

Chapter 1

“Reduce speed to one-third,” ordered the Captain. His young pilot swung the polished brass engine room telegraph smartly to full span and then pulled it back to one-third. Captain McManus then announced his vessel’s intended entry into Havana harbor with two long and very distinct tones from her air horn. The engine room telegraph handle moved as it rang twice, signaling the engine room complied. Gray-black water that sheeted off the cutwater dissipated as the coastal steamer *Olivette* slowed, responding promptly when the inlet valves directing steam to the engines were throttled down.

Captain Cyrus McManus, short, bowlegged, and grayed at his temples, was a former Confederate naval officer in line for a captaincy just as the war drew to a close. Even at his advanced age, he maintained himself in such superb physical condition that no one dared countermand his orders for fear of an old-fashioned butt kicking. He never returned to military service following the war, despite incessant recruiting and the demand for experienced sea captains in the re-constituted U.S. Navy. He chose to ply his trade with the new generation of coal-fired passenger steamers. Working along the Eastern coast, he built a reputation as a master of steam engines. As newer and larger vessels were built, he turned down offers for commands, preferring to stay in charge of the engine room, the heart and soul of the vessels.

The *Olivette* and her two sister ships were the brainchild of an old colleague, shipping magnate Henry B. Plant, who specifically required that the building contractor use McManus as a consultant in construction of the vessels, particularly for the design and production of the engines. When the *Olivette* was completed, McManus willingly served under Captain McKay for ten years, further honing the vessel’s power plant. When McKay retired, Plant and the other owners convinced McManus to assume his rightful and long overdue position at the *Olivette*’s helm.

“Ninety to starboard,” McManus directed. The *Olivette* made him proud. She may have been ten years old but her engines ran with exacting specifications and still ran as smoothly as they did the first time she spun her iron screw. No other passenger steamer could even compare. She was a stately vessel, three hundred feet from stem to stern, and thirty-five feet at the beam, which gave her passengers a wide promenade deck with a clear and full view of the ocean expanse while en route. Moreover, she was reliable.

“Aye, sir. Ninety to starboard,” the helm officer replied briskly. The *Olivette* was a frequent visitor to Havana, a workhorse in Plant’s shipping company, robust enough that she seldom missed her three runs per week schedule between Havana, Key West and Port Tampa. The vessel slid directly into the center of the channel. McManus smiled as he sauntered to the pilothouse port side windows and craned his neck to follow the imposing edifice rock on which perched Castle Morro some fifty feet above.

At the top of the massive block wall, he caught a glimpse of a group of Spanish soldiers, their rifles shouldered, lined along the edge of the castle’s defensive walls, staring back down at him as he directed his vessel to another on-time, mid-day mooring.

“Get over it,” McManus grumbled angrily at the voyeurs. He held them culpable for the personal embarrassment he endured from the *Olivette* Incident, as it was publicly called by the Yellow Press. It was all because a young Cuban woman was taken into custody and searched by a Spanish police matron on his vessel. Led by newspaper mogul Randolph Hearst, the American press exaggerated the incident into three nubile Cuban women strip-searched by a male police officer on his vessel as he stood by unwilling and unable to come to their aid. McManus still smarted over the newspaper story now nearly six months later. He hated being portrayed as a Captain “helpless” against the Spanish authorities.

“Give ‘em a show, Chief,” he then mumbled over his shoulder to his crew Chief.

“Aye, Cap’n!” Chief O’Connor, a grizzled old Scotsman, winked as he growled. His lumbered walk betrayed arthritic hips.

“And hoist the Gadsden on the jack mast,” McManus added.

“Fly ‘em! Fly ‘em all! Gadsden on the jack!” the chief called as he stepped out the side portal and onto the narrow Captain’s walk around the pilothouse to monitor his charges. White clad crewmembers scurried into action, hands flying over ropes and rigging, hoisting the blanched triangular sheets up to

their full-open position on the foremast. The sails had no real function anymore. They were mostly for show, since the *Olivette*'s heartbeat came from a triple expansion steam engine.

The Gadsden flag, a rattlesnake on a yellow background, a symbol of the American War of Independence, was shimmied up the jack mast. McManus sneered. "Don't tread on me, you rat bastards," while passing the fortress. He held back shaking his fist. "Maybe the only good thing to come out of the north," he mumbled as the flag snapped to attention at the top of the mast.

McManus turned back into the pilothouse, but as he looked over his papers, realized he still had one more preparation for coming into port. "Chief, where's the damned Purser?" he called out the open window.

"Right behind you sir," Ames, the ship's purser calmly replied, standing just inside the side portal. A wry grin curled his lips.

"Should 'a known..." McManus's comment was as much an apology as any crewmember would get on board his vessel. He handed Ames a thick yellow envelope, then added with a wink, "Find out from our guest if we expect any return mail."

"I know there will be sir," Ames replied, taking the envelope.

McManus enjoyed the cloak and dagger-like mission with his old friend, Havana's Consul-General Fitzhugh Lee — right under the noses of the Spanish authorities. The nimble purser disappeared as quickly as he had arrived, double-timing his way down the metal stairway to the dining saloon.

Samuel Carter looked up from his coffee when Ames entered. The purser scanned the room as he approached. '*Unnecessary*,' Carter thought. Most of the passengers were watching the Captain's mooring maneuver from the open area at the bow.

"You will see the Green House tomorrow?" Ames asked, his slight British accent tainting his words as he slipped the envelope to Carter.

Carter nodded yes, understanding the message clearly. Ames twitched the corner of his mouth, then scurried back to the pilothouse as Carter stuffed the envelope into his jacket pocket and continued slurping at his coffee. He would move it to his secret hidden pocket when he was sure no one would notice. He already knew Domingo Villaverde had intercepted some very sensitive cabled messages from Madrid that were too risky to be directly cabled back to Key West. Villaverde must have cabled Tom Warren, his telegrapher counterpart in Key West, that he had a "hot one." Warren relayed the message to Ames, who acted as the go-between, that another secret from Havana required delivery. That was the ruse, and the *Olivette* and her timely schedule became the perfect courier.

Carter watched Castle Morro fade into the distance on the port side while Havana harbor widened. Underneath the bright blue sky, the glassy black water perfectly mirrored a flotilla of vessels of all sizes: fishing boats, orphaned dinghies, cockleshells held at anchor close to shore, peeking out from behind massive iron-hulled ocean and coastal steamers moored at the buoyed deeper water stations. Even larger Spanish war-ships nested amidst the flotilla with their gray hulls and big guns peering toward the shore as if on guard for unwarranted landward approach.

Alone with just his thoughts, Carter mused about his past six months, most of it spent in Cuba. Originally assigned here as an experienced counterfeiting sleuth for the U.S. Treasury, his charge was to sort through the activities of some less than honest Americans looking to wheedle advantages to further their illicit activities. He never expected to be drawn into espionage under the auspices of Consul-General Fitzhugh Lee. Protocol demanded he report to him while in Cuba. Lee drew him deep into his cobbled web of covert operatives who monitored the insidious Spanish infection now brutally spiraling out of control. Whether his boss in Washington, Treasury Director Hazen, was or was not aware of the redirection was unclear to Carter, he reckoned there must have been at least a tacit acceptance.

A refreshing breeze slipped through the open windows of the saloon and whisked kindly across his skin, already beading up with sweat. He took another drink from his coffee, cooled enough to take by the mouthful, and mused the rules in this new game of espionage. Lee, an ex-Confederate cavalryman was tutoring him in this new venture. The rules were disparate enough from his previous undercover work and felt made up as he went, with one exception — don't get caught. His lessons at the Citadel gave him some insight to the tactics of espionage, but this was new for America and for him.

Carter took another drink as he heard the distinctive *ring-ring* of the ship's engine room telegraph. He felt the rumble of *Olivette's* engines quell to a pleasant, lulling hum. Another double ring. The engines reversed. No jolt. *Captain McManus and his crew were quite adept at smooth moorings*, Carter thought. Out over the convergence of passengers at the bow, a pack of motorized tugs and ferries headed out to meet them. Steam-powered tugs kissed the *Olivette* port and starboard and together worked the steamer to her mooring while rickety looking ferries hovered nearby.

As the *Olivette* finally stopped and dropped anchor, Carter downed the last bit of his coffee, complete with the bitter grounds, and stood up. He worked his wide-brimmed Panama style hat that shaded his fair skin from the sun on his bristly red hair and hand pressed his suit jacket. As was his habit, he scanned the room. He noticed a rather stout, older man in a seersucker suit helping a well-dressed younger woman up from her chair at a table across the dining salon. Her head turned slightly toward Carter. Her alluring green eyes, framed by her long, auburn hair, appeared to smile at him. Slowly shouldering his old, carpetbag type satchel, Carter smiled back. She turned away with the older man then melded into the pack of American businessmen and visitors queuing for departure.

Carter regrouped his thoughts. There were enough Americans embarking on their own Cuban adventure that he knew his features would not stand out. So long as he maintained a neat outward appearance, Spanish authorities and Cubans loyal to Spain would not suspect him as a spy. Carter realized though, that despite blending in, he still needed to maintain vigilance.

On shore, Carter queued into the line and waited his turn on the dock for routine inspection by the Spanish authorities. He didn't have to worry — he had left his weapon squirreled away at the Consulate before he left for the States. Most of the people in front of him in line were processed efficiently, one officer inspecting papers while the other questioned and cursorily checked bags for contraband, leaving Carter's wait short.

"*Dale tu bolsa a él, ya mí tu cuenta de pasaporte,*" the taller of the two officers barked. Carter complied, relinquishing his bag and papers. The officer inspected the small hard-covered passport, then looked up. "*¿Su nombre es William Alexander?*"

"The Third," Carter replied, one-liner like, presenting three fingers to the officer asking his name.

As long as he added the designation 'III', Carter's stepfather agreed to him using the alias. He tipped up the brim of his hat. The shorter officer looked up as he finished rummaging through Carter's satchel.

"*Nada,*" he mumbled, then dropped the satchel at Carter's feet. He then thrust his arm forward, grabbed the yellowed envelope peeking out from under the American's jacket flap and surrendered it to his superior.

"*¿Lleva algo para declarar, Señor Alexander?*" the officer asked, not trying to speak to him in English. He waved the envelope at Carter, and then opened it. After he scanned them, he slapped them back at Carter without replacing the blank sheets back into the envelope. Carter shook his head and shrugged his shoulders.

"Just wanted some real paper to write home with... didn't think I needed to declare that," he quipped as he picked up the papers and put them away.

"*Vaya,*" the officers barked and turned back to the waiting queue. "*Siguiente,*" one ordered, pointing to the next person in line.

"*Gracias, señores,*" Carter replied, swung his satchel over his shoulder then moved on, distancing himself from the dock area, where many of the Americans stopped to ask passing locals for directions in unrehearsed, grammatically pitiful Spanish. Carter sucked in some of the thickness that was the air this time of year in Cuba. Havana was vibrant, and when not, completely quiet. There were few indications of the desolation, distress, misery and rampant starvation under the Spanish occupation.

He continued on to a café across the main street, the Café Luz. It wasn't his favorite place in Havana. In fact, he probably would not even stop here but for its location — a position that provided full view of the harbor traffic and a focal point where intelligence could be harvested. This rat hole allowed him an unsullied view and protected him from stumbling into the crosshairs of the Spanish junta. The Spanish did appreciate his assigned position as Treasury agent, since it left the local policemen one less issue they

would need to deal with. They neither cared for nor tolerated espionage. Criminality was more acceptable than espionage in this milieu.

“*Buenas tardes, señor. ¿Un café?*” a faceless voice asked. Carter turned and saw the familiar wispy physique of Ramón standing behind him, his hands folded fig leaf in front of his yellowed apron. Carter removed his wide brimmed hat, wiped beaded sweat off his brow, and then nodded “*Sí*” in reply. Ramón disappeared into the sea of table umbrellas. As Carter settled into a white, multi-layered painted wrought iron chair at a small table and gazed out at the *Olivette*, Ramón reappeared. The young Cuban placed a steaming cup of coffee on the table then chinked a water-spotted spoon onto the saucer. Thick, sweet Cuban coffee here was an added attraction here. It the most flavorful he had found in Havana, served hot and sweetened with a generous dose of native sugar cane. Even the late summer swelter’s stifling humidity, drawn in over the island by a tropical storm departing to the west, could not curb his desire for wanting this coffee hot. The flavor was worth the extra perspiration that bled from his pores as he drank.

“Some bread with your coffee, Señor?” Ramón asked, in English this time. “Perhaps toasted?”

“*No. Gracias, Ramon.*” Carter replied as he looked up and considered his waiter more closely. Ramón’s left arm was laced with white keloid scars, traces that stood out next to his dark skin, reminders of his incarceration by the Spanish authorities. He was still not sure if Ramón was his given name, but that really did not matter. No one seemed to use given names here anymore. Ramón’s imprisonment failed its purpose, as it had with most Cubans since it simply cultivated stronger anti-Spanish sentiment and among most Cubans he knew. As Ramón returned a smile to Carter, his parted lips betrayed a missing front tooth.

Carter took out the yellowed envelope from his jacket and set it on the table so that Ramón would notice. He looked around to be sure no one, especially Spanish authorities watched him, then replaced the blank paper with the authentic messages he had hidden from the inspectors in his trousers. Ramón took the envelope, slipped it into the pocket on his apron then disappeared. Carter waited; sipping at his coffee until Ramón walked by and casually set the envelope back onto the table. Carter returned the envelope to his jacket pocket, finished his coffee, and left the bistro, continuing on to the Consulate, which was now more or less, his home.

He regarded his life as it was now. He enjoyed the assignment as an intelligence scout for Fitzhugh Lee and understood his upbringing better than most of the Northerners he worked with in Washington, all of who were as thick as thieves. The General seemed more like a father, not just because of their comparative ages, but also that the old man was versed in the details of what he desperately wanted to know — details about the *Hunley*, a secret Confederate submarine. Carter had discovered only a few years back that his real father had served on that infernal machine and was presumed dead following an incident off Charleston. Few people, even his mother and stepfather spoke much about this vessel. Lee explained why the *Hunley* was critical in the bitter fight to extend Charleston’s life, revealing facts about which his history professors at the Citadel fell short during their lectures.

Carter turned and headed due west, about a block away from the Consulate. He reached the gate that led into the compound, and approached the rather large building that resembled an antebellum plantation house. After slipping through the gates, he headed up the worn carpet covering squeaky wooden stairs, past the first floor offices of the New York Herald that set up shop for several reporters, and into the Consulate proper.

“Well, I’ll be. Welcome back, Mr. Carter. I was hopin’ you’d catch the *Olivette*,” Consul-General Fitzhugh Lee said as he waved to hurry Carter in. His thick southern drawl and aristocratic paunch betrayed both his Confederate bloodline and fondness for the local cuisine.

“I reckon the storm that blew by did nothing for the weather. Still feels like hell out there,” Carter followed Lee and entered the great room of the Consulate, a room replete with plush, aristocratic furniture and gold leafing. Hallways webbed out from the Great Room, which led to what they had converted into offices.

“You ain’t lyin’, son, but I was thinkin’ an Alabama boy like you would feel at home in this soup we got for air down here,” Lee chuckled through his words as he melted into his chair, slipped off his unbuckled boots and thumped his stocking feet onto the corner of his Victorian styled desk. Carter settled

into a cushioned chair in front of Lee's desk as he regarded the formulaic former Confederate cavalry commander. Lee could only be carried into battle by draught horse these days, but his demeanor and suit remained meticulous and diplomatic. He fired up the end of a long, Cuban cigar, offering Carter one while blue smoke boiled from his nostrils. The ecstasy of his inhale could be discerned by his wriggling toes.

"I understand the *Seneca* will be arriving in two days," Carter then prompted as he sat back in his chair.

"Excellent. You've done some homework," Lee chirped as he spun an ambrotype across his cluttered desk. Carter immediately recognized the young, sultry eyed beauty in the picture. Evangelina Cisneros, as he recalled, was the daughter of Colonel Cosío y Cisneros, a former insurgency President and revolutionary arrested by the Spanish authorities. His old friend, General Calixto García had spoken of him many times. According to the Hearst papers, Evangelina was skirted away with him to the Isle of Pines, an off shore prison south of Cuba, more as a result of her guileless support of her father than any specific insurgent activity. The American press chronicled a sordid tale of Evangelina's suffering and relentless pandering by her Spanish captors with enough fervor to rattle the McKinley administration into higher-level negotiations to facilitate a release. The negotiations failed.

When Colonel Cisneros took very ill, the Spanish authorities moved him to an on shore medical facility. At that time, Governor-General Weyler ordered father and daughter to be separated, moving Evangelina to a women's prison in Havana where the Governor-General decreed mandatory incarceration for the city's prostitutes; in reality, Weyler cordoned them off for his own sordid benefit and for the delight of his minions. Over a hundred women were jailed, and Carter thought that Evangelina Cisneros shouldn't have been subjected to such detritus.

"So let me understand this whole caper," Carter dropped the ambrotype back on the desk while Lee poured himself three fingers of Scotch into a crystal tumbler.

"Hush, son, and let me finish," Lee interrupted, raising his open palm, cigar wedged between his forefingers like a pointer. "McKinley and his bunch up in Washington haven't gotten off square one on getting her released. The presses in New York have called on him to release her, along with other political prisoners, mind you. My bride has filed a personal plea with Governor-General Weyler. Nothin'. Even Mrs. McKinley, bless her heart as infirm as she is, petitioned Weyler. Still nothin'."

"Why her?" Carter could not hold back his question. "Why *her* in particular?"

"Strike while the iron's hot, son!" Lee slammed his open hand on the desk and vaulted up from his chair. Shoeless, he slid around the room in a rather awkward march. He stopped at a world map on his wall pointed to places as he spoke. "With Cánovas gone and Sagasta is in control over, here; Weyler no longer has the full support from Madrid, here. By the way, I am sure Villaverde's stolen cables confirm that, since this not something the Spaniards would want us to know. McKinley, here, ain't doin' crap to take advantage of Weyler's weakness, here. So if we can embarrass Weyler by sneakin' out the most talked about prisoner in the world, maybe Madrid will finally recall the damned "Butcher" and we can get on with some real negotiations for *Cuba Libre*."

"And why me?"

"I know those damned cowboy reporters are running along with this scheme with or without us, and we can't have that. Especially since I can't trust them to pull it off without stumbling. And those clowns stumbling could expose everything we are doing here."

Carter mulled over the comments for a moment as he fondled his cigar.

"And I know you can get it done right, son," Lee added before sucking deeply on his cigar.

"So I'm going to kidnap this woman and skirt her over to the *Seneca* right under the authorities' noses?" asked Carter.

Lee turned and grinned from ear to ear. "You got it, son." Carter scrunched his lips and continued a fixed stare on Lee. "You know, son. You look like you could use a drink and some rest. Why don't you slip in there and get in a quick nap before we get this thing rolling?" Lee noted as he pointed to a room Carter had been using.

Sam Carter took his morning walk around the harbor and noticed that the *Seneca* still had not arrived. It would have been a day early today, he thought, but the ship's arrival was clearly the most important piece of this cockamamie plan Lee had coerced him into executing. And if they completed their job before the ship arrived, hiding an escaped prisoner in Havana might just become the more dangerous part of the plan's agenda.

There was little he could do about the *Seneca*, he thought as he stopped in front of the Café Luz for a coffee. He settled into a bent iron chair at a small table and continued his gaze out onto the murky waters of Havana harbor. If there was any solace to the polluted darkness, it was now. Ferries and fishing boats would soon split the surface like plows in a cotton field, spreading wakes meandering toward the shoreline and seawalls, which would then disappear as they kissed the land.

"*Buenos Dias, señor. ¿Un café?*" Carter turned and saw Ramón standing behind him. Mauve colored stains streaked down the Cuban's same yellowed apron made Carter wonder if anyone considered washing them. As Carter removed his wide brimmed hat, he nodded, and Ramón once again disappeared into the sea of table dew-laden dripping umbrellas. Carter's mind wandered aimlessly until he noticed the young lady that had been on the *Olivette* seated at a table across the veranda. She was alone and interestingly dressed in more casual clothes than the fine dresses she wore on the ship. Carter's curiosity was stirred as he watched the young woman scribble notes in a bound brown booklet between sips of coffee.

"Your coffee, señor," Ramón's voice startled Carter. He set the steaming coffee on the table.

"Any news?" Carter asked. Ramón quickly stiffened. His eyes wandered around to be sure no one was within ear shot before leaning over Carter's right shoulder.

"*Casa de Recojidas*. Plans delivered this morning," Ramón whispered as he unfolded Carter's napkin.

"Yes, it will be hot today." Carter avoided a direct reply, speaking with an arrogant flair and much louder than his waiter. He mopped his brow again with a handkerchief.

"And guard schedules."

"Yes, we have been very fortunate no storms have ruined this wonderful weather," Ramón flashed an asymmetrical smile and nodded at Carter. He stuffed his yellowed dishtowel in the loosely tied string holding his apron from falling below his waist, then turned and limped away, back toward the café's kitchen.

Carter got what he needed. He sipped at his coffee and monitored the locals as they meandered through narrow streets. In spite of the oppressive heat, women knew enough to dress modestly so not to incite wandering packs of soldiers. Not even the sensationalized Caribbean machismo compared to what he had heard of their brutal and lustful demands for satiation.

Others, like Ramón, failed to hide the examples of retribution for their dissidence; disfigured limbs, scars from bullets, and burns from torture. Their eyes remained hollow. Their disposition echoed disparagingly hopeless against what appeared to be the invincible and brutal overlord which the Spanish military had become. He reckoned that most of the locals knew not what he knew; that their own patriots, insurgent Generals Calixto Garcia and Máximo Gómez were in fact, making slow but forward progress against the oppressively strangling Spanish rule. Carter would have rather buoyed their hopes with that revelation, but the insurgency needed the element of surprise on their side.

Carter set his cup down and let the coffee cool just a bit more. As he drank in the sights, he noticed that the table where the young lady had been sitting was now vacant. He brooded for a moment, realizing he had lost his chance to approach. It would have been a welcome diversion for his morning. When he dropped his gaze to the ground though, a leaflet lying under the table caught his attention. He picked it up, turned it over and noticed that it was a copy of the *Ensayo Obrero*, a socialist paper. Mulling over the paper as he milked his coffee, he reckoned that in a place as chaotic as Cuba had become, messages like this could fuel anarchy and spread like fire through a dry cane field. That however, was of little concern to him for now, he noted as he checked his pocket-watch.

"Damn," he mumbled as he realized he was running late. He bottomed-up the cup, letting the residual grounds of the coffee slide into his mouth, since they would allow him to continue savoring the

taste. Stuffing the leaflet into his jacket pocket, he fished out a few coins, dropped them onto the table, and left the cafe.

"Sam, we've been waiting for you," Consul-General Fitzhugh Lee called as Carter entered the Consulate. He waved Carter to follow him down the easternmost hallway. "We're in the main office." Carter trailed the paunchy Consul until they turned into a wide-open conference room where two men stood. They turned and stared at Carter. Instead of shying away from their owl-like glances, Carter approached with a wide smile.

"Sam Carter. Glad to meet you," Carter stated. He recognized Karl Decker from his Nordic features, athletic build, and distinct hairless scar that followed his jaw line, surrounded by week-old stubble. Decker obtained that wound when he was trampled while reporting on a violent coalmine strike two years back. Sam assumed Decker would have probably forgotten that it was he that pulled the reporter out of the fray that night. Probably even saved his life.

"Karl Decker." The well-dressed reporter shook Carter's hand vigorously and strongly, as if to emphasize his fitness.

Carter reckoned he was about thirty, a year or two younger than he was. "Reporter, correct?"

"That I am." Decker puffed up, as if trying to intimidate Carter, but it only served as amusement.

"And this is Carlos Carbonell," Lee quickly moved to separate Sam from Decker. Carbonell was distinctly Cuban, with dark eyes much friendlier than Decker's.

"Señor Carter," Carbonell grinned and nodded. "I appreciate your assistance and understanding about how important Evangelina's freedom is for my people."

"Ramón indicated that plans and schedules have been delivered," Carter turned back to Lee, slighting Decker.

"Yes, yes, they are here," Lee motioned to the large conference table where several mounds of paper had been piled. As Decker, Carbonell and Carter headed toward the table, Lee went to a corner stand and poured himself a glass of dark, sweet rum. Carter noticed that the ex-General did not offer to pour a glass for anyone else in the room. They all needed to stay sharp.

Carter glared over to Lee as the old man sipped on his snifter. He was uneasy jumping into a plan that had already been half done, especially one most likely concocted by a reporter more interested in just another flashy story he could write. Risk in this case would need to be weighed with intense scrutiny. Carter preferred to work alone and did not care to be involved with a reporter's agenda. Lee made it clear he thought otherwise and that this prison break needed to be successful, he with reservations about Decker's impetuosity compromising the plan. Lee needed Carter involved. Carter capitulated to the joint effort, out of loyalty to Lee, and out of understanding the consequences of failure.

Arching his eyebrows, Lee terminated the non-verbal discussion, grinned and lifted his snifter as if offering a toast.

"Prison plan," Decker stated matter-of-factly, pulling a large paper out from underneath the mounds. He dramatically slapped it down, flattened it, and then circled above it with his finger until he found his mark on the map. "As I have been told, Cisneros is in New Hall...here."

"What's over here?" Carter asked as he studied the map briefly.

"La Casa." Decker said. "The whole area must have been a neighborhood before the Spaniards turned it into a prison."

"It was for rent. With the help of Consul Lee, I was able to secure it." Carbonell grinned proudly. "We can bridge across from here to the roof. It is a short span."

"And these are the list of guards, their rounds schedules, and available transport to get away," Decker added, listing the papers he had picked up from the pile and waved them triumphantly at Carter.

Carter thought as he skewered Decker with a sideward glance: *'What a pompous ass. If you recall, I got those.'*

"The guards are *not* the most diligent," Carbonell inserted. "They are there because the Spanish cannot use them in the jungle."

'That's a dangerous assumption,' Carter thought. He knew that many soldiers purposely bumbled to be assigned a safer city post. *'And your roundness is not a liability?'*

"I see," Carter responded, checking the schedules before refocusing on the map. With the facts understood, he walked through the plan in his head. The rented house next door would make this caper simpler. "How many in the room with her?"

"Eleven, at last count," Carbonell answered. Carter scrunched his face. "They are all rather 'nice' ladies. Not the kind a young girl should be with," he added, twitching his full eyebrows as his mouth twisted into a devilish grin.

"I can round up enough morphine to put a whole stable to sleep," Lee anticipated Carter's next question. He had propped his shoe-less feet on the desk and casually wiggled his toes as he milked his drink and puffed on a rather fat dark wrapped cigar.

"I'd rather use something else, but morphine will do for now," Carter mumbled.

"I have been able to bring small things to her," Carbonell added. "The guards usually do not search me."

"Does she know about this?" Carter noticed Decker's impatience.

"Yes, I sat with her last week," Carbonell said.

Carter looked over the guard schedule again, and then looked at his watch.

"Tomorrow night, then. Get the morphine to her this afternoon. Decker and I will go after her and then you can take her away in the carriage," Carter finished, pointing to Carbonell. All the heads around the table nodded. Lee grunted his agreement between draws on his cigar.

Kaiser Wilhelm was visibly disturbed by the dispatch he received from his ambassador to Madrid. His newly appointed foreign minister, Bernhard von Bülow, squirmed in his chair as he watched the Kaiser thoroughly read the document a second time.

"Insolence...!" Wilhelm spat. His forehead glowed red as he threw the document down onto his desk and slammed his fist onto it as if squashing a bug. "Yankee insolence," he growled at von Bülow.

"Sire, it is only conjecture that General Woodford will be delivering an ultimatum," von Bülow countered, rather sheepishly.

"This is an outrage. No one has the right to demand compliance." Wilhelm vaulted from his seat and started pacing about the room. "It is high time that we stand by Her Majesty and provide a concerted front against this blatant disrespect for our authority as monarchs. What Spain wishes to do in Cuba is her business and her business alone."

"May I propose caution, Sire. America does provide a very rich market for our exports," von Bülow started in an attempt to calm the Kaiser's volatility.

Wilhelm continued to march angrily in a circle about the room, his arms folded behind him, underneath each of the larger than life portraits of his father and his grandfather. He finally stopped, stomped his heels into the floor and turned toward his minister.

"That does not give them the right to snatch Cuba for herself!" he growled. "If not Spain, then I should have it! That has already been discussed."

Wilhelm knew that was not the complete truth. It was his desire to have Cuba, something that he had not directly discussed with Spain's Queen Regent. With Cánovas now out of the way, he should have little resistance in plying the pearl of the Caribbean from his European neighbor. Even if it took deception.

"May I suggest an indirect approach, Sire?" von Bülow calmly offered. Wilhelm folded his arms in front of him, cocked his head, and assumed a listening posture. "I can test the conviction amongst the European monarchs with regard to a mutual stance in this matter. With caution I add that the concerted response shan't expose Germany as the one leading this charge."

"Who would you suggest?" Wilhelm mused as he tugged on his mustache.

"Perhaps Austria."

"Explain," Wilhelm demanded.

“Being the Queen Regent’s birthplace, Austria should most willingly come to her aid, and take the lead in encouraging her to solicit the support of the other monarchies on her behalf.” Wilhelm continued stroking the tips of his exaggerated handlebar mustache until a sly grin crept onto his face.

‘France would not be an issue, and Nicholas is so mired in his own debacles that he would be lukewarm to it but not opposed,’ Wilhelm calculated in his mind. *‘England is the wild card.’* He started back toward his expansive oak desk, gold leaf gleaming at the corners, then settled into his chair and stared up to the portraits.

“I agree,” he conceded. “But assure Vienna that I will be ready to provide the most earnest consideration to any proposals which London or Paris provide.”

“I will attend to this immediately, Sire,” von Bülow said as he gathered his papers, folded them together and started back to his office.

As soon as the door had closed, Wilhelm unlocked the upper left file drawer at his desk, where he maintained his most sensitive files, and took out the plan that Admiral Tirpitz had recently returned to him. The details he had hoped his strategic confidant would add were there, clearly and meticulously printed in his bold, ornate script. He approved of the plan. It was brilliant.

Wilhelm turned the page and read over the requirements listed on the attached papers Tirpitz had titled *“Vorbedingung weiblich.”* As far as the Kaiser knew, the materiel he identified was on track. Tirpitz had won financial support from the Reichstag, and was now fathering the construction of the requisite dreadnaughts and battle cruisers in the Krupp shipbuilding factories.

Underwater vessels would come later. Tirpitz did not see the need for such a stealthy vessel, but Wilhelm knew better. Once Ziegler finished his reconnaissance for the invasion plans, he would assign him to investigate this Holland project the Americans were so secretive about. Once he had that information, he would have his own fleet of submarines. He filed the plans away, locked the drawer and recalled that he had heard little from his operatives in America. Those would be valuable pieces of information to affect his plan. An unwary McKinley, consumed by his struggle with Spain in the Caribbean fit well with his overall agenda. Ensuring the security of the plans, he rose from his desk and marched out toward the telegraphers’ station with hopes of seeing Ziegler’s reports.