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FOUR KNIGHTS GAME

GIVING A SIMULTANEOUS CHESS EXHIBITION against 50 players was nothing new for Douglas Franklin. A prodigy as a child, an international grand master at 18, Douglas had spent the last 10 of his 29 years wringing out a living doing what he loved best: playing chess. He had been around the world a half dozen times. He had little money, a small walk-up flat in New York City, an unbroken string of invitations to all the major international tournaments, and he called that freedom.

Like most grand masters, Douglas was accustomed to playing simultaneous exhibitions in a kind of trance. Not that he didn't know what was happening on the boards; but he relied on his prodigious skills, natural instincts and vast experience to sustain him through the long hours as he moved around the inner circle formed by the players' tables, working to obtain an advantage in the openings, then allowing each game to take its course, to play *him*.

This exhibition was different. The girl was a distraction.

She was good, Douglas now realized; too good to be a casual weekend player like the majority of participants on the "Chess Cruise" he had been hired to host. He had underestimated her and chosen a line of attack that was quick and powerful, but ultimately inferior. She had withstood the attack, and Douglas now found himself in *zugzwang*, where all the moves available to him were bad ones.

Sensing a game of unusual interest, a number of spectators had crowded around the girl's board. Armand Zoltan, the ship's owner, had positioned his huge bulk directly behind the girl's chair and was staring over her shoulder at the score sheet she had been keeping. Zoltan's eyes were large and black, like two pieces of coal shoved into the puffy dough of his face. His gaze momentarily flicked upward

as Douglas approached. Then he turned his attention back to the score sheet.

There was one other man who appeared more interested in the record of moves than in the actual position on the board. He had slipped between two of the tables and was standing inside the circle, studying the piece of paper by the girl's hand. He was tall and thin, with pale, almost yellow eyes that seemed to blink in spasms. A bald pate was sparsely covered with a few strands of hair combed from one side to the other and plastered down with hair lotion. His suit was obviously well-tailored but failed to disguise the fact that he needed a bath. He smelled of spicy after-shave and sweat.

Douglas touched the man on the shoulder. "Excuse me, I need some room." The man stared hard at Douglas for a few moments, then moved quickly back.

Douglas lighted a cigarette and pretended to study the position on the board in front of him. He knew the position was hopeless; what he was really interested in was the girl. If she were nervous, she didn't show it. She was cool and poised, despite the crush of onlookers and Zoltan breathing down her neck. She had a high forehead framed by silky, raven black hair; cold, penetrating green eyes that seemed to reveal little were contradicted by a full, sensual mouth.

The score sheet had no name on it.

Douglas tipped over his king in the traditional gesture of defeat. "I resign," he said easily.

There was scattered applause, quickly stilled by the angry shushing of the other players.

"Thank you," the girl said quietly. She rose and began to fold her score sheet.

Douglas gently touched her arm. "May I ask who just beat me?"

The girl smiled and extended her hand. "My name is Anne Pickford." Her grip was firm, like her game. She spoke with a pronounced British accent.

"You play a fine game, Anne. Do you mind if I borrow your score sheet? I'd like to look it over."

Anne laughed as she handed him the paper. "If you like. But my guess is that you know every move that was made. The line you used was refuted three years ago in Copenhagen. You were the one who refuted it, against Barslov."

Douglas grinned and slipped the sheet into his pocket. Many of the spectators had moved on to the other boards, but Douglas was aware

that the man with the yellow eyes was standing close by, watching them. Douglas leaned closer. "Actually, I was looking for an excuse to ask you to have a drink with me."

"Why must you have an excuse, Mr. Franklin? Where's your natural grand-master egomania?"

"It's badly bruised at the moment. Eight o'clock in the upper lounge?"

"Fine."

The girl nodded curtly, then turned and walked away. Douglas waited until she had disappeared from sight out on the deck, then moved on to the next board. He studied it for a moment, then reached down and moved a bishop. "Checkmate," he said cheerfully.

"PICKFORD," DOUGLAS SAID. "There was an English grand master, Samuel Pickford."

Anne smiled and sipped her drink. "My father. He taught me how to play."

Douglas tapped the score sheet in his pocket. "Of course. It really was a beautifully played Sicilian."

Anne shrugged. "We both know you'd beat me easily in a match."

Douglas' glass was empty. He looked inquiringly at the girl, who shook her head. He ordered another Scotch for himself, then leaned back and studied her.

"Why haven't I heard of you? Judging from the way you play, I'd say you were at least an expert. Considering the state of women's chess, I'd think you'd be in international competition."

Something moved deep in the girl's eyes, a dark, silent laughter that Douglas found disconcerting.

"I find my own game more interesting," Anne said quietly.

"Really? What game would that be?"

"I'm a journalist." Her eyes were veiled again. "Actually, this is a working trip for me."

"You're not here as a player?"

"No. I'm afraid I sneaked into the exhibition."

"I'm glad you did."

"I was in Barcelona when I heard about this junket to Glasgow for the Interzonal elimination. Obviously, chess is very chic now and I thought there might be a good story in the cruise. I was right. Here I am in the middle of the ocean, having drinks with the infamous Douglas Franklin. . . ."

Douglas laughed. "Infamous?"

"Well, perhaps that's overstating the case. But it's true that most serious players resent you, and non-chess players admire or envy you. For the same reasons."

"What reasons?"

"Take the Glasgow Interzonal. You won't be playing in it because you never bothered to try to qualify. Instead, you're hosting a boatload of *patzers* on their way to sit in the audience. Who else but Douglas Franklin would win his share of major tournaments every year, then turn his back on the chance to play for the world championship? The chess Establishment thinks you're irresponsible."

"What do you think?"

"I think you're having a lot of fun. You're waiting for your wanderlust to burn itself out. When you want the world championship enough, you'll go after it."

Douglas shrugged. He felt it was time to change the subject.

A steward arrived with his drink. As Douglas pushed back his chair to give the man room he noticed two men watching them from a table in a far corner of the lounge. One was Zoltan, and the other was the man with the yellow eyes.

Douglas waited for the steward to leave, then pulled his chair back close to the table. "Let's see how good a journalist you are," he said quietly. "The two men at the corner table—the fat one's Armand Zoltan, right?"

Again, something moved in Anne's eyes. She glanced quickly over his shoulder, then back into his face. She seemed puzzled. "Yes. He owns this ship. But didn't he hire you?"

Douglas shook his head. "I was hired by the travel agency booking the cruise. Who's the guy with him?"

"I don't know." Her voice cracked almost imperceptibly and she quickly swallowed some water. "Why do you ask?"

"Just curious. They seemed to take a special interest in our game this afternoon. Maybe they think it's still going on."

Anne paled and her eyes shifted slightly out of focus, as if she were looking at something ugly and menacing far in the distance, beyond the confines of the ship.

Douglas tried to bring her back. "Does Zoltan play chess?"

"A Four Knights Game," Anne said absently.

"I must have missed a move. How's that again?"

Anne's eyes came back into focus and she smiled disarmingly. Whatever she had been looking at was gone, sunk in the depths of the

ocean, or her mind. "Nothing," she said easily. "I was just talking to myself." She stifled a yawn that could have been feigned. "I'm sorry," she said. "I'm very tired."

Douglas summoned the steward and signed the check, then escorted Anne out of the lounge. Zoltan and the yellow-eyed man had already left.

Anne chatted pleasantly on the way back to her cabin, but Douglas could sense that something in her had changed. She was distracted, and he had become nothing more than a shadow at her side that talked. This bothered him, and he tried unsuccessfully to break down the barrier that the mention of a man's name had erected.

Douglas' mind rapidly shifted to other things when he reached his own cabin. He was positive he had locked it before leaving, but the louvered door swung open at his touch.

He stepped inside and switched on the light, then froze. His berth had been torn apart, thoroughly and professionally. His suitcases had been opened and their linings torn out; his clothes and personal possessions were strewn over the floor.

In the air was the faint but unmistakable odor of the man with the yellow eyes.

Douglas sensed rather than heard a movement behind him. He had just started to turn when something hard and heavy smashed into the base of his skull. What started out as a terrible, rending pain ended as a warm wave sloshing back and forth inside his brain. He didn't even remember falling.

"HELLO, DOUGLAS," THE GIRL SAID. "You look terrible."

"I had a rough night." Douglas gently touched the back of a head that felt like it was filled with broken glass. "I got mugged."

"Really?"

"Really. And the man who did it was the same man who was with Zoltan in the lounge last night."

Anne's eyes narrowed. "How do you know that?" She tried to adopt a casual tone, but her voice was tight and had a sharp edge to it.

"I smelled him," Douglas said evenly.

"Did you report it to the captain? I suppose you've done that."

"Sure. He was properly upset. Said he'd look into it."

"Was anything taken?"

"That's why I called you. You see, I don't have that much to begin

with, and it was all there when I woke up. I double-checked. It wasn't until I took off my jacket that I realized what was missing. It was the score sheet you gave me. That's what the man was after."

Anne paled and quickly looked away. "You could have lost it." Her voice was strangely muffled, as though damped by some intense emotion held tightly under rein.

"I didn't lose it."

Anne quickly regained control of herself. The face that she now presented to Douglas was totally expressionless, the green eyes cold and distant. Suddenly, without warning, she laughed. "Is *that* what you wanted to talk to me about?"

Douglas felt his face grow hot. He'd realized before he called Anne that he would risk sounding foolish, and she was not making things easier for him. Still, he felt sure that whoever had sapped him had known exactly what he wanted to find. If the score sheet had been taken, there was a reason.

"I know it sounds strange," Douglas said tightly. "That's the point. I thought you might have some idea why somebody would want to steal that particular score sheet."

"Please leave me alone," Anne said coldly. "I've heard some stupid lines before, but this tops all." Her eyes flashed. "Really, Douglas, you're such a child. Is this another game? Must you make everything into a game?"

"What is it, Anne? What's wrong?"

"Stick to your chess; that's obviously what you do best. You've already begun to bore me." She punctuated the last sentence by slamming the cabin door in his face.

Douglas stared at the closed door for a few moments, then turned and walked slowly back the way he had come. When he reached his cabin he found Armand Zoltan and the ship's doctor waiting for him. The room had been straightened; his clothes had been neatly folded and packed in two new, expensive-looking suitcases. There was a large basket of fruit and a bottle of Scotch on the table beside his bed.

The doctor, a thin, reedy man with a chronic case of dandruff, sat stiffly on a chair at the opposite end of the room, a huge, leather medical bag propped on his knees. He smiled nervously as Douglas entered.

Zoltan rose from his chair and gestured expansively around the room. "Mr. Franklin!" Zoltan's smile did not touch his eyes. "I hope you will now find everything in order. I wished to take the liberty of coming personally to apologize for this terrible incident. The man

you described to Captain Barker is under close surveillance." Zoltan took a check from his pocket, signed it with a flourish, then held it out to Douglas. "I trust this will be sufficient compensation for the suffering and inconvenience you've been caused."

"Nothing was stolen," Douglas said evenly, but it suddenly struck him as odd that Zoltan should be on this particular ship. From various newspaper accounts Douglas knew that Zoltan was a multi-millionaire, with a large fleet of ships trafficking on the oceans of the world. What was he doing on a five-day cruise from Spain to Scotland? It was unlikely that he had even had anything to do with the decision to book a boatload of chess players. That type of mundane business affair was usually taken care of by mundane business managers. Zoltan should be on his island hide-way, counting his money. What was he doing here?

"Please take the check anyway," Zoltan insisted. "You've proven yourself to be a most valuable part of this cruise, without a doubt underpaid. Accept this as a token of my appreciation."

Douglas took the check and shoved it into his pocket without looking at it.

"I've brought Dr. Macklin with me to examine you," Zoltan continued. "We want to make absolutely certain that you're all right."

"All I've got is a headache," Douglas said. "It'll pass." He suddenly wanted to escape from Zoltan, the cabin, the questions. He glanced at his watch. "I have a class on chess openings in twenty minutes," he continued. "I want to make sure I earn my keep."

"As you wish, Mr. Franklin. The captain, the crew and myself are at your disposal. Please let me know if there's anything you require."

Douglas started for the door, then stopped and turned. "By the way," he said, watching Zoltan's face, "I'm going to be discussing the Four Knights Game. What do you think of that opening, Mr. Zoltan?"

Zoltan looked puzzled. Finally he shrugged. "I'm aware that it's a very old opening, and not particularly aggressive. But I'm certainly no expert by any means."

If the question meant anything else to Zoltan, he had managed to disguise it well. Once again Douglas felt foolish, a participant in a shadow game that might exist only in his mind. He excused himself and walked out of the cabin.

DOUGLAS' CLASS WAS WELL ATTENDED, his lecture and demonstration enthusiastically received. Still, he found his mind constantly returning

to Anne Pickford, for reasons that he could not fully explain to himself. Probably it was pride; he was not used to having doors slammed in his face.

Douglas finished with the class at one, then went to the dining lounge. He had hoped to catch sight of Anne, perhaps try to speak to her again. She wasn't there.

After lunch he went to the girl's cabin, knocked repeatedly on the door, but got no answer. He tried the door and found it locked.

Douglas had no responsibilities for the afternoon so he set out to look for Anne. He started on the upper deck. It was a calm, clear day at sea and the European coastline could be seen far in the distance, off the starboard bow. A number of passengers were sunning themselves or playing chess. Douglas strolled casually among the players, greeting familiar faces, occasionally stopping to answer questions or give advice. All the while he kept looking for the girl. There was no sign of her.

Next, Douglas traversed the lower deck, swimming pool, cocktail lounges, and any other place he could think of where the girl might be. By five o'clock his head was splitting and he went back to his cabin to take a nap. He arose in an hour, showered and dressed for dinner. He ate and stayed in the dining lounge until it closed, nursing coffee, watching the doors. Anne did not appear. He went to her cabin; there was still no answer to his knock.

Douglas felt a cold chill pass through his body. Once again he searched through all the areas of the ship that were open to passengers. Then he headed for the ship's bridge.

"I think you're missing a passenger," he reported.

The deck officer stared at him. "I beg your pardon, sir?"

"I said I think one of your passengers may be in trouble. Her name is Anne Pickford. If she's on the ship, I can't find her."

The officer, a Greek of moderate build and deep-set, soulful eyes, shook his head. "It is possible that you simply missed this person, sir. The *Argo* is a large ship."

"It's also possible that she fell overboard. I think you'd better call the captain."

The officer hesitated a moment, then said, "As you wish, sir."

Captain Barker arrived a few minutes later, with Zoltan. There was no question as to who was in charge, and who would do the talking. Barker's face was flushed with interrupted sleep, and his coat was only half-buttoned. His eyes darted nervously about the room and refused to meet Douglas' gaze.

Zoltan stepped forward and took Douglas' elbow solicitously. "Mr. Franklin, how are you feeling?"

Douglas eased himself out of the other man's grip. The expression on Zoltan's face was imponderable. "It's one of your passengers I'm worried about," Douglas said tightly. "Miss Pickford is not in her cabin. I've been—"

Zoltan made an impatient gesture with his hand. The folds of flesh on his face rearranged themselves into something that might have been a leer. "You have a taste for the finer things in life, Mr. Franklin—Douglas, if I may call you that—but you needn't concern yourself about Miss Pickford. She's in good hands."

"Is that right? Whose hands?"

"Miss Pickford took ill quite unexpectedly this morning. Dr. Macklin examined her in her cabin and diagnosed her illness as acute appendicitis. As you may know, appendicitis can often strike without warning. Dr. Macklin thought it best that she be hospitalized immediately. As luck would have it, there was a British patrol boat in the area. Our request for assistance was immediately granted. By now Miss Pickford is undoubtedly in an English hospital."

"I didn't see any patrol boat."

"Of course not. I believe you were giving a demonstration-lecture at the time. In fact, I hope none of the other passengers saw it. We try to keep these unpleasant matters as unobtrusive as possible. The sight of a woman being carried off on a stretcher would be, at best, unpleasant. Before you know it there would be rumors of food poisoning, or something like that. The cruise would be ruined for many passengers. Miss Pickford was transferred from the loading platform at the bow of the ship. Are there any other questions, Douglas?"

There were many other questions, but Douglas decided he would keep them to himself. If Zoltan were telling the truth, everything was fine; if he were lying, nothing could be gained by arousing his suspicions.

"No," Douglas said, fixing his gaze on Zoltan's chest, "I'm glad you acted quickly."

"You are a good person to have on board, Douglas," Zoltan said with a wide grin that could have meant anything. "Most people would not notice the absence of a casual acquaintance. Such concern is to your credit. Now I suggest we all go back to bed and leave the deck officer to his duties. Good night, Mr. Franklin . . . Douglas."

There was a note of finality to Zoltan's voice, and Douglas knew

he was being dismissed. He nodded curtly and left the bridge. As he stood near the rail in the moonlight, smoking a cigarette, he stared at the red lettering on the door leading to the lower levels of the ship: NO ADMITTANCE. AUTHORIZED PERSONNEL ONLY. If Zoltan had lied and Anne was still on the ship, that was where she must be. It was the only place he had not looked.

The thought that he was actually considering going through the door bothered Douglas—perhaps the blow on the head had transformed him into an idiot. At best, if he were caught below, he would have compromised himself and his job. At worst, assuming Zoltan was involved in some criminal activity, he might never reach Glasgow. The sea was the ultimate garbage dump, and a ship at sea was a world unto itself, with no place to run and no place to hide; and it was obvious that Zoltan was the final arbiter of the law on the *Argo*. An outside observer might be fascinated by Zoltan's story of how he disappeared, but Douglas had no interest in allowing such a situation to develop. Money was power and power was often more potent than truth. There was no doubt in Douglas' mind that Zoltan had a number of high-voltage connections. One person had already disappeared, and Zoltan was evidently not distressed by that.

Had Anne actually disappeared? Why would Zoltan lie?

Douglas mentally reviewed the reasons for his uneasiness: a bump on the head during the course of a robbery that wasn't a robbery; Zoltan's acquaintance with the yellow-eyed man who had hit him; a vague reference to a chess opening that Zoltan hardly knew. Finally, there was the girl's strange behavior. Beneath Anne's cold exterior there had been fear—he was sure of it.

Douglas flipped the cigarette into the wet darkness beyond the railing. He glanced around to make sure he was unobserved, then slipped through the hatchway, closing the steel door quietly behind him.

He found himself at the top of a steep, narrow stairway that was only faintly illuminated by a string of naked, low-wattage electric bulbs. The steps led down to a narrow corridor lined on both sides with cabins. The corridor was empty. Douglas removed his shoes and moved past the cabins, which he assumed held sleeping crew members. He reached the opposite end of the corridor and tried the door there. It was open. He passed through the door, closed it behind him, then put on his shoes.

The corridor beyond the crew's quarters was wider, lined on the right with recessed steel doors on which the word *Cargo* had been

stenciled. At the opposite end of the corridor, fifty yards away, was another door.

Douglas tried the first cargo hold. It was locked, as were all the others. Frustrated, he tried the door at the end of the corridor. It, too, was locked. He cursed softly to himself as he realized that he had maneuvered himself into a *cul de sac*.

He turned and started back the way he had come. He froze when he heard the footsteps. They were echoing off the metal floor beyond the closed door leading to the crew's quarters, and they were coming toward him.

Douglas was abreast of the second, recessed steel door. The recess wasn't very deep, but it was the only conceivable hiding place. He flattened himself against the steel plate, and heard the door at the end of the corridor open and close, and the footsteps resume. He peered around the edge of the recess.

The footsteps belonged to the man with the yellow eyes. He was in his shirt sleeves, and the shoulder holster he wore was stuffed with a large, ugly, blue-steel automatic.

Douglas braced, ready to kick out at the man's groin as he came abreast. Then the footsteps stopped. Douglas again looked around the corner of the recess in time to see the yellow-eyed man turn a key in the lock of the first door, open it and pass through. He left the door open behind him. Douglas waited thirty seconds, then slipped down the corridor and looked in the open door.

The cargo hold was large and brightly lit, with two doors at the opposite side. One of the doors was open, revealing a corridor, and Douglas assumed that was where the yellow-eyed man had gone. The right side of the hold was filled with large wooden crates stacked neatly in piles of four.

Douglas entered the hold, darting across the concrete floor and ducking behind one of the piles of crates. A few moments later he heard the sound of footsteps again. The yellow-eyed man emerged from one of the corridors, walked quickly across the cargo hold and exited through the steel door. The door closed behind him with an ominous click.

Douglas stepped out from his hiding place and examined the crates. There were no markings on them, and each was circled by a tight, metal band. There was a large pair of wire clippers hanging on the wall. He took down the clippers and cut through one of the bands. The band snapped with a loud, singing crack that reverberated

throughout the closed confines of the hold. Douglas ducked behind the crates again, his heart hammering in his chest, but the silence returned. He waited a few more minutes to make sure no one was coming, then used the handle of the clippers to pry back four of the plywood slats.

The crate was filled with machine pistols; a protective coating of light oil glistened on the black metal. Douglas picked up one of the guns, wiped off the oil with his handkerchief and examined it. The serial number on the frame had been carefully filed off.

The pistol felt heavy and alien in his hand. He searched through the crate for ammunition but couldn't find any. It was just as well—he wouldn't know what to do with a loaded gun.

He replaced the pistol in the crate, found a tarpaulin and threw it over the broken band and slats. Then he crossed the hold and moved down the passageway from where the yellow-eyed man had come. The corridor was about fifty feet long. At the end it branched off at right angles to form another corridor. There were small, glassed-in office cubicles on either side.

He found the girl in the last cubicle on the left. She was lying on a cracked leather couch, tightly bound. There was a wide strip of adhesive tape over her mouth. Her eyes widened when she saw him.

Douglas suddenly realized that he was trembling; his clothes were pasted to his body, and he could smell his own fear in his nostrils. He took a deep breath, then went to the top of the T formed by the intersecting corridors and glanced around the corner. There was no one there.

To the left and right were steel ladders leading up to hatch covers. Douglas quickly climbed one of the ladders and tested the wheel gear on the bottom of the cover. It turned easily. Douglas breathed a sigh of relief at the discovery that there was another way out from below decks without going back through the cargo hold and crew's quarters. If they could manage to get back to the passengers' section, Zoltan just might be forced into a sort of Mexican standoff. He climbed back down the ladder and slipped into the office.

Anne's breath exploded in an urgent whisper as Douglas stripped the tape from her mouth. "Douglas! Zoltan will kill you if he finds you here! Get out!"

Douglas laughed shortly. "That's a strange request. What's he going to do to you if I leave you here?"

The girl said nothing.

Douglas knelt beside her and examined the ropes. They were thin, and the knots had been tied by an expert. There was blood on the girl's wrists and ankles where the rope had cut into the flesh. He searched through the cubicle but could find nothing sharp to cut the ropes so he went to work on the knots with his fingers.

"Who are you?" Douglas asked quietly.

"I'm a British agent," Anne said after a pause.

Douglas smiled wryly. "That's your game?"

"That's my game."

"Well, it certainly isn't very ladylike."

Anne smiled. "Don't talk like a male chauvinist pig, Douglas."

"Chauvinist, hell. None of my opponents has ever tried to tie me up."

"It adds a different dimension," Anne said dryly.

"You like to play word games, too," Douglas said seriously. "The Four Knights Game you referred to: that's the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse, right?"

Anne winced but did not cry out as Douglas pulled the ropes free from her wrists. Her hands and feet were swollen and inflamed. "Death, war, pestilence and famine," she said through clenched teeth. "Zoltan deals in death: drugs, guns, adulterated medicine. If the price is right, he'll smuggle anything in or out of any country in the world."

"I've seen the guns. Where are they going?"

"Northern Ireland. Special delivery to the terrorists. My job was to notify my superiors when and where the drop was to be made. I had a portable transmitter, but they found it."

"I don't suppose you can explain to me how I got involved in all this."

"Somehow, Zoltan found out about my cover and mission, but he didn't dare move against me until he could be sure I was working alone. My playing in the exhibition aroused his suspicions. He became even more suspicious when he saw I was beating you, and that you wanted my score sheet. He thought you might be a contact, and the score sheet might contain some sort of code. That's why Hawkins—"

"Hawkins. He's the one who's allergic to soap?"

Anne nodded. "You might say Hawkins is the executive director of the seamier side of Zoltan's business enterprises. In any case, they realized they'd made a mistake when they examined the score sheet. They tried to cover up, but by then you'd already talked to me. They knew I'd make the connection, and that's when they moved in."

Douglas finished removing the ropes. Anne eased her legs over the side of the couch and tried to stand. The blood drained from her face.

"Can you walk?"

"Just give me a minute to get the circulation back." She bent over and started to massage the muscles in her legs. "I acted toward you the way I did because I didn't want you involved," Anne said quietly, without looking at Douglas. "I must say, I'm glad you're so persistent. It must be that grand-master egomania."

The odor hit Douglas' nostrils a split second before he heard the words.

"You should have minded your own business, sonny."

The voice and smell belonged to the man with the yellow eyes, the one Anne had called Hawkins. Douglas spun and crouched. Hawkins was standing in the doorway, his legs braced. His lips were drawn taut as a bowstring in a strange, cruel smile. The pistol in his hand was aimed at Douglas' head.

"Checkmate, sonny," Hawkins said, and pulled the trigger.

However, Douglas was already moving, warned by his sensitivity to other people's moods. He knew that Hawkins intended summarily to execute him and that he had little to lose by trying to fight back. He ducked low and drove for the man's legs.

Douglas' speed saved him. The sudden movement caught Hawkins by surprise, throwing off his aim. The bullet smashed into Douglas' wrist, shattering the bone. Numbed by the effects of a massive surge of adrenaline, Douglas barely felt the pain as he hurled himself through the air and hit Hawkins at the knees. Douglas hit the floor hard. Hawkins crumpled over the top of him.

"Run, Anne!" Douglas heard himself shouting. "Get out of here! There's a hatch cover around the corner!"

"Douglas—"

"Run!"

He was vaguely aware of a lithe body hurtling through the air over his head, then the sound of footsteps turning the corner. A few seconds later there was the sound of a steel hatch cover clanging shut.

He was not dead yet. Douglas interpreted that as meaning that Hawkins had lost control of his gun. The yellow-eyed man's breath was coming in short gasps, and he was moaning with pain.

Douglas started to wiggle out from beneath the other man's body. It was then that the pain hit him, exploding in his wrist and coursing through his body like bolts of electricity. He cried out and clutched

at his wrist. The fingers of his right hand were immediately enveloped in a warm, sticky fluid.

Hawkins rolled off of him. Douglas lifted his head and almost vomited with terror as he saw the gun lying on the floor a few feet away. There was no way he could get to it before Hawkins.

Hawkins took a step toward the gun, then screamed in pain, clutching his right knee as he slumped to the floor. He then began crawling across the floor toward the gun.

Douglas pushed himself to his feet with his good right arm. His head swam with pain, and for a moment he was afraid he would pass out. Then it cleared enough for him to see that Hawkins had the gun. Douglas wheeled and ran out through the door at the same time as a loud explosion thundered in his ears and a bullet smashed into the wood paneling beside his head.

Douglas sprinted around the corner, let go of his wrist and pulled himself up the ladder to the right. He managed to turn the wheel gear, then, bracing his legs on the rungs of the ladder, pushed against the hatch cover with his shoulder. The steel cover was jammed.

He started to climb down, intending to try the other cover. He froze when he saw Hawkins suddenly emerge from around the corner. The man was staggering, clutching his ruined knee with one hand. His eyes were clouded with pain and hate.

For the second time Douglas pulled himself up the ladder and pushed against the hatch cover with his shoulder. His head was filled with a sound like crashing surf—the sound of terror.

Hawkins leaned against the wall, lifted his gun and fired, but the pressure on his shattered knee ruined his aim. The bullet bit into the metal inches from Douglas' left side, then whined off down the corridor.

The hatch cover suddenly burst open. Douglas scrambled up through the opening as a second bullet whined through the air beneath him. He slammed the hatch cover shut, then lay on his back, gasping for air, drinking in the cold, wet sea breeze.

He would have given anything to be able to lie there, not moving, and wait for them to come and get him. There seemed no sense in resisting; Anne and he had not really gotten away, but had merely escaped into a larger pen. They were still trapped on a ship at sea.

The thought of the girl brought him to his feet. He was not ready to die yet, and he would not be a grand master if he had not learned to play out some end games that were apparently lost.

He looked around him and immediately saw that he had made a

tactical error—he had come out the wrong hatch. He was on a narrow walkway, blocked off from the passenger section by a steel bulwark.

Hawkins' voice, fogged by pain and rage, came out of the darkness above him. "You should have taken the trouble to learn the layout of the ship, sonny. You came up the hard way—I took the freight elevator." There was a pause filled with hoarse, heavy breathing, then, "You're going to have a lot of company in a few minutes, sonny. But I'm going to take care of you personally."

Douglas pressed flat against the bulkhead. To his left, separated from him by twenty yards of moonlit walkway, were dark, undefined shapes in the open storage area at the stern of the ship. *Twenty yards.*

"Where's the girl?" Douglas asked.

"We'll find her," Hawkins said. The voice seemed closer, almost directly above Douglas.

Douglas tensed, clutching his injured wrist to his side. "You can't afford to do a lot of shooting, Hawkins. It'll wake the passengers."

The answer was a soft, spitting sound, like the cough of a cat. The wood on the walkway to Douglas' left splintered.

"End of the line, sonny."

Douglas pushed off the bulkhead and dashed toward the black shapes at the stern. Bullets whined in the air like angry steel bees. Finally he dove through the air, landed heavily on an oil drum and rolled off on the other side. His wrist felt as if it were bathed in molten metal, and he bit off the scream that formed at the back of his throat.

Finally, after what seemed an eternity, the pain subsided. Douglas lifted his head slightly and looked around him. He was on the edge of a forest of oil drums that had been loaded on pallets and lashed onto the deck. He lowered his head and crawled backward, deeper into the tangle of steel drums.

Somewhere in the darkness in front of him a door opened and closed. Then he heard the curious, shuffling footsteps of a man dragging one foot behind him. The drums could explode from the impact of a bullet, Douglas realized. Hawkins knew that too. The yellow-eyed man would be very careful, wait for a sure shot at close range.

Douglas turned as far as he could without making noise and desperately searched for something with which to defend himself. His knee brushed painfully against something—a chain. Douglas' mouth went dry. He reached down and caressed the thick, rusted links with his fingers.

The chain was heavy, perhaps too heavy for him to use in his

weakened condition. Still, it was the only weapon he had. One end was anchored firmly beneath a wooden pallet, probably having become lodged, then abandoned, during the course of loading. He estimated the loose end to be about eight feet long.

Douglas peered over the top of a barrel. Hawkins was about fifteen feet away, moving carefully, the gunmetal extension of his hand glinting in the moonlight. Douglas sank back down to the deck. It was only a matter of time before Hawkins or one of the other men moving out in the dark found him, and the longer he waited the weaker he would be. He would be executed, shot like a helpless, wounded animal. His left arm had begun to smolder with a white heat. He could wait no longer if he hoped to take Hawkins with him.

Douglas kicked at the nearest barrel. The drum produced a dull, thudding sound. The shuffling footsteps stopped, then started again, coming directly toward him: twelve paces, ten paces . . .

“Where the hell are you, you stinking—”

Douglas gripped the chain in the center with his right hand and sprang to his feet, shifting his weight and pulling on the chain with all his strength. The steel links clanged against the drums, skipped free and described a wide, whistling arc. The end of the chain caught Hawkins in the center of the forehead. There was a sound like the popping of a knuckle and the yellow-eyed man fell to his knees, then crumpled onto the deck.

Douglas leaped from behind his barricade, intending to search for Hawkins' gun. Out of the corner of his eye he saw two crewmen, guns drawn, converging on his position. He ducked down, frantically groping in the dark for the gun.

Douglas!”

Douglas glanced up at the sound of Anne's voice. He could see the girl standing at the railing on the upper deck, silhouetted by the moonlight. She was frantically waving her arms and could not see the man coming up behind her.

“Anne!” Douglas yelled. “Behind you!”

He didn't see what happened next. He ducked down behind a barrel as a bullet ricocheted off steel. He heard Anne call out his name again; he looked up in time to see her body hurtling down. The sound of her body hitting the water floated up to him through the darkness.

Douglas reacted instinctively, although he probably would have done the same thing if he'd had time to think about it—he would be no worse off in the water than he was on the ship. Bending low,

using the barrels as a shield, Douglas raced for the side of the ship, then leaped over the rail, aiming for the area where he had seen Anne fall.

His own fall seemed interminable, and when it finally ended he wished it hadn't. The water came up to meet him like a slab of concrete and once more pain shot through his wrist, blinding him, tearing the breath from his lungs. The icy cold of the water kept him conscious, but his strength was gone; the water was closing over his head and his lungs burned. In a moment, he knew, he would end it all, open his mouth and suck in the water.

Someone was yanking at his hair, pulling him up. Douglas kicked the last few inches to the surface, drinking in great drafts of air. Anne was supporting him in the water.

"Hey," Douglas sputtered at last, "I was supposed to rescue *you*."

Anne smiled. "I didn't want you to rescue me, I just wanted you to follow me."

Douglas shook his head. "I can't swim. My wrist is broken."

"Can you float?"

Douglas slowly lay on his back in the water, resting his left wrist on his chest. "Uh, I don't mean to sound pessimistic, but I'm not sure this is a solution. It's cold out here."

Anne glanced toward the east. The sun was just breaking over the horizon. "If you can hold out for an hour or so, we'll be eating breakfast on a British destroyer."

"How'd you manage that?"

"By being unladylike toward a very surprised radio operator. That's why I had to leave you down there with Hawkins. Duty, and all that. Besides, I thought you'd be able to handle him."

"Thanks a lot. What about Zoltan?"

"Well, I suspect he's going to have to take a big loss on this particular shipment. That ship will be a lot lighter by the time it pulls into Glasgow. By the way, did I thank you for saving my life?"

"I don't think you had time. Did I thank you for saving mine?"

"We can properly thank each other later."

Douglas smiled. "Are you any good at blindfold chess?"

"Pawn to king four."

Douglas thought for a moment, then said: "Pawn to queen bishop four."