

PALISADES PARK

THE LOST CHAPTER

I've mentioned elsewhere that Eddie Stopka's experiences on the island of Espíritu Santo in the South Pacific were inspired by those of my uncle, Seaman First Class (Ret.) Edgar Wittmer, during World War II. What I haven't mentioned is that this part of the story was originally conceived as a stand-alone chapter—but at the request of my editor, who felt the book was running too long, I cut it down to those scenes I felt were essential to plot and character development. But this meant losing one of the more amusing sequences in the book (taken verbatim from my uncle's service adventures). Well, in response to hordes of (okay, a few) requests to see this on Facebook, and in honor of my Uncle Eddie's 92nd birthday, I now present the chapter as originally written, uncut and complete with...cows?



Espíritu Santo, New Hebrides, 1943

IT WAS A BIG ISLAND compared to the many tiny atolls, barely more substantial than a mirage, scattered like faerie dust across the South Pacific: fifteen hundred square miles of rugged volcanic rock and coral terraces, fringed by tall coconut palms and white horseshoe beaches. In addition to the dwindling sandalwood forests that once comprised much of its trade, Espíritu Santo was blessedly fertile, its plantations harvesting cacao, copra, sugarcane, coffee, rice, cotton, and vanilla beans. Half the island was overseen by the French and half by the British, with much of the interior an inaccessible, unknowable tangle of jungle and swamps that had claimed the life of more than one naive adventurer. But after 1942 the nation that truly dominated the landscape, physically and economically, was the United States. Located just five hundred and forty miles from Guadalcanal—and soon to become the Allies' first beachhead against the Japanese Empire—Santo was ideally situated to be the U.S. Navy's forward base in the Pacific. Virtually overnight, the construction battalion of the Navy's engineering corps, the Seabees, hacked out roads through the bush and carved landing strips for bomber squadrons out of mangrove swamps. Quonset huts sprouted along the southern shore like fields of wild mushrooms. To the east of Luganville, the largest town on the island, rose up the largest naval operating base in the South Pacific, a sprawl of airstrips, ammunition depots, fuel storage tanks, supply depots, seaplane bases,

ship and aviation repair facilities, as well as an ever-increasing American troop presence.

By the time Eddie arrived in September of 1943 aboard the USS *George Clymer*, Santo rivaled some American cities in size, population, and services: home to a hundred thousand Naval personnel, it boasted its own radio station, waterworks, optical laboratory, a telephone system with seven exchanges, five airstrips, four hospitals, twenty-six miles of roads, forty-three movie theatres, even a Masonic temple. Mount Santo, five thousand feet tall, looked down on it all like a watchful Polynesian deity, as in the blue distance a host of idyllic-looking islands, wrapped in clouds, captured the imagination of more than one enlisted man gazing out to sea.

The first thing Eddie did after dropping off his gear was to post the letters he had written to Adele and the kids while aboard the *Clymer*, along with the *ki'i* necklace he had bought for Adele at the curio shop on Hotel Street and some *puka* shells he'd picked up for Toni and Jack. Military censorship rules prohibited him from revealing where he was at the moment, but now that it was safely after the fact he was free to tell them all about his stopover in Honolulu and the beauty of Hawai'i. (He discreetly omitted his bar crawling with Sal and Ernie and subsequent hangover, though he did mention he had a nice "meal" at a place called Trader Vic's.)

For all its exotic beauty, Hawai'i was still a part of America. Here in Espiritu Santo, Eddie felt for the first time like he was in another country—yet one far removed from the war-torn nations he had seen in newsreels. The climate was hot and humid, but the air he breathed in was sweetly scented by frangipani. His barracks was one of dozens of Quonset huts clustered along the shoreline amid coconut palms bent by gentle trade winds. By day warplanes roared down the airstrips known as Bomber One, Two, and Three (narrowly missing, and sometimes not quite missing, errant cows from nearby farms that strayed onto the tarmac) but at night the sound of men playing jazz drifted lazily upwind before the bugler called taps, and then the hush of the surf lulled Eddie to sleep.

But his first night on Santo also saw Eddie awakened, around midnight, by a rude and unfamiliar clanging—definitely not the melodic ringing of a ship's bell—and the cry of the officer on watch, calling, "Condition Red! Air Raid, everybody out!"

Eddie slipped on his britches and jumped to his feet, but the men around him just groaned their dismay and slowly, almost lackadaisically, rose from their cots. The guy on the cot next to Eddie's didn't even bother to get up, so Eddie poked him. "Hey! Fella. Air raid, get up!"

"Aw, hell," the man said, opening his eyes reluctantly, "it's just Piss Call Charlie, that's all."

"Who?"

"I was havin' such a nice *blonde* dream, too," he said in a soft Southern accent. "Goddamn Japs."

Eddie and his bunkmates straggled out of the Quonset hut, where the watch officer was sounding the alarm by banging a length of pipe against what Eddie sincerely hoped was an empty acetylene tank, producing the jarring clangor that echoed throughout the area. From above came the drone of a plane circling overhead, its engine audibly different than the engines of American fighters that Eddie had heard and studied.

In pitch blackness they all stumbled to the ditches in which they were told to take shelter. “Get those asses into the trenches,” the watch officer said. To a seaman shaking a cigarette out of a pack he barked, “No smoking, you idiot! Why don’tcha just send up a flare while you’re at it?”

“What is it up there,” Eddie asked the Southerner, “a Japanese Zero?”

Stifling a yawn, the man nodded. “Ol’ Charlie swings by ‘bout once a week, drops a couple bombs in the bush—‘less there’s a full moon he can’t see for shit, it’s darker out here than the inside of a turd.”

The men lay down, as ordered, in the ditches, as Eddie wondered aloud, “Shouldn’t somebody be shooting back at him?”

“What for? Not worth wastin’ the ammo. Charlie may kill a cow from time to time, but that’s all. By now he’s probably got a whole herd of ‘em stenciled onto his fuselage.”

Sure enough, after about half an hour of listening to the Japanese plane buzzing overhead—occasionally disgorging a bomb that scored a direct hit on a palm tree—the watch officer announced an all clear. Half the men went grumbling back to the barracks, while the other half headed for the latrines: “And this here’s why we call him *Piss Call Charlie*,” the Southerner said. “Long as we’re up already...”

Eddie saw the wisdom in this, and he too headed for the latrines.

THE NEXT MORNING he and his newfound pal, Bobby—Seaman First Class Bobby Crays from Baton Rouge, Louisiana, who in the light of day may well have been the handsomest bastard Eddie had ever seen—braved the mess hall for their breakfast of dehydrated eggs, dehydrated potatoes, dehydrated grapefruit juice, and dehydrated milk for dehydrated coffee.

Eddie blanched at his first bite of rehydrated omelet. “Shit. Was this ever a real egg?”

“Sure,” Bobby said. “Laid by a genuine dehydrated chicken.”

“Is the food here always this bad?”

“Hell no, sometimes it’s worse. See, swabbies like you, y’all have gotten spoiled on shipboard food. The Navy knows better’n to serve crap like this aboard ship. Whole damn crew would mutiny before lunch.”

Eddie tried a bit of the whipped potatoes, a bland mockery of the real thing. “Even a starving Irishman wouldn’t eat this,” Eddie said, “and I know my potatoes. I thought an army marched on its stomach.”

“You ain’t *in* the Army,” Bobby pointed out, “you’re in the Navy, boy! And if you think this is bad, wait’ll you see what’s for supper.”

Eddie took a swallow of coffee, which was, at least, hot.

“So what’d you do in civilian life, Stopka?”

“I own a concession at an amusement park. How about you?”

“I’m a professional ne’er-do-well. I start one business after another, and they ne’er do well.”

Eddie laughed. “Maybe you should give the amusement biz a try. You sound like an entertainer to me.”

“Me? No, I’m just an ol’ coon-ass from the bayou. Though I do have my moments.”

After breakfast, such as it was, Eddie reported to the base’s metal shop, part of the base’s huge aviation repair facility that included a dry dock, a Plexiglas shop, paint shop, wood shop, parachute riggers, a pontoon assembly plant for seaplanes, and overhaul facilities for torpedoes and aircraft engines. Carriers like the USS *Saratoga*, which lacked the resources to repair planes damaged in sorties with the Japanese, off-loaded the aircraft here to be given thirty- or sixty-hour checks by aviation machinist mates.

His first day, Eddie was put to work cleaning out one of the torpedo bombers that had just come back—shot up pretty good by Japanese pilots with much better aim than Piss Call Charlie—aboard the *Saratoga*. It was a Grumman TBF Avenger, and fore and aft had taken a lot of flak. Eddie and a machinist’s mate named Wilkowski were told to “hose out” the cockpit cabin. Eddie wasn’t fazed by the blood on the Plexiglass canopy, which was laced with bullet holes from the Zero’s 7.7-millimeter machine guns; but he was puzzled by the gray lumpy substance, looking vaguely like dry cement, on the inside of the canopy. “Jesus,” he said, “what the hell *is* this stuff?”

“What the hell do you think it is?” Wilkowski said. “Chopped liver?”

A light dawned, and Eddie realized that what he was hosing off the canopy was what remained of the tail gunner’s brain matter.

He felt a wave of nausea, could taste the bile rising in his throat.

“Oh, Christ,” he said softly. All at once he was back in the foundry in Newark, the sight of his father’s seared, mangled flesh causing him to vomit—as he feared he was going to do now.

“Hey. Stopka. You gonna be okay?”

Acts of bravery in the military are often the result of a simple desire not to disgrace oneself in front of one’s peers. Eddie fought back his gag reflex and nodded. “Yeah,” he said. “Shit. Poor bastard.”

“Get used to it. God hates tail gunners.”

Eddie held it together for the next hour, purging the compartment of all human traces, making note of the equipment that had been shot up and the degree of repair necessary, then casually took a bathroom break.

Inside the latrine he threw up, thinking of his father, feeling tears welling up in his eyes for him as well as for the dead gunner. He took a few deep breaths—not the smartest thing to do in a latrine, he realized—then wiped his mouth off even as

he wiped all trace of fear and revulsion from his face, and walked casually back into the repair hangar, wondering if he could keep this up for the rest of the day—much less the rest of the war.

HE WOULD COME, in time, to feel less nauseated than sad—sadness that a man's life and flesh could be so easily swept from the earth. Thankfully, there was more to Eddie's responsibilities than just this grim task. In the metal shop he helped fabricate new parts for the planes, using the big "heat treat" ovens in whose forges steel was tempered or aluminum hardened. He gained new respect for the makers of bombers like the Avenger or the newer Wildcat: though coming in from battle with their fuselages stitched with holes from twenty-millimeter cannon, most of the aircraft were still pretty close to operational, due not merely to the lighter guns the Japanese used but also the stronger metals used in American fighters. Eddie was astonished to see one Grumman Wildcat with its rudder and tail torn to shreds...and yet somehow the pilot had still managed to fly it back to its carrier. "You know," he said to Wilkowski, "if all our planes are this good, we might just win this war, after all."

But it was only in these moments—and, of course, Piss Call Charlie's weekly visits—did Eddie really feel the presence of that war. As in Hawai'i, the natural beauty around him was breathtaking and the local culture as diverse, in its own way, as in Newark's Ironbound. On their days off, he and Bobby would borrow a Jeep and tour the island—from picturesque sights like Turtle Bay, where the Navy had a seaplane base, to local oddities like a house designed by a French planter named My, which was built entirely without right angles—an octagon—on the theory that it would be more hurricane-resistant. And Bobby insisted they stop at a bar-restaurant run by a colorful French woman named Françoise Gradel, who served the best coffee and French fries on the island. Eddie had to admit the latter were almost as good as his Saratoga fries back home, but he declined to sample the bar's other most popular commodity: the girls who lived upstairs and whose affections were available for a slight fee.

Espíritu Santo had the allure of the tropics, streets named after French and British notables, and a population that included both Polynesians and immigrants like the Tonkinese, from the Gulf of Tonkin region of Indochina, most of whom spoke only a kind of Creole English called *Bislama*. Bobby taught Eddie a few phrases in *Bislama*, enough to get by, such as "Alo!" (Hello), "Tank yu tumas" (Thank you very much), or "Wanem nem blong yu?" (What's your name?).

Eddie even ran into a few old friends: the stone or wooden totems that guarded the entrance to little shops or scowled at him from street corners. Here the idols were called *tiki*, not *ki'i*, and they apparently represented different gods, but they were very similar to the ones Eddie had admired in Hawai'i. Some were even more colorful and imaginative, like one saturnine fellow whose long face was painted half red, half green; each of his big circular eyes had a small red pupil around which spun a spiral of red, green, and white, like the eyes of a cartoon

hypnotist. Another one looked something like an anteater with a piggish nose, out of whose nostrils sprouted two long dried palm leaves—resembling either a mustache or nostril hair gotten badly out of hand.

This last one appealed to Eddie so much that he asked the shop's proprietor, "*Hamas?*" (How much?)

The man shook his head. "*Mi no salem tiki. Costem mi tumas.*"

Eddie looked to Bobby, who translated, "He says he won't sell it, it cost him too much." To the man he added, "*Hamas costem?*"

"*Faef vatu.*"

"He says it cost him five *vatu*—about five bucks."

Eddie took out his wallet, pulled out a ten-spot, and handed it to the man. Looking stunned but delighted, he did a literal as well as a figurative turnaround, reaching over and unhooking the figure off a nail in the wall, handing it to Eddie with a smile and a cheery, "*Tanks tumas!*"

Eddie enshrined the *tiki*—dubbed Colonna after the mustachioed comedian Jerry Colonna—on the wall of the metal shop. That night he wrote a long letter to Adele and the kids, telling them about his purchase and even drawing a little sketch of Colonna, though, as per censorship regs, he could only refer to his location as "Somewhere in the South Pacific."

LIFE ON ESPÍRITU SANTO mostly agreed with Eddie—all except the food. Bobby wasn't exaggerating about the Navy cuisine: in addition to dehydrated everything, the only fresh meat the men were served was what they were told was lamb, grown in Australia. But one sniff of the foul, gamy meat belied that: if it was lamb, it had been left out in the sun way too long before cooking. It was actually mutton, and its taste was as strong and gamy as its smell. And not only was it gamy, it was dry as leather, the Navy chefs habitually overcooking it. Yet that didn't stop it from turning up on the menu every damn day: mutton chops, mutton steaks, mutton stew, boiled mutton, roast leg of mutton, braised rump of mutton. By the end of a man's service, the sight of a sheep would be enough to reduce him to tears. Some in the metal shop were desperate enough for decent chow that when a new plane came in for its thirty-hour check, they would discreetly liberate its sea rations, which often contained better grub—chocolate, cheese, canned spaghetti—than was being served on base.

"I can't take this anymore, Stopka," Bobby finally told Eddie one night. "I'm goin' out tomorrow and gettin' me some real meat. You game?"

"After all this mutton," Eddie said, "I'm nothing if not gamy."

There was a small cattle industry on Espíritu Santo, and the next day Bobby and Eddie drove a Jeep to the French-controlled part of the island, where they arranged to purchase a slaughtered cow from a French cattle rancher. It didn't come cheap, but it was worth it for fresh meat that wasn't mutton. "*Ne pas mettre une date sur l'acte de vente, s'il vious plait,*" Bobby told the man in passable French.

“What did you just say to him?” Eddie asked.

“Told him not to put a date on the bill of sale.”

“Why not?”

“Patience, boy. All will be explained in the fullness of time.”

They drove back to base, where they sneaked into the empty metal shop after dark. They put aside the heart, liver, and lungs to give to the Army veterinary department, then rigged up a makeshift meat grinder out of a steel drill and an engine cylinder. The first flurry of chopped meat came out of the grinder so fast they had to duck to avoid being pasted by their dinner; they then set up a screen to protect themselves from flying beef.

Bobby fashioned a roasting pan out of some aviation-grade aluminum as Eddie cut out a couple of nice thick filets. They set the heat treat oven at its lowest setting—250 degrees—slid in the pan, and grilled themselves two of the most delicious steaks either man had tasted since joining the Navy.

The remaining meat—steaks, ribs, hamburger meat—was wrapped in aluminum foil and traded to the men of the 27th Division, who received all of the excellent Australian beer they wanted but no meat. They were more than happy to trade a few cases of beer for ten pounds of fresh beef.

“See,” Bobby told Eddie as they sat on the beach drinking their warm beers, “in this here Navy, y’all gotta have a gimmick to get along.”

“Amen to that, brother,” Eddie said, tipping his bottle to his lips.

“I even went hunting doves a while back. They nest in the cacao plants, and I’d sneak up on them with a riot gun I got from ordnance. I’d make a rustlin’ noise, and when they heard me and flew out, I let spray with the gun and bagged me a nice load of fresh dove meat.”

“A riot gun? Didn’t you get a lot of shot in the birds?”

“Yeah, I had to pluck ‘em and clean ‘em pretty good, but I used to do that all the time back home.” He took a pull of beer and said thoughtfully, “But right now I’m thinkin’ of bigger game.”

“Yeah? Like what?”

Bobby smiled. “You see all those fool cows that go wanderin’ across the landing strips? The control tower operators have to grab a Jeep and chase ‘em off the runway before the next plane comes in. Way I look at it, we’d be doing the Navy *and* the cows a favor by taking ‘em out of harm’s way before they get themselves fricasseed by the engine of a TBM-3.”

Eddie’s jaw dropped. “You want us to become *cattle* rustlers?”

“I prefer,” Bobby said airily, “to think of it as tradin’ in cattle futures.”

“Jesus, man, those cows belong to somebody—what the hell happens if we get caught with ‘em?”

Bobby took a slip of paper out of his shirt pocket. It was the bill of sale given them by the French rancher. “This is why I told him not to date it. This way, if we get caught with the goods, we can show ‘em this.”

Eddie looked at him with equal parts dismay and admiration.

“Gotta have a gimmick, Stopka,” Bobby said again, “to get along in the Navy.” Eddie laughed. It was so absurd, he couldn’t do anything else.

“Ah, hell,” he said, “count me in. Those were damn good steaks.”

And so began Eddie’s life of crime on the range. He and Bobby would secrete themselves, usually after dark, among the hibiscus plants that bordered the airstrips—planted by the Seabees as camouflage to confound Japanese bombers—and wait until a wandering cow started on a vector toward the airfield. This way he and Bobby could reasonably claim, if caught, that they were merely preventing it from potentially damaging American planes. They used a standard issue .30-06 millimeter Springfield rifle, and since Bobby was a better shot than Eddie, it fell to him to assassinate the cow. He aimed for the head, not merely because it was quicker and more humane but it wasted less meat. Lifting the carcass was the hardest part of the job, but they finally wrestled it onto a WC51 weapons carrier they had procured by “midnight requisition”—a closed carrier, the canvas top hiding its illicit cargo in back. They transported the carcass to the base veterinarian, who in exchange for a couple of prime filets slaughtered the animal for them; and after they had dined on some steaks of their own, they traded the rest of the meat to the 27th for Australian beer.

This was a pretty good gig for about a month, during which time they bagged four cows—all of which, Eddie told himself, would otherwise have died even more unpleasantly, dismembered, perhaps, by the landing gear of a C-46 cargo plane.

But the fifth cow they felled proved, upon closer examination, to be diseased—it had mottled sores all over its body; truly a mercy killing. “Jesus Christ, Bobby, we can’t take this thing, it’s got leprosy or something.”

“Ah, shit,” Bobby said, and spat. “Well, we can’t leave it here, if someone examines it they’ll see it was shot. Let’s dump it somewhere.”

They transported the unfortunate heifer into a palm grove just outside the base and dumped it, assuming that the carcass would deteriorate quickly in the heat and humidity, leaving little evidence behind.

Sadly, they were unaware that a Carrier Aircraft Service Unit—CASU, pronounced *cashew*, providing maintenance and support duties for Naval air carrier groups—was camped not far from the scene, and as the crime victim ripened in the hot tropical air, the unholy stench quickly made its presence known to the men of CASU-13.

Within days, an order came down through the ranks making it clear that anyone in the U.S. armed forces caught shooting cattle would be subjected to a general court martial.

Thus was ended Eddie’s career as a cattle rustler.

IT WAS JUST AS WELL, since November saw the start of the rainy season—it lasted through February—and Eddie would not have relished the task of rassing cow carcasses in the kind of monsoonal rains that blanketed the island in winter. It

rained day and night, sometimes for two weeks straight, and after a while you just came to ignore it—going about your business, walking around or standing watch in the downpour as if it were nothing more than a sprinkle. The only thing that got on Eddie’s nerves was the ceaseless drumming of the rain on the metal roofs of the Quonset huts, like a water faucet dripping onto the lid of a tin can—*plonk, plonk, plonk*—twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week. Luckily after a hard day’s work and a couple of beers, sleep came easily even amid the constant racket.

In his off time he wrote letters home and read the ones he got from Adele and the kids. Toni wrote and told him about a new high diver who had performed at Palisades—someone who rode a bicycle down a ramp, then dove into a tank of water. Eddie experienced a brief moment of alarm, envisioning Toni riding her bicycle down the pitched roof of their house, then diving into a plastic wading pool, but reassured himself that Toni was more responsible than that. He hoped. Jack kept him briefed on the latest radio adventures of Captain Midnight and Superman. And Adele reported that business at the park was excellent but the man she’d hired, Jim, wasn’t quite working out and she would not rehire him next season.

Before the deluge had begun, Eddie had also salvaged a piece of driftwood he’d found on the beach—a ten-inch-thick palm log about two and a half feet long—then sawed off the ragged ends of it so they were nice and even, and to amuse himself, took a chisel to it, trying to carve a likeness of the metal shop’s *tiki* mascot, Colonna. He started out with a socket chisel, paring off large chunks of the upper part of the log to recreate Colonna’s rounded, elongated head, then switched to a smaller, carving chisel to carve out the big eyes in their shadowy sockets. He did his best, but it was a poor approximation of the original’s eyes and he knew it. He fared a bit better with the nose, but when he set about trying to duplicate the ridges that fringed the idol he found this the most difficult and delicate part. Using a mallet to drive the chisel resulted in a choppy cut, so he switched to using his hand only; the result was less choppy but still unsatisfying. It took him a week of trial and error to complete the ersatz *tiki*, and at the end of that time—though he had enjoyed the process of sculpting it—he had to admit that what he had was a crude copy of an artful original. Whoever made Colonna was a master carver.

But it *was* fun. He thought he might try it again, this time using a different *tiki* as a model.

Not long after, in late November, Eddie received a piece of V-mail from Adele that dampened his spirits more than the torrential weather:

Dear Eddie,

I’m sorry to have to tell you that my father passed away two days ago, of congestive heart failure. It wasn’t entirely unexpected—he had been ill for some months—but it still came as a shock, especially to Toni and Jack...

She related the events leading up to Franklin's death, the funeral preparations, her mother's grief...all in a curiously calm, detached tone. She talked about selecting a casket as if she were inspecting the bumpers of a new car. She spoke of comforting the children, but nothing of the loss she must have been feeling herself, as if she couldn't bear to express it. Her words were carefully chosen, emotionally weightless, except for one line—a P.S. added to the main body of the letter:

God how I wish you were here.

The words twisted like a knife inside him and tears sprang to his eyes. He would have given anything to be back home, helping to comfort the kids, trying to comfort his wife, instead of here on the other side of the world. He felt helpless; impotent. The people he loved most in the world needed him, and all he could do was to read this letter, the unwritten pain between its lines, and think about what to say in reply. But the right words eluded him—even after he had written his response, inadequate as he knew it was.

ADELE SLEEPWALKED THROUGH those first few hours after Franklin's death, feeling—from the moment she saw her father's lifeless body, swollen to three times its natural size, like a cloth doll left out in the rain—as if she were little more than a radio relaying messages from her conscious mind, which had sunk to the bottom of a deep well. Every comforting word she gave her mother, every careful question she asked the funeral director, came via wireless, or maybe ventriloquism, from that deep pit of conscious thought, which animated her body as Edgar Bergen did Charlie McCarthy. She felt about as real as Charlie, and didn't begin to ascend out of that deep pit until she went to pick up the children at school and had to tell them the bad news, that their grandpa, the only one they had ever known, was dead.

Coming only months after Larry Schwarz's death, Franklin's passing was especially hard on Toni, who cried all evening. Adele cried with her, and later wept alone in bed. She couldn't stop thinking of that afternoon Franklin had come to the park, the raw pain and aching regret in his voice as he confronted, clear and sober, what he had made of his life, and what might have been. Could she really blame him for quailing at that, for choosing to face it the only way he could—through the sweetly distorted prism of a glass bottle?

Tell me you don't.

Adele yearned for Eddie's arms around her, the consoling warmth of his body enfolding hers. This was too much to bear alone. Damn him, anyway—now, when she needed him, where was he? First in Hawai'i, where, according to one of his recent letters, he'd had a grand old time—sightseeing, frolicking in the surf, eating at fancy restaurants, buying trinkets like that grotesque little shrunken head or whatever the hell it was that he'd sent her. She wouldn't have wasted a dime

trying to win that thing if it had been a prize in Jackie Bloom's cat game! And *now* where was he? On some tropical island with swaying palm trees and sandy white beaches, working on engines like he could've been doing in goddamned Edgewater at the *Ford* plant, for crying out loud. But no, the stupid, big-hearted Polack, he had to *enlist*—had to leave his family, leave her, to face this alone. She cried into her pillow, hoping Toni couldn't hear, wishing Eddie were here so she could hug him—and then punch him in the nose. And God help her, she didn't know which she wanted to do more.