

Chapter IV

"A Scribbled Name"

The third epigraph in Carter's autobiography begins with the following lines from Dylan Thomas:

Great is the hand that holds dominion over
Man by a scribbled name.

Actually Carter wanted his own "great hand" to hold dominion over men, but why through a scribbled, that is, illegible name? He indeed confused many people into misreading his personality and bewildered them with the enigma and riddle of his contradictory, ever-shifting policies. But that was precisely his aim. Carter had no program or definable policies but a "method" of scribbling unintelligibly the image of his murky personality. Carter's is a very effective method. By such scribbling he mesmerizes and compels people to read into him and his demagoguery anything they desire or hope for, turning them into dupes and accomplices of his provocations. This method makes it possible for him to escape responsibility and to blame others for the disasters which punctuate his record.

Former President Gerald Ford said that Carter's "economic program has been a disaster, his energy policies have been misguided and ineffective. His foreign policies have been contradictory, erratic and dangerous," and wondered, "Why have we pulled our

punches on Jimmy Carter? Why do we let him make himself the hero of disasters he alone created? " The Independent Presidential contender, John Anderson, said that Carter "for some reason ... has the ability to deflect personal criticism even though what people are complaining about is a policy he is clearly responsible for. Somehow he escapes the blame." Early in Carter's term Leon Panetta, Democrat of California, was also puzzled by the absence of any Carter criticism: "He's not viewed as either the culprit or the hero. Perhaps people don't view a new President as part of the government."

James Reston went as far as to beautify Carter's "gift" of provocations to look almost like a virtue. Reston wrote that Carter "confuses Prime Minister Begin on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays, and confuses President Sadat on Tuesdays, Thursdays and Saturdays." As a result, Begin and Sadat alternate between dismay and elation, but Carter

has a purpose ... it would, I believe, be a mistake to assume that he's using provocative words accidentally, out of inexperience. In fact, he is being precisely imprecise... this gift, greatly underestimated at home, is of making people believe in his sincerity and the integrity of his nation's purpose.

This is precisely the point. Carter has indeed a "gift" of misleading people into believing in his sincerity and into mistaking his "purpose" for "his nation's purpose." His sole purpose is to solve his inner conflict. By projecting it on the nation and the world he instigates tensions and confrontations which are nothing but reflections of his own emotional turmoil.

Carter has the uncanny ability to deflect criticism from himself, remaining aloof and silent while projecting his guilt onto appointed scapegoats. Representative Warren Mitchel of Maryland, the former chairman of the Congressional Black Caucus, said that "out on the streets, the perception, the feeling is that the Israeli Government went out of its way to embarrass and humiliate a black man." The New York Times editorial "Who Did Andrew Young In, and Why?" pointed to Young's resignation and said that it had triggered "poisonous racial and religious discord pitching against each other the Black and Jewish communities," and that Carter's failure to explain the reason for Young's resignation created the impression that "Jews did Young in." The editorial ended with the observation, "But the days go by, the passions spread and Jimmy Carter keeps his silence." Actually Carter was not completely silent during his riverboat jaunt down the Mississippi at the time the Young affair was fueling the hatred. When reporters asked Carter who was in charge of Middle East policy his response was "Mondale."

Secretary of the Treasury W. H. Blumenthal, having left Carter's cabinet in the summer of 1979, said that the Administration's failures had resulted from "basic schizophrenia." A letter "To the Editor" titled "Our Schizophrenic Foreign Policy" pointed to the "Vance imbroglio" and "competition" between the National Security Council and the State Department, but avoided blaming Carter for the irreconcilable duality of our dealings with allies as well as adversaries. The likelihood that Vance, or now Muskie, and Brzezinski speak from each side of Carter's mouth is hardly mentioned. One of Carter's former political allies, Governor Maddox, saw through him:

He's cold, cunning, cruel, and will destroy anything or anyone who stands in his way. He is right the opposite from what he projects himself before the public— From a temperamental standpoint, from a standpoint of emotions, truth and honesty, he is the opposite from the way he appears on radio and television. He's a Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde sort of fellow.

But Carter's massive scribbling outweighs by far a rare deciphering.

Lying is indispensable to Carter's scribbling, and he lies readily and fluently. During his 1976 campaign, Carter made strangely glib statements to his audiences. For example, "Now, I want to be your President. I hope you'll come to see me. Please don't leave me up there in the White House all by myself." Or, "If you have any questions or advice for me," said Carter with an air of modesty and humbleness, "please write. Just put 'Jimmy Carter, Plains, Georgia' on the envelope, and I'll get it. I open every letter myself and read them all." As if realizing that he had just said something incredible, he added, "One more thing." His voice began to quiver with boundless sincerity, "if I ever lie to you"— about a three second pause after his voice drops off— "please don't vote for me." It turned out that all his mail had been forwarded to his Atlanta headquarters.

In his *Playboy* interview, Carter accused President Johnson of being a "liar," and then telephoned Johnson's widow to tell her he "did not mean" it. In his biography, he wrote that he was once asked what he would do if he were arrested for being a Christian. He pondered this hypothetical situation for a moment, then acknowledged that he would manage "to talk my way out of it." In real life, he does just that. When his

Manhattan supporters moaned at his suggestion to tax capital gains as income, Carter produced his smile and calmed them down saying, "I said I'd consider it, not that I'd do it."

Sometimes he apologizes and afterwards nonchalantly withdraws his apologies. He was "mistaken," he said, to use the phrase "ethnic purity," and "I apologized." But after saying that he "meant" the "ethnic character" of neighborhoods, he added, "I was right and I don't have any apology to make."

He does not "really" mean it when he says "I love you" to a man he meets for a couple of seconds and whose hand he shakes for the first and last time in his life. But he says "I love you" with such conviction that it is difficult not to believe him. At this moment he indeed might "love" this man. This is how he described this particular phenomenon in a May 6, 1976 television interview with Bill Moyers:

On a factory shift line . . . everybody that comes through there, when I shake hands with them, for that instance, for that instant, I really care about in a genuine way. And I believe they know it quite a lot of times. Quite often I will shake hands with women who work in a plant, and I just touch their hands, and quite frequently they'll put their arms around my neck and say, 'God bless you, son' or 'Good luck—I'll help you and good luck.'

Carter said that such "instant togetherness" was "miraculous." The sincerity and unperturbability with which he made his declarations of "love" to strangers and his various false assertions suggest that, "for that instant," he actually believes them to be true. It might be incorrect to accuse him of hypocrisy. His awareness

of what is true and sincere may be so insubstantial that it becomes questionable whether "lying" and "hypocrisy" can be attributed to him. If he has no major values himself, as his shifts on issues suggest, he really might not mean what he says.

Dr. Harvey Cleckley has described the peculiar phenomenon of a person

unable to distinguish adequately between his own pseudo-intentions, pseudo-remorse, pseudo-love, etc. and the genuine responses of a normal person— His monumental lack of insight indicates how little he appreciates the nature of his disorder. When others fail to accept immediately his word of honor as a gentleman, his amazement, I believe, is often genuine. His subjective experience is so bleached of deep emotions that he is invincibly ignorant of what life means to others.

As a candidate, in 1976 Carter said that "issues exist in the minds and hearts of our citizens," and are not created by candidates. Patrick Caddell, Carter's personal pollster, advised Carter that to be vague on issues presents a certain advantage, since people can project their own conclusions on Carter and see in him the embodiment of their will. This projection also explains Carter's feeling that he embodies the national will. "I'm able to accommodate different kinds of groups fairly well," he said. "And that's one of the things I've always tried to do in the speech— to figure out in my own mind the compatibilities between me and them."

Carter indeed seems to believe that he "never tells a lie." When his contradictions or outright lies are pointed out to him, his resentment appears genuine:

ordinarily I'm quite easy going and don't like to argue.

When somebody insinuates that I'm a liar, I resent it. I think that's a natural human reaction. When asked whether he would withdraw his candidacy if it was proved that he had lied, Carter replied: "I think I would, because I haven't told a lie." He explained, "I'm not a liar, I don't make statements in private contrary to what I make in public."

Yet take a recent example from the public record. Our allies agreed to join Carter in imposing economic sanctions against Iran, once assured by Carter and Secretary of State Cyrus Vance that the United States would not undertake military action while the effect of the sanction was being tested. Vance, taking this assurance seriously, left Washington on the evening of April 10, 1980 for a brief Florida vacation. The next day Carter and the National Security Council decided to undertake the hostage rescue mission without notifying Vance or the allies. Vance's deputy, Warren Christopher, who was present at the meeting, gave his consent because he "was led to believe that the Secretary already knew" about Carter's rescue plan and had agreed to it.

When Vance returned from Florida on April 14, he was not informed about the decision until much later in the day. He "stewed," and early the next morning brought his objections directly to Carter. The same day, April 15, he repeated them at the meeting of the National Security Council, which responded with "deafening silence." Since "Mr. Carter had already decided in favor of the mission, for everyone at that point to have supported Mr. Vance would have meant opposing the President directly." Some of the Council members, as Mr. Vance told James Reston, "conceded

privately that he [Vance] had raised serious questions."

On April 21, Vance submitted his resignation but Mr. Carter delayed its acceptance until the outcome of the mission was announced early on Friday, April 25. Vance waited two more days, then reaffirmed his decision to resign. Used by Carter to deceive our allies, Vance was himself deceived, and called it quits. He could have done it much earlier, on March 1, 1980, when, as a New York Times editorial put it, "he even agreed to play the fool and fall-guy for Mr. Carter's opportunistic 'communications failure' about the United Nation's resolution on Israel." Actually Carter failed to deny American support for the resolution which made mockery of the Camp David accord. Carter's own precisely worded explanation of why he first approved and later disavowed this resolution was "honest communication failure." He did not mention the uproar in the Jewish community over the U.S.'s initial vote for the resolution on the eve of the New York primary.

Representative John Rhodes of Arizona commented:

I very much dislike saying this, but I believe it needs to be said. If there is a strand of behavior discernible through the fabric of the Carter administration's policy, it is the strand of duplicity . . . uncertainty and ineptitude, compounded by moral blindness and lack of understanding of the process of government.

Behind his proclaimed "morality" Carter hides a lack of moral values. Joan Oakes in his article "On-the-Spot Morality" pointed to the "contrast between rhetoric and reality" in Carter's "pragmatism" and to the "moralism in which he habitually enshrouds it, especially

when new standards of moral impeccability are devised on the spot to meet his immediate needs."

Miss Lillian "confidently" predicted that "Jimmy's reign" would "revolutionize the United States, as far as morals and everything else is concerned. Everybody he appoints is going to be of high moral character. He is going to fire everybody who is not." During the 1976 campaign Hamilton Jordan was Carter's chief strategist, and at that time he predicted that "you are going to see new faces, new ideas. The government is going to be run by people you have never heard of." Some of those new faces appear hidden behind their feet. According to reports, the issue that generates most of the angry mail to the White House is "photos of presidential aides with their feet on desks." Jordan, whose photographed feet seem larger than his desk, let alone his face, said that he did not "think much" of Carter's cabinet members "except for two." Later he denied saying that, but congressional aides to whom he made this comment confirmed it.

Jordan initially was Assistant to the President, but in the wake of the summer 1979 purge by Carter of his Cabinet, he was appointed White House Chief of Staff. He revealed his "high moral character" to the wife of the Egyptian Ambassador at a party given in December 1978 by Barbara Walters. He told the Ambassador's wife that he had seen "the pyramids" after having taken a good look at the lady's bodice. When the incident was reported he denied it but conceded that he was "into the sauce pretty good that night." Carter, to show his displeasure, put Jordan in the "doghouse" from which he was soon allowed to emerge to join the Presidential party in Egypt, the last leg of Carter's Middle-Eastern tour. Perhaps at that time Jordan had a chance to see the pyramids.

Jordan as the "target of lewd women" was the subject of news stories revealing that recently-divorced Jordan was "besieged by lecherous women." Instead of finding shelter in the privacy of his White House office from pursuit by "those females," Jordan ventured at night into Sarsfield, a Washington singles bar. One evening he tried "to pick up a woman" but ended up "spitting his drink down her blouse when she gave him the cold shoulder." The article dutifully reported Jordan's and the "Georgia Mafia's" denials, accompanied by complaints that "since The Pyramids,' lecherous women have been calling Jordan up, saying 'come on over and look down my dress!'" The charges against Jordan that he bought and used cocaine in New York's Studio 54 and in some places on the West Coast have been dropped by the Justice Department.

Carter did not see "anything wrong" with Bert Lance's background and character. Long before a Grand Jury acquitted Lance on 19 counts and was deadlocked on another three, Carter had insisted that the "accusations" against Lance "proved to be false." He stated, "there's no way anyone could replace Lance" adding that "Bert Lance is my friend. I know him personally as well as if he was my own brother. I know him without any doubt in my mind or heart to be a good and an honorable man." In Carter's words, Lance is a man of "basic competence, courage, honesty and unselfishness."

Jody Powell is Carter's "oldest, most trusted personal friend." He is a slow-speaking

congenial old boy ... addicted to other people's cigarettes and inclined toward casualness... seemingly imperturbable, maneuvers through difficulties with detachment... fiercely loyal to Mr. Carter, with whom he has a father-son relationship.

In 1964 Powell was "dismissed from the Air Force Academy for violating the honor code, having checked a course notebook on an examination rest break." He transferred to Georgia State University. After his appointment, he described his job as Press Secretary as "immensely important" and promised that he "never would dissemble in it."

Initiating a "guerilla warfare" on the Lance affair, Jody Powell called several major newspapers and accused Senator Charles Percy, who had demonstrated some zeal in questioning Lance, of flying regularly on corporate airplanes and failing to reimburse a Chicago bank for campaign expenses. Powell requested his denunciation to remain anonymous. One newspaper, however, misunderstood him and attached his name to the report. Thus caught, Powell tried to talk his way out of his predicament by first projecting guilt on the press, saying that it was the responsibility of the press to check rumors before publishing them, and that it was not his fault that "Washington abounds with rumors." He also projected his accusations into the future. When he was asked "what would happen at a presidential press conference if reporters were not given an eagerly awaited announcement," Powell said, "I suppose that will then be a process in which you all will look aggressive, abusive and ill-mannered as you continue to badger the leader of the free world."

With amazing virtuosity and straight-faced unperurbability, Powell excels in ducking questions which might embarrass Carter. The question of Carter's involvement in Powell's attempt to smear Percy is of considerable importance. When Powell was asked whether, prior to his attempt to smear Percy, he "had talked to President Carter" about it, Powell said, "I

pointed out to him that I had described my actions as being 'inappropriate, regrettable and dumb.' And, as is often his habit, he seemed to accept my analysis of the situation without question." The question was whether Carter had known about this smear attempt beforehand. Taking into account the personal closeness of the two men, Powell's unrestricted access to Carter, and Carter's deep personal involvement in Lance's affair, it is hard to believe that Powell could have acted without Carter's directive, or, at least, his approval. The fact that Carter "seemed to accept" Powell's "analysis of the situation without question," or even a hint of indignation points to Carter's involvement.

Carter, as he put it, selects his aides on the basis of their "compatibility" with him and their "sincerity." In his autobiography Carter said that Rosalynn's "judgment on political matters is sound, and her instant analysis of the sincerity of political persons is almost infallible." Carter also has a very high opinion of his own abilities for "instant analysis" of people. He said that

very early I was able—six or seven years old—to judge very accurately who the good people were on the streets of Plains and who the bad people were. The good people were the ones that bought boiled peanuts. The bad ones didn't.

Now Carter sells a different kind of "boiled peanuts" but the basis of his judgment has not changed since his early days in Plains: "So I haven't come any further in my ability to judge others, but today I want to talk about judgment to you." He and Rosalynn seem to be quite compatible in their "instant" and "infallible" judg-

ment of people, and are determined to form a judgment of what they call people's "sincerity." Carter, while meeting someone, listens "with a blow-torch intensity which makes most other brands of human attention seem dazed or bored." Rosalynn "shares the trait—an 'interest almost animal in strength and necessity...." Some people find "the gaze a little ominous, even predatory: Are *we* being sized up for future consumption? " The group of Time reporters who detected these qualities in the Carters were not being considered for a Cabinet appointment—they simply came for an interview. What intensity the "gaze" acquires when Carter selects his appointees there is no way of measuring or, perhaps, describing. By "sincerity" Carter may mean something else, but what? He often mentions "compatibility" as an important factor. Bert Lance, as Carter said, was so "compatible" with him that he was "irreplaceable." As for Lance's "sincerity," the notable evasiveness of his testimony suggested that sincerity was not one of his virtues.

Sincerity does not seem to be Carter's virtue either, as his record of lying and constant shifts on issues reveals. Sincerity requires an ability to trust and to love, the main theme of Carter's 1976 campaign. An episode he cited suggests that he had learned early not to trust people. "One of the few unpleasant experiences I remember," wrote Carter

was when a wise guy at the local garage offered to buy a bag of peanuts if I could obey some hand signals that he would give me. I was only seven or eight years old. The checker players and other loafers watched while I moved back and forth and from side to side with my eyes fixed on the movements of the man's hand, until he finally

guided me to step on a lighted cigarette with my bare feet.
A few of the onlookers laughed, while I tried not to cry.

The fact that Carter was to remember this episode for some forty years and tell it in his campaign autobiography suggests that it was for him a memorable lesson in mistrust, and also in something else. He learned the "scribble" method of mesmerizing people into following the "back and forth and from side to side" movements of his "great hand," fixing their eyes on it instead of on the "lighted cigarette" down the road.