

Secrecy and Gamesmanship

By Guntis Goncarovs

Prologue

March 1901

Washington, D.C.**4 March 1901**

Secret Service agent Sam Carter heard the Black Horse Cavalry horses clomp rhythmically over the rain-washed cobblestone road, signaling the approach of President William McKinley's inaugural procession. His assignment in the Presidential detail was the rear of the canvas-covered stage erected in front of the East Portico of the Capitol from where a crazed anarchist might rush to ambush the president during his address, or for that matter, any of the dignitaries on the podium. His job as an operative in the agency was evolving, as were the threats, but only one objective remained in the forefront today—protect the president. Although the rampant growth in domestic anarchism was a primary threat, intelligence revealed to Sam indicated the victories in Cuba and the Philippines awoke European in America's imperialistic motives, militarily and politically.

Sam was keenly aware of Kaiser Wilhelm's adamance to retain his position of eminence at any cost. While he was on a counterintelligence assignment in Havana during the Cuban War, he intercepted several communiques between Wilhelm and German operatives in the island. He was also well aware that Wilhelm had sprinkled seasoned operatives in the States that were at his

beck and call.

Sam's eyes swept the grounds nearest the podium. Nothing unusual. No one lurked. Light rain that fell overnight had ceased for the moment, leaving dirt-rimmed puddles that onlookers invariably tracked through. Heavy gray and slaty low overcast skies lumbered reluctantly along, urged on by a steady wind blowing from the southwest. The large, dampened, yet high spirited crowd surrounding the red, white and blue flag bunting-draped railings and Portico milled about peacefully, unfazed by the gloomy weather. Nothing there raised his suspicion either. On the platform above the crowd, Chief Justice Melville Fuller sat stiff in a ladder-backed chair near the rostrum, cradling the president's personal hard-covered Bible in his crossed arms, waiting to perform his part of the four-year ritual. He adjusted his long, satin black robe that fully covered his black suit, then primped his flowing shoulder-length silver hair and snowy handlebar mustache. To his right, the ingenious inventor, Thomas Edison puttered, making final adjustments to his new-fangled moving picture recording apparatus that would document the day's proceedings. Sam was interested in Edison's motion picture machine, but now was not the time to split his attention between the machine and his present responsibility to protect the president.

"I'm guessing you've tinkered enough on that contraption over the last four years to clear up the grainy images from the last time?" Fuller said, grooming himself as Edison lifted the curtain attached to his contraption.

"Correct. As long as this rain holds off, these images will be as clear as a photograph," Edison replied.

Fuller harrumphed, turned to his right then juttied out his chin as Edison tinkered, bent over, before disappearing under the cloak.

Sam heard a surge in the crowd's clamorous cheers, and looking toward the sound saw a field of miniature flags waving gently at first then growing more fervent. He then glanced toward the ramp and spotted a line of men in tall, black top hats emerging from behind the Capitol doors. Out in front and setting the pace for the procession, McKinley's cobbled together Cabinet walked single file toward the podium. Excepting State Secretary John Hay and Navy Secretary John Long, most of these men, the president's top advisors, were replacements for incompetent predecessors. Following closely behind and strutting with a slight forward lean was the stout and incessantly boisterous Vice-President Theodore Roosevelt.

Last in line was President William McKinley, walking regally with slow, measured steps, arm in arm with his wife, Ida, waving to the crowd with his free white gloved hand. Agent Foster, assigned as the president's personal bodyguard, assumed a position in front of McKinley while Al Gallagher, originally stationed at the ramp on the south end of the canvas-covered platform, closed rank behind. As the group strutted along the ramp, the onlookers' cacophony swelled while the military band struck the brassy introduction of *Hail to the Chief*. Cued by the music, Fuller rose from his seat and stood at his assigned location while the Cabinet members migrated to the rear to provide the president an unobstructed path to the rostrum. McKinley hesitated long enough for Cortelyou to take Ida's hand from his to escort her to a nearby seat, then moved closer to Fuller.

"My opinion, sir, is that you should prefer to deliver a short speech if you don't want to get too wet," Fuller said as he glanced skyward.

"If it is God's will to rain on this parade, well, so be it Justice Fuller. That is of no concern for me," McKinley's long face blossomed with a creased smile.

"Just providing a reminder, sir. The extraordinary length of President Harrison's speech

on a rainy afternoon may have contributed to the shortness of his term.”

“I have no intention of dying in office, Justice Fuller, if that is your concern. I believe I am as fit as I have ever been,” McKinley hooded his eyes, nodded, and slapped his protruding white cummerbund and its stressed buttons.

Fuller glanced down to the President’s large, sloped torso and arched his eyebrows. “Your heft might betray your fitness, sir.”

McKinley harrumphed then winked once at the Chief Justice. “If you insist on being so impatient on this fine day, let us get on with it. The sooner we can get to fraternizing with my adoring constituency, the better.”

As Edison started recording the event, the white-haired Chief Justice nodded and stiffened to attention before holding out the Bible for McKinley. The President removed his top hat, which Cortelyou astutely grabbed, then pressed his left hand over the book and sucked in a deep breath. The crowd noise subsided, McKinley widened his eyes, arched his eyebrows, stiffened his back and raised his right hand.

With perfect practiced diction and without a hint of his heavy New England accent, Fuller started to administer the oath of office. McKinley repeated the prompted phrases perfectly, concluding with an emphatic “So help me God,” before bending over and kissing his family Bible and accepting Fuller’s congratulatory handshake. As the gathered crowd applauded their approval with another raucous flag waving fury, Fuller stepped back and nodded for McKinley to face the crowd from the rostrum. The president pivoted, took three small steps to the front center of the stage, then faced the crowd, reached into his pocket and pulled out a short stack of note cards before clearing his throat.

Sam felt droplets on his head before McKinley even started. He eased back to stand under the canvas covering while the president, undeterred, glanced back at the chief justice and winked. As he turned back to the rostrum, he wiped his head with a clean white handkerchief and started his address.

Bremen Field Headquarters, German Federation

6 March 1901

Kaiser Wilhelm froze, thinking he heard a creaking door followed by shuffling footfalls in the hallway. He tipped his head toward the door to the cavernous grand hallway, listening closely for any other noise, but it was quiet.

Probably just the wind in this drafty old compound, he thought. This field office, a relic from pre-Federation days had deteriorated over his twelve-year reign, and although he had ordered repairs, other than those in his personal suite and his war rooms, the work had languished. There was a local legend that the grounds were haunted, and although he wasn't particularly superstitious, those stories and the large number of secret entrances and passages, left him uneasy and desirous of more guards than he preferred to use. Housing soldiers who were meant to fight during battle and drill when not for a stationary security detail led to a complacency and comfort that withered away their value.

A few minutes passed. Nothing more. *It couldn't be an intruder*; he assuaged his concern. If it was, he was convinced his guards would have subdued him and he would have heard some commotion. His eyes remained glued to the reflection of the door in his gold-framed, full-length mirror standing in the epicenter of his personal suite, assuring it remained closed. Shifting his focus, his concern dissipated as he admired his reflected image, fully rigged out in his

gold-braided military tunic and polished brown leather riding boots. Save his palsied hand, he marveled at his radiated strength which no one dared challenge. He then quickly snapped down on his medal and ribbon endowed waist blouse, then turned and opened the door to the cavernous grand hallway. Taking two confident strides into the expanse, he stopped and warily scanned. Nothing. *It was surely just the wind*, he thought.

He was alone in the expanse except for his young aide, Friedrich, who was dozing a bit at the small oak desk near the entrance to his situation room. His personal bodyguard entourage had been dismissed, resting in their Spartan quarters, leaving security to the military regimental guard that surrounded the Bremen Field Headquarters compound. Snapping his black, leather handled riding crop into his armpit, he wedged it hard enough to feel his back smarten and straighten, then stepped off with a slow, disciplined strut along the corridor while indulging in the swirling strains of Wagner's *Ritt der Walküren* echoing in his head.

His slow pace down the long hallway offered him time to reminisce about the marvelous past two days he spent riding aboard the dirigible airship which Count Ferdinand von Zeppelin had both designed and piloted. That flight over the German coastline, leisurely turning the balloon-like vessel along the English Channel was his first and was excitingly more pleasurable than he ever imagined. The airship performed impressively sharp, precise, acrobatic maneuvers and elevation changes at will.

An entire squadron of these vessels would certainly control the skies over all of Europe, he imagined. *Yes, von Zeppelin had engineered something that would add to his supremacy. Eight would be formidable. Twelve would be invincible. These are clearly more than simply scout ships.* He rolled his eyes toward the vaulted ceiling, thinking that controlling the skies would be the backbone of his military superiority—no one would dare challenge his primacy with a

formidable arsenal of airships governing the skies over Europe supporting his armies controlling the land.

That would be the future, as was the submarine, Wilhelm thought. The finding one of his operatives in America made concerning submersible vessels was intriguing; boats that could patrol underwater, unseen and at the ready to strike fear in any opponent's fleet. He wanted to have them first, but Konrad Ziegler relayed that America was already testing an operational prototype. He surmised he needed to progress as quickly as possible to assure he had at least one if not more of these vessels to counter-play in this game.

Like choosing chess moves, he needed to envision steps ahead of his adversaries. Submarine torpedo boats were in the future. For now, naval supremacy was world supremacy, and he reveled in the growth of his navy. The centerpieces, Admiral Tirpitz's dreadnaughts, more floating metal and guns than anyone could have imagined, vaulted his Navy into a respectable position and kept pace with his desire—to rule the seas and secure his place in the sun. Cuba. What should have been his stepping-stone to both continents following the assassination of Spain's Prime Minister Cánovas was taken away by American interference in that insurrection.

Alone in his illusion, Wilhelm reached the three-meter-tall double oak doors which led to his conference room, stopped, and waited for his sleeping aide. It did not matter that he was by himself and the room was empty; a majestic entrance was always warranted. He could practice his entrance in the grandeur his position afforded him. He clapped the hard leather heels on his hobnail boots sharply, then stiffened to attention at the doors and waited.

Friedrich startled and vaulted into action, scrambling to his feet. He stumbled by his master, gaining a position in front of Wilhelm, pressed down on the gold-leafed door handles, and shouldered the doors open.

“You are so attentive,” Wilhelm mumbled under his breath. The young man regained his balance as the heavy doors split, grudgingly opening to reveal vaulted windows from where sunlight poured into the room. A broad world map cloaked the expansive conference table on which the magenta-colored territory of the German empire had been encircled with a heavy black boundary. Wilhelm took three long strides into the room, stopping with each step to drink in each angle, as if he was executing his Imperial coronation march. After his fourth step, he froze, spotting a slovenly dressed, smudge faced man appear from behind the conference table, his eyes bulging from their sockets.

“Die, Wilhelm, die!” The man leapt up and aimed his revolver.

Wilhelm froze. He gasped and his eyes widening to the size of a five-mark pieces. Words failed to pass his lips, until he finally squeaked out, “Guards!”

Friedrich broke into a sprint and launched himself over the desk and directly at the rogue.

“Guards!” Wilhelm squeaked again. Doors down the hallway flew open, half-dressed bodyguards spewed out and scrambled down the hallway. Flooding the room in seconds, they surrounded the emperor.

“*Crack!*” Friedrich’s body jerked but continued flying into the assassin. His arms wrapped around the shooter as the entangled men crashed to the floor. A second wave of bodyguards swarmed in, their battle swords clanging in metal sheaths. They all brushed by a wilting Wilhelm and fused into the struggle.

“Friedrich? My God, Friedrich.” Wilhelm faltered forward, then stumbled toward the table, Aghast, he grasped for the table and stopped, gazing onto the floor where lay his trusted aid, face up, alone, and pushed aside by the guards pummeling the assassin. Friedrich’s hollow eyes drifted toward Wilhelm; his mouth agape, seemingly unable to utter a single word through

pooled blood. His pain creased face drooped to a flaccid, blank stare as his chest gurgled pink froth through a growing maroon stain on his shirt. Wilhelm dropped to his knees at his aide's side, close enough that the last of Friedrich's life spit onto his white dress tunic. Numbed, he bowed his head momentarily while the raucous manhandling next to him raged on, screams and angered curses echoing off the freshly plastered walls.

"Enough!" The Kaiser barked as he stood. He slowly turned his head toward the assassin, now jacked up by the guards with his arms awkwardly folded behind his back, then narrowed his fire-filled eyes. After taking two steps toward his assailant, he grasped the man's neck with his right hand, craned his neck forward and stared directly into his eyes.

"Who?" Wilhelm's thumbnail pressed deeply into goose-bumped flesh. The man remained silent, quivering, returning a forced steel-eyed glare. "Who sent you?"

The Kaiser studied the man's face, sorting through possible identities, but the deranged man's features were as common as a blade of grass. There was nothing recognizable as Jewish or Polish. *A simple, sniveling anarchist, nothing more. The fetid political sewer into which Europe had decayed festered these vermin.*

"I demand you tell me who sent you!" Wilhelm squeezed harder, his fingernail drawing a trickle of blood. The assassin's eyes bulged further, but his tightened lips revealed nothing. *Respectable resolve, yet contemptible*, he thought. *A misguided socialist bent on creating anarchy in the only stable regime in all of Europe? No, this was something even more insidious. It had to be. There was one man who had consistently dared challenge his primacy.*

"Take him away." The Kaiser spit into the assassin's face before shoving him back into his bodyguards. Turning away and through his bared teeth, he hissed, "I cannot accept that one

simpleton breached my security. There is something more. Someone else. Before his execution, I need to know who put him up to this. I need to know if this is America's doing."

"Yes, your Excellency," the guards replied in unison, nodding affirmation sharply.

"Summon Field Marshall von Moltke. Immediately!" They didn't need to know why he needed his head spymaster. The Field Marshall would be able to get his request to his operative Ziegler fast enough.

"Yes, your Excellency." Heels clicked and boots stomped out of the room.

"And find me another confidant to replace Friedrich. Find another fine young man like my dear Friedrich." Wilhelm sighed and lowered his head, his words softening. As the guards completed binding the tousled man's wrists, two men flanked the intruder and dragged him out from the conference room leaving the Kaiser alone with the body of his fallen aide.

Part 1

Spring 1901

Chapter 1

The White House

10 March 1901

Vice-President Theodore Roosevelt marched up the steps of the main entrance to the White House, responding to the telephone call from the President's personal secretary that there was need for an emergent Cabinet meeting. Since Cortelyou wouldn't have provided details anyway, he didn't bother to pry for the reason behind the gravity in his tone. He was appreciative that Cortelyou included him for most of the high-level and sensitive discussions, even though he was not an official part of the president's Cabinet. *Probably figured I'd weasel it out of somebody afterwards, so why not*, he mused, chuckling.

Taking two steps at a time he bee-lined to and up the stairwell to the second floor where the cramped, poorly lit, windowless Cabinet conference room was situated, thinking that if he arrived first, he could strategically position himself close to McKinley. The President had a habit of mumbling as he was thinking which he found sometimes more insightful than what he said aloud. But when he reached the open door and stepped inside, he stopped, taken aback that despite his hurried response, he was the last to arrive, save McKinley himself.

State, Navy, and ONI. The game afoot was international, he imagined, taking inventory

of the participants, whose eyes all glanced up and fixed on him as he casually walked into the room. He gravitated toward the physically diminutive State Secretary, John Hay, who looked more to him like a bearded gnome from a fairy tale than a diplomat. His posture was as perfect as if a board were lashed to his back under his long frock coat, and even sitting forward on the chair's edge left him unable to reach the foot rests that had been specially designed for the conference table. The Secretary remained consumed with fiddling between the folders laid out in front of him. He liked working with Hay since his smooth congeniality complimented his straight-forwardness, and he could take a verbal jab now and then.

Roosevelt pulled up a ladder-backed chair and sat next to Hay before exchanging customary sneers that served to stoke a combative tenor across the table with Navy Secretary John Long. A curmudgeonly old New Englander with a steel-trap memory, Long was his boss three years ago when he resigned and headed off to lead the Rough Riders, and was unforgiving for the move, one he deemed a politically motivated foray. Their relationship was contentious from the start, as the old man's frugal, arduous, and tedious study over how shipbuilding should be retooled, frustrated Roosevelt's moves to improve the fleet. That their boisterous head butting had become common knowledge, Roosevelt always joked about selling tickets to the rest of the Cabinet for their debates.

Flanking Long was Commodore Charles Sigsbee, formerly the captain of the ill-fated *USS Maine*, now head of the Office of Naval Intelligence. Roosevelt felt camaraderie with the balding, bespectacled Cuban War veteran since both were battle tested and both harbored a deep distrust for Kaiser Wilhelm's expansionist moves.

"Your canal is in trouble, Teddy. The French have capitulated to the elements." Hay's whispered words barely escaped his thick white beard and mustache as he leaned sideward.

Not great news but I'm damned sure that's not the gist of this meeting. The canal needs to be built and sooner than later. Roosevelt thought. He had contingencies for everything, including where the canal was to be constructed, and thought now would be the time to propose it. He just had to sell it, and convincing Hay of the viability of the plan would be the first step. "I don't see that as trouble as much as an opportunity. We should talk later," he then replied, wincing and clacking his teeth.

"The President appreciates you attending with such short notice. He will arrive shortly," George Cortelyou, the President's stout bodied personal secretary announced as he stepped through the doorway, drawing everyone away from their posturing. His thick black mustache twitched as he spoke while his owl-like eyes scanned the room from behind his pince-nez. Roosevelt noted he made only one slow pass around the room before leaning back toward the hallway for a brief moment.

"Gentlemen, President William McKinley," he then announced as he stepped back into the room. Roosevelt joined the rest of the inner circle cabinet members in standing as the portly McKinley stepped into the room, stopped and surveyed. Leaning toward his trusted aide, he whispered something that even Roosevelt's sharp hearing could not pick up. Cortelyou confirmed understanding with a nod before heading out. The president then swaggered to the head of the ornately carved and highly polished walnut conference table, its center littered with folders and paper piles, flipped the tails of his frock coat back, and settling his large frame into his walnut swivel chair. As his seat groaned, McKinley motioned for everyone to be seated, then turned to his left and nodded toward Commodore Sigsbee.

"Charles, I believe your information is the central purpose for this meeting." McKinley's voice was solemn and reserved.

Intelligence. Naval intelligence. This could be very interesting, Roosevelt thought, regarding Sigsbee as he stood. The Commodore appeared to have maintained his active duty fitness even being assigned to desk duty in ONI, despite his blanched hair and distinguished broad white, waxed at the tips mustache betraying his years. He adjusted his wire rimmed oval glasses, opened the manila folder he had positioned in front of him on the table, then cleared his throat. “Thank you, sir. My first item is a confirmed intelligence report that there has been an assassination attempt on Kaiser Wilhelm. Unsuccessful, I should add.”

“Now that’s a shame,” Roosevelt mumbled under his breath as Sigsbee tapped on the telegram. “He’s probably looking to mount heads on poles by now.”

“A European anarchist was responsible,” Sigsbee continued. “Although, the report states, Wilhelm harbors a delusion that somehow we were involved. This may deserve some additional monitoring.”

“That’s not surprising,” Roosevelt noted a bit louder, then stifled when McKinley furrowed his forehead and skewered him with an icy glare.

“Next item,” McKinley directed, his glare unrelenting.

Sigsbee shuffled his papers. “We have some additional intelligence indicating the Kaiser may be reinvigorating an invasion plan for America. Details are sketchy, and we still need to verify with more intel. I do not believe these are related.”

“Preposterous!” Long harrumphed, stiffening and scowling at Sigsbee.

“But true to form,” Roosevelt tapped his barred teeth and chortled under his breath. “Can MID corroborate?”

“I have not reached out to Major Wagner yet, but since this appears to be naval planned

operation, Army Intelligence might not have anything,” Sigsbee replied.

“This plan sounds more like yellow press propaganda,” Long spewed.

“Gentlemen, let’s focus questions on the topics at hand and let Charles complete his report. We can discuss the merits of Wilhelm’s moves and resolve our actions once we have all the facts,” McKinley growled. Roosevelt squirmed in his chair and pushed his butt-cheeks down into the leather cushion while Long glowered at him. McKinley turned back to his chief naval spy. “You did mention you have a bit more detail, correct Charles?”

“Yes sir. My agents here have tracked and verified that the German Naval attaché, Lieutenant Hubert von Rebeur-Paschwitz has made at least one excursion to locations along the coast, which I presume are the possible landing sites. When we noticed he had been absent from the consulate several times without notifying our office his destination, contrary to our mutual traveling agreement, our suspicions were alerted. When confronted, he claimed he was visiting with the German Barons out in Newport, but I sense that is just convenient cover.”

“Naval War College?” Long wiggled his eyebrows.

“Nothing confirmed, but the target areas are someplace up north, perhaps even as far up as Portsmouth,” Sigsbee replied.

“Does he have the material to make this invasion plan work?” Long prodded.

“We do know that KruppWorks is double-shifting, ramping up manufacturing on mostly dreadnaughts. What we don’t have is information on troop numbers, but that’s not likely a problem for him. I can confirm that intelligence with Wagner. Everything considered, if he’s planning to transport an invasion force of some sort, he’ll clearly need more ships than what we know he has right now.” Sigsbee folded his hands over the papers.

“That’s quite a bit of coastline we’re talking about, Commodore. Do you believe we have adequate defensive capability up there?” Roosevelt asked, confident he was the only other one in the room that understood battle planning.

“Can’t make a judgement on that, sir,” Sigsbee responded. “Even if I had the locations, I have no recent information on the suitability for landing. We could solicit Inspections and Surveys, and feed that intel to Admiral Luce and Commodore Wainwright. Their exercises, war game simulations if you will, up at the War College would give us a better idea on both the viability of Wilhelm’s plan and what we may need to do for naval defense capability . . .”

“John?” McKinley cut Sigsbee off, startling Long. “Weren’t we building submersibles or submarines or something like that to replace our aging monitors . . . for coastal defense?”

Roosevelt held back a chuckle at the President catching his Navy Secretary dozing. Long then cleared his throat. “We purchased and commissioned Mr. Holland’s torpedo boat late last year, then awarded two contracts; four additional submarine torpedo boats to Nixon’s Crescent Shipyard up in New Jersey, and another four at Union Iron Works in San Francisco.”

“Commercial shipyards? Shouldn’t we be building these in Navy shipyards?” Roosevelt clacked his teeth and glared at Long.

“The yards aren’t ready to take on those projects,” Long fired back. “Nixon promised four ready-for-launch by the end of the year, commissioning in about another year. Iron Works may need a little more time. Bottom line is that we’ll need to rely on the one Holland submarine and the old monitors for coastal defense until then.”

“Seems slow. Wasn’t there another bidder? I seem to recall someone by the name of Lake may have also bid on the contract.” Roosevelt scowled.

“He’s an arrogant little cur. Was asking too much. Holland was easier to work with, and also had more experience. I didn’t believe I needed your approval to move forward.” Long snapped back, then pursed his lips and scowled. Roosevelt understood the response.

“Gentlemen. Let’s focus on the issue at hand.” McKinley slapped his hand on the table. “Charles, can you ensure Admiral Luce considers all this with his simulated exercises? The monitors and such?”

“Yes, Sir.”

Secretary Hay raised his hand as if he were a student in a classroom. “If I may, sir, and if you do not mind adding another log on the fire, so to speak, I think we have one additional theatre to discuss.”

“As long as it is relevant, but I have learned you do always have pertinent insight, Mr. Hay. Especially when it comes to international affairs.”

“I do not know if Commodore Sigsbee has any information on this, and I do not intend to commandeer this discussion, but I understand there is some unrest in South America which involves Germany and others.” Hay’s comment immediately captured Roosevelt’s interest.

“Please continue.” McKinley leaned forward.

“It appears that Venezuela is reneging on its payment of foreign debts, Germany in particular, among others. The State Department has been monitoring this regime closely since the last coup d’état, and it appears that at least Wilhelm is threatening intervention over that particular issue. I am sure others may follow.”

“Despite what I usually think of Wilhelm, I’d say that he’s justified.” Roosevelt leaned in. “If this little caudillo thinks he can get away with not paying his debts, whether he inherited that

burden or not, a little pressure may be warranted. Sometimes shaking the trees is all these cretins understand.”

“Waving sticks may not always be the best diplomacy, Teddy.” McKinley cautioned.

Roosevelt recoiled, then added, “I have a good friendship with the German Diplomat von Stenberg. I can talk with him to be sure Wilhelm understands our position that we aren’t averse to limited intervention, provided it does not end with some sort of colonial annexation.”

“Perhaps we should let Mr. Hay handle that discussion, Theodore. After all, he is our chief diplomat.” McKinley offered.

“Did I hear you correctly, Mr. Roosevelt? Are you advocating another tidy little war over here?” Long’s quip drew an icy eyed silence from Roosevelt.

“Gentlemen, please. Let’s be civil.” McKinley rolled his eyes, then turned to Hay.

“Would you say these are related or separate issues, Mr. Hay?”

Before the secretary could respond, George Cortelyou stepped through the door and headed directly for McKinley. The room fell silent as the two exchanged whispers, the content blanching the president’s face. He stood and snapped down on his vest. “Please excuse me gentlemen, but my dear Ida is in need of my immediate attention. I trust you can collaboratively conclude what we need to do. Mr. Cortelyou will appraise me later.”

As the president hurried out the door, Cortelyou settled into his chair and facilitated the discussions to conclusion.

* * *

“Now that was an invigorating discussion.” Roosevelt clacked his teeth as he strutted along the walkway in Lafayette Square. He could barely contain his enjoyment in his escape from the hot

and stuffy Cabinet room, especially since now he could light up one of his dark Cuban cigars and savor the smoke while they walked without consternation. Reluctantly, he slowed and shortened his brisk stride so that the shorter John Hay could catch up. “Although I rather enjoy the briskness of winter, this is mighty enjoyable weather, wouldn’t you say?”

“Agreed. This is truly enjoyable weather.” Hay, panting from his effort to keep up, stopped at one of the benches lining the walkway and leaned into it.

“Too much desk time?” Roosevelt stopped and circled behind the bench. Reading Hay’s fatigue, he dropped onto the bench where the statue of a horse-mounted Lafayette, peered down on him.

“I’m a bit older than I look, Teddy, and I know I don’t hide my years well,” Hay replied, exhaling loudly as he joined Roosevelt on the bench and stretched his back as he leaned into the hard concrete.

Roosevelt had to shade his eyes from the sun’s gleam off the statue’s polished metal trim, leaned back and worked the end of his dark Cuban cigar, already dripping with brown, acrid tobacco juice where he had chewed it past the point of saturation. All that remained in the stub was one, possibly two chewing plugs, which he figured he could maw on the way back to his office. Once he sensed Hay’s breathing recover, he asked, “So you say the French have given up on building the canal. Don’t think the general up there would have approved the capitulation.”

Hay stroked his blanched white overgrown goatee. “I hear mosquitoes, yellow fever, brutal heat —”

“Hay, you do know that waterway must be built.” Roosevelt vaulted up from his seat and immediately began pacing along the concrete sidewalk, the hard soles of his knee-high riding boots hammering away with each of his deliberate steps. He then stopped, sharply about-faced,

and exhaled explosively. “We should take over the whole project, then. I didn’t really think they could finish it, anyway. Not rugged enough.”

“What is the president’s position?”

“McKinley knows we need it.” Roosevelt stretched the truth. He’d talked with McKinley about the need to be in charge of a canal through Central America someplace, but never gained a firm commitment from him about when and how to proceed. “Listen. You of all people know we can’t survive in isolation anymore. We’ve licked our wounds long enough since the War of the Rebellion. That was forty years ago. If we expect to open up to the Far East, well, we need a shorter route than around South America. That was near disaster in the Cuban War.”

“And who do you propose take political control over this dream of a westward passage if I may ask?” Hay pressed his wide forehead into his open hand.

“I’ll hear nothing about following a dream from any carpetbaggin’ member of Congress. Supremacy at sea is an integral part of our commercial and military prowess and this canal is an indispensable tool to realize our destiny. You know that, Mr. Hay.”

“And who will be the protectorate for . . .”

“Let me make myself perfectly clear, Hay,” Roosevelt raised his tenor and fisted hand, spouting as if he was a preacher delivering a blistering fire and brimstone sermon. “We can’t accept anything less than total control.”

“The Clayton-Bulwer Treaty expired, Teddy.” Hay cautioned. “That means, by default, there’s nothing in place to define how or by who this passageway will be controlled. Or by who.”

“Then, my dear fellow, this will be a grand opportunity to propose us for the job.”

Roosevelts teeth clacked as he smiled.

“A reminder, sir, we’ll have to go to Congress for this, and right at the moment, they are as cantankerous as ever over the President’s tariff policies. His ‘Open Door’ proposal with China was a blood-bath on the Senate floor. Worst I have seen in years.”

“Sometimes a little kerfuffle is what those stuffed-shirts over there need.”

“I simply don’t know if we can get the votes.”

“I can always exert some influence on the Hill. I am sure you know I don’t mind being a bit prickly when I need to be.”

“Of that, I am clearly aware, sir, no malice intended.”

“None taken. That’s why I respect you, Hay. Not afraid to be brutally honest.”

Roosevelt’s steely eyed stare softened as his grin grew wider by the second. He saw a concerning fatigue in Hay’s eyes as the chief diplomat vacantly looked toward Lafayette’s statue. If his gambit with Hay failed, there was no one he could turn to that had his negotiating skill. He circled back to the bench, sat down, and started with a calmer voice, “I understand the toll the negotiations for the rights to the canal had taken before, and additional negotiations between the French, the British, the Columbians, and worst of all, the always contentious Congress could be brutal. And then there’s the snooping press, which I assure will nag you like blackflies on a summer’s night.”

“Appreciate your empathy, but I believe our first important hurdle is an agreement that allays Britain’s interests.”

“I don’t see a problem. We take one thing at a time. We get Britain on board and I’m sure the others will follow. We don’t need congressional support to go and talk, do we?”

Hay sighed deeply and looked toward the cloudless sky. “We’ll need to re-negotiate the Clayton-Bulwer treaty as a first step.”

Roosevelt chewed faster and harder on his cigar stub. “Clayton-Bulwer was worthless to begin with. Just throw the damned thing out and start over. This canal must be under our control. Built, run, and protected by American boys.”

Hay glared at Roosevelt. “Let me be sure I understand what you are proposing: Nicaragua, Costa Rica, and Columbia are independent, and the isthmus belongs to Columbia. We can’t just go in and continue digging where the French had failed, nor can we take some piece of land and start digging another hole in the ground.”

“Then if we have to, we’ll prop up a new country willing to sell us rights to the area we’ll need. I’m sure there’s a penny-ante strongman who wants his own little dominion in payment for help against Columbia.”

“That is a bit aggressive,” Hay grumbled under his breath. “Don’t forget that little problem brewing in Venezuela.”

Roosevelt loudly cleared his throat, enough to scare off a small flock of chickadees nearby. “He is a sure-fire candidate. He’ll buy in for a piece of the action. I like that he doesn’t mind going toe-to-toe with Willie and Company.”

“In our country’s best interest, I believe we need to work the diplomacy first.”

“You’ll need to put some meat in it, Hay. Waiting too long at the table to talk things out was the same pacification attitude that got us into the mess down there in Cuba, Hay. Maybe we should talk a little less and be a bit more aggressive—you know, a big stick rather than chatting about what has to happen.”

“Perhaps the President . . .”

“McKinley has a habit of waiting too long, Hay. I remind you again what happened in Cuba.”

“It might have been a little less of a mess now if we—”

“Damn it, Hay. Taft needed something to clean up anyway. Now, if we have to, we’ll take the damned isthmus and start the canal ourselves. It’s the best place for it. And once we start it, Congress will be left in a position not to debate the canal itself but just to debate how to use it.”

“Then, sir, I believe it is incumbent upon me to get this treaty negotiated expeditiously before you propose some sort of imperialistic coup d’état to get your way.”

Roosevelt’s grin widened. “Mr. Hay, I like your chutzpah.”

“Sir?”

“The clock is ticking, Mr. Hay. I suggest you find a way to keep me from acting on my impatience and just walking in and taking over.”

“Then, sir, I believe my time is very short and I have my work cut out for me,” Hay grumbled as he stood.

“That’s the spirit, Hay. That’s the spirit.”

Chapter 2

Naval Academy, Annapolis, Maryland

24 March 1901

Sam Carter was uncomfortable sitting straight-backed on a wooden bench outside Commodore Richard Wainwright's office at the Naval Academy waiting to be summoned inside. He attracted wandering side-eyed glances from the young men in dark blue navy uniforms ambling along the hallways between their small classrooms behind flimsy wooden doors, his casual work clothes out of place in a military institution. Just being in a hallway outside a faculty office rekindled hurtful memories of his time at the Citadel that was littered with counseling for his unprofessionalism—fighting—in response to his classmates incessant baiting for not being a real American. Since he was born a bastard child of a foreigner and a war widow, he was not the usual student-cadet that could profess their lineage back to the nation's founding, and his trespassing into their entitled world was enough to rile up his classmates' provocations.

The door jostled as its knob clicked, bringing Sam back to the present. When it opened, a young midshipman slunk out, head down, as if he had been chewed on for some sort of mess up. Sam could empathize, having experienced what that exit felt like. Without turning around, the

young man stiffened and began to pace down the hallway, leaving the doorway to the office half-open.

“Samuel Carter. Now this is an unexpected pleasure.” The tall, wiry Commodore Wainwright appeared, his thick, graying mustache twitching as he spoke. A toothy glint peeked out from behind the whiskers. Sam noted that the Commodore had weathered over the last few years since he had seen him although his eyes retained their same piercing steel-blue color that he remembered. “Didn’t think I’d ever see you here.”

“Morning, Sir.” Sam stood and started to salute, but caught himself, remembered Wainwright coaching him that his salute was weak and bordered disrespectful. He offered a handshake instead.

“Still with Wilkie’s spy ring, or have you come to your senses and looking to join up?”

“Yes, sir, and no sir.”

“That’s a shame, Carter. I could use someone with your engineering knowledge. I’d bet you’d feel right at home in one of these new submarine torpedo boats.”

“Appreciate the confidence, sir, but I was hoping you might help me sort something out.”

“I’ll do what I can. Com’on in and tell me what’s on your mind, son.” Wainwright about-faced, marched toward a small end table where a collection of cups and a dinged-up metal carafe rested. “Coffee?” he asked, pouring himself a cup.

“Appreciate it,” Sam replied as he pulled a chair up to the commodore’s modest metal desk, which paled in comparison to some of the massive oak desks he had seen in Washington.

“I’ll warn you, it’s not sweet like that Cuban stuff you probably had down there, but just as stout.” Wainwright poured a second cup, then set it down in front of Sam before dropping into his own chair. “Now, what’s on your mind?”

“The *Holland*, sir. I’m figuring someone might be spying on it while it’s here, well out there.”

“Not a big deal if they are. They can look all they want, but they won’t see anything that’s not already public knowledge, thanks to the damned newspapers.”

“So, you’re telling me that if someone wanted better intel on what this boat can do, they’d have to get inside?”

“You got it. That’s where the secret stuff is. And to get inside, they’d either have to get through some nasty marines we have stationed out there, or they’d have to go through me or the Navy Department. Unless of course they are Navy brass. And then Lieutenant Caldwell restricts their rubbernecking to a small area inside the boat where they couldn’t see much of anything.”

Or get the plans, Sam thought, then asked, “I understand this is more a training boat . . .”

“And experimental. Sure glad that Caldwell’s the adventurous type,” Wainwright cut Sam off.

“We’re building more, correct?”

“Crescent Shipyard up in Jersey.”

“Private shipyard?”

“Navy doesn’t have anything ready yet. Working on it. Anyway, I’m thinking they’ve got a few pretty close to being done since . . .” Wainwright stopped, leaned forward and pierced Sam with his eyes. “Now I assume you can keep a secret since you are spying for us, right?”

“Yes, sir.”

“My wife, Evelyn has been asked to christen the first one down the chute. Don’t know the name yet, but I’m sure it’s something special, like a fish or a snake.”

“That might be interesting to watch.”

“I can make that happen.” Wainwright’s smile peeked through again.

“You can?”

“Consider it done. By the way, since you’re down here and if you are interested in a short sail, I know that Lieutenant Caldwell is planning on some shallow diving exercises this afternoon. If you want, I can clear you to take a ride and you can see for yourself what all the hullabaloo is about.”

“I think I would enjoy that.”

“Then head on over to the dock. I’ll ring up Caldwell and have him wait for you.”

* * *

“Hold the rungs as you descend,” Lieutenant Henry Caldwell growled as he guided the latest rubbernecker shimmy his way into his boat, then thought, *Christ, Wainwright. How do you expect me to get any training done with this godforsaken parade of sightseers?*

As Caldwell monitored his latest tourist descend into his boat, he understood this visitor was Sam Carter, a government agent but Wainwright’s message didn’t specify which branch. Like his crew, he still struggled to accept that the uniqueness of his boat interested military brass, politicians, and newspaper reporters.

“Short drop, Mr. Carter. About another foot down,” Caldwell cautioned, as he noticed Carter dangling one foot off the last rung, as if feeling for the deck below. Carter finally dropped, landing both feet onto the oak-planked operating deck.

“Mighty tight fit,” Carter said as he turned toward Caldwell, wiping his hands on the front of his shirt. “Could’ve used some grease getting through that hatchway.”

“Consider it efficiency of space, Mr. Carter. Lessens the chance of flooding the compartment,” Caldwell replied.

“Sam Carter,” Carter offered his hand to shake.

“Welcome aboard, Mr. Carter. This is my second in command, Chief Machinist’s Mate Barnett Bowie.” Caldwell declined the greeting, instead nodding to Bowie, who was sour-faced and standing next to him. The captain then chuckled as he read his chief’s stare, before adding, “He’s okay, Chief. Mr. Carter is ‘Wainwright approved’.”

“Aye, sir.” Bowie groused as he saluted Caldwell then turned toward Carter. “Welcome aboard, Mr. Carter.”

“Appreciate the cordial welcome,” Carter replied.

For the moment, there was a silent standoff amidst the three men. Caldwell shifted his jaw side to side as he watched his sneering chief inspect the *Holland’s* latest visitor. He knew what Bowie was thinking, he’d heard it before—cockroaches and rats is what they are. Nothing but pestilence.

“Alright then, your lead, Chief. Take us through a shallow dive, ten degrees down, level off at ten feet,” Caldwell broke the icy silence. “Hatch secured?”

“Aye, sir.”

“Then get your engine secured. Follow the submerging procedures we briefed back in the office.”

“Aye, sir.” Bowie clomped off toward the rear of the boat, turning his head as he passed Carter, eying him with a skeptical glare.

“A little rough, but he’s a good man, Mr. Carter,” Caldwell continued. “As you can see, most of the controls and instruments are up here, forward, as well as the torpedo tube and the ordinance. Engine is aft, but I assume you know that.”

Carter nodded.

“And don’t touch anything.”

“I don’t intend to, sir.”

“Then you’ll need to excuse me and the crew for a moment, Mr. Carter,” Caldwell frosted his words. “I need to ensure everything is working properly for this maneuver, otherwise, it won’t be a pleasant ride for any of us.”

“Don’t mean to be in the way, sir. Do what you need to do, sir.”

“I’d suggest you stay up here while we get underway. And keep in mind, these low bulkheads don’t give and will certainly cause one hell of a headache.”

“I understand. I’ll wait right here.” Carter leaned toward the bulkhead, grabbing a brace as he hunched over and rested against the hull.

Caldwell about faced, lowered his head and shoulders to pass through the narrow bulkhead and marched the centerline of the boat toward the aft compartment where he could monitor his crew maneuvering the vessel through the shallows of Chesapeake Bay. He preferred a deeper floor like there was up in Newport, but a shallow one would be more forgiving. Reaching the deck five feet above the chugging Otto gasoline engine in the aft compartment, he stopped and thought, *this Sam Carter was not an average rubbernecker. He had connections if Wainwright personally authorized him and suggested showing him a shallow dive and recovery.*

Caldwell reckoned he’d poke at Carter a bit after they resurfaced to get the real poop on who he was. With that thought caged, he felt his mind clear enough to better focus on the evolution. Looking at the rear of the engine, he timed the exposed drive shaft turns, validating the speed would be slow enough for the prop to maintain a wide, trimmed turn to the south before diving. He caught a whiff of acrid smoke—exhaust—probably from that small crack in the exhaust manifold Chief Bowie discovered on his last inspection. That would need to be

repaired before their summer sail to Newport, during which they were expected to remain submerged for most of the trip.

Making an about face, he methodically worked back toward the bow, inspecting the piping connections and exposed runs of copper wire along the hull, then hovering briefly at each station to assure everyone remained engaged and alert. His crew was still learning the nuances of underwater operations, which included sinking the boat without panic. Submerging was a novel process and not a skill any sailor learned easily, especially seasoned salts. Even he was not fully comfortable with it since the newness of the step-by-step procedure had to be meticulously followed or risk an uncontrolled sinking. Maybe it would be one day, but not yet. Now it was still a nerve-racking evolution for him and the crew.

He was confident with the abilities of his crew, having hand-picked them for this duty based on Commodore Wainwright's recommendations; every one from the barnacle-encrusted old Chief Bowie to the skillful electrician, Ensign Hall. They worked together like a Swiss watch—they had to—it was all about survival at frontier depths. This was the modern Navy. These men were the smartest, most intuitive and confident sailors he could find, and had melded into a tight knit crew. They needed to be close brothers and they were. They were also quite rough around their social edges, and may have had the foulest mouths he had ever heard, but they were all adept seamen and now submariners.

Caldwell paused near Ensign Hall, who was monitoring the electrical control station, then moved on after receiving a "thumbs-up" from his electrician. A few more steps forward sat Ensign Swanson, focused and his hands at the ready on the trim and ballast air and water valves. With his walk-about complete, he entered the control station by ducking underneath the last rounded bulkhead, his head just missing its dull metal edge.

“Where were we?” Caldwell asked as he spotted Carter standing against the inner hull. Carter didn’t respond, obviously still wide-eyed watching the collection of brass gauges around him. Bowie stood focused on the procedure laid out on a stanchion in front of him, running his finger along the steps. Rather than waiting for a response, Caldwell continued. “Oh, yes. The technology designed into this vessel by John Holland at Mr. Nixon’s shipyard is state of the art. Intuitive and functional.”

“Secure the engine. Swap to batteries,” Bowie’s voice boomed down through the hull.

“I hope you are ready, Mr. Carter. You can watch our progress here,” Caldwell pointed to the large needle on the polished brass depth gauge. As the arrow twitched, he turned and nodded to the rear of the vessel: “The aft compartment contains the heart of this boat, a fifty horsepower Otto gasoline-powered—”

“Water!” Caldwell shouted as he saw a curtain of seawater sheeting down from the walls of the access trunk. His head snapped around and skewered Chief Bowie, now scrambling toward the breach. “What the hell—?”

“Aye, sir,” Bowie blurted as he hustled by.

“Chief, the hatch is not fully secured!”

“It was, sir,” Bowie darted back, growling as he hopped up on the platform under the hatch where the incoming seawater splashed on his face. “I thought it was.”

“Well, it ain’t, Chief. Get it done. Now!” Caldwell’s voice and steel-gray eyes steadied on the Chief as the trim angle responded to the water ingress.

“Aye, sir,” Bowie wormed into the access trunk and grasped the eighteen-inch wheel. He jammed it hard and tight, grunting with one single thrust of his massive hands. The shower trickled for a moment longer, dripped, then stopped.

“Sealed, sir!” Bowie groaned. His boots clanked on each steel rung as he climbed down the access trunk and dropped onto a steel platform, then onto the oak decking, now covered with cold, foot-deep green seawater. His hair was matted over his forehead under his soaked sailor’s cap. As he sloshed through the stream of water headed toward the rear of the vessel, it started cascading over the short drop. At the rail, he toggled a single valve open and announced, “Air tanks open.”

“Trim it level!” Caldwell called out forward and then turned back toward the rear of the vessel. “Stations!” he shouted, then glanced back at Carter, now grasping at the nearby bulkhead while squaring and spreading his legs.

“I don’t believe this was quite what you expected, Mr. Carter.” Caldwell grasped hold of a ladder rung.

“Perhaps not.”

“She’s still a bit of a virgin to us, but these men all know what they’re doing and how to handle her.” Caldwell’s mettle was as icy as the seawater sloshing inside his shoes. He began shouting rapid-fire orders back toward his men. “Gunners on the bilge pumps. Hall, get us on batteries. Callahan, stow the ventilator and assist the Chief on sealing up that exhaust before that back-draft chokes us to death. Swanson, open the air bottles and get our internal pressure up. We’ll need to use the trim tanks for ballast. In that order everyone. Understood?”

The orders were met with a round of staccato chorus of ‘aye, sir’ followed by breath swallowing curses. The boat pitched and yawed like a drunk unable to right himself. Cusses littered a round of echoed ‘aye, sir’s’ as the boat pitched and yawed, wandering slowly. Caldwell watched Bowie’s clenched, oil-soaked fists wring the two-foot diameter diving wheel, then felt the sub, now bloated with water weight washing the deck boards, start to level off.

Hall cursed loudly as arcs of blue and yellow snapped and flashed like lightning at his face when his hands traipsed across the open copper wiring on the switchgear. Eyes shifted to Hall as he scrambled back toward the wires. "I'm all right," he insisted.

"Swanson, more trim, forward ballast." Caldwell warbled. He spoke slower than usual since he was aware that his voice would be distorted and muffled by the increased pressure. "Level us out before we bury the prop."

"How much?"

"Use your gut, just get the bow down. We can trim up after," Caldwell said as he watched the large arrow-like needle on the depth gauge narrated their descent. He turned to Carter and added, "Once she's leveled your ears won't pound so much and we can talk. I'm sure you understand. By the way, how's your gut doing?"

"Not a problem, sir," Carter responded, but Caldwell knew he was lying. His stomach continued to twist up like a wet knotted rope, and he figured Carter's did as well.

"You do look a little green," Caldwell snickered as the depth's darkness crept into the hull, the glass in the portholes darkening the more they sank.

"Got it, Captain!" Hall called out as he slammed a final lever up into the copper tabs.

"Give me some lights. The batteries should have been charged when we left," Caldwell ordered into the darkness.

"Aye, sir," a faceless voice replied. The boat began to level as Caldwell counted five seconds to himself, the expected time for the lights to start with a dim, flickering, then remain lit with a yellow glow. The lights flickered again followed by a soft, low thud which shuddered through the hull. The tail kissed the muddy bay floor, he figured then felt the bow drift down a couple more feet before it also thumped to rest.

Level, no water ingress, and a soft landing, Caldwell thought, scanning through his boat and reading his crew's expressions. He then looked over to Carter and was pleasantly surprised his visitor had not melted into a quivering, panicked mess.

* * *

Blowing out a lungful of stale air that he must have had held since they started their frenetic descent, Sam Carter hoped his face didn't betray how sick he felt. His stomach was twisted into knots, his head spun and pounded at the same time. Hoping he could hold back from puking, he steadied himself against the hull to tame his vertigo. Even with how physically mangled he felt, to his surprise, he didn't feel terrified. Slowly releasing his grip on the bulkhead, his hands tingled and feeling returned to his fingertips. The compartment was silent outside of a random stray spark popping out from the switchgear and the vessel's ribbed metal braces creaking it seemed in agony under the water pressure squeezing the outer hull.

Bottom of Chesapeake Bay. We can't be stuck here, can we? Sam sensed a creeping anxiety, and wasn't sure if it was just him or throughout the boat. He hoped it was just him who teetered on the verge of being scared shitless. His nerve though, remained steadfast, remembering the confidence Lieutenant Caldwell had touted in his crew.

Is this how it happened to my father? The painful thought weaved through his mind. *Sinking to the bottom of Charleston Bay, unable to fight back against the water rushing into a breach on the Hunley caused by the explosion of their own ordinance? Or was it an agonizing death, asphyxiation, trapped in an intact tube and run out of breathable air?*

"All right, men. Let's get started." Caldwell broke the silence. "Let's start by getting this water out of here and get us some buoyancy. Mr. Gumpert, bilge pump. Mr. Swanson, blow out the trim ballast, forward, then aft. We don't want to spin a hole with the prop."

“Understand, sir. Forward, then aft.”

Silence followed. Sam heard air start pissing through the pipes that ran along the hull behind him. The seeping grew louder until the rushing sound stopped. “Air valves open, sir. Pressure at maximum,” Swanson called out.

“Watch your clinometer and balance the trim,” Caldwell barked. Sam realized the captain had been weaving through the boat’s stations while he coached his crew into action. As he sensed a slight angle upward, Sam was mesmerized by the condensation trails starting to bend toward the rear of the boat. The captain emerged from amidst the hissing valves and clanking gears, glanced at Bowie, then grabbed a hand-hold near one of the air tanks.

“Now, Bowie. Take us up,” Caldwell ordered. Imitating the captain, Sam clenched the bulkhead as best he could, bracing himself.

“Stand by for cold sync.” Bowie called out as he slammed a three-way knife switch closed. Lights dimmed. Gears clanked. A motor buzzed, like a mosquito at first, but the hum ramped up smoothly until Bowie slammed another lever closed. The motor whined. A shudder followed. Vibration quivered the hull. Finally, the *Holland* responded, lurching up.

Sam released his grip of the bulkhead then drifted down to sit on top of the round torpedo tube shell, using his cold hands like outriggers. The *Holland* eased away from the bottom. They were free and headed up.

“Back off on the up angle, Chief. Let’s not pop any eardrums this time,” Caldwell chirped, his voice sharp and metallic. He sat down next to Sam, twitched his thin, dark eyebrows and asked: “So, tell me, Mr. Carter. I’m reckoning you don’t work for the press.”

“I officially work for the Treasury. I thought —”

“Treasury?” Caldwell’s eyes betrayed his surprise.

“Twenty degrees up, bearing two-seven-zero,” a voice called out from the front of the vessel.

“Back off to ten degrees up and come to one-eight-zero, Chief,” Caldwell ordered without breaking eye contact with Sam.

“Aye, sir,” Bowie’s voice interrupted.

“Treasury?” Caldwell scowled.

“To be more precise, a branch of the Treasury.”

“Got it, say no more.” Caldwell winked and raised his open hand, then covered his ears. Sam caught the joke. “So, that’s where he hid you guys?”

“Roosevelt’s idea, I think,” Sam noted. “I would be interested though—”

“Aye, sir. One-eight-zero. And leveling off at ten degrees up angle. Ten feet down,” Bowie clinically announced.

“Good work, Bowie. Once we break surface, swing her into the docks, slow and steady. We’ll need to muster up and review this escapade to figure out what exactly happened.” Caldwell turned back to Sam. “Listen, this probably isn’t the best time to talk. I don’t need any more casualty drills, like running into a pier. These guys may be just a bit rattled right now so this is what I can offer. After the review back at the barracks, I’ll take the time to answer your questions. But right now, if you’ll excuse me . . .”

“I understand, sir,” Sam leaned back, let Caldwell pass and watched him as he resumed directions to his crew.