

M. RANDOLPH MASON, ET AL

THE SANDERLING

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Chapter 1

Sanderling (Irene)

I watched the sanderlings busily working the edges of the inshore surges. They stayed just ahead of me as I squished along between the froth and the miniature scarp which marked the limit of the wavelets riding on the flooding tide. Alone again on the cool morning October beach, I composed more reflections in the cerebral diary of my life.

My, God, how it's been!

Sanderlings, *Calidris alba* from my "Beginner's Guide to Shorebirds", are little shorebirds who subtly change cloths for winter. They come back to my beach, no matter where I am, by August, where they change from their brown speckled summer jackets to their soft grey winter capes. It's been suggested that there are no beaches in the world without sanderlings... I imagine that I take my little patrol with me everywhere I go.

Usually there's about five or six of them. Though, sometimes only a pair; but in the norm, a small flocklet, they scurry and probe for those burrowing crustaceans which tarry too long to avoid becoming a sanderling snack.

Without fail, there's always one who plays catch-up. She's the one who never seems to notice that her little troop has moved on. Little tiny legs a-blur, she scurries, catches up... and then fails to pay attention again. Attention deficit disorder? No, I don't... *she*... doesn't have *that*! There's just soooo much to see and do and touch and eat and... oh!

Yes.

Well, I've exposed myself. I do scurry and play catch up. And I am easily distracted by new things. My Mom says I'm "hypersensitive." I am. So now you know - Irene the little catch-up sanderling.

Military School (Phillip)

As did for his father and grandfather and great grandfather, the time came for learning to discipline one's self. No surprise, for he had know it was coming from the

moment he could first have a decent conversation on the front porch steps with his father, Dr. Elliott Randolph Jefferson.

That conversation had begun with the recitation of the name of every male heir to the name from Thomas I, who died in 1697 leaving the plantation to Thomas II who had a son name Peter, who had a son also named Thomas, whom *everybody* knows, and another son named Randolph. And thus, it was memorized by every male in the line from Randolph to T. Phillip Jefferson, the youngest fellow on the porch step.

The conversation ended with the pronouncement that Phillip was to be enrolled at a very well known, prestigious military academy for the school year following his fourteenth birthday. Written in stone, this decree was kept from being far from the anticipation – dreaded anticipation – of young Phillip for the next six years.

* * *

At the end of his fourteenth summer, the anticipation had materialized with the crisp white trousers and grey wool jacket he wore with, not pride, but abject fear. Within minutes of being left at the mercy of the upperclassmen, he had a nickname.

“T. Phillip Jefferson? Surely your little T doesn’t stand for Thomas.”

He could not answer.

“I can’t hear you.”

“Sir, yes Sir! Thomas.”

“You’re a scrawny piece of crap. You have been well advised to avoid having people call you Thomas.”

Phillip didn’t move or speak.

“I can’t hear you.”

“Yes, Sir!”

“Very fine. We shall call you TP – as in toilet paper. No! We shall call you Rolly. Yes! Rolly Jefferson.”

One doesn’t always have to die to experience hell. He went through the next year as Cadet Rolly Jefferson. In that year, whenever facilitated by the absence of adult authority, he was stuffed naked into gym lockers, forced to scrub toilets with his own toothbrush, and further juvenile humiliations which numbered and registered into the steel lockbox of his mind.

By the start of the second year, Cadet Jefferson was a force to be reckoned with. He had become rock solid, muscular, stolid, and incredibly soft spoken. But when he spoke, they damn sure listened. For Cadet Jefferson was far more intelligent than his peers and much more creative. Cadet Jefferson engineered revenge. He never once took credit for the incredible and devastating misfortunes of his enemies. But he wreaked havoc on the very aspects of their lives which brought the greatest attention. Uniforms were desecrated, crib notes miraculously appeared in the wrong places during exams, whole homework assignments disappeared, girlfriends were informed of indiscretions - never a repeat lesson; always new and imaginative. When Cadet Jefferson was left

unmolested, then so fared the Corps of Cadets. All of this respect was exacted with nary a peep from Cadet Jefferson.

Two years was all that his father asked or expected. Phillip departed the academy without looking back. For years after Phillip left, they lionized him with greatly embellished stories and legendary status. The faculty was left scratching their collective heads in wonder, and amusement.

That was also the year that his mother left his father for another man.

Phillip's life lessons etched themselves into his increasingly stoic personality. Father and son became aloof together their personal unspoken pains shared but unquenched. They kept each other at bay as neither wanting to reveal weakness.

And Phillip purposefully lost interest in affairs of the heart. Loneliness became regarded by him as an affectation disgustingly displayed by dependent persons. Phillip vowed that he would never be left by anyone.

And he KNEW how to keep that vow.

Little Brother (Irene)

When I was born, Dr. Galyon told my mother that I was her last child. He observed that the first child, my little brother, Robert Junior, nearly killed her. He did not expect mother to survive to raise me. She had a roaring case of endometriosis. Her body was full of scar like tissue that connected and bound up her female parts.

"No more, Vivian. No more!"

And to reinforce his warning, he cut out her ovaries along with me.

Oh! My little brother - he's the reason my father couldn't love me out loud. You see, when I was four months old, we lived in a big beautiful house in Herndon, Virginia. One perfect summer Saturday, my father jumped into our Buick station wagon to go to the sporting goods store to check out a sale on kreels. Those are the belt baskets into which you put your trout after you've caught him on the lightest line on earth.

My little brother made not a sound as my father backed over him and his tricycle. On that day, my father killed my brother and himself. No, my father didn't kill himself right away; he just took the rest of his life to die. My little brother was the son my father, the Scotsman, had dreamed of all of his adult life. You see, the doctor had just informed my mother that there would be no chance for another son. I, of course, do not remember any of this. But my father never, NO NEVER, said that he loved me. I know he did. But, after little Robert, he was afraid.

But, Oh God!, he did hold me. He held me so tight that I thought I might smother. His stout highlander arms held me so tight to his chest that his heart sounded like a pounding drum. I often heard him speak to God.

“Oh God. Please do not let me lose this little girl. Oh God! I promise to protect her. ***OH GOD!***”

So, while he never *said* that he loved me, there was no shortage of evidence.

The Buick was first to go. Then the house in Herndon had to be sold. The stain of my little brother’s death could not ever be washed from the driveway. Not having patience with his desperate need to escape from my brother’s blood, my father moved us into a tiny apartment while waiting for a high-rise condominium in Alexandria.

Finally, my dad was able to close on a condominium on Jones Point, overlooking the Potomac River, just on the south side of the Wilson Bridge. We were high up in the air, ninth floor, east side. From my little girl bedroom window, I grew up looking south, down the river and I could see the boats in silent progress coming up and down the Potomac. To the north, only a couple of miles away, were the heart and soul of our nation, Washington, DC. From our balcony, I could see the Tidal Basin and the Jefferson Memorial – the ***Jefferson*** Memorial!