

START

JOE

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JOE. ~~Do not leave this room.~~ *(On phone.)* Hello? Scotty! No, it's a perfectly good time, thanks for calling back. This won't take long. I just have one question and it's entirely public-spirited: When are you going to fire those irresponsible children you've got reporting for you in Southeast Asia? Of course I'm serious. If I didn't think it were an appropriate question, I wouldn't ask it. I — *(Susan Mary enters.)* Sorry, just a moment. *(To Susan Mary.)* Knock, Susan. Is that really too much to ask? I'm working.

SUSAN MARY. I'm sorry, Joe. I just have a quick — *(Joe holds up a hand to stop her.)*

JOE. I'm sorry, Scotty. I simply refuse to believe you and the paper wouldn't be far better off having them cover something more suited to their experience and abilities, such as high school athletics or one of the sleepier state legislatures ...

JOE. Scotty. I'm sorry, I think we were accidentally disconnected. Well, why would you do that? *(Pause.)* All right, I'll tell you precisely where I "get off." First of all, I do not see you and I as "rivals," that is a stupidly blinkered view of our business, we are all in this together and we have to look out for one another and for the greater journalistic good. Secondly, your boys over there — They are boys, goddamnit, they are boys! Does Sheehan even have his driver's license? And if you let me know the date of Halberstam's bar mitzvah, I'll be sure to send him something nice — Hello? Shit. *(He hangs up.)*

JOE. How dare you hang up on me twice in a row, you miserable son of a bitch, when all I am trying to do is help you? You — Oh hello, Stewart. I'm sorry. Welcome back. No, it's — Congratulations for what? Yes, it's been an interesting few weeks, they got rid of Diem all right, but not "just like I told them to," Stew. If you think I have that sort of influence on the South Vietnamese generals, I can only say I'm flattered. What about the White House? Oh please. I told them no such thing, and they did no such thing. Well, even if we merely looked the other way while that very unpleasant man was removed — All right, was "killed," don't be prissy, Stewart, this isn't a Girl Scout picnic. The point is Jack had the guts thank God to either arrange, or allow to occur, the necessary change in leadership, and now finally our responsibility is clear, and the way is clear for real success over there. Balls. He is not looking for an excuse to get out. That is a ludicrous misreading of both the situation and the man. Promise me you won't write that anywhere, you'll just embarrass yourself. He's far more tough-minded than you give him credit for, or than you yourself seem to be at the moment, if you don't mind my saying so. Fine, I'll set you straight over dinner. Love to Tish. (*He hangs up. Abigail comes in, coat on, still wearing the skirt.*)

JOE. Hello. Hello, Scotty. (*Pause.*) I accept your apology. Though I don't believe I've ever hung up on you. Well, I don't recall any of that, but I appreciate your calling back. Nevertheless I am right about this, Scotty, and you are wrong. Your boys — Your *boys* scurry around out in the underbrush over there interviewing every whining malcontent and defeatist in the Army rank and file they can find, and calling their bitching and moaning the "truth," meanwhile all but calling the men at the top, the men in charge, the men who *know, liars*, and I call that undermining American interests. And I am here to tell you for your own damn good to reassign them, or maybe you'd prefer to wait until after we lose Vietnam the way we lost China, and what comes next, tell me that? Yes you're damn right I "subscribe" to the domino theory, I named the damned theory, and I'll — listen to me: The president thinks you should reassign them too. You bet your ass we spoke about it and he agrees with me, and as soon as he gets back I am going to urge him again to call you — I think it certainly *is* his goddamn business, I don't know what on earth his business is if not — Going after me too? I'm quaking. What did Halberstam say? I don't give a good goddamn, you brought it up. What are they saying about me? *What are they saying about me?* Don't you *dare* — Hello? (*Scotty has hung up.*)

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