

# Chapter 44

## MARBLE PITS, SUMMER NIGHTS

**H**IS NAME WAS Chase. He hailed from a big estate in Georgia where the live oaks had been planted by his great-granddaddy's great-granddaddy's slaves. His ROTC ring came from the same academy his father had attended: Oak Hill Military, where the motto carved above the gates read *Oculus pro oculo*: An eye for an eye. His mother was a helmet blond who seldom spoke to coloureds and had never met a Jew.

Chase neither liked nor disliked the Casino Lac-Leamy. It overlooked a flooded quarry, and the lounge where Jena's roadies had assembled gave directly on the lake. The midnight water made him think of marble pits and summer nights back home. Otherwise, for him, the québécois casino and the toney lounge were just another exercise in nursing bourbons, feigning solidarity.

His partner, Bridget, felt the same. Culled from INSCOM's shadowy, elite brigades, part of their assignment was to fraternize with Jena's crew. Neither did it well but neither groused. Most of Jena's team was in the dark about her minstrel show. Chase and Bridget's eyes and ears made sure it stayed that way.

At least this was the last time for a while. Jena was returning to the BRAZIER labs. While she was doing voodoo for the white boys, Chase was off on leave.

He told himself he had no feelings about Jena being black. She

was an Asset, and her skin could be bright blue for all the difference it made. She was, however, uppity, and nobody liked that. It never crossed his mind that uppity was not the word he'd use if she were blue.

He looked forward to unwinding from the battering his Southern pride was taking. The first thing he was going to do was lose the chin-strap beard. It worked for the persona he adopted for her shows, but made him look too pretty and attracted the wrong men. He'd keep his red hair buzzed, though, just to bug his little sister, living up in Boston with a journalist these days. He'd try to lure her home again with peaches and a night of Rebel Yell.

Chase's other sister was his elder by six years. Apple of her Daddy's eye, she had been the first to show him how to throw a football, thread a worm and clean a rifle. Navy now and teaching at Annapolis, her classes didn't start until the middle of September. Maybe they'd go hunting coons, and spend some afternoons together hooking bream for supper from the Tulgahoochee Creek.

Across the table, Bridget's rum and Coke was getting low. She signalled for another. As she did, something at the entrance caught her eye. Chase twisted round to have a look.

The guy was wearing Levis with a T-shirt tucked in at the waist. The jeans were faded, old-school tight and rolled up at the cuff. The plain white crew-neck looked as if, up close, it smelled of bleach. He scanned the lounge and glanced at Chase with eyes so green they had to be cosmetic, even if the Wheeler County farmboy duds looked lived in, not for show.

Chase went back to Bridget. She had furlough, too, and planned to hike New Hampshire on the Appalachian Trail. Chase was giving pointers since he'd done the trail twice.

A band set up and started playing eighties covers. Bridget rolled her eyes but turned to watch.

The green-eyed man, his back to Chase, was sitting at the bar. He had a bowl of peanuts. Chase watched idly as he squeezed the red skins off before he popped them in his mouth.

Donovan had done that, too; he didn't like the bitterness. And

like this guy, he'd pulled it off—casual and masculine. Not that they were anything the same. The farmboy thing was wrong. So was his build. Yet there were echoes: the way his arm bulged when he raised his glass, the way he hooked his shoes around the stool.

The band switched into French, and for a moment, Chase was elsewhere.

The last place he had ever seen Lieutenant Colonel Donovan McCreedy—a Georgian like himself, but from upstate, near Elberton, more good ole boy than Chase—was Thibodaux, Louisiana, where they'd stuffed themselves on Creole food, gotten drunk on sazerac, stumbled to their hotel room and fucked to Cajun music from a club across the street. Donovan had driven back to Fort Polk in the morning. That afternoon, his unit had been ordered down to Haiti.

Forty minutes later, as the band was winding down, the green-eyed man unhooked his legs and left. Chase gestured at his partner's empty glass. She shook her head. He waved a waiter over, paid for both of them, and let her take the lead toward the door.

The casino was a glass and cherrywood confection set atop a gambling floor that glittered like a midway. Chase and Bridget stuck to the periphery, strolling past the crowded games of Pai Gow and roulette. Chase stopped at a blackjack table. Once again his partner shook her head. She needed rest; her period was coming on. He waited till she'd walked away, then left the tables and began to troll the slots.

Chase was not a man to cruise in public. He preferred the baths where servicemen collected, men who knew the meaning of *the manly love of comrades*. The too-green eyes had only given him a glance, yet Chase had sensed their owner understood—like Donovan, who from the first had dignified what up till then had only been the hard, hot fumbings of drunk Oak Hill cadets.

Donovan McCreedy—mowed down at a checkpoint by some Uzi-wielding jungle bunnies outside Port-au-Prince.

Chase had laid that ghost.

Or so he thought.

He spotted his objective in the foyer, heading out.

The quiet on the sidewalk came as a relief to ears assaulted by the *gling-gling-gling* of slot machines. Chase looked right, toward the Hilton where tomorrow he'd be watching over Jena. Its windows had a greenish tint that verged on phosphorescent. The knot of people standing at the entrance looked like wraiths.

Scanning left, he caught a flash of T-shirt past the line of idling taxis. It was gone a second later. The casino's lower levels rested on a limestone shelf that narrowed to a rounded spit. A hairpin in the road led down; the guy had gone around.

Chase set off, keeping to a measured pace. From his vantage higher up, he could see his target making for an arbitrary fence dividing where you were allowed to walk from where you weren't. He hopped it like a soldier, vaulting easily one-handed. Past the floodlights frosting the casino's sides, he disappeared again.

A gaudy imitation of the *Jet d'eau* in Geneva spilled magenta, pink and purple in the middle of the lake. Closer to the shore, the water was an inky black that made the docks and berths of the casino's small marina look like bleached bones floating on the surface of a tar pit.

The temperature dropped as Chase walked down the switchback road. The air felt soft and heavy, like Savannah but without the marshy stink.

No, not Savannah—like the quarry up near Elberton.

The end of junior year at Oak Hill Military had seen Chase and Donovan promoted to cadet-lieutenant. To celebrate, they'd spent a week at Donovan's, a chance to decompress before the start of summer work: marble-cutting in a granite shed for Donovan; for Chase, a junior law-clerk job in Rome, across the state.

Their final night together, Donovan had driven to a disused pit off Hartwell Highway. There they'd climbed down to a ledge that overhung the quarry pool. Three beers later, naked to their tennis shoes, they'd run and whooped and cannonballed the drop of sixty feet. Scaling up had taken every ounce of skill they had. Panting, they'd spread out a thick, felt sleeping bag and flopped down on

their backs.

Chase recalled a moon so bright the stars were hard to find, and granite rockface sparkling beneath a wash of silver.

Donovan had shifted on his side. Chase had turned to face him. Wordlessly, they'd pressed their toughened man-boy chests together, stroked each others' hardened poles, and bound themselves in brotherhood with splatterings of cum.

Chase hopped the fence and made his way toward the rear of the casino. The spit beyond it tapered into night. The figure at the end was waiting, outlined in the fountain's shifting colours. Resemblances to Donovan began to multiply: the set of his shoulders; the swell of his chest; the tilt of his hips. His triceps as he crossed his arms behind his head and slipped his T-shirt off.

Chase picked up his pace. The figure pivoted and once more seemed to vanish.

The blunt end of the spit was stepped, Chase saw when he looked over. The stranger was below him with his face toward the lake. Chase slid down, sparking off an avalanche of pebbles. The stranger turned. Even in the dark, his eyes glowed green. His jeans were open with his cock protruding from the **V**. He held it cupped as if it were an offering.

Dizzy with the memories it promised, Chase accepted, sinking to his knees and swallowing the shaft.



*Luke's hand is on his cock and beating hard.*

*Both of us are fully clothed. He's on his back, his zipper down. I'm beside him, watching. His breathing's getting ragged and he's seeing only what's inside his head.*

*He didn't want the story telepathically. He wanted it in words, for me to take my time and tell him everything. Reliving it has gotten me hard, too. If I touch myself, I'll probably explode. But I want this as a gift for Luke. His pleasure is the only thing I need for now.*

*His stomach starts to spasm and his hand becomes a blur. Suddenly, he's cumming—thick white spurts that pool in his fist.*

*His breathing steadies. He holds his cock upright. I touch the tip and put my finger to my tongue. The salty taste sends pre-cum up my shaft. I crack the waistband of my jeans and slide my hand inside.*

*He turns his head toward me.*

*“Can you hold it, Jimmy-Dean?”*

*His brow is glistening. His eyes are even greener when he's facing me. I brush his mind with Yes and If you want me to and Why? There's no answer but a smile like Mr. Shen's face in repose.*

*He takes my hand and squeezes, then gets up and grabs a towel from the rack behind the door. We're in a bed-and-breakfast half an hour north of Ottawa. The bathroom's down the hall. He wipes himself, zips up and folds the towel back in place.*

*Mr. Shen has booked a room as well. The two of them arrived at noon. Far from tired, Luke was itching to explore the village where we're staying. Mr. Shen, familiar with it, happily obliged.*

*Luke goes over to the window and stares out. The view is on the Gatineau, a twilit river winding out of sight between two rocky hills. Three days travel through geography more rugged than he's ever known and still it's not enough.*

*“You were keeping something back,” he says.*

*“Jealous it was me there doing Chase?” I rib him.*

*He floods my mind with admiration—fierce, fraternal pride without a trace of envy or resentment. “From John,” he clarifies aloud. “You left out something.”*

*Mr. Shen had asked about Josh Byron. I'd recounted my half of the meeting.*

*“Sunday is a go, then?” was his only question afterwards.*

*I get off the bed and join Luke at the window. “CSIS has decided to back off,” I tell him. “They won't be checking out the Farm. Byron didn't even want co-ordinates.”*

*“The Farm is safe?”*

*“Completely.”*

*“Nice bit of payback, then. Getting Colton to clear out for nothing.”*

*“I wasn’t thinking of revenge.”*

*“Maybe not, but still. . . ”*

*A discreet knock interrupts.*

*“Boys—,” Mr. Shen says through the door, “—any time you’re ready, I’ll be waiting by the car.”*

*“Thanks, John,” Luke calls out.*

*Mr. Shen is treating us to supper up the river, at a diner called The Pineview. He says they have great sugar pie.*

*Luke puts his arm around my shoulder. “This means that we can go back to the Farm.”*

*“If that’s what you want. I was thinking maybe someplace. . . ”*

*He kisses me—softly, on the lips, enough to make my hard-on stir again.*

*“No, it’s perfect, Jimmy-Dean,” he breathes. “Perfect.”*