

A CESSPOOL OF SPIES - SAMPLE CHAPTERS

LINDA WATKINS

PROLOGUE

Somewhere in the Midwest

THE LITTLE BOY COULDN'T SLEEP. HE HAD HAD AN exciting day. First, his mom and dad had taken him to the picture show where he saw not only Charlie Chaplin but, his favorite — the cowboys. And, despite his mom's objections, Daddy had bought him popcorn, candy, and a Coke which he demolished while watching the show.

Upon leaving the theater, his dad had then stopped and purchased him a white ten-gallon cowboy hat just like the good guy wore in the movie! Oh, how proud he'd felt wearing it! But the day wasn't over yet. After the show, they went to a diner, where he had a hot dog and French fries along with another Coke.

All in all, it was much too much stimulation for a five-year-

old boy and now, jacked up on all that sugar, he bounced on his bed, sleep evading him.

The white cowboy hat sat atop the knob on the footboard of his four-poster and he reached for it and put it on his head.

“Bang, bang,” he whispered, making his thumb and forefinger into a pretend pistol.

He laughed, then an idea hit him. He would have some fun with Mommy and Daddy. He would play a joke on them.

Slipping off the bed, he tiptoed down the hall to his parents’ room. He knew it was empty because he could hear the radio playing downstairs, punctuated by his parents’ occasional laughter. Once inside the bedroom, he walked past their bed to the nightstand.

Slowly, he opened the drawer. He stared at its contents for a moment.

His father’s gun.

He reached into the drawer and, surprised by the weight of the weapon, gripped it with both of his little hands. Holding it out in front of him, he tiptoed back out into the hall and down the stairs to the living room.

Mommy and Daddy were sitting on the couch, talking. They looked startled when they saw him enter the room.

“Take this, Black Bart!” the little boy yelled gleefully as he pulled the trigger on the gun.

CRACK!!!

The weapon exploded, its recoil causing the little boy to fall backwards onto the floor.

CRACK!!!

Another gunshot went off, aimed at the ceiling, and plaster rained down on the little boy’s head.

He could hear his mother screaming and now, extremely frightened, he began to cry.

“Daddy!” he yelled. “Help me!”

His mother’s screams continued, echoing across his consciousness.

Tears now stained the little boy’s cheeks and all he knew in that moment was that he had made a big mistake. Probably the biggest mistake in all of his short, happy life.

ONE
UNIVERSITY OF PITTSBURGH

“SIMON!”

I was hurrying down hallway, on my way to my next class, when I heard someone yelling my name from behind me. I tried to ignore him, not wanting to be late.

“SIMON! WAIT UP!”

I figured whoever wanted to talk to me wasn't going to give up, so reluctantly I stopped and turned to see who it was. It was Archie Holloway. He was running toward me, knobby arms and legs flying, a sheet of paper in his hand.

Archie was a senior like me, but was a couple years younger. His red hair was slicked back with *Brylcreem*. but not even that goop could keep his cowlick from standing at attention. I grinned thinking of how he looked like Alfalfa in the *Our Gang* movies.

He stopped a couple feet from me, trying to catch his breath.

“Calm down, Archie,” I said. “What's the big deal?”

"You going to the presentation tonight?" he asked, shoving the paper in my face.

Puzzled, I took it from him and quickly scanned it.

"The CIA?" I asked, handing it back to him. "Man, I've already done my service for God and country. Don't think I'm going to sign up again."

I began to turn and continue walking to my class but Archie put his hand on my arm, stopping me.

"Hey," he said. "They're giving a hefty recruiting bonus if you sign up for three years and, when you finish your stint, they say they'll help foot the bill for further education. I know when we graduate this June, you plan on doing construction for a couple of years to make enough money to fund at least one year of law school. Man, you could do three with the CIA, no sweat, and maybe get the whole ride taken care of."

I stared at him, now more than just a little interested. Back home in Nemacolin, PA, it was just my dad and me and he worked the mines. When I was close to turning eighteen and just barely out of high school, I told my pop I wanted to enlist. The year was 1942 and WWII was raging. I remember my pop looking me in the eye and saying, "I'm proud of you, son. You have my permission. But when you get home and this damned war's over, you're going to college. We have a deal?" I'd replied, "Yes, sir," and ran down to the recruiting office and enlisted in the Navy. Two years later, I was sent home, wounded by shrapnel after my ship was strafed by the Japs. Got myself a Purple Heart and, true to my word, enrolled in college at the University of Pittsburgh. I was now set to graduate with honors. Pop was still in Nemacolin and I knew he didn't have the money to help with law school, which was my dream. Maybe this CIA gig could turn the corner for me.

Thinking, I looked at the flyer again and, this time, studied it more closely. What Archie said was true. They were offering a bundle and it sounded like easy work. Doing research and stuff like that. I'd planned on working for a couple of years anyway before going back to school. What would be the harm in listening to the CIA guy's spiel?

"You goin'?" I asked Archie.

"Naw, you know my folks are loaded. I'm going straight to grad school. But I thought, you know, given your circumstances — and, word is they give preference to vets."

I nodded, grinning. "Yeah, finally that scar on my shoulder is good for something. Thanks for letting me know."

"You going?"

"Maybe. Now, I'm late for English Lit and you know what Professor Hanks thinks about tardiness. See you in the funny papers, and thanks."

With that, I hurried away, folding the flyer as I walked swiftly down the hall. The CIA? What did I know about it? Not much. It had been formed by President Truman in 1947 when he signed the National Security Act. The newly established agency took the place of the now-defunct Central Intelligence Group and was supposedly an independent, civilian agency. But it resided within the Executive Branch of the government and that made its independence dubious, to say the least. Its mission was vague. All I knew was it was charged with coordinating the nation's intelligence activities.

I thought about this as I took my seat in the back row of the lecture hall. Would they expect me to be a spy? I chuckled silently thinking about this. Fat chance. It would probably be more like what Archie had said — doing research on different countries and shit like that. Could I hack that for three years?

Hell, yes, I could. But I didn't get my hopes up. It was more likely just another pipe dream.

I leaned back in my chair, putting thoughts about the CIA out of my head, and turned instead to the professor who was droning on about the symbolism in *Moby Dick*. Furiously, I jotted down notes. I had to ace this course to stay on the honor roll.

CLASSES FINALLY OVER, I HEADED TO THE STUDENT UNION where I had a gig bussing tables. As I jogged over, I thought again about the CIA presentation that was going to take place at eight that evening. I wanted to attend and wondered if I could get my boss to let me off a little early so I wouldn't miss anything.

I worked diligently for about two hours, then approached Mr. Saggett, the manager.

"Excuse me, sir," I said politely. "There's a presentation in Donner Hall tonight at eight that I'd like to attend. I can make up the hours lost tomorrow."

Mr. Saggett smiled. "The CIA guy?"

Surprised, I nodded.

Saggett laughed. "Somehow I didn't peg you for a spy, Biggs, but you go on. And, don't worry about the lost hours. I know you've got studying to do for finals. We'll work something out later."

"Thank you, sir," I replied with a grin. "Thank you."

I quickly finished wiping down a few of the tables that had just been cleared, then took off my apron, stowed it in the

laundry sack, grabbed my books, and headed over to Donner. I had to admit to myself that I felt strangely excited. Would employment with the intelligence agency be just boring research? Or, would it be something more?

TWO BRAD

BRADLEY HIRAM SULLIVAN CHECKED HIS appearance in the bathroom mirror and smiled, pleased with what he saw. He was still fit and trim, even at the ripe old age of thirty-six, and he still had all his hair. Satisfied, he strode out into the hallway and peered into the auditorium. About two dozen young men were filing inside, most carrying either books or notepads. Brad studied each face carefully.

“Everything all set, Corporal?” he asked the young man who was approaching him.

The corporal nodded. “Everything is set to go, Major.”

Brad frowned. “Nix with the *major* stuff, son. I’m civilian now.”

The young man blushed. “Sorry, sir, I mean, Mr. Sullivan, sir.”

Brad smiled. “What do you think of the crowd, Stan?”

“A little thin, sir. Thought Pittsburgh would be better. You know, lots of working class here.”

Brad nodded. “You’re right about that, but it’s not quantity,

it's quality and some of those faces out there look fresh and intelligent."

"And, maybe hungry, too, sir?"

"Very astute, Corporal. Now, pass around a sign-in sheet, so I'll have names to go with the faces I just memorized. You know the drill."

"Yes, sir!"

The corporal grabbed a sheet of paper and a pen and made his way across the stage into the audience, making sure each attendee signed in. Later, when the presentation was finished, his boss would, with the dean's permission, pull files on all the students who attended and make copious notes as to each's eligibility for employment with the Central Intelligence Agency. Sullivan, who had practically a photographic memory, would match the names with faces, deciding which of the young men would be most suitable to recruit.

When the corporal returned, Bradley took the attendance sheet, folded it, and placed it in his pocket. Then, he nodded to the younger man, indicating it was time for him to man the slide projector.

The spotlight came on and, as the logo for the newly formed Central Intelligence Agency appeared boldly on the screen behind him, Brad stepped up to the podium.

THREE SIMON

THE HALL WAS SPARSELY POPULATED WHEN I ARRIVED and took a seat in the second row. I glanced around. Most of the guys there were in my class; some I knew, some I only knew of. On the stage were two men. The older one was wearing a three-piece suit with wide lapels. He was obviously the guy in charge. The other one, younger, was also dressed pretty nattily and was setting up what I assumed was a slide projector. The older guy, though dressed in civvies, had the demeanor of a man who'd been in the military. I guessed he was someone who had a lot of salad on his uniform and who was used to being in charge. Anyone lower in rank than a captain would have been barking orders at the younger guy, but this man talked quietly, yet with an enormous amount of authority. The kid with the slide projector, I assumed was a private or a corporal — just a grunt like I'd been.

I studied them as they prepared for their presentation, wondering about this CIA organization. It was supposed to be run by civilians, yet these guys were military. I was sure of it.

Was all the CIA propaganda about being a civilian organization just a smoke screen? And, if this intelligence agency was run by the Pentagon, then what was its actual mission? Just collecting intel? No, it had to be a bit more complicated than that and, if it was, did I really want to get involved in it?

I pondered this as I watched the giant CIA logo fill the screen behind the podium. The lights suddenly dimmed, and the older man stepped up to the microphone, tapped it a few times to make sure it was working, then began to speak.

“Gentlemen,” he said, “welcome. My name is Brad Sullivan and I am here as a representative of the Central Intelligence Agency, a vital arm of our government. Before I go into our mission and the purpose of this meeting today, let me provide a little background on our agency.

“While foreign intelligence gathering has been a part of our government’s mission since the Revolutionary War, prior to WWII these functions were carried out separately by the FBI, the US Armed Services, and the Department of State. These agencies did not, at all times, coordinate with one another. Thus, it became a necessity to combine all foreign intelligence services into one agency. In 1946, the Central Intelligence Group was formed from the former OSS and, in 1947, President Truman...”

He began to drone on and I could see the guys in the audience had divided into two groups: one that took notes furiously as if the knowledge he was imparting was going to be on their history final exam, and the others who were leaning back in their chairs trying desperately to stifle the desire to yawn. I fell into the latter group. If I wanted to know the history of the CIA, I could always go to the library and look it up. What I wanted to know was what these yahoos

were offering and would it be enough to get me to sign up with them.

Finally, Sullivan got to the meat of the matter. A slide flashed on the screen indicating there would be a signing bonus for anyone who committed themselves in writing to a three-year stint in the CIA. In addition, upon discharge of the three-year term, support would be made available to assist former employees in furthering their education. This support would be in addition to that supplied by the G.I. Bill.

All that sounded damn good to me. But I wondered what exactly it was I would have to do during those three years. Spy on people? Sullivan wasn't saying. Mr., or possibly Major, Sullivan was rather vague on the exact duties recruits would be expected to perform. Instead, he focused on the perks and went through each one in detail and, when he got to the last one, he polled the audience.

"How many of you gentlemen are veterans?" he asked. "Give me a show of hands."

I glanced around as I raised my arm. About half the audience had served.

"Good," Sullivan said with a grin. "Now, how many of you have seen combat?"

Again, hands went up, including mine.

Sullivan stood silent, studying us for a moment, then continued on. "I ask about your service because you've already been through basic and that will give you a leg up if you sign with us."

A broad-shouldered kid in the front row spoke up. "How do you mean, sir?"

"Well, we have a training camp, run by The Office of Training, for new recruits. Part of it is physical and, since

you've already done basic, that module should be a walk in the park."

The kid nodded. "I get it, but what else is covered in the training?"

Sullivan leaned forward on the podium. "I'm glad you asked that, son," he replied. "While we expect our recruits to be in tip-top physical shape, we also require them to bone up on the basics of intelligence gathering. This means you'll also be drilled in surveillance techniques, wire-tapping, and other methods of gathering information."

"Do you mean it's like a spy school?" I asked, which garnered chuckles from the audience.

Sullivan frowned. "I like to call it instruction in observation techniques, not spying, if you get my drift."

More laughter from the audience was followed by more questions. I took notes and then, when the presentation was over, grabbed one of the pamphlets provided by the junior officer. I tucked it into my notebook as I filed out of the auditorium along with all the other students.

Back in my room, I studied the pamphlet which included an application form. It all sounded good, but I still wondered — what was the catch?

Knowing I needed some advice, I took the brochure and a dime down the hall to the pay phone.

"Simon?" a gruff voice answered.

"Yeah, Pop, it's me."

"What happen? You fail an exam?"

I laughed. "No, Pop. Just wanted to hear your voice."

My father laughed, followed by a harsh cough.

"You okay?" I asked, suddenly concerned.

"I'm good, Simon," he replied. "Just a touch of a cold. Now, what's the real reason for this call?"

I quickly summarized the presentation I'd just come from.

"Well, what do you think?" I asked when I finished.

"Sounds good, but what's the catch? Ain't no such thing as a free lunch, you know!"

I grinned. We were on the same page. "That's what I thought, too, Pop. But, still, that signing bonus and the promise of support for grad school — it might be too good to pass up."

"Yeah, I know what you mean, son. I wish I could help out more, but ..."

"Don't you worry about that, Pop," I said. "I'll get there one way or the other. Think I'll fill out the application, send it in, and see what happens. If they offer me the job, I can always turn it down if things seem hinky."

"Good idea, Simon. Now, your old man's beat. I'm going to clean up the dishes from dinner and head off to bed. If you need to talk more, call me on the weekend."

"Will do, Pop, and thanks for the advice."

We exchanged a few more pleasantries, then I hung up. Back in my room, I sat at my desk and opened up the application. I'd complete it tonight and send it off in the morning