

Mount Olivet

The Rising

P. D. St. Claire

*For all that's gone before
and all's to come,
for each of us, now
every one...*

PROLOGUE

Bless me, Father, for I have sinned...

John Riley had confessed this sin before. And every time he had confessed it, it had come back. Every time. This time, though, it might be different. It was now a year and more since the war had ended. And this time, *this* time, the priest was Fr. Joseph Hara, his father's best friend.

They had grown up together, Joseph Hara and Paddy Riley. A chaplain in the European theater, Joseph Hara had ministered and comforted those who had done the killing and the dying there, those who had fought the *Great Crusade*. And it was in this that he had come to know about war and what it did to a person.

Paddy Riley had served as well, in the *Seabees* of the U. S. Navy, the name taken from the first two letters of *Construction Battalion* - CBs. Mostly volunteers too old for combat duty, the *Seabees* had followed the fighting across the Pacific, building harbors and roads and airfields on islands taken in the advance on Tokyo.

A veteran of the First War, Paddy Riley would not be denied his place in this one. Commissioned a Captain in the U. S. Navy Reserve, he had shipped out in 1943, bands playing and flags flying, only to return the year following, dead of a sniper's bullet on Tarawa atoll in the far Pacific.

Not yet eighteen the Saturday morning the telegram arrived, John Riley had enlisted in the U. S. Marine Corps. This thing, this killing of his father, this needed to get fixed, settled. So, where Joseph Hara had gone east to comfort and console the wounded and the fallen in Europe, John Riley had gone west, to the Pacific, to track down and to kill the man who had killed his father.

It has been two months since my last confession...

They were in Joseph Hara's rectory office at Blessed Sacrament parish in Chevy Chase, DC, a village of sorts in the Northwest quadrant of the city. The window shade drawn against an afternoon sun, they had settled into two oaken chairs set at an angle, each to the other, in front of Fr. Hara's desk. Joseph Hara's eyes were closed, his head bowed slightly against his left hand, shielding his eyes from John Riley. A thin stole of purple satin draped over his shoulders and down his front.

John Riley cleared his throat as he sat forward, his head down now as well, his arms resting on the arms of the chair, his hands joined before him, working slightly against each other, the words coming again, as before.

I killed a man, Father...

Memories of Iwo Jima rose in John Riley's mind, the maelstrom of the landing, head and neck scrunched down, working his legs through the surf, tracer bullets flashing by, one glancing off his helmet, another ripping through his shirt at the shoulder, burning, grazing his skin, he losing hold of his gun, then out of the water, legs weary, boots wet and dragging, sprinting up the beach, traction slipping in the sand, his right hand holding his helmet on, his left arm pumping, then half stumbling, half diving down into a shell hole, others of his unit there, cowering, one crying, the gunnery sergeant, Doyle from Chicago, now calling them up and forward, throwing him a Thompson submachine gun taken from a fallen comrade...

"You can all stay in this rat hole and die *for sure*," he shouted from a half stance above the roar of battle, "or you can follow me up to that ridge and have some chance of getting off this beach *alive*! Now on your feet! All of ya! And Hollister? You listening, Hollister? You pick up your weapon, Hollister, and stop crying or by Christ I'll shoot you my..."

Something tore through Doyle's left shoulder, ripping his arm and part of his side and most of his neck off, knocking what was left of him into the shell hole in a shower of blood and bits of his bones. Screaming as they squirmed away, those in the hole clustered, staring at Doyle's body as it jerked to a stillness, dead. John Riley remembered reaching for the Thompson and getting up in a crouch. 'Come on, you guys, come on. We gotta get outta here...'

"There was a lot of killing in the war, John." Fr. Joseph Hara spoke softly, evenly, his eyes closed. "A lot of killing. There was no other way..."

John Riley had heard this before, almost the exact words. 'War is hell,' another priest had said, his head nodding in the dark of the confessional box, seemingly dulled to a near sleep by the confessions of boys who had killed other boys on a beach or in a wood or on the sea or in the air...

The silence of the room surrounded John Riley as he tried to make this confession different, to explain the levels he had learned of killing, the purposes and the ways of it all, the roar of battle that falls to a silence in the heart and the mind, all gone, all life reduced to the reptile's lunge and snap, a tearing at the flesh, though not with scaled paws and bared teeth but the firing of a Thompson gun at 700 rounds per minute, bodies jerking and falling askew, then the sounds when done, the low cries and whimpers of the near dead and dying. That was the type of killing John Riley had done, and got a medal for it, too...

And as he told of these killings he sensed that Joseph Hara understood them to be an opening, a way of getting to what John Riley had come to confess and with this hope he began.

"It was nearly done at Iwo. They said it'd be over in a couple of weeks, but they'd said that before, about Pelilu,

too...But Iwo was even worse, laced with caves, like some kind of bee hive. They'd pop up from anywhere and nowhere then disappear as quick, throwing grenades, bursts from their machine guns..." John Riley blinked his eyes, swallowed hard.

"It was the south end of the island, jagged cliffs and rocks and hot...Christ it was hot." He paused, licking his lips, swallowing hard, images in his mind of jungles rising to ridges and blinding white rocks against a crystal sky. His eyes fixed ahead. "And they were *crazy*, Father, *crazy...lunatics...*" He looked at Joseph Hara for an instant, then quickly away. "When you'd get one in the open, no gun, defenseless? He'd run to some cliff...Jump rather than be taken prisoner." He fixed on Joseph Hara again, held his eyes. "They called it *bushido*, the code of the warrior...Death before dishonor, before surrender..."

Joseph Hara nodded. He knew.

John Riley closed his eyes, his head fixed ahead. "Four of us were on patrol, working our way along the south face of Suribachi. I was on point...so hot, rocks too hot to touch..." John Riley's hands came off the arms of his chair. "...Lost my footing, slipped down on my left hip, nearly going over a ledge, a shot whizzing by, just above me..." Another swallow taken, his eyes closing. "Caught Castellano square in the chest. *Pfft...* Right through him. Gone. Dead. Like that..." John Riley tried to snap his fingers but only motioned it, a voice now roaring from just behind him... "Sniper!" Johnson shouted."

John Riley sat up a measure, startled by the shout of his own voice, then forward again, his breathing back. "We're all down now, me, Castellano, but he's dead, then Johnson and Miller, all pushing flat behind some rocks...Johnson getting his hand mirror out, scanning forward. 'Christ, there he is! I can see him. Maybe sixty, seventy yards out, a little up...' Another shot, ricocheting off the rocks where Johnson held the mirror. He jerked it

back, moved lower, then put the mirror out again. ‘Hey. What’s this? He’s out of his crouch. Looks like his gun’s jammed...’

“Don’t you believe it, Johnson!” Miller was laying flat against the rocks, his head down. “Could be a trap...a trap, sure thing...a trap...”

“Then Johnson said, ‘No, don’t think so. He’s up, heading out. No gun...’ I looked up.” John Riley sat up straight in the chair, his eyes ahead, searching, focusing. “And there he was, working his way around some rocks, away from us, down low, crouching. Skinny, boney shoulders, khaki shorts, no shirt, no weapon... A sniper out of his hole and running for cover...”

John Riley shook his head, his eyes wide open. “Something in me snapped. ‘Might be the son of a bitch...’ I remember thinking, coming out of my crouch, Johnson calling me back down, ‘Get down, Riley. Where you think you’re going? You know better than...’ But I was up after him, the Jap...I could see him clear, crabbing his way along the lava rock, maybe seventy yards ahead. He slipped and fell down over a ledge, maybe five, six feet, got up limping, scratching over the rocks, blood at his left knee.

“The others were shouting me back, but them coming now, too. The Jap kept looking up, ahead. *He* knew where he was going.” John Riley raised up a measure. “Sure, he knew...there was a cliff ahead, that’s where he was headed. Didn’t want him to jump, though, I didn’t want him to kill Castellano and...and...maybe Dad and then get to choose how he died. He was *mine*, this Jap son of a bitch, he was mine, *he* was why I came, to kill this sniper son of a bitching Jap...”

John Riley shook off a bead of sweat that had formed on his right eyebrow.

“I could see him jumping from rock to ledge to rock, falling again and up, me closing on him as he limped,

kept turning to see who's after him, then looking ahead to the cliff. I found a flat he'd missed, wide open, closed on him in a snap, just as he got to the cliff. He looked down, froze for a minute, then turned around, stared at me, up and down, then smiled...Son of a bitch's smiling at me! I'd left my Thompson where Castellano'd been hit. Jap went into a crouch, his arms low and out, looking to come at me, thinking I'm unarmed. He was wrong. Wore my .45 at my lower back, holstered out of the way. He couldn't see it, grinning at me...His mouth full of teeth, yellow and chipped...I pulled the .45 out now. He froze, stared at it, coming out of his crouch, backing to the cliff..."

John Riley was back in the rectory, sitting up, something coming to him as he turned to Fr. Hara. "All of a sudden, Father, I wanted him *alive*... I remember now. Yes. I wanted him to tell me if he was the Jap who killed Dad. It's crazy, I know, but maybe...And if he was, then he was...then he knew what Dad was doing when he was hit, if it was *this* Jap, then he was...was part of Dad in a way...don't you see..? Had the last living memory of him..?" John Riley turned away.

"I leveled my Colt at him, motioned him to put his hands behind his head, to sit down. He started into a crouch just as Johnson caught up, then Miller, too. This changed it all somehow. The Jap stood up, seven feet away, at attention. Saluted us, son of a bitch Jap, saluted us... then jumped. We ran to the edge as he fell...then shots, lots of shots and his body jerking as the bullets struck him before he careened off the base of the cliff, a blur of blood, his body breaking apart down into the sea..."

John Riley had never remembered it all so clearly before, every step, every shot, the body jerking as the bullets hit it, the blur of blood as it hit the rocks...

Joseph Hara shifted in his seat.

John Riley looked up at him, then away. “I went out there to kill the Jap who killed Dad. Ended up killing a lot of Japs. A lot of us killed a lot of Japs...” He turned quickly to Joseph Hara. “They’d come at us, you know, at a fortified position, and you’d just mow ‘em down, like tin ducks in a shooting gallery, like the movies, just like the movies...” He looked away. “That’s what they did, just like you see in the movies, came right at us. Nothing to us, though, like insects, just gnats and ants...nothing...robots doing what they were told to do and getting mowed down just like the people who sent them knew they would...But this Jap, this sniper...This was...”

John Riley turned to Fr. Hara. “If he *was* the Jap that killed Dad, if this was *that* Jap, then he wasn’t just some gnat or bug. He was *that* Jap, don’t you see? A distinct, separate person? A man who had done something I was going to kill him for doing...He had a name to me – *Dead Jap*, that was his name, that’s what he was going to be – a dead Jap. And of all the Japs I killed out there, I don’t even know how many, he’s the only one, the *only* one, that won’t go away...”

John Riley sat forward in his chair, his elbows on his knees, his hands joined, gripping to the white, his eyes closed and his body rocking forward, maybe for a full minute.

Joseph Hara cleared his throat.

John Riley didn’t respond. He could hear Joseph Hara shift in his seat but stayed fixed forward, not responding, the pressure in his hands growing to painful as he tried to squeeze the sin away.

“John...” Fr. Hara shifted closer, not touching him. “John, can you hear me?”

John Riley nodded, sat up a measure, took a breath, sat up all the way, leaning back, a deeper breath taken, his

arms resting on the oaken arms of the chair. He opened his eyes, looking ahead at first, then at Joseph Hara.

“Can I get you some water, John.”

He shook his head ‘no.’

“I’m sure you’ve already heard all the things we’ve been told to tell you about killing people in a just war, John. I’m not going to do any of that... What I am going to do is to give you the absolution of the sacrament of Penance.” Fr. Hara made a sign of the cross as he spoke. “In the name of Jesus Christ, our risen Lord, I absolve you, John Riley.” This is from God the Father, John. You are absolved of this sin.” Joseph Hara sat back, silent.

John Riley could feel his eyes on him and turned to him.

Joseph Hara leaned forward again, fixing on John Riley as he reached to take his forearm, gripping it firmly. “Now, John, I want to help you to absolve *yourself*. I want to help you come to a footing with this thing so you can live the good and Christian life you want to live and will live without this thing of war that holds you.” He fixed on John Riley until John Riley looked to him. “Do you understand, John?”

John Riley nodded.

“I’m trying to picture you, John, on that cliff...you and Johnson and Miller and the sniper, at what, seven feet away?”

John Riley nodded.

“Then he jumped, you said, and then you and Johnson and Miller went to the edge and shot at him as he fell?”

John Riley nodded, shivered as he sat forward again, his hands joined, his eyes closed.

“But you just said that you wanted him to surrender, that you pointed your gun at him and motioned him to sit down, to put his hands behind his head. Isn’t that right?”

John Riley nodded, his hands gripping more tightly.

“Look at me John. Open your eyes and look at me...”

John Riley sat motionless, eyes closed, his head fixed ahead, stiff, unmoving.

“John, listen to me, now...look at me, John...”

John Riley turned to Fr. Hara, opened his eyes.

“Now, John, I’m going to ask you a question and I want you to think carefully before you answer. Very carefully. Are you ready?”

John Riley nodded, his eyes fixed on the priest.

“What did you do with your gun, John, when it was all over?”

John Riley fixed more closely on Joseph Hara, not understating.

“What did you do with the gun?”

John Riley turned away, confused.

“It’s a simple question, John - *What did you do with the gun, your gun?*”

John Riley turned back, his eyes unfocused, his head shaking slightly. “I don’t...I don’t know...”

“It must have been somewhere, John. Colt .45s just don’t disappear, evaporate...”

John Riley looked away. “What difference does it make, for Chrissake, what happened to my gun, my weapon...it’s what I did with it, that’s why I’m here...” John Riley shook his head turning away, frustrated, angry...this was no help...

“Think back, John. You’ve told me everything, *every* detail. You left your Thompson with Johnson and Miller. You ran, you fell, you came to a flat the sniper hadn’t seen and you closed on him. You have him trapped. He’s at the edge, standing ‘seven feet’ away from you. Not ten feet, not four, but seven feet *exactly*...His teeth were chipped...You know all these things, John, all these details, why don’t you know what happened to your gun?”

Joseph Hara moved closer, speaking firmly, his face close enough for John Riley to feel his breath as he spoke. “You’re a Marine, goddamit! You’re a highly trained, battle-tested, battle-hardened son of a bitching U. S Marine! You *kill* Japs for a living! Get medals for it, for Chrissakes! Where’s your weapon, *Marine*? How you gonna kill any more Japs, *Marine*, if you don’t have your goddam weapon, your *GUN*?”

John Riley sat bolt upright, staring at Fr. Hara, stammering. “But, but I, but I *don’t* know...”

“DON’T KNOW? You don’t *KNOW*? What do you mean ‘*Don’t know*’? THINK, Marine! Where’s your Colt? Where’s your weapon?”

John Riley closed his eyes, his mind racing...the run, the cliff, the Jap’s eyes, his face when he thought John Riley was unarmed, his fear when John Riley drew his .45, starting to sit until Johnson came up, then standing at attention, then jumping, the three of them stepping to the cliff, the Jap’s arms flailing, trying to hold balance as he fell...

“*You’re on the cliff, Marine!* Four hundred feet in the air, rocks and breakers below, the sniper, tumbling down and away from you...*for Chrissakes, Marine! Where’s your GUN?!*”

John Riley lurched to his feet, staggering back, kicking his chair out from behind him, knocking it against a cabinet, leaning forward, crouching, looking down, over the cliff, breathing heavy, the Jap falling, arms flailing, bullets hitting him, then something passing him on the way down, John Riley’s right arm and hand raising and coming down hard, “You Jap son of a *bitch!* You...” John Riley froze, his eyes fixed down, then rising to Fr. Hara.

“I-*I threw* it at him...*That’s* what I did with my gun, I *threw* it at him...” John Riley rose full up, his eyes away, his mind racing. “I remember now, I do. I watched the

gun pass him on the way down. I can still see it, hitting the rocks before he did...I *threw* my gun at him..."

"Then...?"

"...Then...then I *couldn't* have shot him..." John Riley became faint, his legs buckling as he fell forward, Fr. Hara rising to take his weight, holding him up as he leaned into him, sobbing. "I didn't shoot him, Father, I didn't kill him...That one I *didn't* kill..."

CHAPTER ONE

The Deal

September 1993

It's your brother, Michael. Come home.

Six words was all. His life changed? Another's maybe ending? Even gone by now?

John Riley folded the note again, putting it back in the breast pocket of his shirt as he looked out the window of the plane. They had been pulled out of a meeting on *The Deal*. That's what they had all come to calling it. It was close to the end, folks getting nervous with sets of six inch-thick briefing books and everyone working really hard to keep straight all the parts and pieces of the thing, the numbers of it all by type asset and property.

For John Riley, there was an added factor: He didn't do real estate, not really.

An engineer by training and instinct, what John Riley *really* did was build things – office buildings mostly, whole parks of them and shopping malls and whatever else might need getting built. He had been President and CEO of Hennessey Construction since 1968, a company half-owned by him and his siblings - a married sister, Kay Rhinemann, and his brother, Michael. The remaining half of the company was owned by their mother, Mary Riley, all ninety-one years of her and looking to go for a hundred.

Hennessey Construction had been left to Paddy Riley, John's father, by Jack Hennessey in 1936. With it had come properties in Washington, DC that Jack Hennessey had been accumulating in the last quarter of his life, collecting really. 'Like baseball cards' one friend of his had put it. 'More by way of a hobby than anything

else.’ And he’d kept at it right to the end of his 88 years. Since then structured into an independent subsidiary, *The Hennessey Land Company*, the properties had been managed in a highly conservative manner, their value surging on the passing of each bust and boom in the real estate market.

By 1991, Hennessey Land Company’s office properties, unimproved land, hotels and rental units, all located between Baltimore and Richmond, had a combined tax-assessed valuation of some \$419 million. The market value was more than double that, even as they were just coming out of the 1989-91 bust. With Mary Riley at 91, John Riley, as chair of Hennessey Land Company, had decided that the lawyers could no longer be ignored.

As much as it seemed Mary Riley was going to live forever, clearly her expectation, she was going to go sometime. No one, not even Mary Riley, gets out alive. Settling the tax liability of her estate as Hennessey Land was now structured could force the sale of its assets into a market that looked to be moving sideways for another year or two, maybe more. Now, being an engineer, structuring things is what John Riley did best and for the last twelve months of his life, restructuring the assets of Hennessey Land Company was most of what he had been doing.

He had been helped in the decision to do this by Hennessey Land’s President and General Manager, Brigit Winslow. At thirty-eight and his oldest child, it was Brigit Winslow who had sketched out their options. These ranged from selling off pieces one-by-one to arranging swaps of properties into real estate investment trusts whose shares could be sold on the market. Then there was breaking their holdings up into housing, office and retail subsidiaries and selling one of these off to cover the bulk of the anticipated tax liability of Hennessey Land’s combined assets. What to do?

Get lucky, as it turned out, that's what to do. Get *lucky*. Near out of nowhere they had been approached by three suitors, Mid-America Holdings, Security National Life Insurance and Great Basin Mutual Life, all three out of Chicago. Eyeing the Washington, DC real estate market, they each wanted the whole kit and caboodle, Hennessey Land Company, the lock, stock and barrel of it. 'Know your luck' was how Jack Hennessey always put it. 'Know your luck, and don't worry yourself about what the other fellow's getting out of it. Do your homework, take a fair price, and move on...'

But that was all on hold for now. Michael Francis Riley was in Georgetown University Hospital for open heart surgery, already under the knife. John Riley had spoken to Michael's wife Margaret from the car on the way to the airport in Chicago. He had gone in for a routine check-up that morning only to learn that three arteries in his heart were at imminent risk of closure, the radiologist wondering how he had even driven himself in that morning.

John Riley sat up a measure, stretching at the shoulders and arms, looking about the cabin of the plane. Directly behind him sat Brigit Winslow and her assistant, Chelsea Reis. Across the aisle from them was Hardin Brooks, head Real Estate partner at Fox, Worthy, along with a junior partner from the firm. Beside him was Bryan Canny, a spread sheet displayed before him, his eyes tracking its columns and rows.

It was Bryan Canny who had been taken out of the room for Mary Riley's call and had given the note to John Riley. Born in Ireland, he had joined Hennessey Construction as an office assistant in September 1983. Rising to Special Assistant to the CEO, his particular gift was finding ways to be useful, most recently completing a graduate degree in Information Science just as Hennessey

Construction was undertaking an enterprise-wide upgrade of its IT system.

Catching John Riley's eye, Bryan Canny smiled a nod, rising and stepping into the aisle. "A coffee, now, John? A libation, perhaps?" Bryan Canny's six-foot-plus frame now bent at the shoulders to accommodate the interior curve of the cabin.

"No, no thanks, Bryan. Nothing for now..."

Bryan Canny's eyes held John Riley for a moment. "How you doing, now, John? Good, are you?"

"Good enough..."

Bryan Canny stretched at the shoulders and arms, turning to his left and starting aft as a red light flashed in the forward bulkhead.

Looking up, John Riley reached for the seat belt and buckled himself in, leaning back as he looked again out the plane window. He was on the port side of the plane, forward of the wing. His seat. They would be flying down the Potomac, to the southeast. This would put Georgetown Hospital to the left and almost directly below.

An afternoon sun brought out the full range of greens in the trees and foliage lining both sides of the C&O Canal that ran along the Potomac just below the hospital. John Riley had been to the hospital any number of times over the years, visiting the ill and dying as the generation preceding his own passed to their glory in the comfort and caring of the Jesuits. "They get you up to heaven and your reward, or to home and family for your comfort," he remembered his mother Mary once saying. "Guaranteed!"

Sitting up, looking down, he studied the building's wings and courtyards, trying to discern where the operating room might be from the main entrance, and where Michael Riley's life was being saved...or lost...

John Riley turned away from the window, his eyes closed, his mind on his brother. Michael Riley not being alive was unthinkable, ridiculous. *Unacceptable*. It made

no sense at all. He was the healthiest human being John Riley had ever known. Energy just ran through the man, like electricity, like it might ignite his suits on a dry day. He just never stopped, Michael Riley didn't, always pushing something down the line. Hell, he'd played rugby well into his fifties and John Riley suspected he still snuck out for an old boys game. And now he had a son, not yet a full year out...no sense at all, his dying. *Completely* unacceptable....

The Kennedy Center now caught John Riley's eye, huge and white, ringed with bronze coated columns, a behemoth of marble veneer at the Potomac's edge that for all its capacities and efficiencies had the critics howling at its grand opening. Next as the plane banked slightly to the right, staying along the river line, was the Lincoln Memorial, seeming to fill the window of the plane. Looking beyond it, the full reach and expanse of the National Mall now displayed before him, stretching east in razor sharp lines of avenues and broad pebbled ways to the Capitol building, itself now bright and ever majestic as it caught the full light of the afternoon sun.

Anticipating the Tidal Basin and the Jefferson Memorial next, John Riley sat up, finding Maine Avenue and the marinas and restaurants lining Washington Channel. This is where they had grown up, the Rileys, in the southwest quadrant of the Capital City. Escaping thoughts and fears of his brother dying, John Riley took in the whole of the place, M Street now stretching out across South Capitol Street to the Anacostia River, the Southwest waterfront passing immediately below, the shadow of the plane racing across Water Street and its restaurants and bars and an easing coming to him now as he thought of his last time alone with Paddy Riley, just the two of them.

It was high summer of 1943, a late Saturday afternoon with Paddy off to war the following Tuesday.

They lived near the corner of Fourth and N Streets, SW, two blocks from the Washington Channel and nearby the house where Jack Hennessey had lived for the last 40 years of his life. Jack had gifted the house to St. Dominick's Parish for an orphanage on his death and they had walked by it that afternoon in 1943 making their way along Water Street.

Not knowing what to say, John Riley had said nothing as they strode through the early revelry of a Saturday evening on Washington's waterfront. Fishing boats and crabbers' scows lined the docks and piers with watermen hawking their oysters and rockfish, some pounding their tables with cutting boards to get passersby's attention all amid the sound of honkytonk pianos and banjos wafting in the air as the music from one bar mixed and faded with that rising from the next.

At the west end of the waterfront was *The Salty Gael*, Paddy Riley's particular favorite. Mounting its front steps with the same purpose he brought to all things that he did, Paddy Riley led his son by the dining room and through an open double door to the outside bar on the far side of the building. Stopping briefly to breathe in the shaded air under the canvas awning, a dark green, he took in the boats gliding by in the evening quiet before stepping to the bar. Here he turned to John Riley, nodding, his smile full and broad as he pulled out two bar stools, sitting himself down on the one and motioning his son to the other.

Taking his seat, John Riley looked farther to the west. The dome of the Jefferson Memorial rose above the willow trees marking the embankment at the closed end of the Channel and shading the benches and strolling paths that lined it. His arms resting forward on the edge of the bar, John Riley sat up abruptly when Paddy Riley signaled the barman and ordered two Harps, 'As cold as you have'em, please, Phillip, and chilled glasses as well.'

Paddy Riley winked at his son and gave him a quick thumbs-up.

It being known that Paddy was soon off to war, the barman gave an extra hustle, a Harp and chilled glass in each hand held high as he worked down the bar. "Here ya go, now, Paddy, and Dennis said the first one's on the house..."

"Himself, then...?"

"Aye, *himself!* And who else?" A voice, thick and rough, roared out from behind them, John Riley ducking his head from the force of it. "And just *yours*, now, Paddy. Not the lad's, there!"

Paddy Riley turned, his head now up and back, his face breaking into a full smile as he fixed on a large man coming to his side.

"It's just a war, now, you know, Paddy. You'll be back soon enough." The man winked at John Riley as he nodded to the beers. "Sure, it's not like it's Christmas or any such..."

Paddy came off his stool, his hand out quickly, taking that offered by the man who stood almost to Paddy's six feet two. With a barman's apron tied high and tight across a full middle, the man's arms and hands were large even against Paddy's. Taking his hand, Paddy pulled him close before pushing him back, winking at John Riley.

"This here, son, is Dennis Aloysius Burke, owner and proprietor of this rat hole."

Dennis Burke shook John Riley's hand, squeezing hard with a wink of the eye, then back at Paddy Riley. "And where else, now, would I be finding the good company of the likes of yourself, then?" They laughed as Dennis Burke faked a jab at Paddy Riley before moving down the bar, smiling and nodding as he went.

Paddy Riley fixed on Dennis Burke, following him away, almost as if to avoid John Riley's eyes. Now looking quickly at John, Paddy Riley reached for his

Harp, pouring his beer deliberately, maybe to show his son how it's done. His glass full, he raised it to John, the banter in his eyes now gone, his head down a measure. Finishing the pouring of his own beer, John Riley raised his glass, touching it with Paddy's, they each taking a pull.

"Well, son, here we are." Paddy Riley drew a deep breath as he fixed on John Riley, his eyes holding him. Breaking off, he gestured around the bar. "This is a good place, the Gael...as good as any," his eyes now back down on his son. "When you're out for a night, you want to be where the people'll take care of you, you know, catch you when you fall, keep the riff raff from stepping on you and out of your pockets, too. That's important." He motioned down the bar. "Dennis, there, he's over from Cork. Must be twenty years now. Put in his time and bought this place off a friend of Jack Hennessey's. A good man, Dennis."

John Riley nodded, sipping his beer, looking away as he savored its taste and effect.

Standing off from the bar, Paddy Riley gripped its edge, eyes fixed ahead for a moment before turning to John. "Look, son, you got to know that your mother's still pretty sore about me going off, volunteering and all. Hasn't left me alone about it all week." He shook his head, looked away then back. "But done's done." A breath taken and released, his eyes away again. "Didn't have a choice, really. Not to my thinking, anyway. Something I just had to do." He turned to John Riley, motioning about him. "Had to hold my place here."

John Riley nodded, looking about, uncertain what he meant.

"And not just here, son, at the Gael. No. I mean here, inside, too." Paddy Riley brought his fist to his chest. "And yes, here, too," his arms out now and wide. "The country, America. Yeah, I learned that in the last one, in France." A pause, looking away. "Didn't really know

what America was all about till I got away from it.” Looking back at John Riley, a smile came to his face.

“We were all ‘Yanks’ to them, you see, *Over There* and all that. And let me tell you, *they* knew who we were, that’s for sure. They’d pick us out before we even opened our mouths, even wearing civvies, no uniforms or nothing. Just us, just by the way we walked around...that’s what they’d tell you, anyway. Yes, sir, going there, seeing other folks, Frenchies and all, meeting Yanks from all over – New York, Chicago, Dallas, wherever, all the same in some way...just this thing we all had...Never got a word for it, but the same. We all had it. Yeah, that’s when I learned what being an American is all about, what we *are*.” He paused, looking away for a moment, then back. “And for me, inside, any American able to serve, able to get an oar in, well, he’s just *got* to do it.”

John Riley, his eyes fixed on Paddy Riley, nodded, swallowing hard now.

“You’re seventeen, son. You’ve another year at Gonzaga.” Paddy Riley nodded for emphasis, to reassure. “You got to promise me you’re not going to do anything foolish before you finish your schooling, son. My going in is all this family has to put up until you finish high school, that’s for sure.” His eyes fixed harder now. “You understand, that now, son, don’t you? Make sense to you?”

John Riley nodded.

“Then I have your hand on it?” Paddy Riley’s hand went out.

John Riley’s head went back, looking at his father’s hand for moment, taking it now as he stood off the stool, feeling the full size and strength of it.

“Say it, now, son...”

“Say, it?”

“Yeah, you got to say it. I got to hear it...Say it...”

John Riley searched in his father's eyes, it all coming to him now what was going on, what was happening. All of a sudden it was next Tuesday and they weren't just out for a beer. No. Paddy Riley was going to *war*. War wasn't something to come, war was here, *now*, at the outside bar of the *Salty Gael*. This was their time, *their good-bye*. John Riley felt his head nod as he formed the words, "Yes, I promise..."

"Promise what?"

"I promise that I'll stay on at Gonzaga, to graduate..."

Paddy Riley nodded, an unsure smile coming to his face. "Okay, then, that's done...done. And that's a promise I'll hold you to..."

Feeling his father's grip loosen, John Riley tightened his own, holding his father's hand fast, pulling them closer, looking up. "But you got to promise me something, too, Dad..."

Paddy Riley's head went up a measure, eyes back then looking down and deeply into John Riley's eyes. "Promise you..? Sure, son, sure...What's that..?"

John Riley felt his father's grip waver, go soft a measure, unsure. Tightening his own grip even harder, he stepped closer. On his toes now, he spoke into Paddy Riley's right ear. "You got to promise me you're going to come home from that thing..."

Paddy Riley caught his breath, his eyes blank for a moment, gone inside himself, then looking away, his eyes now closing. "Yes, son...Yes, I do that. I promise. I promise I'll come back...get back." He turned to John Riley, his eyes clear, his head nodding to confirm. "I *will*..." Paddy gripped John Riley's hand back harder now, almost to hurting, almost it seemed to pull him close, to hug him, but he didn't.

Standing back instead, Paddy Riley's face went bright, his eyes as alive as John Riley had ever seen them,

the blue of them sharp and brilliant, on him now. “Hell fire, boy, Japs ain’t got a bullet hard enough to get through *this* thick Irish head.” He rapped the side of his head with his right fist, laughing. “You’d think she’d know that by now, wouldn’t you? Your mother? Wouldn’t you? By now? Hell, what’s she so worried about?”

They both laughed now, picking up their glasses, each taking a good pull of Harp, toasting each other, their thick pub glasses clanging and banging together with beer spilling on their hands and down their forearms in the thick August heat and then a full pull again each to empty. Paddy slammed his glass on the bar with a loud *thud!*. “Phillip! Yes, you, there, Phillip Gallagher! A round all about, if you please! For all! And make it snappy!”

“Aye, Paddy, right you are! A round all about, it is...!”

The wheels of the *GulfStream IV* came down hard on the runway, the plane bouncing several times more before settling on the tarmac.

John Riley was home now, and now to Michael...