

## DOROTHY AND THE TINMAN

Karena lent credence to our role as landed gentry, and I took pains to dress her so. We flew to Switzerland where my partner, Crane, kept his money, and met his banker. I chuckled as the little man became entranced by her dulcet tones and slinky gown. His hands shook as he peered at the hundred-thousand dollar check. Licking his lips while Karena's breasts heaved softly in his face, he adroitly awaited my desires and tried in vain to stifle his own. I wanted to deposit the entire sum, and needed an unspecific amount of gold, about twenty pounds, from which I would draw what I could carry, if Monsieur Chenault understood, at which point Karena giggled and stroked his vibrating leg.

We were escorted to a vault with twenty-five pounds of brilliant metal piled on a Louis XIV table, and left to snort coke and dabble in such a vision as lay before us. Karena was so excited by the intrigue and fortune that while I inspected the stack of tiny bars, she swooped down, giving me one of the most unusual blow jobs I've known. Standing there with my pants around my ankles in the cold vault, my hands full of coke and gold, I looked down at her flowing yellow hair and laughed so loudly I thought it might set off an alarm.

What a life! Visions of my partners passed by me...the Young Turks of the drug revolution, Ralph crossing Lake Titicaca high in the Andes, Crane sitting in a waterfront Maldive bar, his eyes preened to ships on the horizon, waiting for his load of hashish from Afghanistan, and B. L. at the head of a long table with his acid angels filling Double-O gelatin capsules from a white mountain before them. Each of us was insulated behind these creatures created for diversion, relief from tension, and our front of tantalizing sexuality...a trap for unwary intruders. This was her job, but I taught her slowly as she might've been terrified if she really knew what I was up to.

When Monsieur buzzed on the intercom, I winked at Karena, and as he entered she gave him a big hug. "Do you feel anything on her body, Monsieur?" I asked. "Try to find the gold."

She provocatively placed his hands on her breasts. "Not here?" she coyly queried, "How about here?" and she pulled his arms around her waist to feel her buttocks.

The good man was flabbergasted and greatly relieved to be allowed to sit and count what remained on the table. He issued me a tally for just under eleven kilos, and I put my arm around his shoulder and bumped him with the now loaded vest.

"Aha," he cried, "I should have known!"

I withdrew twenty-thousand in cash, and went to the best shops and bought clothes and expensive watches. When I was sure I could carry no more, we walked to our hotel, watches up both arms, strutting stiffly like the tin man in the Wizard of Oz. The heavy vest became part of me and I practiced smoothly getting in and out of taxis and at dinner. It was not the sort of souvenir one left in a room.

We flew for what seemed an eternity. I drank nothing, so as to avoid the bathroom, and sniffed a little coke to wile away the hours of what was surely the most physically uncomfortable stretch of my smuggling career. I hated common deals like these where you only turned a double or triple profit. Dope was about five-thousand! Convinced I was only doing it for the thrill, I turned to kiss Karena, asking her in my best Bogart style, "Casablanca, darling?"

It was definitely attitude, and we stepped off that plane like Bogie and Bacall onto a stage with all eyes upon us. In the glazed East Indian morning, My tacky pith helmet and white suit contrasted sharply with her burgundy, feathers, and parasol. I managed a swarthy strut, complete with swagger stick, while her slink set mens' hearts and pricks aflutter all 'round. It was a classic from the golden screen, a return of Lawrence of Arabia, and she was taking her part so seriously, I could barely keep from laughing.

We were whisked through customs and into a limo to the Grande Hotel. There I fairly leapt from the bestial vest, stripped the watches off my crumpled arms, and lay in the tub with the piled fortune in sight and relief in the offing. I ordered eight double-vodka tonics and flopped on the bed, watching the ceiling fan in its slow orbit. I called Mr. Ramalpinder at Air India to let him know I was back and invited him to the hotel.

The drinks tasted unreal and we did some coke and made love while the vest perched on the toilet. I missed my Colt for a moment, but reasoned my trust with Rama grew as did his profit. Besides, he knew I always carried a gun, so I ordered another eight drinks and we curled together watching the fan lift the canopied veil above us. Karena purred at my side, her blond hair streaming through the valley of her pointed breasts.

Her eyes were full of that pleading hope I'd had to deal with since we'd met...for she was a junkie, strung out on smack, and willing to do anything for a steady supply. I'd baited her on this trip with a promise of the best in the world. I knew she wanted a shot, and had planned one here as we moved swiftly across the world. She sighed in brooding overtures, but I reminded her she'd have to wait 'till I unloaded my "vested" interests. I proffered up some coke, and she accepted with a little girl's giggle.

Rama was amazed at how business had grown and called me a mad dog capitalist. Vice president of Air India, his position and integrity left little concern in our dealings.

He drooled over the collection of watches, hefting the vest several times with glee, and grinned at half-covered Karena. Rama would buy anything I brought him, I thought, and smiled back as we set our exchange for the morning.

In her enthusiasm, Karena could hardly finish dinner, but ate dutifully, like a daughter, mocking my concern for her health. She wanted a full-color dream, so I gave her some heroin, and she dug in her purse for her fit, registered neatly, and got off into the vision she loved. I smoked a little of it to calm the day's coke, and we settled in, the bulked treasure under my head and fan swishing above us. It took forever for night to dissolve into dawn, and several times I woke sweating, while helicopters and napalm colored my dreams. These hadn't bothered me 'til this fan, so I discounted their reappearance and rested through them like another would bad weather.

Later, dressed like aristocrats having a proper British tea in the Grande's garden terrace, we chatted about Rama's upcoming visit to Hawaii, while the valise leaned against my leg. The transaction was quite simple, and took place in his bank's boardroom as Rama was a trustee. A shrewd little assayer came in with his scale and tally sheet, smiled at me, and did his thing, while Rama and I fiddled with the watches. They were worth five times here what I paid. Then we loaded it all back into the valise, went downstairs, and wired a neat quarter-million to Monsieur Chenault. We had tea while we waited for the return receipt, and upon its arrival, Rama took the valise, we shook hands, and Karena and I headed for the airport.

We were flying to our appointment now with destiny, laid back in the first-class lounge, sipping champagne, as I considered how kind Rama'd been to throw in two 'round-the-world air tickets. He liked round-trip plans...they filled his coffers. Karena was stroking an embarrassing bulge in my pants as she giggled about last night. She liked practicing tantric sex, especially when she was stoned on junk and I was up on coke. Then her pleasure lasted forever.

I was lost in thought. Was it tantric or just lust without love? Did I use women now instead of share with them? A thousand endings to the Laotian crisis encroached, and still no plan seemed clear. I had an extremely sexy girl, a working familiarity with the obstacles, and most important an attitude that could do no wrong. With Mrs. Spielman gone, who could say what the APO card was worth, especially in the now abandoned town. Karena was my ace, and I couldn't afford to reevaluate my methods now or become unsure in any way.

We checked into the Erawan Hotel in Bangkok, and after a dip in the pool, made love for hours in air-conditioned luxury, as I listened to Armed Forces Radio Saigon. Jesus, right in the middle of our orgasm came the disturbing report that South Vietnamese troops, backed by American air support,

had invaded Laos!

I groaned, kneeling behind Karena, watching her buttocks quiver, and came into her from behind, forcing her forward and down on the shaking bed. I lay sprawled between her legs, shaft stuck like I'd speared a large fish, as my mind groped at other realities. What now? Why couldn't they have waited another week? What roles would we play under these new dictates...certainly not Lawrence of Arabia! I began packing for a return to the war. I was gonna enlist Tiny's support.

I watched a few drops of semen sparkle in her blond pubic hair while I chopped some coke and screened it into film cans for travel. The complex scenario ahead held me dazed. Challenge coursed in my veins. This was the point wasn't it, to win against all odds? I slipped ten-grand into the pouch inside my pants, stuffed a bag with bare necessities, and kissed her goodbye. She had a small stash of dope, some money, and a big smile when I left. I just hoped she wouldn't OD or get lost outside the room.

After putting the rest of my valuables in the manager's safe, I caught a cab to Utapao and spent the early hours of evening bartering for a forty-five, a shoulder holster, and some army fatigues. As luck would have it, I caught a Chinook full of plasma straight into Nha Trang, and arrived in a blood-red sunrise...smack dab on the same beach I'd arrived on in 1965. It was a thrilling flight, complete with ground barrage and a few hits. I got off, shook red dirt out of my hair, and circled the ugly green insect looking for bullet holes.

I left without thought or thanks for the ride, and snagged a Jeep to Tiny's base down by the pier. By now I was sure he was running the whole war...at least the profitable aspects of it. He was good about favors. Since I'd spotted a barge or two of Salems and beer to the wrong pier for him, the first thing I did was slap the forty-five on his desk and ask him to make it smaller.

His three-hundred pounds shook with laughter, and he roared, "Aha, my tugboat captain wants another Colt!" He rubbed his hands together at the prospect of our teaming up, listening carefully to my dilemma in the north, and drooling at the description of Mama-san's products. He'd simply send a chopper to bring the shit back, and we'd run it out in bodybags, along with a load of China white for some real profit.

This was exactly what I'd expected from his mercenary mind, and there was little sense explaining I was into it for the challenge, and concerned with karmic wrong doing. I started to tell him about sacramental drugs, but had lost my impact. Christ, it didn't matter...karma to Tiny was some unfamiliar card game and moral fiber may as well have been something you put milk on for breakfast!

His air-conditioned trailer began to buzz with orderlies

taking requests for strawberries to General Westmoreland, a jazz piano to Hue City for a party, and the usual hustle bustle that kept the war on its feet. As the madness reached a crescendo, I used one of his hot phones, patched in to Hawaii and got Tab, my artist in residence, sounding like he was in an echo chamber. "Howzit," I started, "What the fuck, over?"

"Where are you, man?" came his very unmilitary reply, "Saint George has been missing at sea for a week on Terry's Hobie Cat, and they think you offed him!"

"What, that's ridiculous, I'm in a Quartermaster's tent in Vietnam, here, listen, over!"

Tiny got on the line and identified himself officiously with the date, time, coordinates and telephone patch code for verification. Smiling like a cherub, he handed the phone back to me muttering, "Fuckin assassin, huh?"

"Tab," I yelled, "I'm not gonna discuss my defense over this line. Just tell 'em I'm not involved. I actually liked the guy! How are things anyway? Can you hold out for money and is there any mail, over?"

He was OK, and filled me in on the latest news, phone calls, and Souvat's letter from Australia! I couldn't believe it! He was at a transmitting station in Cape York. I got his phone number and signed off. What next? The odds were building against me...or were they tests of my belief? I spent the rest of the morning trying to reach Souvat, and then Tiny took me to lunch. As we bounced along the beach road, I thought I saw Lu Duc haul ass between a pile of wrecked jeeps. Tiny just laughed, "He's still working the pier, and his sisters have opened a bar and whorehouse combo...you wanna go there, kid? I'm sure they know you're in town by now."

What a place, I thought. It was timeless in all its infinite details. I demurred, having enough on my mind presently, and concentrated on just what it was I needed from Tiny. At the French restaurant on the beach, I tried in vain to think of all possible contingencies. I settled for some coffins on hold at Udorn in Northern Thailand, his people there aware of my possible call, and a file full of vague and complicated paperwork it took his quartermaster all afternoon to type.

The cross-referenced orders implicated USARTHAI cooperation with USAIDLAOS in the sensitive repatriation of the bodies and personal effects of two Peace Corps volunteers who'd been assassinated. On all copies, Tiny stamped a large "SENSITIVE" cover sheet, and smiling at his handiwork, guessed Westy himself would lend me a staff car if I needed it. I loved him...always optimistic and ready to screw the system for the sake of the underdog. Using his magic phone booth, I connected with Souvat after lunch, checked on Karena in Bangkok, and headed for the "land of under."

Tiny got me on an ANZAC transport, but the moment I

climbed in, I knew I should've flown civilian. Here were the boys who hadn't played with the war like me...broken pieces of humanity, body bags, and shattered minds to remind me of its horror. Young Aussie and Kiwi faces stared into the windowless tunnel of the droning aircraft, attached to bottles dripping life's fluids, their color changing from greys to dull dead right before me.

There I was, snorting coke in their blood-drenched latrine, up to my ears in international intrigue, and these guys were dying for a cause none of us understood. I just grit my teeth and concentrated on my mission. There was too much to consider in my own mess, and I watched them from that space inside me that knows no emotion...the one that now took women hostage, as well.

I fled the plane like I would a hearse, and headed north, chartering a bush pilot to carry me across the no man's land above Cairns. My mind seemed incapable of allowing beauty in anymore. Thousands of sheep roamed below us as I concentrated on strategy and all the little things I wanted Souvat to say for me. I needed letters of introduction and protection, intent and method...and instructions for the Pathet Lao, Thais, Laotians, and his family. No telling who I was going to run into this time.

I'm sure the pilot thought I was mad as I scribbled non-stop in my notebook, creating flashcards for every emergency I could envision. I could've cared less what or who he guessed he was ferrying into the void ahead...I didn't even know he was aboard.