

# **Chapter 1**

## **April 1964-April 1968**

If you didn't have any demerits outstanding, if your grades were up to par, and if you passed inspection like a good plebe, then, by the grace of the upperclassmen and the academic board, you could be allowed to go and work outside the academy walls and earn yourself ten bucks or so on Saturdays. Mowing lawns mostly, or doing some gardening here and there, a little house fixing for little old ladies who lived in houses that were way too big for them, but were left to them by their husbands who had croaked, while they lived on and on, refusing to give up the domain. Or some garage work, or, in Case's case, toting bales and bolts of cloth in Eugene Stein's warehouse in Little Neck—a stone's throw from the academy, but nevertheless far enough for Eugene's sexy little Italian secretary to come and pick him up outside Vickery Gate.

Her name was Rosanne Rossellini. When she sat behind the wheel of Eugene's Lincoln, she looked like a ten year old child, not even able to look over the rim of the steering wheel, and barely able to drive the sleek, black hearse because her feet couldn't reach the pedals. Case had to crouch in the front seat, while she almost had to drive standing up. But she was anything but a child. She had curves in all the right places, a beautifully sculpted face with a fine nose, coal black eyes and long, black, naturally wavy hair. She always wore blouses that drew Case's eyes to her inviting cleavage—and miniskirts that made him want to put his hands between her well formed, muscular, but very feminine thighs. He would dream of Rosanne on the nights that he returned from working in Eugene's warehouse, sometimes

beating off underneath the covers after lights-out, when he was sure that his roommate was fast asleep and he could hear him snoring.

Rosanne was twenty-four; Case only nineteen. She was an “older woman” in his eyes—an unreachable conquest, a woman of the world. Experienced. Gone through many lovers, no doubt, with a face and a figure like that. Certainly not interested in what must seem like a naïve plebe to her; a boy who had barely shed the pimpled marks of adolescence. This almost forbidden attraction was mutual, Case sensed, and he treated Rosanne from the first day that he saw her, with all the respect he could muster, while trying to avoid staring at her blouse, and fighting the urge to reach for her crotch underneath her always tightly drawn miniskirt. He didn’t know if she indeed had similar feelings for him, as their conversations were always superficial, courteous toward one another, light. Never did they divulge anything about themselves; their past, likes or dislikes, whether or not they had a girl or boyfriend, or anything of the sort.

He did ask her out once, about three weeks after they met. That is, three weeks after she picked him up and dropped him off at the main gate of the academy every Saturday. It was a disaster, and he knew then that it wasn’t the age difference between them that had prevented them from exploring the minds and bodies of each other—it was the enormous difference in height.

They went to dinner in a classy restaurant in Great Neck on a Saturday night. She drove her own car, and picked him up at Vickery Gate, as cadets weren’t allowed to have cars. It was a metallic-blue Corvette, with standard gear shift, which she still couldn’t handle after three years of driving it. Case could barely wrangle himself into the small car. That evening was the first time he actually walked alongside her, because in all the time that he had seen her, he had only seen her half standing behind the wheel of Eugene’s black Lincoln, or sitting at her desk high up behind the glass wall of the office, while he was toting bales in the warehouse.

Once they had entered the restaurant, Case could hear the guests seated at the tables snickering as they walked past. He felt like he was taking his little sister out to dinner—Case in his dress blues and Rosanne half his size, holding his hand, and walking beside him, dressed in a tight-fitting, shimmering, silvery dress, that was even shorter than the miniskirts she always wore, and which she constantly had to pull down because it

worked its way up her ass as she walked. Case hadn't felt so humiliated and conscious of his height since his junior year in high school. He was sure she felt the same way, albeit of her own diminutive stature.

They ate, they talked superficially, and they kept praising the dishes that were put in front of them. Case paid the bill, and they left. He told her that he had to get up very early on the following morning, because he had watch duty, and would she please drop him off at the gate? He noticed a relief in her voice when she said that she, too, had to get up early to go and visit her folks in Connecticut. She raced back to the academy, thanked Case for a wonderful evening and a great meal, and gave him a peck on the forehead—like a mother would kiss her nine year-old son.

\* \* \*

Case first met Eugene Stein in the spring of 1964, about four months before he left for his sea year. It was during his first year at the academy, after he had passed the first six months of humiliation and degradation, which sifted the men from the boys. Eugene was Jewish, middle aged, short but not too short, overweight, and slightly bald, with a large nose, shifty little black eyes, and a sense of humor that took some getting used to, but was unsurpassable once Case understood it. Eugene immediately took a liking to Case, perhaps because he was a businessman and saw in Case the opportunity for cheap cadet labor—a sucker who would be willing to work his ass off for six hours just to earn enough beer money so he could blow it all at Maurice's that same night. Or maybe Eugene simply just liked him.

Eugene Stein was an importer of exclusive textiles. Truckloads of bolts of expensive cloth from Ireland, France, England, Egypt, India and Australia were dumped on the receiving bays of his warehouse during the week. It was Case's job to put all those bolts in their proper sections in the racks—mostly by forklift truck but sometimes by hand. Wholesalers would come to the warehouse during the week, examine the bolts, feel the texture of the cloth, take notes, make comments and withdraw to Eugene's office to shake hands, close their deals, and ogle at Rosanne. It was also Case's job to take the same bolts of cloth that he had stored the week before and lay them on the loading bay in lots so that the wholesalers' trucks could come and take the loads away during the following week. It

was grueling work but it was rewarding, inasmuch as Case indeed earned ten or sometimes twelve bucks in one afternoon which he invariably blew that very same night in Maurice's. He had to drink fast because plebes had to be back on academy grounds by ten o'clock sharp if they didn't have special permission to stay out later if they were on a date or other special event. In any case, Maurice was off limits for plebes after ten on Saturdays; dates, special events, weekend liberty passes or not.

It was during a slack time one Saturday that he learned of Eugene's special penchant. He wasn't a heavy drinker but he collected whisky. Every imaginable brand was in his collection of booze—on a rack he had constructed on the back wall of his warehouse reaching from floor to ceiling and measuring at least thirty feet long. It was filled with bottles of Scotch and Bourbon from all over the world. The rack was locked off by heavy steel mesh grated doors as if the bottles were priceless artifacts in a museum—which in fact some of them were. It was also at this time that Case learned that The Macallan was one of the most expensive Scotch whisky's in the world, with the acme of that brand being the distillate of 1926. And then there was the one from 1940, from just before the war started and all the distilleries in Scotland were barred from producing another drop of whisky in the name of 'war effort'. Neither Case nor Eugene could think a reason why stopping the distillation of such a noble drink would contribute to that cause.

Eugene had twenty-four bottles of the 1940 The Macallan in his collection and for a reason known only to himself he broke one open, invited Rosanne to join him and Case, and poured each of them a drink in a heavy lead crystal tumbler. They tasted "the drink of the gods" as Eugene put it that Saturday afternoon during a break. Eugene poured another round, then abruptly put the cap back on and placed the drink of the gods back behind the steel mesh doors of his vast whisky emporium. He asked Case later that afternoon if he could bring another cadet with him for the next couple of Saturdays because he'd made some good deals lately and there was a lot of cloth to be moved.

Most of his classmates were indisposed and unavailable; they had to work off their demerits or were desperately seeking excuses to go out and do anything but manual labor. Mowing lawns was fine, but toting bales and pulling loads was for jackasses.

He found a second classman, Jim Carnegie, who once rescued him during a plebe beat five months earlier—and he was glad he could repay him by offering him some weekend work. But Case had mixed emotions when he caught Jim two weeks later in Eugene’s warehouse in a dark corner near the thirty foot long rack of whisky bottles nailing Rosanne. Both of them were lying on a rolled out bolt of dark English tweed, entwined in each other’s arms, breathing hot and heavy while Jim’s hand was doing what Case had always wanted to do. Rosanne’s blouse was unbuttoned, exposing her voluptuous breasts and rock-hard nipples, while Jim’s pants were down to his knees and she was groping with both her hands in his BVD’s trying desperately to release the beast within.

They didn’t see Case and he didn’t stick around to see what he knew would eventually happen.

He was nineteen; Jim was two years older. He was six feet six and three quarters inches, Jim was five foot six and had a year at sea behind him. Rosanne was twenty four, sexy, hot to trot, versed in the game of love, and five foot one in her high heels. It was a match made in heaven for those two—at least that Saturday afternoon on a bolt of expensive English tweed. Rosanne and Case were a mismatch from day one. He felt like he did in high school; awkward, gawky, and an absolute fool for having taken her out weeks before, knowing he had grossly overreached himself.

He went to Eugene, told him he wasn’t feeling well, collected his ten bucks, and started walking to the academy. Eugene came after him in his black Lincoln and drove him the rest of the way.

“Didn’t like what you saw?” he asked after an embarrassing period of silence.

“What do you mean?” Case asked him.

“I saw it too you know—Rosanne getting laid by Jim. I know you like Rosanne. She told me about the date you had and that you two just didn’t match up.”

“I know, Mr Stein, I know. I just feel so . . . I don’t know how.”

“Young?”

“That’s close enough,” Case said, “I still have a lot to learn I guess.”

“Don’t worry about that too much. You will. You know what the worst part of it is?”

“No, what?”

“They’re screwing on my twelve-dollars-a-yard tweed! How do you like that? I’ll have to cut off at least six yards from that bolt. I’ll take it out of Rosanne’s pay.”

He laughed when he said it. Case laughed with him but he knew that Eugene wouldn’t do that.

When he dropped Case off at the gate, he gave him a hundred bucks. Case was flabbergasted and asked him what this was for.

“I’m gonna hire myself a fifty-year-old ugly eunuch to tote them bales and pull them loads—one who can keep his hands off Rosanne anyway. She’s a good kid and I don’t want to lose her yet. You cadets are good workers, strong and cheap to boot, but horny as hell. That’s understandable what with your being caged up in that academy of yours. Rosanne is my protégé you know. I have no children and she knows the business like no other. She’s got a set of brains in her head that’ll get her places in this world. She found ways to save me a bundle of cash—not entirely kosher, but it works. She knows the ropes and all the ins and outs already, and she’s only twenty four. Must be her Italian blood. I’m gonna make her a partner after a couple of years—give her a chance to buy me out later on.”

Case looked at him for a full minute before answering. “So this is good-bye I suppose,” he finally said, “and this is sort of a severance pay.”

“You might say that. It wouldn’t be a workable situation anymore, don’t you agree? You’re leaving on your sea year assignment in a month or so, and with a sexy little bitch like Rosanne around and with having seen what you saw, you’d only be frustrated as hell for the next couple of weeks anyway. So yeah, it is severance pay.”

“Well, thanks Mr Stein, I really mean that. And you’re right, it wouldn’t work anymore. Say good bye to Rosanne for me.”

“I will Case, I will. Send me a postcard once in a while when you’re off on one of your many trips.”

Case said he would, stepped out of the car, and went back to his battalion.

But he never sent Eugene a card. Nor did he have any contact with him again until he called him nearly five and a half years later from Colombo proposing the deal of a lifetime.

\* \* \*

Someone retched in the hall. Case could hear the poor sucker stumble and fall, utter a stream of wails and curses, get up again and feel his way to his room. Judging from the sounds outside the door, he knew that it must be well past midnight, the time when the lights in the main halls of the Doghouse would be out except for some dimly lit emergency lights at either ends at the stairwells. He could just make out the time on the luminous dial of his alarm clock—2:00 a.m.—*Christ*, he thought, *I've been trying to get to sleep for three hours.*

He'd been in the Doghouse for well over a week now. Given the circumstances, it was all he could afford. A hundred dollars eked out of his now totally depleted savings account at the Seamen's Bank for Savings, plus the few bucks his mother gave him before he left home, would have to do for another two weeks until he could return to the academy. "Steamship office assignment" it was called—it amounted to nothing more than going to the offices of an American steamship company in full uniform, along with one or two of his classmates who were unfortunate enough to have picked the same billet, and listen to a succession of individuals telling the exciting story of how they slaved at shifting paper from one pile to another, answering telephone calls from equally bored individuals at the other end of the line, or make remarks to one another about the miniskirt so and so's secretary was wearing today.

He was assigned to U.S. Lines' offices in New York, one of the most prestigious shipping companies in the nation. Its flagship the *S.S. United States* had won the blue ribbon for the fastest Atlantic crossing by a passenger liner some years ago. Their freighters plowed the North Atlantic from New York to all ports of call in western Europe.

The office assignment was part of the academy curriculum for the first class year. It was something that had to be done and suffered through. The report on this assignment and the subsequent report of the office mentors on Case's performance and enthusiasm all contributed to his overall academic standing. Most cadets however saw this as an extension of their summer leave—three weeks in the city—be it New York, Boston, New Orleans, San Francisco, Seattle or wherever the academy saw it practical and fit to assign them after taking personal and practical preferences into consideration. For Case and for most of his classmates it was a necessary

evil and a free lunch every day aboard one of the ships of the company they were assigned to. They always had one or two in port.

A hundred bucks! More than enough for a month, especially when he was used to living on the ten bucks a week he made doing odd jobs on weekends during the years he'd been in Kings Point. A hundred bucks! Live it up—this is prime time, September 1966, splurge!

He splurged and took a room at the Soldiers, Sailors and Airmen's Club on Lexington Avenue.

Even though the academy had arranged for free lodging for cadets at the Seamen's Church Institute, he chose to go to the Soldiers, Sailors and Airmen's Club. For a hundred and some bucks, he could afford a little luxury. Besides, it was a lot closer to the U.S. Lines offices. He could sack in a little each morning, saving him the hassle of the uptown subway traffic at 7:00 a.m. every day. But for a dollar and a quarter a night he couldn't expect the luxury that he had assumed would become him by paying for a room instead of free boarding at the Doghouse.

Clean sheets and towels was the only positive attributes that could be said of the room. For the rest, it was a cramped space, no more than six by ten feet, further stuffed with a plain wardrobe, a washstand with a cracked mirror and faucets that were loose in their fittings and that rattled when he opened either one, a small desk and chair and a murky window overlooking Lexington Avenue. Trying to get to sleep there was a feat in itself. Shutting the window in this insufferable summer heat would soon devoid the room of breathable air, but leaving the window open invited flies and mosquitoes.

And then there was the noise: the din of the never-ceasing traffic; the sirens of fire trucks, police cars, and ambulances fighting their way through the congested streets of New York; and passersby shouting their woes into the night.

On the first day at the U.S. Lines office, he was met by the receptionist—a queer doubling as a boy Friday who was always so glad to see cadets from Kings Point in their lovely uniforms come visit the offices. Boy Friday was ever so glad to show Case around and introduce him to the proper people—all of them friends of his and all of them queer—until Case's mentor, a tall grey haired man with heavy horn rimmed glasses so



big as to hide half his face, rescued him from Boy Friday showing him off to the entire complement of queers in the office.

Case had grown another inch and a quarter since his plebe year and topped the mark at an impressive six feet eight inches. He was slender, twenty-one years old and looked it. He still had a certain amount of innocence radiating from his face—the innocence of youth and candor. A rather large nose was the only feature that stuck out of an otherwise normal, somewhat ruddy face. At least “ruddy” is what it said in his continuous discharge book. *Ruddy*; what a word! The clerk at the US Coast Guard who filled in the information in the blanks probably guessed Case’s complexion from the black and white photograph stapled in it—he indeed looked like an American Indian with a crew cut.

Stitch was at the office too. His real name was Richard Bostitch, but everyone called him Stitch. Stitch was a classmate was nearly as tall as Case, except that’s where the similarity ended. Stitch was blond and blue-eyed and had the generally washed-out look about him characteristic of fair-haired and light-skinned people. But he was just as slender as Case—skinny, even, with large, wide ears protruding from his head. He looked ridiculous in the dress khakis he had chosen to wear on his first day at the office. His hat seemed to be perched on top of his head like a ten-inch lid precariously balanced on the six-inch opening of a jug.

Stitch followed the book, never deviated from the norm and always did what he was told. He had a proper upbringing in New England somewhere. He respected his parents and teachers in grade and high school; went to Sunday school and later to church on Sundays; and followed orders from his superiors when he entered the academy as a plebe—even if it meant that he had to brush out the heads with a toothbrush if a second classman, such as that little prick Badoux, got it in his sadistic, pea-sized brain to assign such duties. He would probably sail the required three year stint after he graduated, find a boring job somewhere afterwards, marry an average-looking woman, have the proverbial average two-point—something kids, and live in New Jersey in an average house until he was seventy-six—point—something years old. It was no surprise, therefore, that he lived in the Doghouse, just as the academy had suggested to everyone on steamship office assignment in New York.

After having gone through the motions of the first day at the office, which was actually a foraging expedition for a free lunch aboard the S.S.

*American Challenger*—which was docked alongside the pier just outside the office building—and ogling the mini-skirted, long-legged secretaries, Stitch suggested Case come with him to the Doghouse. He'd met some people there he said. They could all go out someplace in the neighborhood and have a meal and a Schlitz or two.

\* \* \*

Case awoke in the Soldiers Sailors and Airmen's Club the following morning at nine with a splitting headache, twenty dollars lighter and absolutely no idea how he got home the night before—only vaguely remembering a place called the Blarney Rose buried somewhere in the canyons of lower Manhattan, and the faces of two men in their mid—twenties sitting on either side of a rough wooden table strewn with overflowing ashtrays, tin plates with half eaten pastrami sandwiches, empty beer glasses and peanut shells. All of them spinning the incoherent yarns that only drunks can spin, with Stitch at the head of the table donned in his dungarees, smoking thick cigars, telling tall tales spiked with four-letter words and downing pitchers of Schlitz as if he was the old man of the sea himself.

One fifth of his fortune shot in the first night. A few days later, when the visits to the U.S. Lines office became progressively shorter (until some days consisted of only a lunch visits to whichever ship was in port and a courtesy tour by one of the mates); and when the get-togethers with Stitch and his friends became longer and longer and when his funds had dwindled to less than fifty dollars, Case checked out of the Soldiers Sailors and Airmen's Club, picked up his duffel bag and guitar case, and took the subway downtown to check into the Doghouse on South Street. Free room thanks to the academy, but he had to pay for his own meals. Fifty dollars for ten days, that's a fin a day less subway fare to and from U.S. Lines. He would have to hoof it from the Forty-Second Street exit to the pier, which would leave four dollars and seventy cents a day for meals. *Should be enough*, he thought.

He'd never stayed in the Doghouse before, having heard enough about it to steer clear of the place. However, his dwindling funds led him to swallow his pride, pick up his duffel bag and take the subway from