other, briefly but closely, as if.... Peg had no other word for it. As if they were kin. When they pulled apart, their hands still on each other’s arms, Peg saw BJ’s eyes were wet.

“God, I missed you,” BJ said. His voice was warm and relaxed. He reached out and took hold of her arm again. “Peg, this is Benjamin Franklin Pierce. Hawk, this is Peg.”

The man held out his hand. He was smiling. “Hawkeye,” he said. “And you’re Mrs Hunnicutt.”

“Doctor Pierce,” Peg said. She was amused. At least, she was more amused than anything else.

“Doctor Hunnicutt,” Pierce said. He held out his other hand to BJ.

“Doctor Pierce,” BJ said, taking his hand and shaking it enthusiastically. “Can you tell me what we should do if New York is attacked by squid-riding bandits from the ocean?”

“Offer them a martini?”

Peg laughed, startled, and Pierce looked at her and smiled – sudden and open-mouthed, as if he were laughing without noise.

“And speaking of which,” he added, letting go of their hands and gesturing back towards the foyer, “I booked a table here for eight-thirty, and the barman makes a pretty fair dry martini.”

“We’re eating here?” BJ looked at Peg. They had spent over ten minutes upstairs with the sitter explaining that they would leave the number of the restaurant where they were eating at the reception desk. It had taken BJ at least ten minutes to explain this to his satisfaction, and Peg had summarised it briefly because she had a suspicion the sitter had switched off by the time BJ had finished explaining.

“We’re eating here,” Peg said, keeping any comment out of her voice.

Pierce looked from one of them to the other. His eyebrows were raised. He said, sounding curiously apologetic, “I booked a table here – one of the doctors at Bellevue tells me the food’s good, and it’s well lit – but we can go somewhere else, if you’d rather.”

“We’re eating here,” BJ said, and grinned. “Good lighting makes all the difference.”

“I like to be able to see my food,” Pierce said, to her. They were moving towards the foyer. “Picked up the habit in the army – if you didn’t keep an eye on the food in the mess tent, it was likely to eat you.”

“I’d have thought you’d have picked up the habit earlier,” BJ said. He sounded innocent. Peg looked at him suspiciously, and caught Pierce giving him the same look.

“Why’s that?” Pierce asked.

“You’re from Maine.”

“What difference does that make?”

“I thought Mainers only ate sea food,” BJ said.

Pierce looked away and caught her eye. He shook his head. “You know, puns like that are considered grounds for divorce in forty-two states, Mrs Hunnicutt. I can put you in touch with a good lawyer.”

The bar was the other side of an archway from the foyer, and the restaurant beyond the bar. A waiter came up to them.

“Pierce. Table for four. I mean three.”

“This is your party, sir?”

“Yes, one lady, one gentleman, and one trained ape,” Pierce said, ticking them off. “Do you serve apes here?”

Their table would be ready in twenty minutes, apparently, and they could have aperitifs in the bar: Pierce and BJ both ordered martinis. Peg shook her head and ordered orange juice.

“What’s it like working with the medical pin-up of the year?” BJ said.

“He’s a terrific surgeon,” Pierce said. “Better than me. Which of course makes me hate him. But he’s a good guy. Though he likes making jokes about the front lines being a great place to send surgeons for training.”

BJ laughed. Peg glanced at him. Something she'd found hard to pinpoint came home to her: over the past six months – over the past two or three weeks, on this long quiet vacation – the level of tension in BJ had been ratchetting up, so gradually she'd been finding it normal all along, noticing and covering for the quirks, but never registering the tenseness in BJ, strung tight. Until it loosened, all at once, when this man showed up.

She put her orange juice down without tasting it. "Are you married, Dr Pierce?"

"Hawkeye," Pierce said. He was still smiling. "No. Where did you go on your way here? It's a great idea, just taking off like that – what states did you cross?"

BJ started telling him about their route. He was relaxed and happy: you wouldn't know, listening to him, that the funny story about the burst tyre in Oklahoma and Erin's bumped head had been two hours of tears, screaming, and sulks in the middle of mud-soaked nowhere. BJ told it about a bumbling bear of a husband who got everything wrong, and it would have been funny. You had to not be there.

"...so then I checked Erin for concussion while Peg changed the tyre, and a few miles down the road we found a motel. We nearly sent Erin in to book us a room: she was the only one of the three of us who wasn't *covered* in mud. You should have seen us: me trying to hide behind Peg and Peg trying to hide behind me, and Erin with a bump on her head that made her look like a unicorn."

Pierce laughed. He looked at Peg. "I was hoping to meet Erin," he said. "I even booked the table for four."

"She's asleep," Peg said. She was smiling despite herself. Somehow Pierce looked less ugly now than he had at first sight. "We were planning to stay in New York for three nights, and BJ's going to look after Erin all day tomorrow, aren't you?"

"My wife wants to buy herself a dress," BJ said solemnly. "I keep telling her, that shouldn't take more than twenty minutes. Half an hour, at most. You just walk into a shop, point at a dress, tell them you want that one if they've got it in your size, and pay for it. I ask you –" He was smiling now. "– how can that take all day?"

The waiter came to tell them their table was ready before Peg had answered him.

They tried – both Pierce and BJ – to keep her part of the conversation, and when they were talking about BJ's practice or Pierce's post at Bellevue, it was easy enough to be part of it. Not possible when they were talking in surgical Latin. BJ didn't talk about Korea very often, but Peg had expected him to talk about it with his friend.

"Do you ever hear from Klinger?" BJ asked.

Pierce shrugged. "I got a Christmas card last year about six months late. I guess he's still in Korea."

Peg kept track of their Christmas card list. There had been a stack of Christmas cards in 1953 from all over the US: doctors and nurses and corpsmen and patients. Not so many last year.

"Yeah, Christmas cards," BJ said. He was smiling. "Some letters, too."

"A couple even from me," Pierce said. He was grinning. "Not that you answered."

"I'm hopeless at writing letters, you know that," BJ said. He was grinning, too.

"You know what this guy did," Pierce said to her. "Wrote me a goodbye note in *rocks*."

"Rocks?"

“Yeah, the army had rocks whitewashed to mark off the paths in the compound. When we broke up the camp, I went out by chopper, and I looked down and BJ had written ‘goodbye’ across the chopper pad in white stones. Must have taken him hours.”

“Not quite,” BJ said. He laughed, but he had tensed up again. “Do you ever hear from Margaret?”

Pierce shrugged. “Christmas cards. You?”

“Christmas cards,” BJ agreed. “Do you ever hear from – ”

“Probably,” Pierce said. He sounded faintly exasperated. “Shall we just list off the entire 4077th and tick off who we got Christmas cards from? Winner buys the next bottle?” Peg was still nursing her first glass of wine: the two men had almost finished the bottle.

“What about Father Mulcahy?”

“What?” Pierce looked comically astonished. He shook his head. “What?”

“Well, do you ever hear from him?”

“What is this – roll call?”

“Seriously,” BJ said. He was half-laughing, but he was serious: Peg could tell. “I wrote to him a couple of times, I figured if we were across this side of the country we could take in Pennsylvania, but he never wrote back.”

“When was this?”

“The first time I wrote to him was last July, right after Erin’s third birthday party. Remember the picnic we had at the 4077th, with the cake – the birthday cake for Kim and Erin?”

“Yeah,” Pierce said.

BJ had written about the picnic in the last letter he’d sent her from the 4077th: a party arranged by his unit for the local orphanage, with one small child who was about the same age as Erin.

“It made me think of Father Mulcahy – I wanted to find out how he was doing.”

“Not me?” Pierce’s voice was edged.

“Well, I felt kind of responsible,” BJ said. “You see – no one knew this,” he said to Peg. He looked at Pierce. He was embarrassed, though Peg couldn’t see why he should be. “Father Mulcahy was deaf. He’d lost his hearing almost completely.”

Pierce had put his knife and fork down. He was staring. “How... how do you know?” His voice had lost its edge: he sounded stunned. “When – when did he – how did you find out?”

“I was there when it happened.”

“You were there?”

BJ nodded.

“You were there?” Pierce repeated. He looked down at his plate, and picked up his glass, drinking from it. “Listen, Peg – can I call you Peg? – there’s one thing I’ve wanted to know ever since I met you. It’s a rather personal question, but I hope you won’t mind me asking.”

“What?” Peg looked at BJ, wanting rescue. Pierce’s voice was light, fast, twitchy.

“How did you get BJ to shave off that cheesy moustache?”

Peg managed a polite laugh. “I didn’t like it, so he shaved. His first night back.”

“Oh, that’s nice.” Pierce sounded vague. “That’s nice.” He looked back at BJ, and emptied his glass. “When did it happen? How did it happen? Unexploded munitions?”

“His eardrums were damaged, and I think the nerve centre was damaged. I don’t know how much residual hearing he had left by the time we all left, but it wasn’t much.” BJ had stopped eating: his voice was odd, constricted in some way. It was unfamiliar, like hearing a stranger speak out of her husband’s face. “By the time I left to go home – the first time – he couldn’t hear my watch ticking. He had tinnitus in both ears.”

Pierce picked up his glass, looked at it, and looked across the room, an abrupt turn of his head. The waiter came over.

“I want a Martini,” Pierce said. “A very dry Martini.”

“I thought we were going to have another bottle,” BJ said.

“You can have another bottle. Bottle of anything you like,” Pierce said. “I want a very large, very dry Martini.” He put the wine glass down again and looked at BJ. “Go on. How did it happen? When did it happen?”

“A shell landed in the compound – just a few feet from where he was standing. Blew him off his feet.” BJ spoke awkwardly. “When he came to – mild concussion, skin abrasions, he was only out for twenty minutes or so – he was hard of hearing.”

“Unexploded munitions,” Pierce said, out loud, but quietly, as if to himself. “*When* did it happen?”

“We were all hiding under a table in the mess tent – the Colonel and me and Father Mulcahy, and I think Margaret was there too – and then we all realised no one had got the PoWs out, they were still penned up there right by the tank. It was the day I got my orders – the first set – to go home.”

Pierce leant back in his chair. He tilted his head up, and said, to the ceiling. “It was when I was in Tokyo, right?” He looked at BJ again. His face was a grotesque mask: he was scaring Peg, and it was all the more frightening that BJ didn’t seem to notice anything: this wasn’t a story he’d ever told Peg, but he went on talking as if Pierce were reacting normally, as if Peg were the only one who was seeing the nightmare.

“I got my orders to go home, and I’d – I’d just talked Potter into saying I could go if we could find a surgeon to replace me – and Father Mulcahy ran out before we could stop him – we were yelling at him to come back – and he let the PoWs out. They all got out. We had a couple of dozen PoWs penned up in the compound until the tank arrived and we had to move them. You remember that tank we had sitting in the compound?”

“I remember. I drove it into the garbage dump when I got back from Tokyo. Why didn’t any of you think of doing that?”

BJ shrugged. He smiled. “No one else ever had your direct approach,” he said. He was looking cheerful, but he was getting tense, whatever his outward appearance.

“Would have saved a world of trouble,” Pierce said. His voice dragged. “So this happened – he was deaf – Father Mulcahy was deaf when I came back from Tokyo and you were gone on your way home? You just – you just went home? Without telling anyone?”

“Father Mulcahy made me promise not to,” BJ said. “He was – you knew him, Hawkeye! – he was worried about what would happen to his orphanage. He cleaned out practically the whole of the 4077th, everything he could loot, even the Colonel’s horse, everything went there before we all left. He thought if he was sent to the evac hospital they’d send him home, and he was worried about his orphans. I told him he had to go home, but I couldn’t – and besides, I thought, someone was bound to notice. I didn’t see how he could keep it to himself that he couldn’t hear.”

The waiter appeared with an outsize cocktail glass. Pierce took it from him, looked at it, and drank, a long swallow. He lifted the glass and looked at its remaining contents. "Finest kind," he said, very quietly. He looked at BJ again. "So you just went home, knowing – and when you came back, you didn't tell anyone?"

"I couldn't see how he'd managed to keep it a secret," BJ said again. He sounded bewildered.

Pierce drank again. He had emptied the glass of two-thirds of its contents in two swallows. His voice was rough. "He'd just nod, and smile."

"Right. Hawkeye –" BJ half-laughed. He was really upset now, and tense as wire. "Listen, maybe we should take this somewhere else. Are you all right?"

"Me?" Pierce grinned. It was patently not amusement. "I'm fine. Why wouldn't I be fine? Just fine. Finest kind."

"Let's go back up to our room and talk," BJ said.

Peg shifted a little. She didn't want Pierce in the same room as Erin.

Pierce shook his head. He took a last drink of his Martini, putting down the empty glass. "I don't think so." He stood up. "Excuse me," he said to Peg, and went out, walking quite steadily.

Peg let out a breath she hadn't realised she'd been holding. She wanted this dinner to be *over*, and she didn't want to meet Pierce again. He had put a scare in her.

BJ was looking after him. "I wonder –" he said, and shifted his chair. He had nothing but concern on his face.

"Don't," Peg said. She was feeling half-ashamed of herself. BJ's protectiveness, of herself and of Erin, was so strong that it could even be irritating: if he wasn't afraid of Pierce, there was nothing to be afraid of. "Your story upset him. He'll be back in a few minutes."

"I hadn't realised –" BJ didn't finish. "I never told anyone about that before."

Peg nodded. Some of BJ's war stories had polish and finish and he told them well, if rarely: some he'd only ever told to Peg. None of them had been as disjointed as that.

"I promised Father Mulcahy. And then I didn't think about it – I was trying not to think about any of it. But he's right, I should have told *someone*."

"Well, you can't change that," Peg said, trying to be matter of fact. "But maybe you can do something now. We can go back through Pennsylvania. You should have told me how much it mattered to you before." She put her hand over BJ's, clenched on the table. "I've always wanted to see Philadelphia," she offered, untruthfully.

"When we all left," BJ said, "Father Mulcahy couldn't hear anything anyone was saying to him, and no one knew it except me."

"You made a promise. It can't be wrong to keep a promise."

"It can if you're a doctor," BJ said. He looked at her, and smiled a little. "You've really always wanted to see Philadelphia?"

"Yes," Peg said valiantly. "There's lots of things there I've always wanted to see."

"We'll go, then," BJ said. "You can tell me all about them on the way." He glanced round again. "Where *is* Hawkeye?"

Peg started eating again. The food on her plate wasn't quite cold. BJ started to eat, too, but he kept looking over at the doorway Pierce had gone out of.

The waiter came over again. "Mrs Hunnicutt?"

"Yes?" Peg was startled. "Is there – did the sitter in our room call?"

“No, ma’am,” the waiter said. “The gentleman who was dining with you left this for you.”

It was an envelope – marked with the name of the hotel – stuffed with a thick amount of paper. Her name was written across the envelope, in a large quick scrawl.

“He left?” BJ asked.

“Yes, sir.”

“Why?”

“He didn’t say, sir,” the waiter said.

Pierce had paid for the meal before he left. They paid off the sitter. Erin was deep asleep. Peg sat down on the edge of bed, and opened the envelope. There was a thick wad of lined paper, folded over, that looked as if it had been taken out of a notebook, and a single piece of notepaper, again marked with the name of this hotel. The handwriting on the notepaper was difficult to make out: after a minute, Peg handed it to BJ, who was standing over her, chewing his impatience.

“‘Dear Mrs Hunnicutt,’” BJ read, “‘It was good to meet you. I was hoping to give this to Erin, but you’ll have to decide when she’s ready for it. Best wishes, B. F. Pierce.’ What is it?”

Peg had unfolded the paper. “Names,” she said.

“What?”

The handwriting here was much clearer. “It’s a list of names.” It took a minute to figure out what sheet the list started on: it was only partially in alphabetical order, and sections seemed to have been written at different times by different pens. “There’s a message here for Erin.” It looked as if Pierce had been trying to write more clearly: sometimes the list staggered, but it wasn’t the scrawl of the notepaper, and the message to her daughter, on a rough-cut slip of paper folded in with the list, was written with painstaking clarity. “He says these are the names of young men you operated on in Korea,” Peg said. She folded the paper again, shielding the words from the light. It seemed almost too private for anyone to read. “It’s for Erin,” she said again.

BJ was holding out his hand. “What is it?”

Peg shook her head. “It’s for Erin,” she repeated. There were so many names on each page, so many pages: how long had it taken Pierce to write it out? “I’ll give it to her... when she’s a little older.”

BJ sat down on the bed. He looked rocked to his foundations. “Hawkeye’s writing private letters to my daughter about my patients? And you’re –” he spluttered “– you’re *letting* him?”

“Yes,” Peg said. She felt the weight of the paper in her hand, dry and rough. It was an astonishing labour of love. “Yes.”

“I’m not sure I like this,” BJ said.

“You don’t have to,” Peg said. “I do.”

They stared at each other.

BJ half-smiled, finally. “I was going to say – I want to go find Hawkeye. Now I have two things I want to talk to him about.”

“Well, we were going to spend tomorrow and Sunday here, anyway,” Peg said. “I can take Erin with me when I go shopping tomorrow. And we could stay a day or two longer, if you want to.”

BJ glanced at his watch. He gathered himself, getting ready without actually moving. Peg felt her stomach fall. “You want to go *now*?”

“Yes,” BJ said. He met her eyes again. “I’m – I know how this must sound, but I’m worried about Hawkeye.”

They had talked about this. Just once, the evening after Erin’s third birthday, when Erin was asleep, worn out with excitement. That night had been the only time they talked about it: Peg had wondered, sometimes, especially when BJ proposed the cross-country trip to New York, but – BJ had never brought it up again, and Peg had thought it best to let sleeping dogs lie.

Peg brought her hands together, holding the letter to Erin carefully between them. “BJ, was there ever anything... anything *more* than we talked about?” Which hadn’t sounded like so much: two drunk men finding themselves on the same narrow bed, fumbling in the dark and stopping before anything really happened. Whatever could happen.

BJ put out his hands, enclosing hers and the letter between them. “He was – he is – he was my best friend, next to you,” he said. His voice was thick. “I – I *love* him, Peg. I worked with him, I knew him – I knew him better than I ever got to know anyone. Except you. I want to make sure he’s all right.”

“Is he queer?”

BJ’s hands twitched. His eyes looked away, then back at her. “I don’t know. He told me he was – once he told me he liked men as well as women. But I never saw him – he’d make jokes about it all the time, so did I, we all did, I guess – but I never saw him – ” BJ paused. “There were rumours about him and another doctor, a guy who left before I got there. Well, jokes, more than rumours. No one seemed to take it seriously. I don’t know. Does it make a difference, if he is?”

To Erin Hunnicutt. This is a list of all the young men your daddy took care of while he was in Korea. Many of them have him to thank for being alive today. I want you to understand why he had to be away during those first years of your life. I hope I have the chance to give you this is person, but around here you never know.

“Not to me,” Peg said. She withdrew her hands from BJ’s. “Hadn’t you better change before you go out again?”

2. BJ

The address proved to be a modern apartment block, not far from the subway. Probably walking distance to Bellevue. Living like this wouldn’t suit BJ – when the new baby arrived, he and Peg were already talking about moving from the small house to somewhere larger, with a bigger yard – but he could see the convenience of it.

If Hawkeye didn’t answer – BJ rang the doorbell again. Was there any way to find out if he was home and ignoring him or still out? No reason the neighbours would have noticed, one way or the other.

BJ heard footfalls from inside the apartment, and the noise of a lock being undone. He had to figure out how to face Hawkeye, and he had to do it now.

Even before the door fully opened, he said urgently, “I know you’re mad at me, and I deserve it, but – ”

Father Mulcahy stood in the doorway, blinking at him.

BJ stopped talking. His mouth fell open. He looked down at the envelope in his hand, checking the address, and up again at the door number.

“Father –” he said, startled and delighted. He stepped forward. “Father!”

Mulcahy stepped back. “You’d better come in,” he said, and added hastily, “Close the door.”

BJ advanced on him, intending to hug the priest harder than he’d ever been hugged. “I don’t care if this isn’t –” He kicked the door shut. Mulcahy had already retreated down the hall.

“Would you like coffee?” Mulcahy offered. He was standing by the sofa in the living room. There was something different about him. BJ stood still, taking him in. Mulcahy was staring at him.

“Can I take your coat?” Mulcahy said.

BJ shrugged off his coat. Mulcahy approached him, oddly, his eyes fixed on BJ’s face. “Would you like something to drink?” Mulcahy said. He took the coat and backed off, keeping himself turned towards BJ.

BJ turned and looked around the room. Fixed high in one corner was a light like a spotlight, with a red slide to cover the bulb. Across the room from it was a large mirror.

“You’re still deaf,” BJ said. He hadn’t realised how much he had been hoping it wasn’t true. He turned towards Mulcahy. “That light’s wired up to the doorbell, isn’t it? That’s how you could answer the door.”

Mulcahy’s mouth tightened. He had always had a pleasant face and manner, but he looked somehow bleak. “Yes,” he said. “I’m sorry, BJ.”

“You’re sorry?” BJ shook his head. “I am – Father, I’ve been trying to find you since last July to tell you – to ask you – to find out how things were going for you and ask you – tell you how sorry I am. I should have told Colonel Potter before I ran away.”

“You couldn’t,” Mulcahy said. His voice had all its old familiar simplicity and authority. “I made you promise not to. I did realise – when the doctor my bishop sent me to wanted to know why I hadn’t been treated sooner, I did understand what I’d laid on you. But not before. I’m sorry, BJ. But I had to stay.”

BJ opened his mouth. He wanted to say *But you didn’t. All you had to do was tell Klinger – Margaret – the Colonel – Hawkeye – and the orphans would have had everyone looking out for them* – Klinger, who had fallen so suddenly and unexpectedly in love? Margaret, who had been thinking about nothing but where to go next? The Colonel, who was Regular Army to his backbone and his boots, and disapproved of looting on principle even in a good cause? Hawkeye, who had been on the edge of going crazy, and couldn’t bear to be around small children? BJ himself, too desperate to go home to write a note for his best friend?

Father Mulcahy hadn’t trusted anyone but himself to make sure the orphanage was fully supplied. And it was too late, and too cruel, to convince him he’d been wrong.

“That doesn’t matter,” BJ said, swallowing everything else he might have said down. “How are things going for you now? What are you doing in New York? I thought you were still in Philadelphia – Peg and I were going to take it in on our way home. Peg says she’s always wanted to go there.”

“Really?” Mulcahy smiled.

BJ grinned and shrugged. He glanced round. "I came here – " He remembered to turn towards Mulcahy. "Peg and I were having dinner with Hawkeye tonight, and this *is* his address."

"I'm working as a teacher at a school for the deaf, and taking night classes towards a New York teaching certificate," Mulcahy said. "I – Hawkeye invited me to stay in his spare room. At a – a very reasonable rent. He's a very good landlord."

"I'm sure you're a very good tenant," BJ said, grinning. "Why didn't you come to dinner with us this evening? We're here till Sunday – what about dinner tomorrow? Why didn't Hawkeye tell me you were here?" He glanced round again. Mulcahy's eyes were fixed on his intently, and his mouth had tightened again into bleakness. "Where is he?"

"I don't know," Mulcahy said. "He – he met you for dinner?"

"Sure. Didn't he tell you? I wrote him at the beginning of January, and I called him yesterday when we knew for sure we'd reach New York today." BJ was frowning now. "He acted at dinner like he didn't know anything about you – he does know you're deaf?" BJ glanced up at the spotlight again. "Stupid question, sorry. But he acted like he had no idea – "

"Did you tell him how it happened?" Mulcahy's voice was rough.

"Sure – " BJ broke off.

Mulcahy losing his temper had usually been quite a funny sight: the relentlessly self-controlled man blowing his top, like a polite kettle letting off a jet of apologetic steam. On a couple of occasions, Mulcahy's anger hadn't been funny at all, and BJ found himself recalling them.

"BJ, you *promised* – " His voice rose. BJ thought for an instant that Mulcahy was going to hit him. "Now you break your promise – you *idiot* – " He turned away, abruptly, and went out of the room. When he walked quickly, BJ saw, you could see he'd lost the runner's easy stride. Nerve damage in the inner ear would have spoiled his balance. BJ stood still. He looked up again at the light and the mirror.

Mulcahy was gone a little longer than was necessary to hang up a coat and a hat. When he came back he didn't look angry, except for being a little more red in the face than before. "BJ, what did you tell Hawkeye? What did he do when you told him?"

"I just told him what happened – " BJ was confounded. "Why didn't he tell me he knew where you were?"

"Did you tell him I was deaf by the time he came back from Tokyo?"

"Well, I wasn't sure exactly how deaf you were. You weren't cooperating with hearing tests, remember?"

"Please don't prevaricate. This is too important for that. I couldn't really hear anything when you left, and you knew it. Did you tell Hawkeye that?"

"Yes."

"What did he do?"

"He had a Martini and walked out," BJ said. "Why didn't he tell me where you were?"

Mulcahy took his glasses off. He took a minute to polish the lenses, his head bent, and it dawned on BJ that the priest had found by this a means, as relentless and polite as anything else about him, of telling everyone else to stop talking to him.

BJ sat down. When Mulcahy hooked his glasses back on his ears and looked at BJ again, BJ said "You mentioned coffee?"

“Yes,” Mulcahy said. He made an abortive, clearly instinctive movement towards the door that presumably led to a kitchen. “When did Hawkeye walk out?”

BJ glanced at his watch. “A couple of hours... getting on for three hours ago.” BJ had wasted more time than he’d thought looking into all the nearby bars. “Father, what’s going on? Is Hawkeye all right? He wasn’t acting... it wasn’t just he didn’t mention you. Is he all right? If he’s – why didn’t he *tell* me? Is he – ” BJ wasn’t going to say *crazy* if Mulcahy didn’t.

“I suppose I have to tell you,” Mulcahy said at last. He sat down. “You shouldn’t call me ‘Father’. I’m suspended from the priesthood. I’ll be laicized permanently very soon. Hawkeye didn’t tell you he knew where I was because I asked him not to – I’m not supposed to let people who knew me when I was a priest find out – I’m not.”

“Laicized?” BJ seized on the unfamiliar word, hoping the translation would make sense of everything else.

“Defrocked,” Mulcahy said.

“Not a priest?”

Mulcahy shook his head. He still had the bleak look on him, but he was watching BJ with an odd kindness. “I’ll make you some coffee,” he said, and got up.

BJ sank his head into his hands and ground the heels of his hands into his eyes. He could not imagine Father Mulcahy as anything but a priest. Deaf – *crippled* – but a priest. Teaching deaf children – but a priest.

Mulcahy came back with two mugs of coffee, and handed one to BJ. “Do you take sugar?”

“No,” BJ said. The coffee cleared his head. “Father – Sorry, what do I call you?”

Mulcahy smiled, briefly. “Francis, if you like, BJ.”

“Francis, I need to find Hawkeye. I’m worried about him. He was acting pretty disturbed when he left. Now, do you have any idea where he might be?”

Mulcahy shook his head. “None at all.”

“Where he goes drinking? Favourite bar?”

“No,” Mulcahy said.

“Friends?”

Mulcahy shook his head again. “I know the names of one or two of his colleagues at Bellevue, but I don’t believe he’d have gone to see them.”

“Is he seeing anyone – you know what I mean,” BJ said. “Does he have a girlfriend?” He grinned. “Well, this is Hawkeye, he’s probably got half a dozen. Anyone special?”

Mulcahy drank his coffee. “I don’t believe so,” he said. Priest or not, he still looked uncomfortable at this kind of talk.

“There’s got to be some way we can find him,” BJ said, frustrated. “Isn’t there *anything* you know about where he might have gone?”

Mulcahy’s headshake was little more than a twitch. His mouth was tightly compressed. When he said “I’m sorry I can’t be of more help, BJ,” his voice was unnaturally even and light. “I am worried about him, too, but I think you’d better go back to your hotel. I’ll – ” He glanced at the phone. “Well, I’ll ask him to call you.”

“I want to see him,” BJ said.

“I’m sure he’ll want to see you.”

“I’m not,” BJ said. He laughed, a little painfully. The expression on Hawkeye’s face as he’d said *It was when I was crazy, right?* had reminded BJ, somehow, of the look in

Hawkeye's face when they'd met in the small dull high-ceilinged room in Tokyo with the wired-in window, when Hawkeye had shouted him out of the room. He finished the coffee. "I want to see you again, too," he said. "Hear all about what you've been doing." *Find out why you're not a priest.* "Tomorrow? Sunday? Peg'll want to meet you, too. And you could meet Erin."

"I'd like that," Mulcahy said. He stood up and collected BJ's mug, setting it down with his own on the table. "It's quite late."

"So it is," BJ agreed, standing up. "Dinner tomorrow night?"

"I usually work at the school on Saturdays," Mulcahy said.

"Sunday? How about a big Sunday lunch? Ask Hawkeye –" BJ stopped. He could hear, down the hall, the sound of someone trying their keys in the lock. "Sounds like he's back," he told Mulcahy.

He went past Mulcahy, moving fast, intending to say to Hawkeye *I know you're mad at me, and I deserve it, but listen to me*, and with very little idea of what he could say after that.

Hawkeye shoved the door open, saw him, and his face twisted in disgust and anger. He said, past BJ, to Mulcahy, "What's he doing here?" He was, by his voice, so drunk that BJ was surprised he was still on his feet.

"I know you're mad at me, and I deserve it, but –"

Hawkeye looked at him. "Get out." His voice was slurred, but the hate in it was clear. His gaze slid away from BJ to Mulcahy. "What's he doing here? Never mind." With a lurching kick, he slammed the door shut, and his fist sliced at BJ's face. BJ didn't even need to dodge: he stared at Hawkeye, startled beyond measure. Hawkeye lifted his fist again, almost experimentally, and Mulcahy caught his arm.

"You hold him, I'll hit him," Hawkeye said. He jerked his arm, and Mulcahy moved behind him and caught at his other arm. "Hey –" He was twisting his head, looking as if he were trying to see behind himself. "Let go of me –" He lunged forward: BJ saw Mulcahy's face.

"Hey," BJ protested.

"Let go of me," Hawkeye said. He was struggling, and Mulcahy looked as if he was having a hard time keeping his balance, but he was gripping hard at Hawkeye's arms and didn't let go. Hawkeye's mouth opened in a snarl. He was staring at BJ, and when his head dropped and a noise came out from deep in his throat BJ thought for a moment Hawkeye was embarrassed. Then Hawkeye threw up.

He went down on his knees and bent over and retched again: Mulcahy, evidently almost at the end of his resources, nearly fell with him. BJ crouched down.

"BJ," Mulcahy said, sounding on edge. "I think you need to go now."

"Shut up," Hawkeye said, cutting across what Mulcahy was saying, his voice thick and dead. He was swaying on his hands and knees, staring down into the puddle of gin-stinking vomit on the carpet. "Shut up, you fucking liar, I'll get up in a minute and I'll punch Beej and then I'll..." His voice was slurring, slowing. BJ caught at his shoulders in time to push his face away from landing in his own vomit. He still wasn't quite unconscious, but almost there: he made a noise, something between gagging and sobbing, and stayed there with his face in the carpet.

"God," BJ said. He knelt up, one hand still on Hawkeye's shoulder, and came face to face with Mulcahy. "He often come home like this?"

Mulcahy shook his head. He looked horrified.

“Don’t worry about what he said.” BJ was trying to sound reassuring. “It’s not him, it’s the gin. Look, I’ll get him to bed. I’ve done it before. He’ll be asleep in a few minutes. Well, unconscious, anyway.”

Mulcahy lifted his shoulders in a slow shrug. “Okay,” he said after a moment, and got himself carefully to his feet – you could see how carefully he had to move. “I should clean this up.”

“If this was the Swamp, we’d just bury it and pile some fresh dirt on,” BJ said.

Mulcahy smiled, almost ghost-like. “I’m afraid that would be even worse for the carpet.”

Hawkeye was a familiar weight. He was all but unconscious now, but not relaxed: he was nearly falling over, and it seemed like he kept falling over in the wrong direction. BJ had found him easier to steer in the past, but he got Hawkeye, stumblingly uncooperative, into his room and over to the bed. BJ tugged his coat off, and his jacket, and Hawkeye landed on his back, his arms falling out and twitching. “Beej?” he said, his voice thickly slurring.

“Yeah, it’s me.”

“Soon as the room stops spinning, I’m going to flatten you.”

“Sure you are.”

Hawkeye’s head rolled to one side. “What are you…” he said, and his voice faded out.

BJ finished pulling off Hawkeye’s shoes. He rolled Hawkeye onto his side, in case he threw up again, and stood back. There was an empty tumbler on the other side of the bed: BJ walked round to pick it up. He stood looking a moment at the bed, the small cabinets either side, each with a reading light and their own small clutter, trying to place something in his mind.

Mulcahy was scouring the stained area of the carpet. He looked up when BJ’s feet came within his field of vision, not before. “Everything all right?”

“Sure. He’s not going to feel happy when he wakes up, though. I was just going to leave him a glass of water.”

“Of course. You’ll find the kitchen through the living room.”

Hawkeye was still unconscious, probably, rather than asleep, when BJ came back with the glass of water. He was still lying on his side, mouth open, on the right of the bed. BJ put the glass down on the nearest cabinet, trusting it was out of reach of Hawkeye’s flailing arm. It was obviously the side Hawkeye usually slept on.

Mulcahy was still working on that spot on the carpet. BJ strolled over and looked. “I think you’ve got it clear.” He repeated himself when Mulcahy looked up.

“I hope so,” Mulcahy said. “I don’t like to think of Mrs Bradford having to deal with this.”

“Mrs Bradford?”

“She’s – Hawkeye employs her as a maid.”

“Just a maid?” BJ raised his eyebrows.

“I’m sorry?” Mulcahy looked puzzled.

“Does she sleep here?”

“No,” Mulcahy said. He sounded mildly shocked. “She’s a married lady – a very nice woman. Her oldest daughter takes notes for me at my Wednesday night class. She’s

usually here when I'm out at work, but I met her the first week of the new year – No," he finished abruptly.

"Okay," BJ said. He thought about it. "Who –"

Mulcahy looked down at the carpet. He scrubbed once more at the area where Hawkeye had thrown up, and picked himself and his cleaning items up, moving carefully.

"Does Hawkeye still have nightmares?" BJ asked.

Mulcahy's face changed, a little: his smile became more tightly controlled. "I'm afraid so," he said.

"How often?"

"He's had two since I moved in, just before Christmas," Mulcahy said. "He tells me... this is normal for him. Two or three times a month."

"He still wake up screaming?"

Mulcahy nodded, looking worried and confused.

BJ nodded. His chest seemed filled to bursting. He could barely speak. Mulcahy went through to the kitchen, and BJ followed him: the soaked and smelly rags went down the garbage chute, and Mulcahy was rinsing his hands in the sink, his back to the room.

BJ said, loudly, "How deaf *are* you?"

When Mulcahy turned again, he was smiling, diplomatically rather than sincerely. "I don't want to seem inhospitable, BJ, but it's very late. Perhaps it would be as well if you went back to your hotel."

"How do you know?" BJ asked. He was trying to make his voice sound normal.

Mulcahy's air of worry and confusion only deepened "What?"

"You can't hear," BJ said. He wasn't sure why he was saying this, but he couldn't stop himself. Even the dawning realisation – and shock – in Mulcahy's face didn't make him want to stop. "How do you know he wakes up screaming," BJ wanted to believe his voice was teasing, amused, "unless you're in bed with him?"

Mulcahy put his hand to his mouth. He spoke in a small, shattered voice. "Please don't tell anyone."

As if those four words had created a silence neither of them could break, they stared at each other.

A large part of BJ's sense of self-worth was bound up in being a likeable fellow. He never knew how much until he saw Mulcahy looking at him as if he were the enemy. The double bed in Hawkeye's room was obviously slept in by two people. BJ had seen that from the first moment he looked at it. He just hadn't been sure, because he hadn't known who. Now he was. He did. He wished he didn't.

Mulcahy seemed to recover first. He folded his hands in front of him. He spoke in a voice become determined, his eyes fixed on BJ's face: it was hard for BJ to look at him. "You see – you must see, the damage it could do to Hawkeye if it were known that he was... if people were to think he was a," he swallowed, "a homosexual. He isn't. I know it must look like that just now. But he does have the capacity to lead a normal life. And I hope he will. But just now he needs... he needs someone who knows about Korea, who cares for him, who... He needs someone. Don't think too badly of him, whatever you think of me."

"What about *you*?" BJ demanded. He was floaty with shock. "You really *are* – Is this why you're not a priest any more?"

Mulcahy was bright red. He said, sounding both embarrassed and angry, “It’s a lot more complicated than that. I don’t want to talk about it with you.”

“I *know* Hawkeye’s a queer. I’ve known it since the first week I was sharing a tent with him. I found out about Trapper and he tried to seduce me. I didn’t know about you. *No one* knew about you. How did Hawkeye find out about you?”

“Oh, shut your trap!” Mulcahy’s voice rose. “You come here and break your promise and barge in here causing trouble – just *go away!*”

BJ walked out. He got as far as the living room, and stood there looking round. It was a small, comfortable space, dining-table in an alcove, big comfortable sofa, books shelved and the recently-read in stacks: and, like the double bed, you could see two people lived here together – if you were looking for it. There was nothing he missed about his years in Korea, except Hawkeye.

Hawkeye looking past him as if he wasn’t there, saying to Mulcahy *What’s he doing here?*

Hawkeye holding him, arms wrapped round him, head against his shoulder, one hand clasping his head – so familiar and so right it hadn’t occurred to him it might look strange until he saw Peg looking at them.

The kitchen door opened, and Mulcahy came out. He looked startled to see BJ still there, but he said “I wanted to ask you – to tell you – ” He stopped.

“Yeah?” BJ wasn’t too fond of self-discovery.

Mulcahy stood still. He looked, again, more embarrassed than angry. “Don’t tell anyone,” he said. “Please. Not a word. For your friendship with Hawkeye – even if – even if right now you’re on the outs – not a word to anyone about what you – you figured out. Promise me, BJ. Please.”

“I won’t tell anyone,” BJ said. He knew he was saying it ungraciously.

“Your solemn promise,” Mulcahy said.

“Yeah,” BJ said. He tried to make himself sound less uncooperative. “I promise. Not even Peg.” He knew it was the right thing to say, and he knew he had no right to say anything else. He dug up a smile. “You’ll trust my solemn promise, after what happened?”

Mulcahy didn’t smile. “I don’t see that we – I have much choice.”

“Right.” BJ nodded. “Okay. Look. I’ll go.”

“Yes,” Mulcahy said.

It was cold outside the apartment building. BJ caught a cab heading downtown.

Peg had gone to sleep with a reading light on. BJ showered, rough-dried, and got into bed beside her. She turned over, eyelids twitching, when he reached over her to switch the light off. BJ lay down with his arm over her and his face against her hair.

“BJ?”

“Who else?”

“Is Hawkeye all right?”

BJ had rehearsed this: it came out quite naturally. “Drunk as a skunk,” he said. “Very, very drunk. I rolled him into bed and left him with a glass of water. And Father Mulcahy.” He had to mention him.

“What?”

It would be easier to say it in the dark. “I found Father Mulcahy.”

There was silence. BJ thought Peg had gone back to sleep. She was lying still, not saying anything, breathing softly and regularly.

She sat up and switched the light on. BJ blinked at it.

“Father Mulcahy? The same one you were talking about?” Peg was blinking too in the sudden light. “How – what?”

“He moved to New York, he’s studying for a teacher’s certificate, he’s still deaf, and he’s rooming in Hawkeye’s apartment.” This too had been rehearsed. It was all perfectly true, after all.

“You found him?”

BJ shrugged. “It was easy. I just rang the doorbell, and there he was. And apparently he’s not a priest any more.” This too had to be said.

“Oh.” Peg frowned. “Oh, because he’s deaf, I suppose. I read about that somewhere.”

“Really?” BJ blinked. That hadn’t occurred to him, but it was the kind of thing Peg picked up. “Oh.” It would be easier not even to think about it.

Peg switched the light off and lay down, putting her arm over him. “I’d like to meet him.”

“I asked him to lunch on Sunday.” I may not be able to get him there.

“Good.” Peg kissed him, light and tickling. “So we don’t have to go back by Pennsylvania.”

Unexpectedly, through a tightness in his chest, BJ felt a laugh building. “I thought there were all those things there you’d always wanted to see?”

Peg made a fist and pushed her knuckles against his ribs. “I was trying to think of some before I went to sleep tonight.”

BJ laughed out loud. “Couldn’t you think of any?”

“I made a *list*. But I went to sleep and forgot to write it down.”

“Oh.” BJ slid his hand down Peg’s side. “How sleepy are you?”

“Very, very sleepy. I doubt if you could keep me awake if you tried all night.”

“Oh,” BJ said. He kissed her again. The tightness in his chest was easing.

He felt Peg about to say something, and braced himself for it: she knew he was on edge. “I’m all right,” he said, hastily, before she could speak.

There was a moment’s silence. Peg shifted a little, her hand pressing against his shoulder, moving herself and him in the familiar pattern. “I was thinking about all the different ways I love you,” she said at last. “You care about your friends so much.”

“You’re my best friend,” BJ said. Hawkeye, looking at him as if he hated him. Mulcahy, looking at him as if he were the enemy. “I haven’t done so well by my other friends – ”

“You can’t do everything,” Peg said. “But we’ll do what we can.”

“I love you,” BJ said, hearing his voice thick with arousal and tears.

Weekend, 22nd-23rd January, 1955

Mulcahy got his rosary from under his socks: he couldn’t bring himself to go to bed, either with Hawkeye or in his own room. He sat on the chair in Hawkeye’s room, turning it so that he could see Hawkeye’s face, and counted his rosary beads. He realised, about halfway through the night, that he was not praying in Latin, but in English: the prayers

Mam had taught him on her chaplet, years before he or anyone else ever thought of his being a priest. *Pray for us sinners*. He felt in need of prayers. *Hail, Mary, full of grace, blessed art thou...*

He slept several times, waking with a twitch to find his rosary still in his hands, losing count of beads and mysteries: had he reached the St Francis medal, or the St John? The St Patrick medal was differently shaped from the others, heavier, a present on his confirmation: he kept beginning again, from Francis or from John, and never reaching the end.

Hawkeye was still sleeping when Mulcahy woke for the third or fourth time, and saw that it was past seven in the morning. He got up from the chair, and went to make himself breakfast and coffee. He made a pot of coffee big enough for two, and only then realised that there was no point: Hawkeye was still deeply unconscious, and would not be appearing in the kitchen doorway with his eyes foggy with sleep, accepting a mug of coffee and thanking Mulcahy for it in the most extravagant terms.

Whatever Hawkeye had said – and BJ had said of it, *Don't worry, it's not him, it's the gin*, – he hadn't meant Mulcahy to understand him. *Whatever* he had said.

Mulcahy was almost at Central Station before it occurred to him that he hadn't left a note for Hawkeye. If he went back he would miss his train and be late to Fanwood: the morning would be disrupted. Hawkeye would know where he had gone, where he always went on Saturdays. He could not have written down what happened with BJ in a note, anyway.

Mulcahy turned his mind away from Hawkeye when he was at the school: he always had.

He thought of him only once: running on the grass track round the playing fields, he fell. It still happened sometimes, and no harm done if he fell on grass or mud, but as he was down on his hands and knees, holding himself through a wave of dizziness, someone touched his shoulder.

Hawkeye?

It wasn't Hawkeye, of course: he'd only once appeared out of nowhere at the school. It was one of the boys he ran with. When Mulcahy looked at him, he signed *okay you?*

Mulcahy smiled and nodded. The other boys had stopped, too. He picked himself up and made the signs for *balance lost, fine, run*.

He walked the rest of the track, watching the boys run ahead, sending Hawkeye out of his mind. The children here used signs far more fluently than he did, and responded readily to him when he used signs to them, even though the signing he'd learned in Philadelphia was perceptibly different from here. He was still not sure of the ethics of it: it seemed like taking advantage of his deafness.

He managed not to think about Hawkeye again – or about BJ – until he was walking back from Central Station. When he did think about what had happened yesterday, he was standing outside the steakhouse just down the block from their apartment, and had to fight an unexpected temptation to go in and eat there. He stood on the sidewalk reading the menu posted outside, trying to look as if he really were making up his mind between a steak or a roast chicken dinner.

Hawkeye might not even be home. BJ might have called: Hawkeye might have gone out to meet with him.

Somehow Mulcahy liked that even less: but it made it possible to head for the apartment block. He would make himself dinner and go to bed early, if Hawkeye wasn't home. BJ and Hawkeye ought to make it up: they had been such good friends.

I know Hawkeye's a queer, BJ's voice said. He tried to seduce me.

I got him drunk, I got my hands on him, I had him, Hawkeye's voice – the one he heard inside his mind – was, in his mind, tired and explanatory: but he hadn't heard it with his ears. It could have been boastful, reminiscent, lubricious: he'd heard what he wanted to hear with his eyes.

The hall was empty. Mulcahy shut the door, trying to do it quietly. When he turned around, Hawkeye was standing a few feet away, dressed in his bathrobe. He had showered, or bathed, but he hadn't shaved.

It was like coming home. Mulcahy recognised the feeling. Hawkeye looked worn and red-eyed, his face was puffy and he didn't look very steady on his feet. He wasn't smiling. But he was looking at Mulcahy with an expression that usually made Mulcahy feel both uncertain and happy: he never knew what he did to cause it, and especially not this evening. It was as if something too good to be true had happened. It usually made Mulcahy smile, no matter how uncertain it made him feel. It was familiar. It was strange.

"Good evening," Mulcahy said. "You look terrible."

"Wages of gin," Hawkeye said. He dug his hands into the pockets of his bathrobe. "I don't remember last night too well, but I think I threw up right about where you're standing."

"I cleaned it up."

"I'm sorry about that. I hit BJ."

"Well, you tried. You missed."

"I'm sorry about that, too." Hawkeye might have meant that as a joke. "I called you a liar."

Mulcahy stopped cold. "Oh," he said.

"Just 'oh'?" Hawkeye said. His face was expressionless. He leaned forward. "No denials? No prevarications? No more stories about unexploded munitions?"

Mulcahy swallowed, and shook his head. "BJ told me he'd told you how it happened."

"Would you *ever* have told me if BJ hadn't?" He rocked forward, giving emphasis to his words.

"Probably not." Mulcahy eyed Hawkeye uneasily. "Do you think you should sit down? You still look a bit unsteady. I'll start supper."

"I ordered take-out from that Korean place."

"You did?"

"It should be arriving right about now."

As if on cue, the light in the hall began to flash. Someone was ringing the doorbell.

"Go wash your hands, Francis. I'll get that." As he passed Mulcahy on his way to the front door, his hand went out to Mulcahy's shoulder, somewhere halfway between a clasp and a blow.

Mulcahy stood frozen a minute, watching Hawkeye's back. He must be talking to the delivery boy; Mulcahy could smell spices and hot food. The blow had stung, no more. It was the measure of Hawkeye's anger that hurt.

He got out his wallet before Hawkeye closed the door and turned round again. "What's my share?"

“Forget it,” Hawkeye said. He shook his head, violently, when Mulcahy didn’t put the wallet away, and went past Mulcahy. He might have hit out again, but his hands were full.

When Mulcahy came through, Hawkeye was sitting at the table. Mulcahy sat down across from him, in his usual place. Hawkeye had transferred the food from the foil dishes the restaurant sent to china: he’d set the table with silverware and glasses. There was even a pair of chopsticks on Mulcahy’s side. Hawkeye picked up the wine bottle and poured Mulcahy a glass, as Mulcahy registered that there was a small china vase in the middle of the table with something in it – a piece of glossy paper, folded.

Hawkeye poured water for himself. He lifted his glass. “What shall we drink to?” He was smiling, but without humour. “Trust? Friendship? Honesty?”

Mulcahy picked up the paper. It was a picture of a rose, clipped from a magazine. “I can’t figure out if you’re angry with me or trying to romance me,” he said.

“How about both?” Hawkeye put his glass down without drinking from it. “You *lied* to me. You – ” He stared at Mulcahy. “I never thought you’d do that.”

Mulcahy opened his mouth. He could have said, defensively, that he hadn’t so much lied as told the truth with intent to mislead. He realised, before the words were out, that splitting hairs wouldn’t help. “Yes,” he said. “I’m sorry. I didn’t see that it would make any difference, and there didn’t seem any point in upsetting you by telling you what actually happened.”

Hawkeye’s mouth twisted, and he shrugged hard. “Why didn’t you tell me when it happened?”

“You were...” Mulcahy’s voice trailed off. He stared at Hawkeye, feeling trapped.

“I was crazy.”

“You were in Tokyo.”

Both Hawkeye’s hands were gripping the table, his knuckles going white. “But I came back. And you didn’t tell me. You walked around camp for days letting everyone think you could hear, and you didn’t tell me. You let me say goodbye to you without telling me you couldn’t hear me.”

Mulcahy sat still, silenced, not taking his eyes from Hawkeye’s face.

“You didn’t *tell* me,” Hawkeye repeated. His mouth gave emphasis to the word.

“I’m very sorry,” Mulcahy said. “I – perhaps I should have told someone – told you – ” His voice dried up. He stared at Hawkeye. He had tried not to think about that awkward time, fumbling his way through encounters with people who didn’t know he couldn’t hear them. His last encounter with Hawkeye – when he’d expected never to see him again – had been both painful and embarrassing.

Hawkeye let go of the table. “I’m sorry,” he said finally. “I didn’t mean to badger you like this. Eat your supper.”

“Aren’t you going to eat?”

“I already had dry toast,” Hawkeye said.

“Try some rice.” Awkwardly, feeling some of the same tension and uncertainty he felt when he tried to comfort Hawkeye after a nightmare, he helped Hawkeye to food. Hawkeye didn’t stop him.

“You ordered all the things I like,” Mulcahy said. They’d ordered take-out from the Korean restaurant more than once, and he knew what Hawkeye would have ordered for himself. The food was good, and he was hungry.

He ate, and Hawkeye watched. Whenever Mulcahy looked up from his plate, Hawkeye was looking at him. An intent, predatory look. Not fond. It was disconcerting to see that look without the fondness.

“I meant to let you have supper before I started yelling at you,” Hawkeye said. He was picking at the rice on his plate. He looked down and back up again. “Sorry.”

“I’m sorry,” Mulcahy said again, feeling his way. “I don’t see what else I could have done – at least, until the armistice was declared. I wanted to leave the orphanage as secure as I could. I suppose I could have told people after – after the war ended, before we all went home, but...” He could not imagine how he could have done it. “There would have been such a fuss.”

Hawkeye grimaced. He opened his mouth, worked his jaw wordlessly a few times, and shut it again. He put his fork down to press his hands over his eyes.

“Hawkeye, if you’re thinking what I think you’re thinking – ”

Hawkeye took his hands away from his eyes. “No,” he said bluntly. “I don’t think you have any idea what I’m thinking.”

“That if I’d admitted what was wrong with me and asked for treatment, when it happened, my hearing might have been saved.”

Hawkeye’s jaw dropped, momentarily. He nodded. “Well, yeah, with a few additions that was pretty much what I was thinking.”

“Doctor Lazar said nothing could have been done.”

“I looked him up after you mentioned him last year,” Hawkeye said. “Good ear man. But – ”

“I don’t think he was lying to me to make me feel better.”

“How do I know *you’re* not?” Hawkeye’s finger jabbed out.

Mulcahy stared, disconcerted.

“I thought you didn’t lie. I believed you. What else are you lying to me about?”

Hawkeye reached out and grabbed at his hands, stopping him from taking his specs off.

“No, you’re going to listen to me, don’t tell me to shut up – ”

Hawkeye was leaning across the table, his face too close now to see what he was saying, twisted up. His hands gripped Mulcahy’s hands, holding on tightly. He was still talking.

“I can’t hear you,” Mulcahy said.

Hawkeye let go and stood up from the table. One of the sleeves of his bathrobe had rice sticking to it; the other was stained with red sauce. He moved two steps away and turned his back. Mulcahy got up, no longer hungry, and went over to him. “Hawkeye?”

Hawkeye turned round and put his hands out again. His nose was running. When Mulcahy took hold of him he was trembling. “Hawkeye...”

“Damn you,” Hawkeye said, and sat down on the sofa, still holding on to Mulcahy’s hands. He looked up at Mulcahy. “I can’t even have a good fight with you,” he said. “Every time I lose my temper you can’t figure out what I’m saying.” His hands clenched more tightly. “I love you. Right now I also hate you so much my guts are cramping up. Of course that might be the hangover.” He bent his head and leaned his face against Mulcahy’s forearms.

“Hawkeye?” Mulcahy got his hands out of Hawkeye’s grip, and sat down beside him, putting an arm round his shoulders.

Hawkeye turned his head. "I love you," he said. "I really do love you. But I'm – " he bent his head again. He was tense under Mulcahy's hands.

"I'm sorry," Mulcahy said. "I thought it wouldn't matter – I thought I'd never see any of you again, and it seemed – "

There hadn't seemed any way to suddenly announce, out of nowhere, "I'm deaf," after so many days of pretending he could hear. The unit had been breaking up: Colonel Potter had been so busy. It had been easy even to avoid Hawkeye. Having to say goodbye, with a series of rehearsed speeches, trying to figure out what the opening and closing mouths were saying to him, had been wrenching. But once over, it should have been final. A priest's life was meetings and partings. He hadn't thought of this, but he had known he was coming to Hawkeye with needs he should have suppressed, or gone to a priest to confess and be forgiven –

He could feel Hawkeye's muscles under his arm, hard with tension. Hating him. He lifted his arm from Hawkeye's shoulders. "I should never have tried to see you again," he admitted, finally, folding his hands together in his lap.

Hawkeye lifted his head and stared at him. "Do you mean that?"

Mulcahy swallowed. He was feeling tears prickling at him. "I never meant any of you to find out – I never meant to hurt you. I just wanted to – I was very – very upset," He swallowed again, and got the words out. "I came to Maine because I hoped you'd seduce me again."

Hawkeye's mouth opened. "You wouldn't let me," he said after a minute's silent, open-mouthed staring. "You wanted – and you wouldn't let me even kiss you?"

"I knew it would be wrong."

"Wrong?" Hawkeye's eyes were getting wider. "Wrong? Do you think this is wrong?" Hawkeye leaned forward. "Do you think you're going to hell for living with me?"

Mulcahy stood up. "Hawkeye, please don't," he said, and walked out of the room. He was at the door of his own room when he remembered taking the rosary out of his sock drawer last night: it was probably still on the chair in Hawkeye's room.

It wasn't there. He had been searching for it for about five minutes, under and beside the chair, before he looked up and saw Hawkeye standing by the door, holding his beads between his hands. "I found them when I woke up," he said.

Mulcahy nodded. He got to his feet and held out his hand. Hawkeye handed him the rosary.

"So, what's the verdict? Do you believe you're going to hell for living with me?"

Mulcahy's hands closed round the cool, familiar weight. "I don't know," he said, through a tight throat. "Please, Hawkeye, I don't want to talk about this with you." In the ordinary way of things he could deal quite well with Hawkeye's black jokes about his faith, but not about this. "I know it looks foolish to you – "

"It doesn't," Hawkeye said. "You told me that before, and you're wrong. I don't think how you believe is foolish." He spoke angrily, his hands digging into his pockets. "I'm not joking and I'm not making fun of you, I really want to know – do you think you're going to hell?"

Mulcahy hooked the beads round his wrist for safekeeping. He supposed he had to answer Hawkeye as if he were serious, even though he probably wasn't. "Do you know the difference between hell and purgatory?"

Hawkeye looked startled, and shrugged. "No."

“If a person dies in a state of mortal sin, unreconciled with God, his soul goes to hell. In hell there is no further hope of contrition or forgiveness – it’s said that this is the worst torment of hell, to know that you are forever exiled from God. The church says I am living in mortal sin with you.” Saying it out loud reminded him again of BJ, and it was a moment before he could go on. “I don’t believe I am. I don’t – I don’t *feel* unreconciled with God.”

Hawkeye didn’t laugh. He nodded. “So what is the difference between hell and purgatory?”

“They say, it’s all the torments of hell, but God’s grace at the end of it. Sounds like the Korean war.”

Hawkeye nodded again. He still didn’t smile. He pointed at the rosary. “What brought that on?”

Mulcahy swallowed. “BJ – last night, BJ – ”

Hawkeye’s face changed. “Did he do something *else* to you?”

Please don’t tell anyone.

“He worked out – ” Mulcahy glanced over his shoulder at the double bed. They slept here more often than in his room. “He worked out that we were sleeping together,” he said, trying to make his voice matter-of-fact. “I asked him – he promised not to tell anyone.”

“BJ,” Hawkeye said. His face was expressionless. “He rang twice today, you know? Wanted to meet you for lunch tomorrow. I told him to go to hell.”

“Should you have done that?”

Hawkeye laughed abruptly. “Look, whatever I think of BJ, and since about nine last night I think he’s so low you could fit him under a carpet without leaving lumps, he’s not a blabbermouth. He won’t talk.”

“I meant – you’re friends,” Mulcahy said, cautiously.

“No,” Hawkeye said. “We’re not. Not after what he did to you.”

Mulcahy stared, baffled. “He kept his promise. I made him give me his solemn promise not to tell anyone, and he didn’t break it, though he wanted to.”

“He should have. He *didn’t* want to. If he wanted to, he would’ve. I would have.”

“A solemn promise?”

“Sure. Even if it wasn’t you. I’ve done it before, I’d do it again. I’d have told. BJ was – ” Hawkeye’s hands were tapping against his legs. “He wasn’t thinking about *you*.” Hawkeye’s fists hit his thighs. “He wasn’t thinking about his oath as a physician or his responsibility to a patient or even to a *friend*.” He hit his thighs again. “He was thinking about his happy family in California, nothing else. He just ran off and left you behind to go deaf without even leaving a damn note.”

Mulcahy managed to grab at Hawkeye’s wrists. Hawkeye stared at him. “Don’t do that,” Mulcahy said.

“Do what?”

“Hit yourself.”

“I’m not hitting myself.”

“Yes, you were,” Mulcahy said. “BJ wanted to go home – he wanted to go back to his wife and daughter. I wanted to stay in Korea and protect my children. If you’re going to blame anyone, you have to blame me, as much as BJ, more so, because I *could* have told

you – and I didn't. I'm sorry. But there's nothing any of us can do about it now, and it's not worth your hitting yourself over."

Hawkeye turned his hands to take hold of Mulcahy's wrists. The rosary beads shifted, cool smooth weight next to Hawkeye's warm grip.

"Last night – and when I woke up, this afternoon – I kept remembering," Hawkeye said slowly. "When I said goodbye to you at the 4077th, I thought we'd never see each other again. There we were, standing in the middle of a crowd, and – I told you that there was something I'd always wanted to say to you. I was hoping to get some kind of reaction out of you – like a blush, or the cute way your eyes would get wider when you thought I was going to do something – say something – that was over the line. But you had a perfect poker face, and I said my line and nothing changed. So I made a stupid joke, about your collar being on back to front, and you were just – nothing. I thought – you'd gotten over me."

"You laughed," Mulcahy said. He had been able to feel Hawkeye's body shaking, through Hawkeye's hug. BJ had signalled that Hawkeye was laughing. That was when he had realised that whatever Hawkeye had said, it had been supposed to be a joke.

"So did you."

They stood there and looked at each other. Hawkeye's face was a mess, and his eyes were bloodshot, but his gaze was steady. "You're the best thing that ever happened to me." He lifted Mulcahy's hands, firming his grip. "I love you."

"I love you," Mulcahy said. He stopped, hunting for words. "Last night – I told BJ -- "

"I don't care what you told him," Hawkeye interrupted.

"I told him I – " Mulcahy realised he was turning his face away from Hawkeye, as if he didn't want to see Hawkeye's response. He didn't.

Hawkeye changed his grip to hold on to Mulcahy's arms, and backed him gently across the room to the bed. It had been roughly made – it looked as if Hawkeye had hauled the covers straight, no more. "You want to talk?" he said, and sat down on the edge of the bed with Mulcahy. "Talk. I'm a captive audience." He lay down, pulling Mulcahy down with him, tugging him to lie with his head on Hawkeye's shoulder, his arms round Mulcahy, holding him.

"I told him I didn't think – that you're not a homosexual. Whatever it looked like." Mulcahy felt Hawkeye's chest shake under him, as if he was suppressing a laugh or a comment. "I told him – that I hoped you'd – lead a normal life. Someday."

Hawkeye let go of him, sat up, and backed away, all in one jerky action. He looked as if someone had hit him. "There isn't anything I can say, is there?" He shook his head, still looking as if a punch had landed. Mulcahy's heart lurched. "A 'normal' life?" His hands jerked. "You still think I'm going to leave you?"

"You – you've been in love with so many people, it's – " Hawkeye and Trapper had been a unit for as long as Captain McIntyre had been with the unit, virtually inseparable, behaving as much like twin brothers as lovers; Hawkeye and BJ had been... not quite the same kind of inseparable unit, but a devoted pair; and Carlye Walton. Three that Mulcahy had seen, and Hawkeye had mentioned three more.

"I thought – I thought if you were in love with a woman, it would be bearable – if I could think of you leading a normal life."

"A normal life?" Hawkeye said again. He looked dazed. "You – " He shook his head. "I – " He was sitting with his shoulders hunched, and his face crumpled.

“Hawkeye,” Mulcahy said.

“Shut up,” Hawkeye said. He folded his arms and put his head down.

“I think you – ”

Hawkeye lifted his head again. “Shut up. I don’t want to hear this from you. I know you could do better than me. I’m neurotic, I’m bad-tempered, I drink too much, I wake up with screaming nightmares every week or so, and you don’t have to remind me that you watched me going through, down on, or to bed with half of the 4077th in three years.” He smiled crookedly. “And if the war had lasted six years instead of three, I’d have gone through half the rest. But I’m not going to be talked out of this. You’re the best thing that ever happened to me, and anyone who tries to tell me otherwise is going to get flattened. Including you.”

Mulcahy stared at him, silenced.

Hawkeye leaned forward and touched the side of his face with his fingers: a brief, oddly clumsy caress. “I know it’s not the same for you,” he said. His hand brushed down the side of Mulcahy’s face like a dry kiss. “You want to be a priest, you don’t want to be deaf, this is all – this is second-best. If I can’t be more than second-best, I want to be the best second-best you could ever have.”

“I love you,” Mulcahy said, though his mouth felt half-numb. “I wanted to tell you – what I told BJ last night – because I know, I knew when I said – it wasn’t what I wanted. I feel at home with you. You’re my home. You make me feel that it doesn’t matter that I’m deaf, I’m not a priest, I’m a failure – ” He might have stuttered. His tongue felt awkward, saying the words. “I love you terribly. More than – more than Mass.”

“No,” Hawkeye said. “No – ” He was shaking when Mulcahy took hold of him, trembling violently. “No,” he said, before his face was too close to understand what he was saying, and he was kissing Mulcahy, rough and clumsy and desperate.

What filled Mulcahy’s mind at that moment was the thought of going down on Hawkeye. The taste of him: the feel of his dick solid under soft-velvet: the smell of him: the appearance of his dick, approached mouth-first from close quarters. The taste of his fingers in Mulcahy’s mouth, the look of his words on his face, the tenderness of his hands that transformed to a shaking, uncontrolled grip when Mulcahy knew what he was doing. The smell of his warmth: he smelt like sleep and sex and home. Communion without words.

Hawkeye was undressing him, quickly and expertly – the rosary beads went carefully to his bedside table, and all the rest was going here and there. Hawkeye was good at this, even when his hands shook, and he never stopped kissing. He was talking between kisses, but Mulcahy didn’t have to decode what he was saying: he knew what Hawkeye meant. Mulcahy managed to get Hawkeye out of his robe and was trying to ease off his boxer shorts when Hawkeye finished getting him naked, pinned him down by his shoulders, and began a swift journey of arousal, mouth and fingers, from his throat to his chest to his stomach to his dick –

Mulcahy curled his hands around Hawkeye’s head, made helpless, turning his head against Hawkeye’s thigh, feeling all his muscles clenching up and his mouth opening, making noises he could feel through his throat and his jaw as he felt Hawkeye’s throat contracting around his dick –

He was boneless with pleasure. Hawkeye was smiling. Either he or Mulcahy had turned around: he was lying belly to belly with Hawkeye, and Hawkeye was looking

down into his face, and smiling. It took Mulcahy some time to work out that he had no recollection of moving, and the ceiling behind Hawkeye's head was the ceiling as it looked from this end of the bed. Hawkeye was still wearing his boxer shorts: Mulcahy could feel the fabric.

"You never showed me how to do that." He yawned in Hawkeye's face, most impolitely, but Hawkeye didn't look offended.

"You're a quick study," Mulcahy thought he said, and laughed: Mulcahy could feel it down through his stomach.

"Isn't it extraordinary," Mulcahy said.

"What is?" That came through clearly.

Mulcahy was so intent on the unfocussed look of Hawkeye's face, he had forgotten how he meant to end the sentence. It took a moment before he remembered. "Oh yes. Extraordinary. How great pleasure takes away your sense of time as much as great pain. More so. Extraordinary," he said, and a wave of warmth slid drowsily over him and carried him down.

When he woke, Hawkeye was still lying over him, propping his weight on elbows and forearms. "Morning."

"What – how long did I sleep?"

Hawkeye's eyebrows signalled *gotcha*. "Ten minutes."

Mulcahy twitched. "You've just been watching me sleep?" For ten minutes?

"Of course not. I did the *Times* crossword, and read an article about total repair of tetralogy of Fallot." Hawkeye grinned. "And I put your specs back on." After a long moment, he said, "I could tell you weren't deep asleep. Figured you'd either wake up or go deep, and you woke up."

"You want to – I should –" Mulcahy could feel Hawkeye's body pressed against his, all the way down, and Hawkeye's dick was soft behind his shorts. "Did you –?"

"What?"

"You didn't... didn't let me do anything."

Hawkeye frowned. "Yeah," he said. "It's okay."

Comprehension dawned. "Were you... are you..."

"I'd tell you this has never happened before," Hawkeye said, still with a frown that looked increasingly like embarrassment, "but you'd know I was lying."

"Oh." Mulcahy was hit by what he was sure was an inappropriate – impolite – unsympathetic, anyway – urge to giggle. Worse, if he did start laughing, Hawkeye could not fail to feel it, even if Mulcahy managed to keep it inside. He was finding it hard to keep the impulse buried. "I'm sorry," he said out loud.

Hawkeye frowned down at him. Possibly he felt Mulcahy's stomach muscles clenching to resist laughter. "You see if you think it's so funny when it happens to you," he said.

"It has," Mulcahy said, still struggling. "Only I used to think of it as a blessing." He surrendered, and let himself laugh. After a moment, Hawkeye dropped his head on to Mulcahy's shoulder and stayed as still and warm and heavy as if he had gone to sleep. He didn't move until after Mulcahy had stopped laughing.

"Okay," he said. He looked both amused and embarrassed. "Okay. Are we done now?"

"Well, I am," Mulcahy said. "Shall we get up?"

“It’s not really morning.”

“We left all that food on the table.”

“Are you hungry?”

“No, but – ”

“Then let’s leave it till morning.”

“That would be a waste.”

“I don’t care.” Hawkeye locked his hands behind Mulcahy’s head. “Did you think when I said I wasn’t hungry I was being polite? Do you really want to eat leftovers for breakfast?”

Mulcahy put his hands up and pushed at Hawkeye’s shoulders. Hawkeye sat up slowly, eyeing him. “We can’t leave it there on the table overnight,” Mulcahy said.

His own bathrobe was through in his own room: Hawkeye’s needed to go into the laundry. It did not occur to Mulcahy till they were both clearing up the dishes and plates from the table that left to himself Hawkeye would probably have walked through to the kitchen in his shorts, or naked, not pulled on his pyjama jacket to match Mulcahy putting back on his shirt and his undershorts.

Naked and unashamed. Hawkeye had walked into the mess tent naked from his shoes to his cap: a bet from McIntyre.

Faced with BJ’s knowledge, Mulcahy had said – had whimpered *Please don’t tell anyone*.

Faced with the knowledge that BJ knew, Mulcahy hadn’t been able to lie down beside Hawkeye.

“Are we done now?” Hawkeye asked again.

Mulcahy stared at him.

“Can we go back to bed now?” Hawkeye looked at him, wide-eyed.

Mulcahy swallowed. “Hawkeye, can you do me a favour?”

“Sure, anything. What?”

“Call BJ for me and tell him – ask him where to meet them for lunch tomorrow.”

Hawkeye’s willingness disappeared. “You don’t want to see him.”

No, I don’t. “I think I should. I need to tell him – I didn’t think to tell him what Doctor Lazar said.”

“Good.”

Mulcahy waited. Hawkeye said nothing more.

“Please call BJ for me,” Mulcahy said at last. He didn’t want to have to get dressed again and go downtown to the hotel where BJ was staying.

Hawkeye’s eyes looked hollow with shadows. Finally, he said “I don’t want to talk to him again.”

Mulcahy tried to smile. “Perhaps Mrs Hunnicutt will answer the phone.”

Hawkeye’s mouth twisted. He turned and went out of the kitchen. He was standing holding the phone, jabbing his fingers into the dial, when Mulcahy followed him out.

“What do you want me to say to him?”

“When can I meet them tomorrow.”

“It would be easier,” Hawkeye said, looking away from the phone, “if I just passed on the message about what Doctor Lazar said.”

“Just when. And where.”

"I'll tell them where," Hawkeye said. "Okay." He seemed to be talking to the operator at the hotel; but when his face was turned toward the phone receiver, it was impossible to tell what he was saying. His hand was tapping, but not against his leg; against the wall. He finished, and put the phone down.

"I told them one o'clock," Hawkeye said. "Rico's, down by Battery Park, faces south, I'll call and book a table for the three of you by the front window. Try the pesto chicken, it's great."

"Four," Mulcahy said.

"Yeah, you'll get to meet Erin Hunnicutt. I've already heard all about her. In detail."

"I want you to come with me."

"No," Hawkeye said. He gave the telephone directory an immovable, insolent look, and went on flipping through it. When he had made the second phone call – to the restaurant, Mulcahy thought – he dropped the directory on the floor by the shelf, and walked out of the room.

Through in his bedroom, Hawkeye was sitting on the edge of the bed with his hands locked together between his knees. He looked up as Mulcahy came in. "Tired?"

Mulcahy stopped. Hawkeye's face held no invitation. He looked tired.

"Are you all right?"

"I hate BJ. I want a drink. I'm impotent. You want any more?"

Mulcahy came closer, uncertain. "You didn't seem to mind before...?"

Hawkeye shrugged. He put his hand out and caught hold of Mulcahy's wrist. "I minded," he said. "It just didn't seem to matter that much."

"I wanted –" Mulcahy came closer. "I want to give you a blow-job." It was the first time he had ever said anything so explicit, and he was conscious of his face burning, but he met Hawkeye's eyes with determination.

Hawkeye shifted his hand further up to grasp at Mulcahy's elbow. "No point," he said, and tugged, bringing Mulcahy down to sit on the bed beside him. "Just wear your mouth out without getting anywhere." He leaned sideways and kissed him. "I want you to do me a favour."

"Anything, if I can," Mulcahy said.

Hawkeye was looking at him with a kind of steady-eyed desperation. His hands were moving a little on Mulcahy's arms, shifting and uncertain.

"I want to take you out to breakfast tomorrow," he said.

Mulcahy nodded, surprised.

"After you go to Mass."

Mulcahy jerked his hands back. He shook his head. Hawkeye was on his feet, hands out. Mulcahy discovered he was three feet further away from Hawkeye than he'd thought, and feeling dizzy. He kept himself on his feet. Hawkeye's hands fell to his thighs.

"What –"

"Mass," Hawkeye said. "At that church down the block. Or somewhere else. They do mass at that church at seven in the morning and at half past ten. I didn't look at the boards outside the other churches, but –"

"Why are you doing this to me?"

"You haven't been to Mass in four weeks. Four weeks tomorrow."

Five. Mulcahy opened his mouth, closed it again. "Why?"

"You want to go to Mass."

“I can’t.”

“You can.” Hawkeye’s face had taken on that look of immovable insolence again: it was *different* when it was directed straight at you, Mulcahy realised. “You said you couldn’t because anything you said about how you were living would be a lie.”

Mulcahy opened his mouth.

Hawkeye’s hand came at him with savage punctuation. “You can’t tell them you work at the New York School for the Deaf? You can’t tell them you’re spending far too much of your spare time studying for your New York teacher training certificate at CUNY? You can’t tell them you’re sharing this apartment with Doctor Pierce, who you worked with in Korea, and who sub-lets his spare room to you? What part of any of that is a lie?”

“They won’t know...” Mulcahy’s voice trailed off. “I can’t tell them...” He had fought with Hawkeye before, and won or lost: he had never tried to face down Hawkeye in this kind of mood. Hawkeye had never looked at him like this. “They’ll notice... people do notice...that I don’t – can’t take Communion.”

“Will they ask you why?”

“The priest will,” Mulcahy said. He would have. “It’s the kind of thing a good priest... does.”

“What if he does? Do you have to tell him? What’s he going to do if you just don’t tell him? What if you do tell him – he can’t tell anyone else, can he?”

“Unless I tell him in confession, of course he can,” Mulcahy retorted.

“Just don’t tell him, then,” Hawkeye said. “He can’t make you talk.” His face changed as if he were laughing, but so briefly it might have been a grimace. “No one can make you talk.”

“But it’s still a lie.”

“Because you’re letting them believe something that isn’t true?” Hawkeye loomed closer. His face was distorted. “You were willing to lie to me.” He was too close to understand, but Mulcahy could fill out the rest of what he was saying.

“Why are you doing this to me?” Mulcahy asked again. He felt numb and astonished.

Hawkeye moved back. “I want you to go to Mass,” he repeated.

“Hawkeye – ” Mulcahy wasn’t sure whether the feeling in his throat was a sob or laughter. “*Why?* It makes – it makes no difference to you – ”

“You want to go to Mass,” Hawkeye said, again.

Mulcahy pushed down on his anger. “You can’t – ” He fought to be able to say it in a calm voice. “You’re a very generous man. I know you don’t like me to be unhappy. But you can’t – you can’t give me – you can’t change something like this.”

“I don’t want to change the entire Roman Catholic church,” Hawkeye said. “I just want you to go to Mass.”

“You’re not listening to me,” Mulcahy said.

Hawkeye’s face twisted. “I don’t even know how much of this you’re getting.”

Mulcahy swallowed. “Enough to know you want me to go to Mass – and you’re not listening to me when I tell you I can’t.”

“You can,” Hawkeye said. “The only reason you don’t is because you care more about not telling the whole truth about something that’s none of their business to a bunch of people who don’t even know you – ” He was yelling. There was nothing clear after that.

Mulcahy sat down in the chair and put his head down in his hands. When he lifted his head after a minute, Hawkeye was sitting on the edge of the bed again, looking at him.

He hadn't wanted to meet with BJ, because he was ashamed that BJ knew. Not fear of what BJ would do – he didn't suppose that BJ would do or want to do anything with the information that Mulcahy was a homosexual, was living with Hawkeye – having sex with Hawkeye – and not honest guilt at having sinned: the flinch he felt when he thought of lunch with BJ tomorrow was shame, painful and childish.

He didn't want to go to Mass because he was ashamed.

He'd known he couldn't refuse to meet with BJ out of shame. "I'll go to Mass," he said.

Hawkeye looked at him. "I'm sorry," he said, after a minute. "What I said – was over the line."

Mulcahy shook his head. He was shivering, he realised, even though he knew the room was warm. "I didn't hear half of it." He managed a smile. "I expect you were right, though."

"Meek and stubborn," Hawkeye said, after a moment. "I really hate that."

Mulcahy stared. After a moment, he got out a shuddery laugh. It was a joke. It wasn't even the worst possible joke Hawkeye could have made. He stood up. So did Hawkeye.

"I should," Mulcahy said, fumbling. "I should take a shower." He turned his back on Hawkeye and walked out.

He was showering, looking down at his body, staring at his dick. There was nothing to show that Hawkeye had taken it deep into his mouth – into his throat: there was no visible difference on his body. He could walk into the church tomorrow and no one would see. No one would know.

Dear Lord, he thought, and couldn't think any other words to the prayer. *Dear Lord, dear Lord...*

He was dried and towelling his hair when Hawkeye came in. Mulcahy looked up, smiled, nodded and went out again. He stood in the hall for a minute.

Hawkeye had overwhelmed him, exactly as he had the first time. The only difference was that he hadn't tried to fight it – and he hadn't tried – hadn't even thought of trying to do anything in return. He had fallen asleep.

He hadn't gone to sleep like that in years. Perhaps he never had.

Some part of him wanted to turn left, not right, go to his cold tidy bed and lie there using his familiar strategies for going to sleep without thinking about – what he should not think about, if he wanted to be able to serve Mass in the morning.

He wouldn't be serving Mass in the morning, or ever again. He wasn't a priest any more.

Fly fornication. Every sin that a man doth is without the body: but he that committeth fornication sinneth against his own body. Or know you not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost, who is in you, whom you have from God: and you are not your own?

Dear Lord, help me.

He turned right and went into Hawkeye's room. The bed was a mess: he pulled at the bedding to straighten it.

Mrs Bradford knew. If BJ could figure out two people were sleeping in this bed after only looking at it for a few minutes, Mrs Bradford must know.

Mulcahy lay down on his usual side of the bed. He turned on his side and folded his arms to pillow his head. When the centre light was turned off, and he felt Hawkeye sit

down on the edge of the bed and move to lie behind him, not touching him, he did not move.

Hawkeye didn't turn the bedside lights off. Mulcahy lay there, wishing he could hear Hawkeye breathing. When he turned, Hawkeye was propped on one elbow, watching him, with a sad and doubtful expression that changed, as Hawkeye saw him turn, to a careful smile.

Mulcahy reached out to turn his bedside light off. Hawkeye shrugged a little, and reached to do the same. Safe from conversation, Mulcahy lay down again, on his back, feeling Hawkeye's weight shift on the mattress at his side. He fumbled for and found Hawkeye's hand, and lay still, holding on, waiting to go to sleep.

It was well after seven when Mulcahy woke. Hawkeye was still asleep. In his sleep he had turned over and curled his arm over Mulcahy's chest, holding on as if he could do something to protect Mulcahy. They usually seemed to move together in their sleep: it had not occurred to Mulcahy to wonder about that, until this morning when it seemed as if he hadn't moved in the night, but lain as still and straight as a sleeper on a monastery bed, or an army cot.

Mulcahy got up. He made his way to the kitchen, and began, automatically, to brew coffee: enough for two.

Hawkeye appeared, bleary-eyed, but looking better than yesterday. He accepted the big mug of coffee, looking as if he was still more asleep than not, and drank. He looked as if he were about to say something, and then didn't.

They moved through to the living room, without talking about it, and sat down on the sofa. Hawkeye said finally, "You don't –"

Mulcahy shook his head, hard. "Don't," he said. His hand went out, fending off whatever it was Hawkeye was going to say.

Hawkeye drank his coffee. "I was going to say," he said, though Mulcahy was fairly sure that wasn't what he had meant to say, "you don't want breakfast – till afterwards?"

"I don't have to fast," Mulcahy said. "Or I couldn't drink this."

"Coffee *counts*?" Hawkeye's eyebrows moved with his grin. He glanced at the clock. "We've got an hour – you want pancakes?"

"I'm not hungry."

Hawkeye shrugged. He got up before his coffee mug was half-emptied and took himself and it to the kitchen. He came back a few minutes later with a refilled mug and a plate of toast. Mulcahy ate one slice, then another; Hawkeye ate the rest.

If Hawkeye had asked, Mulcahy would have said no. He was fairly sure of that. But they left the apartment together, and walked towards the church together, and Hawkeye never asked: unless the under-eyebrows glance and shrug could be called a question.

Mulcahy tried not to look at him and he could not hear him, but he was conscious that Hawkeye was there, shadowing Mulcahy. He genuflected, dipped his fingers in the holy water stoup, crossed himself, and repeated, lacking any other prayer in his mind, *Dear Lord*.

He knew, though he didn't turn his head to look, that Hawkeye had stopped when he stopped, but hadn't made any other motion – an agnostic Protestant, it seemed unlikely Hawkeye had ever been to High Mass.

Dear Lord, help me.

No one has to know. No one can know.

He found a half-empty pew, not too far back or forward, and saluted the altar, feeling a coldness grip him. He felt Hawkeye sit down beside him. He fixed his eyes on the window above the altar – Christ crucified, Mary his mother to his right and St John to his left, Mary the Magdalene kneeling at his feet – and tried to pray.

The congregation stirred, and Mulcahy saw the priest enter with the deacon and sub-deacon and choristers following after. From then on, he knew the ritual of the Mass, changeless in time or place, whether or not he could hear the priest's Latin or the responses; but it required more concentration than prayer to know when to stand, to sit, to kneel, to cross himself. In a church where they were not used to deaf parishioners, he did not try to repeat any of the prayers or the Creed out loud.

The priest raised the cup. Mulcahy knew the words: he should not say them, out loud or in intention. The bread and the wine were the body and the blood: the real presence of Christ was on the altar.

Dear Lord.

He was conscious, vividly conscious, of Hawkeye next to him. Hawkeye had knelt when he had knelt, as he had stood when Mulcahy had stood, as if he could be Mulcahy's reflection, not his shadow.

He was as vividly conscious of the presence of Christ in the church: an intense – intent brightness, the light through the stained-glass window, the hairs lifting on the back of his neck, the remembered taste of watered wine and unleavened bread.

He knows. Mulcahy sat still. He knew himself completely vulnerable, and utterly secure. He was held, and prayer was easy.

Dear Lord, you know I love Hawkeye. You know how I love Hawkeye. Forgive me my sins. Bless Hawkeye, and have him always in your keeping. Bless us, dear Lord, and our friendship.

The congregation – the communicant part of the congregation – were lining up. He and Hawkeye were not the only two left behind on the pews, but they were the only two on this one. Hawkeye glanced at him. Mulcahy nodded reassurance, and bent his head again to repeat an act of contrition.

Mass ended. Mulcahy stood up: after a glance at him, Hawkeye stood. He looked as if he had a dozen questions, all coming to the top of his mind at once.

The priest was shaking hands with his congregation on their way out the door. Mulcahy didn't try to dodge past: Hawkeye shot him a glance, but stuck next to him. This priest didn't have as kind a face as Father Saunders: but armoured in confidence, Mulcahy met his eyes and shook his hand.

Out on the street the sunlight reached him: he blinked at it. Hawkeye struck out across the road and Mulcahy followed. He was sitting at the dining table, a mug of coffee in front of him, before he remembered. "Weren't you going to buy me breakfast?"

"I'll make you French toast in a minute," Hawkeye said. "You want to tell me what happened in there?"

"You were right," Mulcahy said. "I can go to Mass."

Hawkeye rubbed the side of his face with his knuckles. "I pushed you," he said. "I'd been thinking about it every Sunday morning, but you know why last night was the first time I brought it up?"

"You were angry with me," Mulcahy said.

“Yeah,” Hawkeye said. He dropped the flat of his hand to the table.

“I’m sorry I had to ask you to call BJ.”

Hawkeye shrugged. “I’m sorry you had to ask me twice.”

Mulcahy looked at his watch. “I’ll have to leave in half an hour to meet them. Is there any way I can persuade you to come with me?”

“No,” Hawkeye said. “What *happened* in there? You were – I was worried about you. You were acting like a sleepwalker – you were – you seemed to be – ” He fumbled and dropped the closing noun. “I was afraid to let you cross the street by yourself!”

“Is that why you came to Mass?”

“I wanted – ” Hawkeye looked away, looked back again. “You were acting like you were – I’ve never seen you like that. I was afraid to let you cross the street this morning. I was afraid I’d pushed you too far. But something happened in there – ”

“I was ashamed,” Mulcahy said. He looked across the table at Hawkeye. “I’m – I was – ” He reached out and took Hawkeye’s hand in both of his. “I was ashamed that anyone else would know, or even guess, what we... that we make love. I forgot – ” He hesitated. “God knows I love you.”

Hawkeye’s grip was fierce and fast. He was smiling, an odd twist to his mouth, but his eyes were full of tears.

“I should have gone to Mass before,” Mulcahy said. “Thank you for pushing me into going. Thank you for coming with me.”

“You’re welcome,” Hawkeye said. He didn’t let go of Mulcahy’s hands. “You know that’s the first time – the very damn first time – you’ve ever said that we make love?” He put his head down, and lifted Mulcahy’s hands in his, dropping a kiss on the back of his hand, another on his knuckles. He raised his head, looking at Mulcahy. “Yeah, I was angry with you last night. But I’d been thinking... I keep thinking... if you had to choose between giving up your religion and giving up me, I know which I’d bet on in the long run.”

Mulcahy swallowed. “Hawkeye – ”

Hawkeye kissed his hands again. He looked up. “What?”

“I wish you didn’t think of yourself as second-best,” Mulcahy said.

Hawkeye shrugged. He wasn’t grinning any more. “Second-best to God,” he said. “Most men would be happy with that. I’ll try and deal with it. I wish you didn’t think of yourself as a failure.”

Mulcahy stared at him. “But I – ”

“You were the best priest I ever knew,” Hawkeye said. “Think of it like Charles always used to say: ‘I do one thing at a time, I do it very well, and then I move on to the next’.”

The laugh that broke out of him felt almost like a hiccup. Mulcahy gripped at Hawkeye’s hands. “But it always used to drive you crazy when he said that in O.R..”

“Let’s face it, it was a short drive.” Hawkeye was grinning again. “You want French toast or you want to take me to bed and make love to me? I’m feeling much better now.” He leered cheerfully.

“I’d really – ” Mulcahy shivered. He wanted nothing more. “I really – I really need to go meet BJ and Peg for lunch.”

“Fine,” Hawkeye said. He didn’t let go of Mulcahy’s hands. “You go see Mr and Mrs Happy from California.”

“Will you – ”

Hawkeye let go of Mulcahy at last, turning his hands palm down on the table. “If I see Beej again any time soon, I’m going to flatten him,” he said “And by ‘soon’ I mean any time in the next fifty years. You don’t want to know what I’d do if I were sitting across the table from him for an hour trying to eat lunch. Nor do I, but I don’t want to find out. I’m a man of peace, and BJ would be a man in pieces. You go. Fine. Go on.”

“Hawkeye – ” Mulcahy didn’t like this.

Hawkeye leaned back in his chair. “I mean it,” he said. “I’m not going. You go if you want to. Take your time. I’ll be here when you get back.”

Mulcahy nodded.

“I mean it. I’m not coming with you.” Hawkeye grimaced. “I can’t believe I said that.”

Mulcahy surprised himself by giggling. “You didn’t last night.”

Hawkeye’s mouth opened and his head went back. He was laughing too hard to speak for a moment. He looked at Mulcahy, and his eyes held almost more affection and admiration than Mulcahy thought he could bear.

He got up and went round the table: Hawkeye turned towards him. Mulcahy put his hands on Hawkeye’s shoulders, leaning on Hawkeye, feeling him still laughing. “I love you,” he said.

Hawkeye’s arms went round Mulcahy’s waist and he pressed his face in against his stomach. He didn’t say anything. He was still laughing a little: Mulcahy could feel his shoulders jerk and his body tremble.

When he let go and stood up, he was still smiling. “You sure you have to go?”

“Yes,” Mulcahy said. “I said I would.”

“Okay. I’ll walk down with you.”

Mulcahy looked at him.

“I’m not going to lunch with Mr and Mrs California,” Hawkeye said. “I’m just going downtown with you.”

The table the waiter showed him to was right in front of the window. Mulcahy sat down with his back to it and asked for a glass of water. He wasn’t sure if it would be easier or more difficult if Hawkeye *was* here, but he wished he was.

Knowing with certainty that he didn’t need to be ashamed didn’t mean he wouldn’t be.

The glass of water and the Hunnicutts arrived at the same time: Mulcahy stood up, shook hands with BJ, with Peg, with Erin – a tall child for three.

The waiter came back with telephone directories for Erin to sit on: Mulcahy reclaimed his seat with his back to the light. Menus were handed out. Peg seated Erin next to her, and BJ sat down next to Mulcahy.

“I’m told the pesto chicken’s good,” Mulcahy said. He glanced sideways at BJ, in time to see him nod and say something.

Mulcahy clenched his hands together under the table. He willed his voice to sound even. “Mrs Hunnicutt – ”

“Peg.”

“Peg, I’m profoundly deaf. I can’t hear unless I can see your face. I’m afraid we won’t be able to have much of a conversation unless you and BJ are both sitting across from me.” He had never said anything so explicit to anyone he had just met outside a school or

a Deaf Club, without extreme need: but, without fuss, Peg said “BJ, why don’t you and Erin change places? Erin, be a good girl.”

Erin got down from the chair and smiled widely, saying something that made Peg – and BJ, Mulcahy saw – laugh. Peg turned to Mulcahy, as BJ was arranging the telephone directories and planting Erin on them, and said “She said she’s always a good girl.”

Mulcahy smiled. “It’s good to meet you at last – to meet you both. BJ talked so much about you when he was in Korea.”

“He wrote about you a lot,” Peg said. She must know, then, that he had been a priest, and wasn’t any more: but she said nothing about that.

They ordered lunch: neither BJ nor Peg asked why Hawkeye wasn’t there. Erin got a small bowl of pasta twists and plain green salad: when she’d finished both, the waiter came back with a plate of tiny pastries. Peg talked more than BJ: an easy flow of questions and small talk, the kind of conversation that made parish visits a pleasure.

Erin had sat still for twenty minutes, more or less: Peg paused her conversation sometimes to say a word to her, and sometimes BJ said something that was probably a response to something Mulcahy couldn’t hear.

“Is Doctor Cournand really as special as BJ thinks?”

“I gather he’s a very good surgeon.” Hawkeye was passionate about him: resentful about his jokes, almost furious with admiration of his skill as a surgeon.

“BJ was saying there was a post open for a surgeon in San Rafael, but he didn’t think Hawkeye would want to take it.”

Mulcahy glanced at BJ, a little startled. BJ shrugged, looking embarrassed. “It was just an idea. I thought Hawkeye would like California. He said he wanted to be a family doctor in Crabapple Cove – ”

“When did he say that?”

BJ looked, if possible, more embarrassed. “At the farewell dinner we had. Hawkeye said he was going to go back to work in Crabapple Cove. But he didn’t stay there long, did he?”

“I didn’t know,” Mulcahy said. The only letter he’d had from Hawkeye, right after he had got back from Korea, had – he thought – been sent from Crabapple Cove, but then he’d done his best not to think about Hawkeye, and he hadn’t kept the letter.

He’d missed something BJ had said.

“ – there’s no way he’d want to leave Cournand, is there?”

“I suppose not,” Mulcahy agreed, mildly.

Out of the corner of his eye, Mulcahy saw Erin playing with the pastries: she had a glass of milk half-drunk that she put in the middle of the plate like a tower, and her game involved lining the pastries up around the glass, and picking one to eat and then rearranging the survivors. She was probably talking to herself, explaining the game out loud, given how her parents were responding: Mulcahy couldn’t see her face. She ate the last pastry, and turned the glass on the plate.

“Drink your milk,” BJ said.

Erin’s head leaned forward.

“Drink your milk and I’ll take you out to the park,” Peg said.

Erin’s head jerked forward, then back.

“No, you cannot,” Peg said. She looked apologetically at Mulcahy. “I’m sorry. She’s been very good, but – ”

Mulcahy smiled. "I understand."

"We were planning to take the ferry ride to the Statue of Liberty," Peg said. "Want to come along?"

"Thank you," Mulcahy said.

"Then let's meet up by the ferry ride in about half an hour," BJ said.

"Make it an hour," Peg said. She smiled. "I'm going to try to get her to have an N A P."

BJ laughed. He reached out and caught hold of Peg's hand. Probably to Erin, he said "– your milk, then!"

The milk got drunk, and Erin got down from the table. She was smiling. She said something, and BJ got up to kiss her. She said something else, and Peg caught at Erin's hand and moved towards the door. Both of them turned to wave goodbye at the door.

BJ sat back in his chair and looked at Mulcahy. Mulcahy looked back at him. BJ looked sober, and under the sobriety, embarrassed. The unspeaking moment stretched. Mulcahy wanted Hawkeye here: whether he said the right thing or the wrong thing, at least he'd break the silence.

"Well," he said. "Here we are."

BJ looked as if he was half-laughing, still embarrassed. "I'm glad you came to lunch. I wasn't sure you would."

Mulcahy stared down at the remains of the pesto chicken on his plate. He looked up again. "I'm sorry Hawkeye didn't make it."

"Is he sober now?" At Mulcahy's nod, BJ looked as if he were chuckling again. "He'd have flattened me." He looked down at his own plate, and pushed it away. He folded his arms in front of himself. "I wish he had, though. I'm sorry, Francis."

"I went to see a specialist when I came home from Korea. Dr Jonathan Lazar. He told me that nothing could have been done to save my hearing."

"Is that true?"

"I wouldn't lie to you, BJ," Mulcahy said. He felt his voice was a little flat, but BJ didn't comment on it.

BJ's expression didn't change, but his body language did: he relaxed a little, and then he shifted his chair and his gaze flicked up and then down.

"I don't think Dr Lazar was lying to me to make me feel better," Mulcahy said.

BJ looked startled. "I – It doesn't make any difference. I shouldn't have kept that promise."

"I shouldn't have asked you to make it," Mulcahy said. "But I can't – I really can't regret it." Saying it out loud, he knew it was true. It might be more difficult to convince Hawkeye, but he had time. "If I'd gone to the evac hospital, and then to Tokyo, once they found out my hearing loss was permanent, they'd never have sent me back. I'd have left those children unprovided for." He had never been sure what good he had done at the 4077th, but at least he'd helped to keep some of the orphaned children of the war fed and clothed. "I don't regret staying – or anything about that promise, except if – except –"

He found this unexpectedly difficult to say. *I got him drunk, I got my hands on him, I had him.* Hawkeye and BJ, leaning against each other, hugging each other with casual affection, making jokes – He took his specs off, reached for a napkin, and polished the lenses. "Except if this damaged your friendship with Hawkeye." He put his specs back on. BJ was a very handsome man.

BJ looked as if he sighed. He leaned forward, planting his elbows on the table. "Hawkeye is mad as hell with me, and I deserve it. Look – I didn't mean to bring this up, but – about you and Hawkeye –"

Mulcahy kept his face still.

"You said the other night this was just – just a temporary thing. Is that because you're planning to move on when you've got your teacher's certificate and you don't need to share an apartment any more?"

Mulcahy stared, completely blank with astonishment.

"What I mean is –" BJ looked as if he was finding this almost as hard to say as Mulcahy found it to listen to " – I had – I have some experience – I know how persuasive Hawkeye can be."

Mulcahy swallowed. He remembered the look on Hawkeye's face last night, as if someone had punched him, and wondered if he looked as shaken now. *Planning to move on?* Behind the astonishment was something else.

"I know," BJ said, "because it – because he persuaded me. We didn't – but it wasn't because I wasn't persuaded."

He can be overwhelming. Mulcahy almost wanted to say that out loud, but he knew he hadn't spoken.

"But I – Look, I'm not a – I know I'm not. I love Peg, and I..." BJ stopped talking. "Do you want coffee, or dessert, or anything?"

"No," Mulcahy said.

"Okay," BJ said. "Look, let's go get – let me pay the check and go for a walk."

Mulcahy shook his head. He took a breath. "BJ, I'm very sorry, but –" He took another breath. "If you want to keep – if you want to keep talking about this to me, then I –" Another breath. "I find it easier to follow what you're saying if you're sitting across from me in a good light than if I'm walking with you and trying to see your face." The only thing worse than sitting listening to this would be walking along catching glimpses of what BJ was saying.

"Oh." BJ stopped. "Okay." He sat still for a minute, without saying anything. He looked around. The table in the window was slightly isolated from the others in the restaurant, and the large family at the table nearest theirs was getting up from it in a good deal of confusion, quite evidently paying them no attention. BJ leaned forward a little. "What I wanted to say was, I'm not a queer, but I – in some way, on some level –" He stopped again, and went on slowly, "On every level, except the one right at the top of my mind, I knew that Hawkeye loved me. I knew he'd let me do anything to him, tease him, mock him, play jokes on him – so long as he knew I –" BJ swallowed again. "I love him too, you see."

Mulcahy nodded. None of this was news to him. He remembered Hawkeye with BJ.

"You said you didn't think Hawkeye was a queer," BJ said. "I don't know if he is or he isn't. But I think I found out on Friday night what he wouldn't – he couldn't let me do, and still – feel for me."

Mulcahy nodded again. *And you miss him. And he'll miss you.* He dropped his gaze from BJ's face for a moment, and failed to catch the beginning of the next sentence.

" – maybe you think that this is just something that happens when Hawkeye's living with someone. Maybe it is. But I think – and I'd like you to tell him – that he's mad as hell at me the same way I'd be mad if someone did that to Peg, and I found out about it."

“You want me to tell Hawkeye –” Mulcahy couldn’t process the end of the sentence. He felt for the notepad in the inside pocket of his jacket, flipped it open to a blank page, and pushed it at BJ.

BJ looked down at it. “You want me to write that down?”

Mulcahy nodded. When BJ looked up at him, he said “Yes.”

“Which bit of it do you want me to write down?”

“If you have a message for Hawkeye,” Mulcahy said, and took a breath, trying to keep his voice level. “If you write it down, I’ll –” Another breath. “I’ll give it to him.” It was very hard for him to keep looking at BJ’s face. He was frightened by his jealousy. He hadn’t felt like this when he used to see Hawkeye with BJ at the 4077th: he didn’t understand why he was feeling it now as BJ, with odd looks at Mulcahy, wrote on his notepad. Mulcahy could read handwriting upside down pretty well, but he didn’t even want to try.

BJ pushed the notepad back to Mulcahy. He picked it up, flipped it shut, and slid it back. “I’ll give him your message.”

“Are you all right?”

Mulcahy nodded. He made himself smile, certain it looked false, but BJ smiled back. He looked concerned.

“Shall we go for a walk?”

“Sure,” BJ said. “But – can we talk?”

“Aren’t we done?” Mulcahy managed another smile.

“Well, I kind of wanted to find out why you’re not a priest.”

“It’s not something I like to talk about.”

“Peg thought it might be because you’re deaf.”

Mulcahy stared.

“I’m sorry,” BJ said.

“Why did she think that?”

“She said she read about it somewhere,” BJ said.

“Well –” Mulcahy cleared his throat. He was, past all the muddle of his feeling, amused. “It’s true that my bishop thought it would be very difficult for me to continue being an active priest, and if I were born deaf I could never have been ordained, and --” He could not suppress a swift grin. “That’s actually a very comforting thought.”

“That they might have kicked you out for being deaf?”

Mulcahy nodded.

“That’s not a comforting thought for me.”

God forgive me, Mulcahy thought, still feeling a very uncharitable amusement. *I don’t really care*. He kept his face still. “I’m sorry I shouted at you last night. Please don’t blame yourself for what happened.”

It was as difficult to talk with BJ, walking in the park, as Mulcahy had thought it would be: it wasn’t a natural way to walk, with your face turned towards the other person, and BJ kept looking ahead, or around him at the view.

They found Peg sitting on a park bench, with Erin asleep with her head in Peg’s lap, and stood talking with her for a little while until Erin woke up and said something. BJ laughed, and said to Mulcahy, “She wants to go on the ferry ride now.”

Erin said something else. She was looking from BJ to Mulcahy.

“She asked if you were coming with us,” BJ said.

Mulcahy shook his head. He smiled at Erin. “It was good to meet you,” he said. He shook hands with BJ, with Peg, and waved a wordless farewell to Erin: he turned away before BJ could say anything. He had the message.

Mulcahy shut the door. He knew Hawkeye would hear him come in: when he turned around, the other man was leaning against the jamb of the door to Mulcahy’s room. They looked at each other. Mulcahy was still feeling a terrifying muddle of feelings, but as amusement had slid past the muddle, so did the certainty that he had come home.

“Were you in my room?”

“Yes.”

“Why?” Mulcahy was taking his jacket off.

“I missed you.” Hawkeye came forward into the hall, fitting his hands into his pockets. “The bedclothes on your bed don’t smell like you. I checked.”

“I don’t think I’ve slept in it since I changed the sheets.”

“We could make up for that now.”

Mulcahy hesitated. He felt for the notepad in the inner pocket, and took it out before he hung up his jacket. “I have a message for you from BJ.”

Hawkeye didn’t take his hands out of his pockets. “You want to flush it down the john, or shall I do it?”

Mulcahy held out the notebook. He couldn’t think of anything more to say.

“How was lunch?”

Mulcahy shrugged. He managed a smile. “The pesto chicken was delicious.”

“They gave you the table right in front of the window?”

“Yes,” Mulcahy said. He was still holding out the notebook.

Hawkeye looked at it. “That’s a message from Doctor California?”

“Just a couple of pages.”

Hawkeye took his hands out of his pockets and rubbed them over his eyes. “Just get rid of it. He’s got nothing I want to hear.”

Mulcahy took two steps and put his arms round Hawkeye. There was a moment’s surprise in Hawkeye’s muscles, and then his arms came round Mulcahy and he was hugging him hard. His mouth and nose were pressed against Mulcahy’s hair, and his hands were gripping at Mulcahy’s ribs. He didn’t say anything.

“Hawkeye,” Mulcahy said. He felt Hawkeye try to pull back to be able to say something, and tightened his grip on Hawkeye. “I wish you’d read it.”

A minute or so later, Hawkeye did pull away. He looked at Mulcahy. His eyes were wet. “Why?”

“I’d rather you read it than you... you thought about it.”

“What’s in it?”

“I didn’t look.” Mulcahy was still gripping the notebook. He held it out to Hawkeye again, who took it and flipped through it. He tore out the two pages BJ had written on, and handed the notebook back. He stood holding the pages in his hand, looking at Mulcahy.

“Don’t you have lesson plans to look at for tomorrow, or something?” Hawkeye stepped back into Mulcahy’s room.

Mulcahy followed him. There were three surgical journals lying on his bed: Hawkeye sat down on the edge of it, still clutching BJ's note in his hand.

"I was reading," Hawkeye said.

Mulcahy looked at the lesson plans for next week on his desk. He sat down on the bed. Hawkeye looked at him, then down at the note. He frowned, turned the first page over – the other side was blank – and looked again at the second page. He looked up at Mulcahy and shrugged. "Why did you want me to read it? He's just saying –" he crumpled the bits of paper up in his hand and threw them at the wastepaper basket by the desk, "– blah blah blah, sorry, blah blah blah."

Mulcahy nodded. Hawkeye stared at him. "Francis?"

"He wanted you to come to California," Mulcahy said. He took a breath. "He loves you."

Hawkeye's eyes went wide and startled. "What –" He laughed, lifting his hand to his face, and put it down again. "What?"

"Peg said – he wanted you to come to work at a hospital in San Rafael."

"What, and live down the street from Doctor and Mrs Happy? Be asked round to dinner on Fridays? Be Erin's Uncle Hawkeye?" Hawkeye was leaning forward, his eyes wide. "Yeah, I'd go for that. Don't you – did you really think I'd want – did you think I'd pick that over what I've got here?"

"Cournand?"

"To hell with Cournand." Hawkeye's hands caught at his arms. "Don't keep telling me to go away."

Mulcahy swallowed. "I'm not."

Hawkeye's hands gripped more tightly. "You want to move to California, I'll go with you. You want to go to Philadelphia, I'll follow you there. You stay here, I'll stay here. I'll even go to Mass with you on Sundays, if you can wake me up in time." He drew in a breath, his shoulders heaving up. "Me and you. Partners. Lovers. Forever. Don't keep telling me to go away, because I can't stand it." His hands were biting in.

"I'm not," Mulcahy said. "I'm –" He drew in a breath. *Whithersoever thou shalt go, I will go.* He wondered if Naomi had felt like this when Ruth told her: bewildered and overwhelmed and profoundly unworthy. "Hawkeye, you loved – you *love* BJ."

"I love you."

"Yes," Mulcahy said. "But –"

"No," Hawkeye said.

"You loved Captain McIntyre. And Carlye Walton. And you – you've mentioned at least three others. I just – don't see why you would want me for the rest of your life. You –"

Hawkeye gulped. It was hard to see whether it was a laugh or a sob: there were tears in the corners of his eyes. He got his mouth under control, and said "Take it on faith?"

Mulcahy put his arms round Hawkeye, feeling the painful grip loosen as Hawkeye's head came down on his shoulder. "I'm good at that."

He felt Hawkeye laugh again, briefly, and then the other man was still: Mulcahy could feel him breathing, quick and shivering. He was disappointed, but not surprised, when Hawkeye's hands came up and pushed him away.

"I want to hold you," Hawkeye said: he looked as if he were asking for something beyond the normal. Mulcahy nodded, startled, and Hawkeye lay down on the bed, pulling

Mulcahy with him, on top of him. They couldn't talk like this: Mulcahy felt awkward. He was comfortable enough, but his full weight was on Hawkeye, he was lying on him as if the other man were a bed: it couldn't be comfortable for Hawkeye, but Hawkeye had his arms round Mulcahy, holding him there. He could feel Hawkeye's breath slowing, getting easier, through Hawkeye's chest into his back.

Mulcahy made himself relax. He let his head go back against Hawkeye's shoulder. He felt Hawkeye turn his head and kiss him, wordless affection, and, with the kiss, a sigh as if of absolute contentment.

He made Hawkeye content by being there. That felt, as it did when he woke with Hawkeye holding him, like a privilege he couldn't possibly deserve. Like he felt when he held Hawkeye like this. As if he was Hawkeye's, and Hawkeye's his: as if they belonged to each other.

He wanted to tell Hawkeye *I lit a candle for your dad at All Souls: I'll pray for your family with mine*. Later. For now, he only wanted to be held.

Thursday 10th February, 1955

In good years, New York in February can be an early echo of spring. This was not one of those years. It was raining: it had been raining most of the past week, off and on. The sky was grey and grim and low, hanging heavy between the skyscrapers.

Hawkeye normally walked home from Bellevue, sooner than take the subway, but it was raining heavily, and he caught a cab. Francis had an evening class tonight: supper would be soup and a sandwich.

Francis's timetable was fixed by the commuter trains: Hawkeye could mostly tell to the minute when he'd walk in the door in the evening. He had time to heat a can of chicken soup and make sandwiches from the smoked ham and French cheese Francis liked and wouldn't let Hawkeye buy for him often enough.

Francis was five minutes late if he stopped to buy an evening paper: ten minutes late if he met a neighbour who wanted to chat: but fifteen minutes late, and he must have missed the train he meant to catch, and be on the next one.

The soup smelled good. Hawkeye fixed himself a bowl, and ate it, keeping an eye on the clock. If Francis had caught the next train, he was five minutes late. Then ten. Then fifteen.

Outside the living room windows, the city was bright, unquenched by the lashing rain: the buildings were outlined in golden rows of windows, and below, the streetlights beaded the sidewalks. It wasn't like Crabapple Cove on a rainy weeknight: there was plenty of light to see where he was going. There was no reason he should have fallen over, and it would be a pretty unlikely fall that would mean he hadn't been able to get up again.

When Francis was ten minutes late even if he'd missed the third train he could have caught, Hawkeye picked up the phone. He put it down again a few minutes later. He had the office number, and there was no one in the office at this time in the evening. There was probably an emergency number for parents to call, but he didn't know what it was.

The road down to the station from the school. What if Francis had fallen there? What if he'd broken his leg, or knocked himself out? What if he'd been attacked on the train?

Hawkeye found himself standing in the hall, breathing hard. Francis had a left hook that could flatten a much bigger opponent, but what if there were two – or three –

This was ridiculous. Francis wasn't even ninety minutes late. He could have got held up at the school, and decided to go straight to his evening class. There was no real reason to worry (unless Francis didn't come back from his evening class); this was wholly unnecessary panic. New York wasn't a war zone.

Hawkeye was staring at the row of coats for several minutes before he realised there was something wrong with it. Francis had two winter overcoats. Both of them were hanging up on their coat hooks behind the door, and one of them still had a woollen scarf trailing out of the one of the pockets. Hawkeye grabbed it. Scarf and gloves in one pocket. Keys and wallet in the other. Francis's hat was still on the hook, too.

He'd left early for the hospital this morning: he hadn't actually seen Francis leave the apartment. What if –

Hawkeye dropped the coat. His mouth felt cold and full of saliva. He was not conscious of shoving the door open, but he was standing in Francis's room, looking round: it was empty. He caught himself checking under the bed, in the wardrobe, behind the desk, panicked into stupidity. But if Francis wasn't in here – and he wasn't in the bathroom or in Hawkeye's room, Hawkeye had already looked in both –

He went back and looked again. No.

Francis had walked out without his coat, or his keys, or his wallet, or even his hat. It was cold. It had been raining off and on nearly all day. And he wasn't back yet. He knew when Hawkeye would be home – hell, he must know he could always ask the super to let him in –

Hawkeye was standing in the hall, his arms wrapped round himself, shaking. He ought to call the emergency rooms. He ought to call the police –

The doorbell rang. On the heels of his thought about calling the cops, Hawkeye's first thought was of a tall NYPD sergeant, staring at him, blank-eyed. *You're Francis Mulcahy's landlord? Can you come down to the morgue to identify a body, sir, there's been an accident –*

He yanked the door open, and felt as if a straitjacket had been unbuckled from his chest. He could breathe properly. Francis was dripping wet, hair plastered to his skull, cold – Hawkeye caught at his hands, pulled him into the hall – cold and soaked and moving awkwardly as if his feet hurt. His jacket was wet, and so was his shirt under it, and his trousers were wet to the knee –

He needed a hot bath, and a hot drink, and by the look of exhaustion on his face, he needed to go to bed.

"And then I'm going to kill you," Hawkeye said out loud. He was light-headed with anger.

Francis glanced at him: Hawkeye had his arm round Francis's shoulders, and was steering him towards the bathroom. Being spoken to when he couldn't see Hawkeye's face properly always made him angry, but he looked too tired even for that, and Hawkeye was too angry himself to care. "You could have asked someone to call me," he said, turning on the hot water taps and beginning to strip Francis. The other man's hands moved awkwardly to help, and Hawkeye brushed them away. "I'm going to kill you. You could have asked someone to ring Bellevue and leave a message for me. You could have come over to Bellevue instead of walking around in the rain all day. You could have

come back when you knew I'd be home – what were you thinking about, were you hoping I'd go out and let you sneak in?"

He had no idea how much, of any of this, Francis was getting. He'd have to repeat it all later. Or not. "I can't wait to get good enough at signing to be able to pick a fight with you when you're not lip-reading me." He pushed Francis to sit on the lid of the john, and knelt down to ease off his shoes and socks. His socks were damp – wet through, in places – and stuck to his feet. He had blood-blisters on the balls of his feet, on his heels, and on his left big toe.

"You were walking all day," Hawkeye said. He looked up at Francis, who was looking down at him with a face empty of everything but weariness. "I'll dress these later. You need a hot bath."

Francis nodded. He stood up, wincing a little. Hawkeye stood up, again brushing Francis's hands away from the waistband of his trousers, and finished stripping him. He waited till he saw Francis lie down in the bath, and look at him: he signed *worry* and *negation*, and saw Francis half-smile, half-shrug.

He'd only had three Wednesday evening sessions with the man from the Deaf Club: he had no idea how to sign *chicken soup*. Or *stay awake, don't drown*. He stood looking at Francis, feeling anger and tenderness. Francis's glasses were crooked on his face. Hawkeye made the sign for *getting*, and reached down to take his glasses safely off. Francis blinked at him. The next thing Francis needed was a hot drink. The pan on the stove was still warm. The sandwiches were sitting on a plate on the counter. Hawkeye filled a mug and came back to the bathroom. Francis hadn't moved.

Hawkeye held out the mug. Francis blinked at it for half a minute or so.

"Do I have to feed it to you?" Hawkeye said.

He was fairly sure Francis couldn't see his face: but his hands came out of the water at last and took the mug. Hawkeye began to pick up the clothes scattered on the floor.

"There's a letter," Francis said.

"What?" Hawkeye lifted his head. Francis was looking at him, his eyes unfocused: without his glasses he looked – vulnerable, but handsomer than ever. His skin had flushed pink with the hot water. Hawkeye wanted him, fiercely and urgently.

"In my jacket," Francis said. "You should probably read it."

There were two sheets of heavy paper, different lengths and widths, folded together. The edges were crumpled and rubbed. The top sheet, when Hawkeye unfolded it, was in Latin, and it wasn't discussing human anatomy or a surgical operation, which meant he wasn't going to be able to read it. But the letter's heading said it was from the Vatican, and it was addressed to Fr. Francis John Patrick Mulcahy, O.J., and it was signed by a cardinal. Which meant he didn't need to be able to read it to know what it said: it was notice that Francis had been laicized.

He refolded both sheets, and looked up again. Francis was clutching the mug with both hands to the middle of his chest. His eyes were closed. He didn't look as if he were asleep. Hawkeye stood there looking down at him.

They had taken a devout and faithful man, kicked him out, and told him he was a failure. For being kind and decent and honest, too honest and too brave to lie.

"I've got him," he said out loud, to the unknown cardinal, to the bishop he'd never met. "You didn't know what you'd got when you had him, and I do."

He shoved the letter into his back pocket, finished clearing the clothes into the laundry basket, and got Francis's bathrobe. Francis had finished most of the soup. Hawkeye rescued the mug, and helped Francis out of the bath into the robe, wrapping it round him.

"Hawkeye, we – we need to talk," Francis said. "Where are my specs?"

Hawkeye handed them back to him, and a towel for his hair. When Francis had his glasses on again, he looked determined, if very tired.

"You need to get into bed," Hawkeye said. "I'll dress your feet."

"I need to talk to you about the letter," Francis said.

"Sure. Any time. But get into bed, okay?"

Francis gave him a puzzled look, but Hawkeye was steering him out of the bathroom, across the hall into Hawkeye's room – they mostly slept there, and Hawkeye's medical bag was stowed in the bottom of the wardrobe.

"There's sandwiches if you're hungry. Or I could heat more soup. Or we could order take-out. You're not going to your class this evening."

Francis shook his head.

"No sandwiches? No soup? No take-out? You're *not* going to your class this evening."

"All of the above," Francis said, and smiled a little. "I'm not hungry." He sat down on the bed, and after a moment turned round and leaned up against the headboard. Hawkeye was finding what he needed in his medical bag, and sat down at the other end of the bed, lifting Francis's feet on to his lap. The blisters looked painful, but if it were possible to persuade him not to go to school tomorrow, stay off his feet for a day, he'd be fine. Francis had good feet. Hawkeye finished taping a soft dressing to the last blister, and looked up. Francis was watching him, intent and serious.

"Did you read the letter?"

"Looked at it," Hawkeye said. "It's in Latin –" He was going to make a joke about the cardinal not using the medical dictionary, but Francis interrupted.

"The one from my bishop."

The other sheet of paper was in English. It was addressed, again, to Fr. Francis J. P. Mulcahy, O.J., but the salutation was to *Dear son in Christ*, and it ended *Yours in Xto*, and was signed by someone who seemed to be a cardinal and a bishop and the Archbishop of Philadelphia. Hawkeye read in a jumble, his eye moving back and forth along the paragraphs. He began again at the top, trying to focus.

It was a joke. It was a very cruel joke, crueller than any even BJ had played. Hawkeye looked at the letter heading, and lifted the sheet to look at the heading of the letter from the Vatican.

He looked up at Francis, and back down at the letter from the bishop. Not a joke.

They hadn't laicized him. They'd forgiven him.

The bishop wanted him back.

Father Mulcahy was invited home to his diocese, where – *in prayerful contemplation* – they would decide how to –

How to let him be a priest. He would be a priest again. Hawkeye sat frozen, with his eyes on the page, no longer taking in the words on the paper. There was nothing else Francis Mulcahy wanted more than to be a priest, and they were letting him come back.

That on getting the news, he'd gone out, forgetting coat and keys and wallet, and walked for so long in the rain, ignoring the pain in his feet, was a measure of how much he loved Hawkeye, how upset he'd be at hurting Hawkeye – but it didn't mean he wanted

Hawkeye more than he wanted – this. They would let him be a priest. He wasn't BJ or Trapper, to leave Hawkeye without a note because his heart's desire had come true: but Hawkeye wasn't his heart's desire, and never had been.

He looked back up at Father Mulcahy. His mouth was dry. "Okay," he said at last. "Okay. I'm –" He couldn't say *glad for you*. "You have to go." It wasn't like it was going to be easy for Francis – for Father Mulcahy – Hawkeye swallowed. There was no point making it worse. "You don't have to worry about me. I'll be fine. You'll –" He was clutching at Francis's feet, he realised, and let go of them, moving his lap out from under them. "You'll have to go," he said again.

Francis drew his feet up under himself, and moved, awkwardly, down the bed. "Hawkeye –"

Hawkeye stood up. He had an awful feeling that Francis – Father Mulcahy – meant to touch him or try to hold him, and he didn't think he could bear it. "No," he said. "I can't –"

"I'm not going."

Hawkeye stared. He shook his head. "Don't –" He couldn't find words for it. He couldn't. If he tried to, he was going to beg – he'd crawl – and it wouldn't do any good. He should call Billy and tell him, sorry, I'm sorry, sometimes crawling does no good. Push me into the pond again, this time I won't come up.

Francis stood up. He looked shaky on his feet, but determined. He came towards Hawkeye, backing him towards the door.

"I'm not going," he said. "Sit down. Listen to me."

"Get back to bed," Hawkeye said hoarsely, and turned away. Francis caught him by the elbows, tugged him round, and moved him into a hug. Hawkeye stood rigidly. Father Mulcahy. Not Francis.

You want to be a priest.

Francis was backing towards the bed. He was still hanging on to Hawkeye: Hawkeye found himself going with him. He would get Father Mulcahy into bed – his bed, the other bed – they could even have sex one last time if –

He was dreaming. It all was a dream.

"You're going to leave me," he said.

"No," Francis said. "Hawkeye, sit down." Francis was trying to pull Hawkeye down to the bed: he sat down himself. It seemed like too much trouble to keep fighting him off. Hawkeye sat down beside him.

"You want to be a priest," Hawkeye said. The letters had fallen to the floor: he bent to pick them up. "This says they're not laicizing you. Your bishop wants you back."

Francis took the letters out of his hand. "Yes," he said. "They – Hawkeye, this isn't –" He leaned back against the headboard. "I'm sorry. I didn't mean you to think... I need to explain..." he said, sounding flat, "When my bishop wrote to me last year, he told me, among other things, that if I applied for laicization, he'd support it. So I wrote to him..." His voice trailed off. "I'm not leaving you," he said, again.

Hawkeye shrugged. "Okay," he said. He didn't believe it: he couldn't let himself believe it. Hope would hurt too much.

"You believe me?"

"I'm listening," Hawkeye said.

“I wrote back to him... asking him, consenting, to his putting forward an application for my laicization to the Holy See. And then I... dropped out of sight for a while, and they didn’t know where I was. But my bishop sent my application for laicization forward, I don’t... I don’t now know exactly when. Because the authorities who would have to approve laicization...” Francis looked at the letters. “You don’t read Latin, do you?”

Hawkeye shook his head.

“The Cardinal wrote that he can find no flaw in my ordination, that I’m too young to abandon the priesthood voluntarily, that I have committed no offence that would merit involuntary laicization, and that he is disturbed that I appear not to have received any prayerful counselling since my application.” Francis sounded as if he was reading aloud, though he didn’t unfold the letters.

“Good,” Hawkeye said, dry-voiced. “That’s all good, right? Your bishop got a lecture? He’s in trouble, you’re not?”

“You read the letter,” Francis said.

“He says he wants you to come home.”

“I was suspended from the priesthood for maintaining beliefs contrary to doctrine a year ago,” Francis said. “He doesn’t say – he doesn’t hold out any promise that he might reverse the suspension. He wrote to me last year... he said he should never have ordained me. He would never have ordained me if he’d known that I’m afflicted...” Francis tilted his head back. He closed his eyes. There were tears seeping out from under the closed lids.

Hawkeye sat frozen. *Afflicted.*

It’s an illness, a sickness, a crime. He’d never believed it. Not when he was a kid playing around with other kids. Not once Tommy took him in hand. He’d looked up the words in his dad’s medical dictionary and told himself they didn’t apply to him, because... because they *didn’t*.

“I burned the letter,” Francis said. His eyes were still closed. “I still... I can’t forget the things he said. He was... he ordained me. He said he wouldn’t have ordained me if he’d known I had these tendencies. That I couldn’t be celibate for the priesthood because homosexuals are bound to celibacy by natural law. He said...” Francis’s voice was shaking. “I couldn’t be a good candidate for the priesthood while I was suffering from this affliction.” There was an edge of raw pain in his voice. “I tried – when I was a boy, I prayed – I prayed to God to cure me, to stop these feelings, to deliver me from temptation. I prayed and I prayed, and God didn’t listen to me. Only when I prayed to be able to resist temptation, not to act on those feelings, God gave me strength. I tried. I failed. God took away my vocation.”

Hawkeye clenched his hands together. He wanted to hold Francis: he wanted to walk away and not have to listen to this.

Francis’s voice was stronger. “God doesn’t want me to be a priest. My bishop doesn’t want me to be a priest. All that would happen, if I went back, is that I’d spend time on retreat, suspended from the priesthood, until... until my bishop could persuade the Holy See to accept my application for laicization. That would...” He was speaking with rigid self-control. “Regularise the situation.” He opened his eyes. His face was wet. He didn’t seem to have noticed.

Hawkeye couldn’t move. He swallowed a couple of times. “For how long?”

“At least three years,” Francis said, after a moment. “I should think. I’d be forty in three years.”

“Three years,” Hawkeye echoed.

“At least.”

The knuckles of Hawkeye’s clenched fists had gone white. He looked down, observing the phenomenon without feeling it, and turned his face back towards Francis. “So. Going back,” he said, as a statement because he could not quite bear it as a question.

“No,” Francis said.

“ – you want to take the chance? They could let you back in. You don’t know for sure – there’s so many people who’d tell your bishop you’re a great priest – ” Hawkeye was one of them, though it was unlikely on so many counts that anyone would ever ask him.

“No,” Francis said again. He sounded bewildered. “I thought you’d be pleased...?”

“I don’t want you to hate me,” Hawkeye said. He felt helpless. “You’ll wake up next to me someday and figure you could have gone back.”

“No,” Francis said. He swallowed. “I want to – ” He was sitting up again. “Will you let me – ”

Hawkeye bent his head and pushed his fingertips against the skin around his eyes. “Anything,” he said. “Anything you want.” His mouth was shielded by his hands: Francis would never know. He lifted his head and looked Francis in the eye. “Anything,” he said.

“I’m staying,” Francis said. “I can’t – I don’t want to leave you like this.”

Involuntarily, Hawkeye shook his head. His muscles were going rigid. “You’re not. You’re – ” He was shaking. “Going home.” It was ridiculous, the number of times he got dumped by someone who had someone better to go to. He laughed, and managed to stop laughing to say “You can’t give God up for me.” His face hurt.

“Oh, for God’s sake!” Francis was very near him now, and shouting. Hawkeye stared at him, confused. “Must you always be the one who gives? Can’t you stand anyone *else* being generous? I’m not going because I can’t stand what it would do to you, and you sit there and tell me I can’t do it? What right do you have to tell me that?”

Hawkeye fumbled for, and found, something approximating a joke. “I’d find someone else,” he said.

“I don’t *want* you to find someone else!” Francis snapped it out, his face very close to Hawkeye’s, and almost looked more startled than Hawkeye felt. He said, more slowly, “I don’t want you to find someone else. I don’t want to leave you for three years. Or at all. I couldn’t bear to do that to you.” He stopped. “I’d find it hard to bear, myself,” he added. “But if...” He had dropped the letters on the bed, and glanced back at them. He was kneeling next to Hawkeye. “If I had gotten those letters in October, or before – if I had been thinking only of myself... I would still have known I couldn’t be a priest any more, but I might...” He looked back at Hawkeye. “I would have gone. But not now.”

“Because of me,” Hawkeye said. His jaw muscles felt rigid. Francis was looking at him with a small frown, as if trying to puzzle out what he had said. “My fault. Your affliction.”

“My – ”

“If you’re suffering from this affliction, no need to make you suffer more.”

“Shut up,” Francis said. “I want to be with you, like this, for the rest of my life.” His hands were gripping hard at Hawkeye’s shoulders. His mouth against Hawkeye’s was awkward and not gentle and not sweet: his lips shoved at Hawkeye’s as if he were

feeding on him, and his tongue slid in and found Hawkeye's. Hawkeye's cock reacted before his mind could: he was still trying to wrap his mind around Francis saying *shut up* in that tone of voice, saying *with you for the rest of my life*, and feeling the tip of Francis's tongue caressing the inside of his mouth, and the solidity of his fingers almost biting, and all of that was overwhelmed by his cock hard – and his muscles no longer rigid. He fell back on the bed, and Francis went with him, landing clumsily on top of him and making his cock jump: his mouth was open to Francis and he heard himself grunt incoherently, *don't stop*.

He would have begged, *don't stop please don't stop*, but he didn't seem to have to beg. Francis went on kissing him, and his thigh between Hawkeye's thighs was giving Hawkeye's aching-hard cock some of the friction it wanted. Francis let go of Hawkeye's shoulders: one hand curled to grasp at the back of Hawkeye's neck, the other fumbled for his fly and found his cock. His grasp was perfect: Hawkeye grunted, twitched, and came.

Francis's hand stayed on his cock, enclosing him. His face was pressed down into the curve of Hawkeye's shoulder. He was a warm solid weight against Hawkeye, and his cock was hard against Hawkeye's thigh. He smelled warm and clean and sweaty. Hawkeye blinked his eyes open and saw him.

He's staying.

He was moving almost before he had his eyes open, going down: he felt Francis clasp his head in his hands, and opened his throat to Francis's cock.

It took less time that Hawkeye would have liked to make Francis come. He had to let him go eventually. His knees hurt. His face felt painful. He was leaning against Francis's legs at the edge of the bed. They stared at each other.

"It's not an affliction, is it?" Hawkeye's throat hurt.

Francis shook his head. He looked very serious.

"You're not going to leave me?"

Francis shook his head again. He smiled faintly. "Anyway, if I did, you'd follow me, wouldn't you?"

Hawkeye nodded. When he smiled, the skin around his mouth and his nose hurt. "To hell, if I have to."

Francis was smiling more widely. "Through purgatory, maybe."

"Maybe?"

"We'll tell them we did our time in Korea."

Hawkeye pushed himself up onto the bed. He kicked off his shoes, letting them lie where they fell on the floor. Francis unpropped himself from his elbows and lay down flat. He looked exhausted.

"You look terrible," Francis said.

Hawkeye rubbed the back of his hand across his mouth, and took his hand away to say "So do you." In fact, Francis looked as if he were struggling to keep his eyes open.

"Lie down with me," Francis said. "Hold me." He yawned.

Hawkeye lay down beside him, and put his arms round him. Francis yawned again and fitted himself against Hawkeye. His breathing changed, tiny rough snores on inbreath and outbreath. Hawkeye lay in the tangle of clothing and bedding, breathing in the smell and sound and feel of Francis sleeping. He was here: he was going to stay here.

Hawkeye woke up: Francis wasn't snoring any more. He was as relaxed as if he were asleep, but he wasn't.

"Hawkeye?" He sounded half-asleep.

Hawkeye ruffled the hair on the back of Francis's head.

"What time is it?"

Hawkeye lifted his head and looked at his alarm clock. He tapped his fingers against Francis's shoulder, ten times.

"Oh." Francis didn't move. "Tonight or tomorrow?"

Hawkeye moved his hand. N, E, X, T, W, E, E, K, he wrote.

Francis laughed: he still hadn't moved. "Are you hungry?"

Hawkeye nodded. He traced Y.

"Me too."

Comfortable silence, broken only by a rumble from Francis's belly that echoed with a rumble from Hawkeye's.

Francis sat up. "I'm hungry," he said. "I can make you a sandwich."

"I made sandwiches," Hawkeye said. "Last week sometime."

"Where are they?"

"In the kitchen. Ham and cheese. The kind of cheese you like."

"I told you not to buy that for me."

"I bought it for me, I just let you share it."

"You don't even like it," Francis said.

"That's why I let you share it." Hawkeye sat up. "I'll get the sandwiches."

"I'll get them."

"Stay off your feet." Hawkeye slid off the bed and nearly fell over: he hadn't managed to get undressed. Francis did not laugh out loud: he only watched. The letters were lying on the floor. Hawkeye eyed them as he kicked himself out of his clothes, and put his bathrobe on. He caught Francis's eye.

Francis shrugged. "You want to flush it down the john, or shall I do it?" He spoke with an effort. The turn of phrase was more like Hawkeye's than his own: he must be quoting.

Hawkeye picked the letters up. "You really want to get rid of these?"

"Yes," Francis said.

"Hospital incinerators."

After a moment, Francis nodded. "Okay," he said. He swallowed. "Hawkeye, in my wardrobe, there's a carton – it was sent from Philadelphia."

"Yeah?" Hawkeye remembered. There had been one carton not unpacked.

"Can you – make sure that gets burned, too?" Francis's neck muscles were rigid, and his voice was controlled.

"If you want." Hawkeye stood still.

Francis moved his shoulders in an awkward shrug. He looked unhappy. "My vestments."

"If you want," Hawkeye said again.

"I had an idea about your vests," Hawkeye offered.

Francis looked at him over a large sandwich. The set of his eyebrows said that if his mouth wasn't full he'd say *vestments*.

"Vestments," Hawkeye said. "Whatever. Mail them to your bishop."

Francis swallowed the mouthful of sandwich. He looked at Hawkeye. "I ought to write to him," he said. "It was... it was meant to be a very kind letter. I just..."

"It breaks your heart writing back to your sister," Hawkeye said. Francis looked startled. "As your personal thoracic surgeon, my medical advice is you shouldn't break your heart over your bishop, too. Send him a bagful of old clothes and tell him to get lost."

"I don't want to write to him at all," Francis said, after a long moment's silence. "I don't feel... very charitable towards him."

Hawkeye very nearly choked on his sandwich. He coughed, spluttering crumbs. Francis looked at him strangely.

"What would you do?"

"Mail him a dead fish," Hawkeye said. "Marked personal, to be opened by addressee only."

Francis looked at him in a moment's disbelief, and laughed. He glanced round. "Where - "

Hawkeye had put the letters down out of sight of the bed: he handed them to Francis, who held them in his hand a minute, looking at them, and turned them between his hands so that he was holding them sideways up. Carefully, he tore the folded letters down the width of the paper, from one side almost to the other. It was heavy paper, a double thickness, and Hawkeye saw the effort in his hands. Unfolded, both letters would be torn in three places.

Francis dropped them on the cabinet beside the bed, still folded. "I'll send that back to him."

"Good," Hawkeye said. He could not keep himself from grinning. *You didn't know what you'd got when you had him, and I do. I do.*

April 2004-May 2006
89 942 words

the end

At a reunion

Friday, July 26, 1963.

Tonight it was just the gang, Sherman said. Mildred knew their faces from Sherman's paintings. Most of them hadn't met in those years, but they talked across the table to each other as if it had been only last week. The wives – and Margaret's Ted – eyed their partners oddly, as if seeing people they hadn't known they didn't know.

There were two unmarried. Hawkeye Pierce, his hair near-white now. Francis Mulcahy, deaf and shy. Neither of them looked at the other often, but when they did, you could see they knew who they saw.

100 words

November 2004

Afterword

I owe a debt to many people, not least the person who advised me on researching Deaf culture and institutions in the 1950s, when ASL was not recognised as a language in its own right and deaf children were discouraged from using it by well-meaning hearing teachers in deaf schools. Thank you: “Such as We” would not have been as it was without your help.

New York School for the Deaf is a real school, founded in 1818, now known as New York State School for the Deaf. Mulcahy teaches at Fanwood Campus in White Plains, built in 1937. The superintendent of the school in 1953 was Mr. Fred Sparks, Jr, who held that position from 1947 to 1961. I know and have used nothing of him but his name, and the other teachers at the school are entirely my own invention, not based on any real person.

Doctor Cournand was awarded the Nobel Prize for Medicine in 1956, for his pioneering work in heart surgery. He was indeed at Bellevue in 1954, but I know and have used nothing of him but his name and something of his medical achievements: the other doctors named or referred to are all invented.

For those who care, Hawkeye’s apartment in New York is a block or two from where East 42nd Street meets Park Avenue: I am indebted to the New Yorkers who helped me work this out.

All Catholic theology and belief described in this novel is based on my own research: I am grateful to Daegaer for her advice, but any errors are mine and not hers.

Shoshanna, editrix supreme, provided incalculable help with the first and following drafts of “Sins and Virtues”. Thank you.

Susan Elizabeth Leinbach

Born: 28th November 1966

Died: 15th June 2006

Susan wrote as Iolanthe: you’ll find her *M*A*S*H* slash stories on her website, iolanthe.netfirms.com/Slashfic.htm. She wrote the first Hawkeye/Mulcahy stories I read: “Spin the Bottle”, “Compassion”, the unfinished story “Playing the Game”, and a trilogy: “Caught”, “Possibilities”, “Escape”. (She also wrote as Scarlatti on livejournal, where we first met.)

It was a sentence from the “Caught” trilogy that inspired what became “Sins and Virtues”:

"I see what you mean," I mumbled, half to myself. The problems were definitely coming into focus now. 'Uh... Dad, this is Francis. He followed me home from the war -- can I keep him?' Oh, no, *that* wouldn't be too awkward....

In an online conversation, I asked Susan’s permission to write the story that happened “after the war” – taking the “Caught” trilogy as backstory. She agreed, and I began to write what later turned into the opening 1500 words (give or take) of “For Ever”. This fragment ended with the sentence “This close, despite the toothpaste and soap, Mulcahy could smell that Hawkeye was still drunk.” There the story paused. I had begun it

thinking simply “What’s the worst thing I could do to Hawkeye? Kill off his father. What’s the worst thing I could do to Mulcahy? Defrock him.”) Soon afterwards, I decided I needed to write my own backstory to “For Ever”, and so “An Officer and a Gentleman” and “Out and Far Tonight” got written. (Also, I saw *Goodbye, Farewell, Amen* and discovered that when Mulcahy had arrived at Hawkeye’s home in Crabapple Cove, he was profoundly deaf – which utterly changed the sketched idea I had for “Such as We”.)

Much grew out of little in writing this sequence, but it was Iolanthe who first made Hawkeye’s and Mulcahy’s feelings for each other erotic to me, and it was Susan who let me exercise my imagination on the story that could happen if Hawkeye and Mulcahy met again after the war, if they had made love in Korea.

Thank you, Susan. I wish we could have met in person: I’m glad we touched via fandom.

Doug Spencer, Susan's partner, wrote in response to a query about donations in Susan's memory:

"I might suggest that any charity local to you which is involved in cancer research, cancer treatment or palliative care would be pleased to receive donations in her memory. Cancer Research UK (formerly The Imperial Cancer Research Campaign and The Cancer Research Campaign), Marie Curie Cancer Care and the Macmillan Nurses are all organisation worth googling for in the UK. Similar organisations exist in the USA and Canada. Any one of a number of local hospices, and a couple of hospice umbrella organisations, would be pleased to have your money.

“If you're a taxpayer, there may be techniques provided by your government to ensure that your donation reaches its target accompanied by any tax which you might otherwise have had to pay: in the UK, google for "gift aid", or fill out the appropriate sections of the screen if you're donating online. Similar techniques will exist in other jurisdictions.

“If these issues don't enthuse you, there will be others which do. Contribute time, energy and money to causes which you feel are going to help you to honour Susan's memory. Wherever you choose to give it, whatever you choose to give will be gratefully received and faithfully applied.”

“Sins and Virtues” is distributed free of charge. You can copy it and pass on copies to anyone you think might like it. Please include this page whenever you copy “Sins and Virtues”, in whole or in part. Remember Susan. I will.

Love,

Jane Carnall

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