

ALFRED KERN

from *Vows and Infidelities*

Author's Note: If Vietnam—how godawful to write this even now—could get itself chased off the front page by a World Series final or a Hollywood divorce, its consequences for friendship were often destructive and for some family relationships as devastating as anything since the Civil War. In a worker's neighborhood, it was simple enough; you had damned well better "back up our boys." In the intellectual community, the test was not whether you opposed the war, but how early you had done so, not whether you had marched in protest but where and when, not if your name had appeared on a protest list but which list and in what publication. Depending on your position, either you condemned or helped those young men who refused to serve.

I remind you that every American war has had its conscientious objectors and just plain avoiders. In the days following Pearl Harbor, God summoned a number of my college acquaintances to study for the ministry; some of them—who knows?—may have been sincere. Vietnam was fought mostly by military professionals and enlistees from our lower economic order. A few of our professionals hoped for a relatively safe Saigon assignment to keep their names on the promotion list. But even the best of the professionals, the toughest and most fervently patriotic, could come to feel betrayed. Read Neil Sheehan's *The Bright and Shining Lie: John Paul Vann and America in Vietnam*.

What follows are scenes about three protesters and one Marine, all of whom ended in exile. These scenes, selected by the editor of this journal, are from a long work about the civilian experience of Vietnam. Like the protagonist of that novel, I spent time in Toronto talking to numbers of young Americans who had gone there to avoid Vietnam. I disliked some of them and liked others. All are fictionalized here, but there is one of them I came to admire deeply; I have a hunch he's the only one who couldn't come back home. You'll know who I mean.

—Alfred Kern
Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania

The breathless young man who asked to share the table in the hotel barroom turned out to be Darrow's first American war-resister. The young man worked in the branch bank in the hotel building. Normally, he didn't spend the money to eat here, but bank auditors were visiting and it was raining.

"I'll buy your lunch," Darrow said, "if you'll talk to me. I'm interested."

Once begun, the young man spoke at length, scarcely touching the food. Later, Darrow discovered that most of the resisters had a greater hunger for talk. If not yet ancient mariners, each had his story to tell.

From a medium size Connecticut industrial town, the third of five children in a Polish Catholic working family, the young man had worked days and taken night courses in business administration at the local state college. As a teenager he had drifted away from the Church, an action which his family now related to his avoiding the draft. His father-in-law openly disapproved of him. "My wife's father was a hot-shot flier in the Pacific. In World War Two. He's big in the American Legion. Not that there's anything wrong with that. But he told me I was—well, you know?"

"Less than manly?"

"What I resent most is the rotten luck. If I'd been older or younger, I'd be home now. I just happened to be the wrong age."

"Somebody always is, I suppose," Darrow said.

"Anyhow, if you ask me, what I did took just as much or more . . ." but he didn't finish the sentence. "What I was going to say was that I happened to be the wrong age when the big money interests decided we had to have a war in Vietnam."

"And your present employers?" Darrow said. "Are Canadian money interests so different?"

"This country isn't suffering from inflation like the others. We have the lowest inflation rate in the world."

"I guess I hadn't known that," Darrow said.

An alert and cautious manager, the young man had made arrangements early, applying for immigrant status and marrying before his first draft notice arrived. On the day he was to have reported for active duty, he and his bride were already living and working in Toronto. After four years in Canada, he had completed

his training program with the bank; he and his wife were friends with three other couples. He did not like living in Toronto and hoped to be sent to a branch in a small town. But Canada was a good country.

"I think Canadian now. When I say 'them,' I mean America. When I say 'us,' I mean Canada."

"I assume you'll become a Canadian citizen," Darrow said.

"And give up my American birthright? I will not."

Later, Darrow sat in the hotel lobby, wishing the rain would stop and also thinking about his luncheon partner. In response to a question, the young man said that he hadn't had time or interest for "liberal art subjects," but had kept up his subscription to *U.S. News and World Report*. In one of the articles, Nixon had angered him by implying that the silent majority lacked awareness and an ability to respond.

"I must have missed that," Darrow said.

"But we are able to respond. I did!"

"I don't think that you or what you did are what Nixon had in mind," Darrow said.

Darrow did not approve of the father-in-law but had been tempted to tell the young man that he himself had been a "hot-shot flier" in World War II. Given his values, this jerky kid should have sucked it up and gone into the army. Probably, they would have made him a paymaster.

But then, what had Darrow expected? Everyone of them a poet? Perhaps, it would be helpful that his first war-resister was ignorant and unlikable.

Tom Hulings

Back on Avenue Road near Techno-Sculpture, in a music store called Bluegrass / Ontario, Darrow met his second war-resister. Darrow explained that he was looking for a Joseph Eger who probably had something to do with the gallery down the street. The young American, Tom Hulings, said that businesses came and went here on Avenue Road; he had purchased the music store only three months before and was just getting to know other business people in the neighborhood.

"This is your store?" Darrow said.

"Mine and the bank."

"Just like home," Darrow said.

Twice while they were talking, Hulings left to demonstrate a banjo to the same customer. He was a marvelous player, and Darrow told him so.

"I've really only begun to play this thing since I came to Canada," Hulings said. "Not too bad for a French major."

Round and small without being fat, Hulings resembled a cherubim. He had lived in Canada now for five years; at twenty-six, his face was soft, the color and complexion also like a child's. Hulings' boyhood had been spent in southern Indiana where he had excelled in school and enjoyed the life of a rural town. Uneducated themselves, his parents agreed that he might go to college if he could find the money. With what he had saved and what Purdue offered him in financial aid, he put together enough for his first year. As a freshman, he had been advised to enter the Naval Reserve Officer Training Corps in hopes of getting a scholarship; the NROTC scholarships provided just about the most sustaining help available—full tuition and a monthly stipend.

"But I couldn't stomach the program," Hulings said, "and finally I got out. I lost the money, but what I really lost was any chance to qualify as a conscientious objector."

"You hadn't considered that beforehand?"

"I lived from one school year to the next."

"Are you a conscientious objector?"

"I think so."

"The government wouldn't allow a change of heart?"

"Not the draftboard in southern Indiana."

"And you had no prior political development? None at all?"

"There was talk—more each year. But I can't remember struggling to think through why I should or shouldn't serve. When the time came, it seemed I'd always known I wasn't going to go. I don't care about politics."

"There doesn't seem much point to what you've done if you have no concern for politics."

Hulings shrugged. "I'm a musician."

"Do you see your parents?"

His parents had long ago become remote from the life he lived, but his mother had been able to visit once. He would like to see his mother more often, also to spend time in bluegrass country. If he could resume his studies, he would go to one of several American universities which offered programs in folklore. His roots in an American past had taken hold only after he had fled the country, but his life now was in Canada. Like most of the other Americans, he had arrived alone and not knowing a soul, had worked at odd jobs—for a considerable period as a waiter—and he felt attachment to Toronto if only because he was succeeding now in a town where he had been broke and lonely. Did that make sense to Darrow?

“A lot of sense,” Darrow said. “That’s the experience which makes for commitment. Are you learning about Canada?”

Hulings had read “a little Canadian history and literature.” Some of it, he said, he had found very interesting.

Darrow and the Canadian banjo customer who had been listening from across the room began to laugh—met each other in their laughter. Momentarily, Hulings looked bewildered. “I guess maybe it isn’t that interesting,” he said, and the Canadian customer laughed louder.

Hulings didn’t have any ideas about how Darrow might find Joseph Eger. “The Americans aren’t as close as a few years ago,” Hulings said. “If we’re friends now it isn’t because we’re from the States. Anyhow, there must be fifty thousand guys who cut out. Maybe more. Not only draft resisters. The deserters, too. Even some parents. And nobody knows how many of us came to Canada.”

“Doesn’t the government have a count?” Darrow said.

“The government doesn’t consider them to be draft dodgers,” the Canadian customer said. “Or deserters. They’re on immigrant status.”

“Of course,” Darrow said, “draft evasion and desertion are not extradictable crimes.”

“Not in any country,” Hulings said. “No government considers it foolish or illegal to refuse to serve in another country’s army.”

“Legally, the Americans came because they want to reside in Canada,” the Canadian customer said. “They’re not criminals here.”

"The tendency at home to think of them as law breakers is also lessening," Darrow said.

"Yes, you've a new set of criminals down there," the Canadian customer said. "In the White House."

"Except we can't go back," Hulings said. "It isn't living in Canada. I'd live here in any case. Now, I would. It's knowing that I can't go back. That's what really gets to me."

"I can understand that," Darrow said. "But you do have Canada. And even if the ties are looser, you have each other."

"Exile makes a lousy common bond," Hulings said. "If you don't believe me, ask around. Or try it for yourself. You'll see what I mean."

Joseph Eger

In the last semester of his senior year, he received the first draft notice summoning him to report. A month later, he received the second draft notice and ignored it, and it was then he arranged with his professors to complete his work early. Wherever he went and whenever he could, he explained his reasons for resisting the war, but he felt no need to stop his narrative and tell Darrow what those reasons had been. The third draft notice informed him that failure to report could lead to criminal prosecution. Eger instructed his mother to say nothing to the draft board, nothing to the federal marshals who might come to the house: he told her to say nothing to anybody. Eger wasn't sure whether the Youngstown draft board had followed standard federal procedures or whether—being Youngstown—it could not conceive of any American failing to report if the draft notice had been delivered. His parents understood and supported him, but they lived in a neighborhood of steel and iron workers. "Good people," Eger said. "Soulful and physical. In church, half the kids are praying to Vince Lombardi."

Darrow knew the area.

With the fourth draft notice, the first federal warrant for his arrest was issued. Two men came to the house; his mother said she did not know where her son was living. But the time for flight had arrived, and Eger came to Toronto. He brought a few personal

possessions and about two hundred dollars. His first room was also on Huron street but above Bloor.

“There’s a small park across the street, and I went there every day to read. All I could think of to do was what I’d been doing for the past four years. I knew that I would have to make some move, but I wasn’t sure how to go about it. Then, when the money started to run out, I found a job as a stock boy at the main branch of the Toronto Library.”

By the middle of the summer, he had met other people and was beginning to adjust. He knew that he must obtain immigrant status, and he began to make inquiries; that was the summer of 1970 and numbers of places—store front offices mostly—had been set up to provide information about American draft laws and life in Canada.

“Who operated these places?”

“Americans ran some of them. And Canadians. Often in partnership. Some of the advisers had resisted the war themselves, but older people were also involved.”

Eger went to as many of these information centers as he could find. He listened and answered questions. He was suspicious of some of the helpers, and he shopped for the right escape group. Canadian law required that the petition for immigrant status be made from the United States—what the young man at the bank had arranged months before his first draft notice arrived. For Eger to become a legal resident in Canada, he would have to cross back into the United States and re-enter from there. After his mother sent the necessary packet of papers including his birth certificate and the Buchanan College diploma, Eger chose his station on the underground.

Responding to the expression on Darrow’s face, Eger said, “That’s right—the underground. Organized by people whose names you wouldn’t find on peace petitions. I was given detailed instructions which were to be followed without deviation. I took a train to Windsor on the date and time specified. As instructed, I got a haircut and wore a suit and carried a camera over my shoulder. In addition to the papers my mother sent me, I was provided with false identity papers—just in case. I was also given a Windsor telephone number and a name—Marcia.”

When Eger arrived in Windsor and called the number, the line rang busy; twenty minutes later, he still hadn't gotten through to Marcia. Before the busy signal, everything had gone smoothly, and he felt as if he were playing a part in a movie—cloak-and-dagger, code names, false identifications—and the feeling never left him entirely. But the busy signal brought his first moment of panic. Then, after the line had cleared, a man answered and said that Marcia wasn't there.

"And I went into my own movie bit, but I kept hearing my own voice. Like I'd memorized the part all right but didn't have much confidence about playing it. I told him that I'd been really hoping to see Marcia, and he said yes but Marcia wasn't there now. And I said that I just had to see her and how important it was I speak to her. And he kept saying yes only Marcia wasn't there. And I said but she was expecting me earlier and the line had been busy before and I'd be disappointed if I'd missed her, and he said Marcia wasn't there now, and he didn't know when she would be back. But if I'd leave my name and call in twenty minutes, he could ask Marcia about it if she got there."

Twenty minutes later, the man told him to hold on and then kept him waiting for what seemed a long time. When the man came back on the line, Eger experienced another moment of fear because he could not be sure the voice was the same voice. This time, he was told to go to a certain street corner where he would be picked up. A man came for him and drove him to an apartment where they waited for Marcia. Eger did not know if this was the same man who had spoken on the telephone. While he did not remember much about the man, he had vivid memories of Marcia; to Darrow, he revealed only that Marcia taught at one of the Detroit universities and was in her late thirties.

Marcia explained that numbers of Americans worked in Windsor and numbers of Canadians worked in Detroit and that she would take Eger across at the rush hour when customs people were busiest. Marcia and the man examined Eger's papers, and Marcia said the chances were he would not be asked to show any identification. If something went wrong and he was caught, the border itself was the best place to escape, but he should not try to run into Canada; the impulse to run back to Canada would be very

strong, but he should go into the United States and try to disappear in the crowds. Marcia drew a map and showed him which street to use, a one-way street where the police could not easily follow. In the event that he was caught, he was on his own, but he must remember to run toward the United States. And the man repeated that Eger must get away from Marcia. Marcia must not be caught with him, and he should neither depend upon her nor worry about her. Marcia would take care of herself.

Marcia drove a middle-size American car, the back bumper decorated with a National Rifle Association sticker and a "Honk if You Love Jesus" decal; a plastic St. Christopher hung from the sun visor. Dressed conservatively, calm and reassuring, Marcia might have been Eger's aunt or older sister; she moved them confidently and with relaxed caution. But by the time they reached the American customs station at Detroit, Eger's heart was pounding. Part of his mind saw and judged what was happening by what he had learned from movies. The American customs officers wore motley uniforms and did not look like regular border guards. The guards did not have a standard haircut, and one fat-belly was smoking a cigar.

"The booth and gate needed paint," Eger said, "and they weren't wearing those long coats. You know those long coats that border guards are supposed to wear? And there was no pole across the road. I wanted a pole to go up and down. Everything seemed to be done too casually. But I kept looking down to see if my heart could be seen beating through my jacket."

They crossed into the United States without incident. Because a certain amount of time should pass before they returned, Marcia drove him through the streets of Detroit. Not long after dusk, they passed Tiger Stadium, the lights burning for a night game, and Eger told Marcia that the Orioles were in town with a young and flashy second baseman named Bobby Grich. Eger said he knew it was probably silly to ask but if they had some time, he would very much like to go to the ball game and watch Bobby Grich and the Orioles against the Tigers. But only if they had some time and it wasn't stupid. Marcia said they should cross back into Canada while the traffic was still heavy; then she looked at her watch and said they could see three innings. The last hour Eger had spent in

the United States was at Tiger Stadium, Baltimore against Detroit, with Bobby Grich making no special play but showing wonderful moves around second.

"Then, when we were coming back across, I had to wait because the guards were listening to the game on the radio. They kept me standing there until the inning was over. I was listening to the game, too, but I kept saying to myself, 'Come on. You're just supposed to hear the first three innings.' And then one of them came to the counter, and I presented my papers and announced that I wished to work and live permanently in Canada. Marcia drove me to the railroad station and said good-bye. I think she had a class to teach the next morning."

"Bobby Grich," Darrow said.

Young, strong, good-humored, functioning, Eger and his comrades were too intelligent and well-educated to avoid feeling occasional despair. They knew they were fugitives, each of them a wanted man, not wholly safe even in a Canadian exile. Undercover military police searched among them for deserters, and American agents had tried to penetrate their underground. Marcia and people like Marcia could be sentenced to prison terms for abetting and aiding the escapes of fugitives. Nothing less than underground railroads had been established (how many nobody knew) with night crossings, forged papers, code names, passwords, escape routes. And thousands of Americans, tens upon tens of thousands, in one way or another maybe a million people, had conspired against their government and its policies. If it seemed like a movie, it was no movie. For Eger, all that remained was the outfitting of the border guards in the proper long coats.

Darrow wanted to say that finally Americans were not stupid, that we could have been tougher at the borders than we were, that we had kept some saving traditions, even that he continued "to have faith in the viability of the American idea," but it was not Joseph Eger who required reassurance. "It's possible that Watergate may help bring us to our senses."

But for Eger, the Balkanizing of America had begun long before, at least a generation earlier. Eger showed but passing interest in Watergate; he was not even incredulous at the incredulity expressed about a secret taping system in the White House, the

passing of money from giant corporations to operatives within the Nixon apparatus, the acts against private citizens by agents of that apparatus, the silent shift of established agencies to Gestapo functions, the need to execute policy in the darkness of night. Eger took no satisfaction in the revelations of Nixon's perfidies, and he did not think public knowledge of the attempted coup by the Nixon fifth column against the Constitution would help those who had resisted the war. Even if Nixon were forced from office, only the manners of policy would change.

"Some of the guys at The House are jealous of you," Eger said. "They would have flown a fighter plane in your formation. Talk to Mike Sackett."

Darrow stared into a glass of Scotch.

"And also understand why we're suspicious. But I'm not bitter. Really I'm not."

Darrow motioned to the bartender for another drink and a beer for Eger.

"And if I wouldn't have chosen this path for myself or Sackett or Hulings, part of me has enjoyed what I had to do."

"You rose to your occasion," Darrow said. He waited until the bartender brought their drinks. "My oldest son served. If anything had happened to him I'd have gone berserk."

"Was he in Vietnam?"

Darrow nodded. "The navy." Then: "I do so feel for the casualties of this war, and their mothers. And fathers."

"And the Vietnamese people," Eger said.

"God, dear God, what sorrow I feel."

Michael Sackett

When Darrow had first met Michael Sackett, he had thought him to be an unlikely citizen of The House. The oldest at twenty-eight, he also had the longest residence in Canada—six and a half years. Alone among them he had not attended college and worked now as their lone delegate to the Canadian labor force. And he was the only one who had accepted military service. Certainly, Sackett stood the tallest and strongest, big through the chest and shoulders, the powerful thighs bulging through his slacks. His

black hair was thick and tightly curled, and the line of his face had already settled so that he appeared to have become the person he was going to be. A fastidious person, what working class women call a "clean man," Sackett worked on construction at the rising CN tower where he handled steel at the highest levels.

Darrow met him at a Jewish delicatessen on Spadina where he bought them beer and corn beef sandwiches. "These folks make a mighty tasty sandwich and real down-home for size," Sackett said.

Darrow kept the beer coming, and Sackett ate a second sandwich—this time a "pastramny," pronouncing it as if he had already been corrected once before and was going to call it "pastramny" anyhow. Sackett spoke easily—the meeting might have been his idea—and Darrow listened, interested in the tonalities, and the clear and straightforward organization which testified to Sackett's developing mind.

Sackett had grown up in Kentucky—near Mayfield—and had gone to school there where, like his father and uncles before him, he played football and "helled around in cars." His father worked as an automobile mechanic and also tended bar on Friday and Saturday at the VFW hall, and his mother was a cashier at a supermarket. The only boy, Mike had sisters, both older and younger. He had enjoyed high school although he could not remember ever having been asked to read a book from the beginning to the end, at least, he had "never read a whole book" during his years in high school. He made the all-county football team and received offers of scholarships from three Kentucky colleges and two from Tennessee, but then had broken his collar bone "fooling around" and later had "totaled a car" he was test-driving for the man who owned the garage where his father worked. About this time, Mike attended a high school beer party, and then later it was discovered that the beer had been borrowed from a local distributor. Suddenly, the college football recruiters remembered that their intention was to counsel the boys, as well as sign them, and they wondered if Mike might better sit out a year to get a better sense of himself and also to make sure his collar bone healed properly. A couple of months after he graduated from high school, his father suggested that he might do worse than join the Marine Corps and "learn to be a man." His father had discussed

the idea with buddies down at the VFW, and they agreed that the Marines might be just the place for a boy of Michael's energy and imagination. And besides, there didn't seem to be much for him around Mayfield except more trouble.

Michael did well in boot camp, didn't mind the discipline, found the physical requirements easy to meet, got along with his drill instructor who was from northern Tennessee. Nobody picked on him, and everybody was careful in how they razzed him. Selected for leadership school, he learned about his responsibilities in combat and heard for the first time "how the United States was trying to save Vietnam." When he shipped out from San Francisco, he was a corporal functioning as a platoon leader, sure to make sergeant. He felt apprehensive but had assumed from the time of his enlistment that he would see action.

In Vietnam mid-summer of 1966, their first assignment was to search-and-destroy. The following December, the week that eight hundred Americans died and the worst week for casualties since the beginning of the war, his Marine unit moved into the DMZ. While they were moving north, the Viet Cong moved south into the Mekong Delta, and Sackett could not understand what was happening. The South Vietnamese troops had been given the responsibility of something called the Pacification Program, and the Americans seemed to be doing most of the fighting. Sackett said the instruction in guerrilla warfare had not helped much. It was like playing in a game where the X's and O's on the blackboard had nothing to do with what took place after the ball was snapped. You could not find the man you were supposed to hit, and somebody kept blind-siding you. Aside from the people on your squad, you could not always tell the players from the spectators. There were no markers, no first downs, no goal line, and keeping score by body count offended him; he could not accept the idea that victory was won only by the number of injuries and deaths.

His company suffered casualties in its initial action. After he lost the first man in his platoon, Sackett ignored his own bewilderment about strategy; he tried to get through each day without the loss of a life. They went into the DMZ to destroy artillery emplacements and seize the high ground which controlled the approaches to the

south. Sackett preferred that assignment to the search-and-destroy missions, and he thought that they had succeeded in the DMZ. Then, when he learned about what had been happening in the south while he had been up north, he didn't know what any of it meant. "The funny thing though," Sackett said, "is that even if I didn't know what was going on, I got better at it. On a day to day basis, you pick up experience in how to kill to stay alive." He was promoted twice and received the Silver Star for valor during the DMZ operation, but he did not tell Darrow what he had done to get the medal.

After more beer had been brought to the table, Darrow asked Sackett if he wished now that he had resisted the war. Sackett shrugged. "Suppose you had a younger brother," Darrow said, "what advice would you give him?"

Sackett laughed. "I might tell him not to believe everything the old man brought home from the VFW hall, but I couldn't do what Eger did. Anyhow, not going at all wasn't an idea that got thought about in Mayfield." Then: "In Nam, when the guys got to talking about the peace demonstrators and the smart-assed college boys, I kept my mouth shut. I bitched some at the beginning but then I discovered that even though I wouldn't have done it myself, I wasn't sore at them."

"How do you explain that?" Darrow said. "Were you reading about the war?"

"Not yet I hadn't read anything. All I wanted when we pulled back was to smoke a joint and have a woman. No, I just never got mad at the guys who wouldn't go. My old man still talks about how his company did this and like they won their war, but I never felt that way. Most of the guys were only doing their time. But I wasn't ever sorry I went."

In late August of 1967, Sackett was rotated home. He went to Mayfield on furlough and visited with his parents and sisters. His father was proud of him, but one night after they had both drunk beer, they argued about the war. Sackett said he wished now that he had kept his mouth shut. That was the first time that he had heard himself being critical of the war in Vietnam; he said that he hadn't put up a very good argument. Later, after he had returned to camp, he tried to do some reading. "I had problems because I

discovered that I didn't know how to read anything. I'm improving some though I still have trouble."

"Was it then that you made your decision to desert?" Darrow said.

"No. A lot of what I read was bullshit. Some of it sorta helped me understand what my feelings had been when I was there. Even so I'd still have gone. I just wanted to get out of the Marine Corps and forget it."

While Sackett was waiting for discharge, his unit was given training in riot control. After what they had already been through, Sackett thought it was all pretty silly, but he assumed the Marine Corps wanted to keep them busy until they were released. He never thought they would actually be ordered to put down a riot. Then, that October they were alerted and moved close to Washington. "It was on a Friday. Friday, October 20th, and the demonstration was scheduled for that Saturday and Sunday. We got the bayonets and billy clubs issued to us that Friday night. And about midnight, I pulled out."

"You could not bear arms against your own countrymen," Darrow said.

"Yeah, I don't know. Maybe so. Eger says that's when they finally made their mistake with me. Just because somebody came to Washington to raise a little hell, I wasn't going to bust their heads. And there was women. Little kids with their mother. And who gives a shit if a bunch of people want to stand in front of the Pentagon and give speeches. Did you know a book got written about that march?"

"It's a good book," Darrow said. "Did you read it?"

"I started it," Sackett said.

Sackett never gave a thought to going home to Mayfield. Dressed in his Marine Corps uniform, the sergeant's stripe pressed flat on the sleeve and the ribbons riding on a line above his heart, he hitchhiked to Buffalo where he spent some of his four hundred dollar stake on clothing. Then, he took a bus into Canada. Like most of the others, he'd lived through a dead period, not sure what he should be doing. He despised waiting on tables and wasn't any good at it. "In Mayfield, we didn't have men waiters." He found odd jobs—preferably outside—and he worked Friday and Saturday

nights as a bartender at a motel; he said the manager was more interested in his size than his ability to mix drinks. He knew that he must ask for help, but he didn't trust the draft resisters and positively disliked other deserters who had come to Canada when their units had been frozen for shipment to Vietnam. Then, one Saturday night at the bar, he met another deserter who had also seen action and learned what he must do to live and work in Canada. Sackett's older sister, married by then, sent him the necessary papers for his application to become an immigrant, but he had felt displaced until he met Eger.

"It was Joe Eger and me that started The House," Sackett said. "Joe says if we ever need a secretary of defense, I can have the job." Meanwhile, Sackett was in charge of their sports program.

"And did Eger also explain the politics of the war to you?"

"What do you mean?"

"Are your present understandings pretty much what Joe Eger also says about the war?"

"Joe has taught me a lot," Sackett said. "But I'm not Joe Eger's butt-boy. Nobody is. For one thing, Joe wouldn't like that. And neither would I. There's lots of things I know that Joe Eger doesn't know."

Afloat with beer, Darrow excused himself to go to the men's room. When he returned, he ordered another round. He didn't want the beer but decided that if they weren't drinking, Sackett would quit talking. "I'm told the military police have been here looking for deserters. Have they found you?"

"Sure, they found me," Sackett said. "Twice."

"What did they say?"

"The first time they talked about the Corps and how the Corps shouldn't have any deserters and certainly the lowest desertion rate of the services and how they knew I was sorry about what I did especially since I had the Silver Star and that they understood I was probably still suffering from battle fatigue when I left my outfit. Bullfuck like that."

"And the second time?"

"How this was probably the last time they could be understanding with me but that if I came back now why they could probably still go easy but that I'd had time to realize what I'd done

and that they might not be so nice about it in the future but that they were still being nice. Bullfuck like that.”

“You weren’t tempted?”

“Most of what they said seemed to be about them and not me,” Sackett said. “I’m here to stay now. Eger’s chances are better than mine.”

He wiped off his mouth with the butt of his hand. “I’ve got a good job on construction. Down at the tower. Have you seen the tower?”

“Hard not to see it,” Darrow said. “Listen, on these disappearing acts of yours, where do you go?”

“Oh, I just like to get off by myself.”

“Tell me to back off if you want to,” Darrow said.

“For a long time after I got here and was trying to get myself settled, I’d be going along all right, and then all of a sudden, I’d want to beat the crap out of somebody. You know what I mean?”

“Yes,” Darrow said.

Sackett laughed. “You still have that?”

“If you ever had it, I don’t think you quite grow out of it,” Darrow said. “You do grow older, however.”

“Yeah, I suppose. Anyhow, I’d go into a bar and have a few brews and look for good trouble. I had me some dandies. But then Joe said if I got into serious cop trouble, maybe they’d deport me.”

“So when that mood comes on, you get off by yourself for awhile,” Darrow said.

“Yeah, something like that. I wouldn’t mind to tell you, Mr. Darrow, but I don’t know if I should.”

“Then keep it to yourself,” Darrow said.

“No, shit, I’ll tell you.” Sackett took a drink of the beer and leaned across the table. “I mean Joe Eger doesn’t even know this.” He grinned and lowered his voice. “I got me a sure way of getting in and out of the States.”

“What do you do there?”

“Nothing,” Sackett said, grinning. “I just go there.”

“Isn’t that dangerous?”

“Yeah, maybe. But I don’t always go to the same place. And I’m careful. I just walk around and poke. I eat in the restaurants and usually go to a movie.”

“You enjoy the risks? Is that why you go?”

“I just like it.” Sackett was still smiling. “It feels different to me.” Slowly, the smile disappeared from his face. “I just like being there.”

Neither spoke for a few seconds.

“Another beer?” Darrow said.

“My back teeth are floating now.”

“That reassures me,” Darrow said, “because I’ve been pissing up a storm. Let’s have another beer.”

Sackett nodded. “You’re all right, Mr. Darrow.” Smiling, he raised his hands and feinted a left across the table at Darrow’s jaw. □

Alfred Kern’s best known novel is *Made in USA*. He is a World War II veteran.