CHAPTER V

LAWRENCE MAKES A DECISION

Lawrence had finally set aside the Marine pamphlet he had been scouring, and, using his fork, he was pensively pushing around the remainder of his black-and-tan. As hungry as Lawrence had been when his food arrived, Kenneth was surprised at how much of the snack was left. He wondered if the food, together with the news of Kenneth's enlistment in the Marine Corps, was too much for Lawrence to swallow. It was clear from Lawrence's facial movements, that he was involved in an internal debate of some gravity. Kenneth could not, for the life of him, guess the nature of Lawrence's quiet quarrel.

Finally, with the mental wrestling match apparently at an end, and his countenance testifying to a sudden crystallization of thought, Lawrence set down his utensil, lifted up his eyes, and stated conclusively: "I am going with you!"

Kenneth *thought* he knew what his friend meant, but he nevertheless said: "Where?"

"In the Marines, of course".

"—But why?" Kenneth asked, as he searched his friend's face for evidence that he might not be serious.

"I will not be a friend who goes with the wind. Where you go, I go—old buddy, old pal, old friend of mine . . . through thick and thin and all that."

Kenneth mulled for a moment before saying: "—I know you value our friendship, Lawrence . . . as do I . . . but wouldn't joining the Marines with me be carrying things a bit too far—?"

"Perhaps . . . but if you insist on this ill-advised notion of becoming a knight-errant, tilting at the world's windmills,

then you will need me to play the faithful and devoted Panza to your idealistic and impulsive Quixote. We simply cannot have you assaulting funeral processions—and Lord knows there will be a lot of them over there—or attacking a flock of French sheep. *I* shall intercede on your behalf. As you know, *Je parle Francais, moi* . . . after a fashion, that is—"

Lawrence continued, "—Truth be told, I thoroughly enjoyed my visit to France several years back . . . and I have been hoping to return, although I am quite sure the French *joi de vivre* has been replaced with *doleur de la mort*. I have savored the choicest French coffees in some of their most famous cafés, I have sampled the rich cuisine of their quaint bistros, and I have explored their finest museums. It is time, I think, for me to see their trenches . . . and, as we know, the country is under new management—a large part of it anyway. By the way, where is St. Denis in all this?! Some intercessor!"

Kenneth snickered at his friend's dry sense of humor and outrageous travel planning, before saying, in a very serious tone: "Don't do this, Lawrence. I will feel responsible if . . ." He paused, unable to find the right words.

"—If anything should happen to me?" Lawrence guessed at Kenneth's delinquent thought.

"Yes—if anything should happen to you . . . I would *never* be able to forgive myself."

Lawrence, tried to lighten the mood again with another thrust of his rapier wit: "Actually, I have been wondering what I would look like in a *moos-stosh*," he said, using his forefingers to draw invisible lines above pursed lips, "and they appear to be a mandatory accessory for officers over there."

"—Seriously, though," Kenneth responded, "this is not the level-headed Lawrence I have come to know . . . you are not given to improvident decisions . . . and we both know that—other than rowing—you disdain discipline of any sort."

"—Truer words were never spoken, Kenneth. I actually had been planning to propose that, after graduation, we take the summer off before joining the working class." Lawrence's well-connected father had secured brokerage positions for the two of them: they were to become members of the firm of Charles Head & Co., headquartered at the Boston Stock Exchange in a prominent, twelve-story, granite building on the corner of State and Kilby.

"—In my mind's eye," Lawrence recommenced, "I had us showing Cambridge a clean pair of heels and passing the summer gaily gallivanting around New England . . . in Red Rover, whenever possible . . . and by train, when the distances might be too much for her. I was thinking about long, languorous days on the beaches in Rhode Island. . . exploring the back roads of the Berkshires . . . sailing off Bar Harbor, perhaps . . . and maybe even taking the ferry across Lake Champlain to the Finger Lakes in New York. Footloose, as they say . . . we would have been fashioning the halcyon days that we would look back on in our later years." Red Rover was the nickname they had given to Lawrence's automobile, a 1913 red Cadillac with a red leather interior that included real horse-hair-upholstered seats. Red Rover had also come equipped with the latest in frills: electric starter, electric horn, clock, handy lamp, weed chains, and running-board trunks. "—And a glorious exercise in prodigality it would have been too," continued Lawrence, "sowing our wild oats and so forth." With a pronounced sigh, he added, "—But all that is out the window

now. We must forego those fatuations if we are to—"

"—And what would KatyKay have done?" Kenneth enquired, thinking of how *he* would treat the object of both his sentence and his desire differently. If she were *his*, he would *never* leave her side for something as trivial as a boyish boondoggle. Lawrence's failure to mention the final member of their tripartite relationship—they called themselves "the three musketeers"—momentarily brought to mind the two behaviors of Lawrence's that truly angered Kenneth—though he never spoke of them: his unfaithful dalliances with other 'Cliffies and his occasional visits to Boston's unsavory "tenderloin district." Lawrence proved the adage—that love and lust do not always keep the same company. Kenneth considered that perhaps Lawrence did not really love KatyKay at all—not in the truest sense of the word. Lawrence's feelings—however they could be defined—were certainly not the deep and abiding love that Kenneth had felt for KatyKay ever since that day in the autumn of his freshman year, when the two of them had sat on the banks of the Charles, watching Lawrence and his Harvard crewmates leave their Dartmouth opponents in their wake. Kenneth had already been captivated by KatyKay's beauty, of course, and, in the relatively brief time that they had spent together lolling on the river bank, he had became spellbound by her voice, her grace, her exquisite charm—her very existence. He had inhabited this bewitched state for more than three years, keeping his love for her a tightly wrapped secret. Perpetually in fear of wearing his heart on his sleeve, he forced himself to don an emotional straitjacket whenever he was in her presence. That KatyKay, Lawrence, and he had become the three musketeers charged Kenneth's life with a volatile mixture of delicious pleasure and exquisite pain. He was playing the part of lovesick swain, stowing away on Lawrence and Katykay's ship of love . . . though, as love ships go, theirs was more of a seven-sailed wooden schooner—probably the most complicated of all sailing vessels.

"—I would simply have explained to her that the trip was *for graduates only*," Lawrence responded, regarding the now not-to-be adventure. "She would have understood. Indeed, I believe she would have encouraged me . . . the two of us . . . to go." A period of silence followed. It appeared that Lawrence was caught up in a reverie of his past visits to the places he had hoped that he and Kenneth would travel to together—places that Kenneth, his youthful travels limited to central and eastern Massachusetts, could only imagine.

As usual, whenever Kenneth's thoughts tumbled to the relationship of Lawrence and KatyKay, he experienced a twinge of guilt. His feelings for KatyKay being what they were, Kenneth apprehended the fact that he was a Trojan horse, of sorts, residing squarely in the middle of Lawrence's romantic camp. To all appearances, he was a loyal friend to Lawrence; and he truly was . . . in every respect but this one. There was a force inside him, Kenneth realized, that could be as deadly to Lawrence's romance with KatyKay as the two-score Greek soldiers, hidden in the belly of Virgil's wooden steed, had been to Troy.

As did the Greeks, Kenneth employed sentries: *his* were his eyes and ears: the former to study Katykay, at his leisure, when the opportunity provided itself; the latter to attend to every word she uttered in her ever-seductive voice. His emotive soldiers, hidden in the dark abode of his bowels, embodied true love, passion, longing, caring, compassion, sentimentality, tenderness, and rapture. He believed with all his heart, that these secret foes of Lawrence

could open the gates to KatyKay's heart and win her love, but he also accepted that such a gambit would cost him Lawrence's friendship. As a result, he had been unable to order his soldiers into battle. *Hades' fires! He hadn't even declared war!* Surely, his behaviors over time, though he did his level best to conceal them, should have been a warning to Lawrence; but if his friend espied them, he failed to recognize them for what they were . . . or he simply ignored them, just as the Trojans—to their detriment—ignored their soothsayer Cassandra.

Kenneth was quite certain that KatyKay was aware of his feelings for her, but they had never spoken on the matter. For more than three years, in the Passion Play that was his life, Kenneth had consigned himself to the silent yearning and lovelorn suffering that keep company with unproclaimed love. He knew, however, that if he were to go off to war, he must, despite what his Greek chorus was advising, declare, confidentially, his feelings to KatyKay. For now, his life would continue to be, in Winston Churchill's terms, one big "terminological inexactitude."

Lawrence ended the silence with: "It might surprise you, Kenneth, that I had, in fact, been considering what my role might be if it comes to war. Doubtless, I could have made a show of it . . . join the officer ranks . . . most likely in the army. And my father could have engaged in some wire-pulling and arranged for me to serve stateside . . . or even *better* . . . overseas . . . tucked safely behind the lines—in some logistical capacity . . . or as an aide-de-camp."

Kenneth nodded his agreement, as it all made perfect sense.

"But," Lawrence added, "I am not sure if I could have lived with that. No . . . not after seeing so many of our fellow students leave our Yard . . . to serve and sacrifice . . . without war even being declared . . . signing up as flyboys and ambulance drivers and such . . . going out of *their* way to put themselves in *harm's* way . . . to be heroes in the strife . . . dying in the trying. And if I *were* to stay behind, I should be *most deserving* of being awarded a white feather—a fate worse than death, I am told." After a pause, Lawrence continued: "As you know, I do not come from a family of died-in-the-wool patriots; but witnessing the sacrifices being made around me—and some have been of the supreme variety—has me thinking that there *is* something to this rally-round-the-flag thing. What's more, the Blakeslee family crest is emblazoned with a knight's helmet and no less than nine swords. It just may be time for a Blakeslee—an American Blakeslee—to take up the mantle of combating the world's inherent evils and live up to the warlike imagery of his coat of arms." Kenneth recalled Lawrence's exceptional English pocket watch chain made of sterling silver—the fob hanging below the "t" bar a miniature representation of the Blakeslee family crest. "If I am going to *wear* it, I need to *merit* it," Lawrence declared. "Moreover," he added, "I cannot very well leave footprints on the sands of time if I'm sitting behind a desk, can I—?"

"—No, I guess not," Kenneth responded. "We are, indeed, led by our classmates . . . and with our expeditionary flag still stuck in our home soil, our classmates are rallying around the flags of other countries . . . Canada . . . England . . . France . . . and *Germany*, for God's sake!" Kenneth had heard that several Harvard students had returned to fight for the opposing standard—that of the German Fatherland. He recalled a prayerful, anthem-filled memorial service held in Appleton Chapel the previous November, to honor nineteen—nineteen!—Harvard men who had died in the European War up to that point. Two of the dead—members of the Class of 1914—had made their way to Germany,

been sent to the front, and died before the year was out. He recalled the name of one of the German patriots . . . Schneider . . . but the other name was lost to him.

"—Wait 'til we hoist our flag and point it east—in the direction of war," Kenneth continued. "It will be the Pied Piper of patriotism. Before this hurly-burly's done, we will have our own pantheon of Harvard heroes: all having been cut down in the prime of their lives; all having spilled their Crimson blood on foreign soil." How unwittingly apropos, Kenneth thought, that a shield had been added to Harvard's college arms just before the war had started.

Indeed, the pervasive, patriotic zeal that was turning out the men of Harvard's ivied halls to war appeared Yard-wide—except down on Plympton Street, where *The Harvard Crimson*, Harvard's student-run newspaper since just after the Civil War, hung its shabby shingle. The paper's tendentious stance in favor of American neutrality in the face of the European conflagration—among other partisan stances—had boosted the use of its sometimes affectionate, most times not-so-affectionate, sobriquet: "The Crime." The "Red Rag," as other students had taken to calling it, was only slightly more popular than the inanimate Brunswick Lion, the German-donated, now-covered-in-rotten-eggs statue that stood its tense, lonely Teutonic sentinel over Adolphus Busch Hall at the north end of Harvard Yard. The sculpted bronze lion had been a gift from the Duchy of Brunswick to what was to be the first Germanic museum in America—now indefinitely closed due to highly impassioned, anti-German feelings. Timing is everything.

"—So when do we go?" Lawrence asked.

"You are *entirely sure* you want to do this?" Kenneth pressed.

"I may be a little out of my element. In fact . . . I am likely to be magnificently unprepared for such an adventure . . . but I am casting my lot with you . . . and with the Marines," Lawrence said confidently. "When do we shove off? Is that the correct terminology?"

"Actually, I believe 'shove off' is a naval expression," Kenneth replied, "but it *is* the navy that carries the Marines where they need to go. As I understand it, we will be leaving after we finish our Harvard course work, but before commencement exercises."

"—Commencement exercises," Lawrence repeated. "They might as well cancel those. There are not that many of our retiring class left, and if war supervenes, there will be very little pomp and pageantry in the Yard this spring. Mortarboards and tassels are being tossed aside for garrison caps, campaign hats, and helmets—all with soldierly emblems and insignia. There will be no 'Jubilee Throng' this year, 'Fair Harvard'."

The two men sat in silence for a brief time, Kenneth reflecting upon how disappointed his parents, especially his mother, would be to learn they would not see him don his graduation cap and gown.

Kenneth spoke first: "Penny for your thoughts, Lawrence?"

"Ah! Actually, they may be worth far more than that . . . I am working on a limerick that could serve as our epitaph . . . should we ever need one, that is. Give me a moment . . ."

"That is a *bit* ghoulish, don't you think?" Kenneth responded, but Lawrence was lost in his exercise of rhyme and meter.

A moment later, he announced, excitedly: "I have it!"

"Get on with it, then," said Kenneth genially.

Lawrence appeared to rehearse it silently one more time before introducing the limerick. "With a tip of the proverbial hat . . . or, should I say, derby . . . to Prince Lear":

"They passed on a chance to be fanciful,
Choosing instead to be dutiful.
They tried, and they cried,
And eventually died,
B'lieving war had made their lives meaningful."

Kenneth was impressed. "That is actually quite good, Lawrence—quite *morbid*—but quite good." Lawrence had pulled pad and pencil from his pocket, and he was writing down his mordant musings . . .

. . . Lawrence's sinister limerick brought to mind a grim epitaph that Kenneth had observed on several headstones in God's Acre:

DEATH IS A DEBT TO NATURE DUE
AS I HAVE PAID IT, SO MUST YOU.

It was as if the Harvard students heading off to war were answering the siren call of death—that summons emanating from a graveyard in their midst. What else could explain the vintage harvest of Harvard scholars issuing from its Yard, many in the shank of the evening of their academic journeys?

Kenneth wondered if the student bodies and alumni of the other Ivies were volunteering to serve in Europe in comparable numbers; or was there something special about Harvardians? Was it the example set by the hundreds of students and alumni who had marched off into the history of their times to serve in the Union and Confederate forces during the Civil War? Or, perhaps more likely, was it the extraordinarily resplendent manner in which the College and its alumni benefactors had chosen to honor those who made the ultimate sacrifice? One could consider these wartime deaths "good deaths," as oxymoronic as that might seem . . . possibly even "glorious deaths." And if they were not glorious in their death, they were certainly glorious in their remembrance, informing future generations, especially the impressionable young people that inhabited college campuses, with the shining standard of their service.

Kenneth understood that the concept of a "good death" had been fundamental to nineteenth-century America, especially during America's War Between the States and in its melancholy aftermath. That notion had solaced a nation that had lost hundreds of thousands of its sons—most of whom died on distant battlefields—and were buried in

faraway graves. Such a sentiment, so ingrained in a country's psyche, was likely to remain resident, even in remnant form, less than two generations hence.

Still, Kenneth felt strongly that a "good death" would not be the primary reason people would go off to war. What else, then? The far-reaching influence of Christian or upper-class idealism? An altruistic inclination to act in service to fellow man? A burning desire to participate in the pivotal event of a generation? A profound need to answer the call to save civilization from destruction? A meaningful rite of passage? A personal search for the truth about war? An opportunity to live Harvard's motto? The age-old lure of romantic adventure? The ever-seductive appeal of heroism?

Unquestionably, Kenneth could identify with the last two catalysts, and he could surely understand the lure of places with romantic-sounding names: Paris, Verdun, St. Mihel, the Somme, Flanders, and the Dardanelles. He grasped the appeal of military units with resplendent names: "Royal Irish Lancers"—"French Foreign Legion"—"Princess Patricia's Canadian Regiment"—"Black Watch of the Royal Regiment of Scotland"—"King's Own Scottish Borderers"—"Queen's Own Cameron Highlanders"—and, "Escadrille Américain." This last unit, a squadron of American pilots serving with the French Flying Corps, was the first unit of any kind to carry the American flag into battle. Kenneth could also easily appreciate the irresistible lure of being: a cool-under-fire ambulance driver; a dispatch-seeking war correspondent on the front lines; a dashing and daring pilot patrolling the skies of France, a life-saving member of the Medical Service; a gallant officer with a direct commission in a foreign army; or, of course, the backbone of all armies, a hard-charging infantryman. Somehow, these beguiling names, alluring associations, and glamorous pursuits lured droves of fine young men blindly onto the dangerous rocks of war—a war that promised so much in the way of opportunity, but delivered instead, barbed wire, trenches, gas warfare, mud, incessant shelling, and gruesome appellations such as "no man's land," all of which combined and contrived to horrify, maim, and kill.

One of those so enticed was Theophile Alexander Vandegrift who had been a member of the Class of 1916 and the stellar stroke of the Harvard crew squad. In the spring of 1915, shortly after the finish of the rowing season, Tuffy, as he was known to his crewmates, made arrangements to take his final exams early and—with his roommate, football player Ralph Reginald "Railroad" Crosby—he joined the American Field Service. The AFS was a volunteer ambulance service on the front lines of the war in France. It had been founded by a former Harvard economics professor, and it was a popular draw among Harvard students and alumni. Tuffy, an aspiring writer whose field of concentration was English Literature, and Kenneth were chums—having the kind of close relationship that one might expect of coxswain and stroke. The night before Tuffy abandoned the Yard for France, the entire rowing team had taken Railroad and him out to The Nip, the Boston drinking establishment most favored by Harvard students . . . and many a nip had been raised and drained in their teammates' honor. Several days later, Tuffy, Railroad, and a number of other Harvard men—two of them Harvard instructors—sailed with the AFS for the French port city of Bordeaux. In November, word came back that Railroad, a stocky boxcar of a man, had taken ill with tuberculosis shortly after his arrival at AFS headquarters in Paris; he had died before ever finding his way to the front . . .

. . . As Kenneth waited for Lawrence to finish committing his limerick to paper, he took in the sights and sounds

that were the rhythm of Jimmy's Lunch. Always a relatively quiet establishment, the impending war and the steady departure of so many students had moved the mood from mellow to melancholic. Jimmy's narrow dining space, consisting of a long lunch counter flanked by a row of tables that ran the counter's length and more, was bathed in the soft golden glow of table candles and wall-mounted kerosene lamps. Music to match the mood played on the Victrola that sat on the edge of the lunch counter closest to the ever-swinging door that fronted, and provided fleeting glimpses into, a brightly lit kitchen. On the phonograph, Kenneth recognized James Harrison's smooth Irish baritone in his rendition of "There's a Long, Long Trail A-Winding." It was an enormously popular song—inspired by the ongoing war in Europe—and the themes of separation, unrequited love, loneliness, and longing appealed to Kenneth . . . even if it was a couple of Yalies who had penned the lyrics and composed the music:

"All night long I hear you calling,
Calling sweet and low;
Seem to hear your footsteps falling,
Ev'ry where I go.
There's a long, long, night of waiting
Until my dreams all come true;
Till the day when I'll be going down
That long, long trail with you."

The words of the melody were punctuated by the clinking of glassware, the clattering of ceramic plates, and the clanging of silverware, as the wait staff went about their business. Though Kenneth did not know many of the patrons' names at the lunch counter or the nearby tables, most of the faces were familiar. There was the notoriously unfriendly, white-haired instructor of mathematics, sitting alone at a table, lorgnette in hand, squinting and scowling at what appeared to be an examination booklet that was far short of expectations; at the next table, there were two ruddy-looking members of the freshman crew, who appeared, based on their gestures and strained countenances, to be arguing vehemently—albeit quietly . . . about the war, perhaps. Behind them, sat a nattily dressed undergrad with a young lady, a 'Cliffie, he guessed . . . she seemed to be crying quietly, possibly having just been told by her companion, whose hands were clasped reassuringly over hers, that he had just joined one of the service branches; at the counter, there was a silent, middle-aged couple, married, Kenneth presumed—he reading a newspaper, she a magazine—no conversational intimacy there, no conversation at all. And, also at the counter, sat a handsome older woman, drinking coffee and frantically reading and rereading a letter, as if she were searching for something that just *had* to be there, something she had missed, perhaps . . . or possibly, she was trying to ferret out what might be hidden between the lines. As Kenneth studied the patrons, one by one, the 'Cliffie's despairing and questioning eyes met his briefly. He held her heavy-hearted gaze for a moment or two, and then—having no answers—he looked away.