

MICHAELANGELO'S RENAISSANCE

kozmic revelations...

a novel-ish
by
michael a kominsky

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- Dedication: Some of the Good Guys -

The world is in greater peril from those who tolerate or encourage evil than from those who actually commit it.

- Albert Einstein

This novel is humbly dedicated to the great apologists and fearless advocates of social justice, past, present and future.

To name just a few, Harriet Tubman, Rosa Luxemburg, Emma Goldman, Noam Chomsky, Ralph Nader, Howard Zinn, Cornel West and Mario Savio.

A Special Homage to those who have made the supreme sacrifice, including Mahatma Gandhi and Martin Luther King Jr. for civil rights, justice and freedom around the world through *peaceful non-violent civil disobedience*.

- About -

Michaelalanzo Kominsky, currently lives in Bellingham Washington, near Lake Whatcom less than a mile from “Ground Zero” of June 10, 1999.

His production company MetaMEDIA Communications on occasion still produces films, usually a bio-pic documentary, often about self-absorbed, obsessive compulsive creatives of which he has considerable personal insight.

When not chasin' bad guys around the page he can often be found in his studio, 'throwing some paint'. His art can be viewed at Kozmick.com

It would be greatly appreciated by the author, if you come across any factual errors, to let the author know. Thanks.



He can be contacted by email: mak@kozmicpress.com

For Daruska

To Carole Beller, *le plus pur artiste...*
une speciale merci beaucoup, for her support and encouragement.

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- Preamble: So, What's the Point? -

Fiction is the lie through which we tell the truth.
- Albert Camus

Everyone living in Bellingham Washington remembers where they were on that lazy, innocent summer afternoon of June 10, 1999. It is the local equivalent to September 11th 2001. If you're of my generation, the day of the JFK assassination:

A gasoline pipeline operated by Olympic Pipeline Company exploded in Bellingham, Washington's Whatcom Falls Park. The gasoline vapors exploded at 5:02, sending a fireball down Whatcom Creek.

- *The Bellingham Herald*

I was working in my studio in the Geneva area, a little less than a mile from Whatcom Falls Park, when an explosion literally rocked my world.

What could possibly cause such a violent shaking of the earth? The Big ONE?

At the time, I had absolutely no idea of the cause or origin. My first impression was, because of the magnitude and the obvious involvement of some kind of petroleum accelerant, perhaps it was the aftermath of a commercial jet crash. But a gas-filled time-bomb-pipeline? Impossible you say? Out of the realm of possibility?

I would not experience that same level of violation and yes, outrage until 9/11.

So this tragic incident became the inspirational and aspirational genesis; a *roman à clef*, (*Fr. a novel with a key*) or a novel about real life, overlaid with a facade of fiction. The names and places in the novel represent composites of places, real people and actual events—the "key" is the relationship between the nonfiction and the fiction. Certain liberties were taken with the facts, including causation and dates for literary and dramatic purposes.

Grandiose? Perhaps. Middlebrow? Probably. Pedantic? Sure. It's a gift.

With the exception of notable historical figures, all the characters are fictitious—any resemblance to the bad guys, living or

dead, is purely coincidental—unless it ain't. The main protagonist Michaelangelo Kozlov bears more than a casual resemblance to the author insofar as the similitude and abundance of disturbing foibles and irritating eccentricities.

Writing is a socially acceptable form of schizophrenia.

- E.L. Doctorow (January 6, 1931– July 21, 2015) RIP

So the story is somewhat of a hybrid between non-fiction and fiction—or fiction-*ish*. Hence, a novel-*ish*.

It is a microcosm expanded to the *what-if* larger scenario of man's indefatigable hubris. A cautionary parable of the blind worship of industry, technology and oblivious reliance on fossil fuel despite imperative warnings of 97% of the credible scientific climate community. The *idiot light* on the dashboard is now frantically flashing red admonishing us to shut down the engine of greenhouse gases before anymore irreparable damage is done. It is the redundant replay of the Tragedy—over and over again—of the Greek mythos of Nemesis, (Gr. to pay what is due) divine retribution for man's hubris as he blithely allows the slow systematic Matricide of *Gaia*.

Tortured and slowly suffocated by a blanket of CO2 at the hands of Her own ungrateful children—a deadly irony—with the same slow irrepressible efficiency of the technology that caused it.

The planet and its diverse life forms are in such imminent existential crisis that *we* no longer have the time or luxury for political or literary correctness. The time for nuance is long past. It is with this sense of exigency, that I have written this unapologetic homily. Given the urgency of the moment, my hope is that one can transcend and forgive if at times, it rings of excessive moral purpose and, yes outrage.

The novel with a purpose is, one contends, a preaching novel. But it preaches by telling things and showing things.

The preaching, the moralizing is the result not of direct appeal by the writer, but is made—should be made—to the reader by the very incidents of the story.

It is the complaint of the coward, this cry against the novel with a purpose, because it brings the tragedies and grief of others to notice. Take this element from fiction, take from it the power and opportunity to prove that injustice, crime and inequality do exist and what is left? Just the amusing novels that entertain.

: : *Michaelangelo's Renaissance* — *m.a.kominsky* : :

- *Frank Norris- author of classic 'muck raking' novels
McTeague (1899) and The Octopus: A Story of
California(1901)*

It is inspired by works of the great novelists of social conscience. Throughout history, some of the greatest agents of social change have been ignited through works of fiction—including classics:

Harriet Beecher Stowe (*Uncle Tom's Cabin; or, Life Among the Lowly*—1852),

Charles Dickens(*A Tale of Two Cities*—1859),

Herman Melville (*Moby-Dick; or The Whale*—1851),

Mark Twain (*The Gilded Age: A Tale of Today* 1873),

Upton Sinclair (*The Jungle*—1906 and *King Coal*—1917, *Oil*—1927),

Aldous Huxley (*Brave New World*—1932),

John Steinbeck (*Grapes of Wrath*—1939), and

George Orwell (1984—1949).

It is through this ancient and sacred tradition of allegory, of striving to deliver their moral payload, that is documented as far back as the Palaeolithic cave paintings of Lascaux 20,000 years ago. By connecting to the primordial instinct to share the experience of the human condition through captivating storytelling, in all its art forms, passing on cumulative *wisdom* through parable, for generations to follow.

An even more timely and prescient example of life imitating art, is the Libertarian tome, the novel *Atlas Shrugged*(1957) by Ayn Rand often invoked by current leadership of the neo-conservative Right as the correct political paradigm for the regulatory role of government in American society—little or none.

Some may be tempted to accuse this Pantheon of the great novelists of engaging in didacticism. That suits me just fine. For they were not just good story-tellers with purpose—they were great highly talented writers. Their high critical literary acclaim along with enormous commercial success I believe vindicates the argument that the telling of a good, entertaining story and the proffering of a valid social purpose need not be mutually exclusive or dry and dull.

: : *Michaelangelo's Renaissance* — *m.a.kominsky* : :

The commentary in the Preamble and Epilogue undoubtedly will be recognized, repeated almost verbatim, as passages throughout the chapters.

Like the guy at the swingin' senior singles bar quipped to the old lady sitting on the next bar stool, "Do I come here often?" I would prefer to think that it's not the onset of senility, but rather, to be so essential as to be worthy of reinforcement.

So in someways, this is my 'Russian Novel'—a dark, Slavic melancholy morality play, panoramic in scope with lots and *lots* of characters over an ambitious time line. My contemporary take on Boris Pasternak's brilliant pre/post Russian revolution epic *Dr Zhivago*—as may have been told by Mel Brooks.

Hope you enjoy the read. We'd very much like to hear from you.

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[Kozmick Press](#), a subsidiary of [MetaMEDIA Communications](#), is a publisher of social justice and environmental conscience media.

Why Did I Write it?

This literary effort was never undertaken or motivated for commercial or remunerative reasons. My primary purpose therefore is to hopefully spread the message of it; to create awareness, inform, and motivate *you and others*, to take proactive action.

While the hard-copy of the book along with the eBook, is being offered for sale on Amazon.com, in an effort to expand the reach of it, until further notice, I offer download of the eBook free of charge at my website kozmicpress.com to everyone and anyone.

Click the DOWNLOAD EBOOK icon. You will then be directed to the product page where you can select and download your particular desired format, including Kindle (.mobi), Nook/Kobo (.epub) and Adobe Reader (.pdf)

Donations are voluntary and can be made via secure PayPal. Any amount is greatly appreciated to help defray costs and expenses.

Until further notice, please feel free to refer and extend this offer to anyone and everyone.

- Preface: A Brief History Primer -

*Woo ah, mercy, mercy me
Ah things ain't what they used to be, no no
Where did all the blue skies go?
Poison is the wind that blows from the north and south and east
Woo mercy, mercy me, mercy father
Ah things ain't what they used to be, no no
Oil wasted on the ocean and upon our seas, fish full of
mercury...
- Mercy, Mercy Me (The Ecology) - Marvin Gaye 1971*

Renaissance French: *Renaissance*, Original Italian: (*Rinascimento*, from *rinascere* "to be reborn") was a cultural movement that spanned the period roughly from the 14th to the 17th century considered the bridge between the Middle Ages and modern history.

It started as a cultural movement in Italy in the Late Medieval period, it later spread to the rest of Europe and finally ended in the Early Modern Age. Although the invention of metal movable type sped the dissemination of ideas from the later 15th century, the changes of the Renaissance were not uniformly experienced.

In politics, the Renaissance contributed to the development of the conventions of diplomacy, and in science an increased reliance on observation.

Michelangelo Caravaggio (1571–1610) was, The Bad Boy of the Renaissance Italian painters was active in Rome, Naples, Malta, and Sicily, during The Italian Renaissance between 1592 and 1610. His paintings, which combine a realistic observation of the human state, both physical and emotional, with a dramatic use of lighting, had a formative influence on the Baroque school of painting.

Caravaggio led a tumultuous life. An inveterate, promiscuous rascal, he was notorious for brawling, even in a time and place when such behavior was commonplace. The transcripts of his police records and trial proceedings fill several pages.

The Gilded Age in United States history is the late 19th century, from the 1870s to about 1900. The term was coined by writer Mark Twain in *The Gilded Age: A Tale of Today* (1873), which satirized an era of serious social problems masked by a thin gold gilding.

The Gilded Age was an era of rapid economic growth, especially in the North and West. American wages, especially for skilled workers, were much higher than in Europe, which attracted millions of immigrants. The increase of industrialization meant, despite the increasing labor force, real wages in the US grew 60% from 1860 to 1890, and continued to rise after that. However, the Gilded Age was also an era of poverty and inequality as very poor European immigrants poured in and wealth became highly concentrated. Railroads were the major industry, but the factory system, mining, and finance increased in importance. Immigration from Europe, China and the eastern states led to the rapid growth of the West, based on farming, ranching and mining. Labor unions became important in industrial areas. Two major nationwide depressions—the Panic of 1873 and the Panic of 1893—interrupted growth and caused social and political upheavals. The South after the American Civil War remained economically devastated—its economy became increasingly tied to cotton and tobacco production, which suffered from low prices. Blacks in the South, which is where most blacks lived in the US, even though ostensibly freed by the Civil War, were systematically stripped of political power and voting rights, and economically disadvantaged.

With the rapid growth of cities, political machines increasingly took control of urban politics. Unions crusaded for the 8-hour working day and the abolition of child labor; middle class reformers demanded civil service reform, prohibition, and women's suffrage. But reform was a slow, very difficult and often bloody path.

John D. Rockefeller's (Standard Oil) net worth today adjusted for inflation would be a staggering *\$340 billion* and in Europe, the notorious war profiteer Nathan Mayer Rothschild, worth about *\$350 billion*.

The Great Depression was a severe worldwide economic depression in the 1930s. The timing of the Great Depression varied across nations, however, in most countries it started in 1929 and lasted until the late 1930s. It was the longest, deepest, and most widespread depression of the 20th century.

Worldwide GDP fell by 15% from 1929 to 1932. In the 21st century, the Great Depression is commonly used as an example of how far and fast, the world's economy can decline. The depression originated in the United States, after the fall in stock prices that began around September 4, 1929, and became worldwide news with the stock market crash of October 29, 1929 (known as Black Tuesday).

The Great Depression had devastating effects in countries rich and poor. Personal income, tax revenue, profits and prices dropped, while international trade plunged by more than 50%. Unemployment in the U.S. rose to 25%, and in some countries rose as high as 33%.

Cities all around the world were hit hard, especially those dependent on heavy industry. Construction was virtually halted in many countries. Farming communities and rural areas suffered as crop prices fell by approximately 60%. Facing plummeting demand with few alternate sources of jobs, areas dependent on primary sector industries such as mining and logging suffered the most.

Some economies started to recover by the mid-1930s. In many countries, the negative effects of the Great Depression lasted until the beginning of World War II. It is widely believed by historians, that the economic calamity caused by the Great Depression was the genesis that enabled the ascendancy of the National Socialist German Workers' Party; NSDAP), the shorthand Nazi in Germany.

The Great Recession was the general economic decline observed in world markets around the end of the first decade of the 21st century. The exact scale and timing of the recession is debated and varied from country to country. In terms of overall impact, the IMF concluded that it was the worst global recession since World War II. According to the U.S. National Bureau of Economic Research (the official arbiter of U.S. recessions) the U.S. recession began in December 2007 and ended in June 2009, and thus extended over 19 months. The Great Recession was related to the U.S. financial crisis of 2007–08 and subprime mortgage crisis of 2007–09.

The years leading up to the crisis were characterized by an exorbitant rise in asset prices and associated boom in economic demand. Further, the U.S. shadow banking system (i.e., non-depository financial institutions such as investment banks) had grown to rival the depository system yet was not subject to the same regulatory oversight, making it vulnerable to a bank run.

US mortgage-backed securities, which had risks that were hard to assess, were marketed around the world, as they offered higher yields than U.S. government bonds. Many of these securities were backed by sub-prime mortgages, which collapsed in value when the U.S. housing bubble burst during 2006 and homeowners began to default on their mortgage payments in large numbers starting in 2007.

The emergence of sub-prime loan losses in 2007 began the crisis and exposed other risky loans and over-inflated asset prices. With loan losses mounting and the fall of Lehman Brothers on 15 September 2008, a major panic broke out on the inter-bank loan market. There was the equivalent of a bank run on the shadow banking system, resulting in many large and well established investment and commercial banks in the United States and Europe suffering huge losses and even facing bankruptcy, resulting in massive public financial assistance (government bailouts).

Global Warming and climate change are terms for the observed century-scale rise in the average temperature of the Earth's climate system and its related effects.

Multiple lines of scientific evidence show that the climate system is warming. Although the increase of near-surface atmospheric temperature is the measure of global warming often reported in the popular press, most of the additional energy stored in the climate system since 1970 has gone into ocean warming. The remainder has melted ice, and warmed the continents and atmosphere. Many of the observed changes since the 1950s are unprecedented over decades to millennia.

Scientific understanding of global warming is increasing. In its 2014 report the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) reported that scientists were more than 95% certain that most of global warming is caused by increasing concentrations of greenhouse gases and other human (*anthropogenic*) activities. Climate model projections summarized in the report indicated that during the 21st century the global surface temperature is likely to rise a further 0.3 to 1.7 °C (0.5 to 3.1 °F) for their lowest emissions scenario using stringent mitigation and 2.6 to 4.8 °C (4.7 to 8.6 °F) for their highest. *These findings have been recognized by the national science academies of the major industrialized nations.*

Widespread coastal flooding would be expected if several degrees of warming is sustained for millennia. For example, sustained global warming of more than 2 °C (about 4°F relative to pre-industrial levels) could lead to eventual sea level rise of around 1 to 4 m (3 to 12 feet) due to thermal expansion of sea water and the melting of glaciers and small ice caps. Melting of the Greenland ice sheet could contribute an additional 4 to 7.5 m (12 to 25 feet) over many thousands of years. It has been estimated that we are already committed to a sea-level rise of approximately 2.3 meters (7.5 feet) for each degree of temperature rise within the next 2,000 years.

In 2010, 123.3 million people, or 39 percent of the nation's population lived in counties directly on the shoreline.

Three-quarters of the world's mega-cities are by the sea. By 2010, 80 per cent of all population lives within 60 miles of the coast, with about 40 percent living within 37 miles of a coastline.

The numbers showed that low-elevation areas (under 10 meters/30 feet) are home to 634 million people. Eventually, roughly one in 10 persons in the world lives in this low-elevation coastal zone, which could become essentially uninhabitable due to sea level rise.

- Prequel -

*On a clear day
How it will astound you
That the glow of your being
Outshines every star*

You'll feel part of every mountain sea and shore...

- On A Clear Day (You Can See Forever) - Alan Lerner/Burton Lane

Moody Seaport, Washington State

October 10, 2001 Thursday 3:01 pm - 1 Kilometer from Ground Zero

A perfect Pacific Northwest Fall day brimming with promise and expectation. So clear, Mount Baker, the great alabaster volcanic sentinel looming on the horizon is caressable.

Maple, Cottonwood and Alder are ablaze with riotous slashes of crimson, copper and rust against a backdrop of the same unsuspecting super-saturated cyan sky of September 11, 2001.

The Blue Beemer convertible top is down when the beautiful and bright mother of two, Professor Jessica Kennedy-Allison, drives away from the conspicuously opulent lakefront McMansion on Cascadia Lake—for the last time.

Part One - Prelude -

- Chapter 1 -

Those who do not follow willingly...are dragged by the gods.
- Ancient Roman proverb—anonymous

Moody Seaport, Washington State

October 10, 2001 Thursday 3:10 pm -.5 Kilometers from Ground Zero

Jessie Allison has been racing around all day in preparation for tonight's VIP affair. It's a beautiful Indian Summer day, she opts to park the requisite *au courant* Range Rover SUV of the *arrivste*, and take the convertible, a 2000 BMW 323Ci, to pick up her twin daughters Meghan and McKenzie from the prestigious and very exclusive Arcadia school.

The twins love riding in the backseat with the top down. They squeal with delight as their father Jack, District Attorney of Cascadia County, takes a corner hard, experiencing the lateral “Gs” of a roller-coaster. Because the Beemer, with the 'DA BMR' plate is Jack's toy, she seldom gets to drive it.

After picking up the girls she's running late. Afternoon traffic is starting to get heavy.

She punches in her husband's mobile number, “Honey I'm stuck in traffic here...so frazzled, I forgot the wine...don't have time to stop and pick it up. Can you stop on the way home from work?”

“*Dammit*, Jessie...I've got so damn much on my mind getting ready for this evening. Why *the hell* did you leave this to the last minute? I shouldn't have to tell ya this is a B-F-D for me...us. Just handle it!” John says with a bite.

“Okay. Okay, sorry. Just thought...never mind. If I take the shortcut...the Moody Creek overpass, I can probably bypass some of this traffic.”

“And pick something with an expensive sounding French name, at least 10 years old.” *Click*.

She could not have anticipated the road construction zone at the overpass, or...

She is immediately stuck in the afternoon bumper to bumper traffic idling on the middle of the overpass that crosses Moody Creek. Impatiently drumming her fingers on the steering wheel, she is waiting for the light to change. *Dammit, this light is taking an eternity. I've got so much to get done before tonight.* But the forces of fate are silently starting to compound.

Picking up her children from school is a pleasant diversion from running errands and frantic shopping all day for tonight's important affair. She listens distractedly as the girls, immaculately dressed in identical brightly colored floral print jumpsuits, with matching day

packs share with great gravity, the daily minutiae so breathlessly important to a sixth grader.

"Mommy do you know what that Maya Tarnowski did today?" says Meghan.

"Well I'll tell ya mommy, she brought her lunch in a *paper bag*, a yucky paper bag!" chimes in McKenzie finishing her sister's sentence as twins often do.

"Which she folded up to take home. And she was wearin' some like *sooo* yesterday totally uncool...like Walmart thing," Meghan finishes.

"Well, not everyone is born with a proper sense of fashion, in some it must be cultivated, dear," Jessica patiently counsels.

"Mommy...what's a Muslim? Amber Ashton said that Maya's mom is a Muslim, and that all Muslims are terrorists," McKenzie says.

"Hmm...well, Muslims don't believe in Christ as their Lord and Savior as we do. Even though they're different from us and don't believe in the Bible like we do, I don't think *all* Muslims are terrorists. I work with Maya's mom and I don't think she's a terrorist," Jessica says.

"Oh. Uh...mommy does that mean that they can't go to Heaven like us?" Meghan says.

"Well according to the Bible...yes, dear," Jessica says.

The girls drone on about Trevor this, and Tyler that, but her mind is elsewhere, as she ponders tonight's *haute cuisine* bill of fare intended to duly impress the Executive Director of the Washington State Republican Caucus.

Her husband, John "Jack" Allison is young, handsome and bright—and nakedly ambitious. With his high conviction rate, he is carefully honing a politically appealing "no-nonsense" tough on crime reputation. He and Jessica, and their twin daughters, strike an inviting camera-ready All-American conservative Christian family image. He is being groomed for Washington State Senator, *the first, but necessary step, of many toward becoming a serious mover and shaker in Washington state politics* counsels ExDir, Jake Rossitor.

Jessie, is a ready for prime-time beauty—tanned, long legged, athletically lean with lustrous long blonde hair and wide-set luminous indigo eyes. The full package. A tenured Professor of Humanities at Moody University, where she herself graduated, she has a graduate degree in Greek Classics—her Master's Thesis was on Aristotelian Tragedy.

Both Jack and Jessica come from families of considerable wealth, prestige and privilege. A small-town golden-boy quarterback used to getting by on his looks, his family's considerable wealth flowed from the plains of Wyoming *black gold oil bidness*. Having flunked out of Princeton, eventually a graduate of conservative University of Wyoming, his checkered and unremarkable academic achievements eventually led him to Seattle University Law School, where he barely

qualified for admission, which in time would lead to meeting his future wife Jessica and settling in Moody Seaport where she was in grad-school and ultimately professor. He has chosen to practice criminal law as a DA, a traditional gateway to higher public office in 'big fish-small pond' Moody Seaport. He is a driven man—with aspirations one day to be Governor of Washington.

Her family amassed their huge fortune the old-fashioned way—they inherited it. During the Great Depression her predatory paternal grandfather, a distant cousin to Joe Kennedy Sr., the patriarch of the Kennedy's of Hyannis Port, had bought up hundreds of distressed commercial properties in foreclosure for pennies on the dollar; prime real estate in urban centers, like New York City and Chicago.

The light finally turns green, as the cars in front of her begin to move...

KA-B-O-O-OM!

Jessica's reverie is abruptly interrupted by a deafening explosion, violently shaking the overpass and the eight cars traversing it. Startled by the explosion, the driver of the car ahead, brakes hard skidding to a complete stop. Jessica slams on the brakes, nearly rear-ending him. Because she's accustomed to driving the Rover with an automatic tranny, she neglects to depress the clutch, the engine sputters and dies. The twins are immediately quieted, then in unison, begin crying hysterically. The driver of the car ahead is now scanning the horizon for the origin of the blast, turning his head, first to the left then, when his attention becomes fixed to his right, the pungent smell of burning rubber as he floors the accelerator.

As she turns her body to reach behind her to try to comfort the girls with a mother's touch, the driver of the car behind is now frantically honking the horn, first intermittently, then a constant, irritatingly loud din. *How rude! Okay buster calm down. I think I'll just take my time...teach him some manners.*

She is now looking to her right, up Moody Creek, when her eyes are assaulted by a vision that can not be possibly be real. A massive angry ball of fire is rolling toward the overpass, directly at them. A fire-breathing malevolent Medusa, like something from an end-of-the-world sci-fi movie. But the reality of this surreal mirage of mayhem, the speed and the size of it, as it roars inexorably toward them is validated by the extreme heat blast that precedes it.

She frantically shoves the stick shift into neutral, and turns the key. Nothing. Paralyzed with fear, she is too terrified to look up, but her peripheral vision senses the impending fireball racing toward them. The constant, offensive blare of the horn unnerves her. It is getting closer. Closer. She is now in full panic mode. She turns and releases the key, again nothing. Nothing. But, in her panic she has forgotten that the

clutch pedal must be depressed before the ignition can engage the starter motor.

Jessica knows that their only hope now, is to get her and the children out of the car. But traveling nearly 60 miles per hour, within seconds, before Jessica can even release her own harness, the voracious Monster has pounced upon them. The last sounds that will be heard are the blaring horn over the snarling roar of the ravenous Beast. Jessica and her perfect twins, their shoulder harnesses still fastened—this is how they will be found, frozen in place, after the fiery tsunami has washed over them, incinerating every thing and every one in its path.

For many years later, almost nightly, John Allison would bolt upright, sheets soaked with sweat, haunted by the same endless loop horror movie of his beautiful wife and two darling twins helplessly watching the wall of fire as it descends upon them. Torturing himself with the same question: *If only I hadn't...if Jessie had not taken the shortcut...that deadly shortcut.*

Was it just bad luck that had snatched my promising future and my beautiful family? How could my omnipotent God allow this to happen?

Or was it just Miz Kismet, teasing one miniscule thread of the implacable unraveling of the Grand Tapestry? Endlessly repeating Greek Tragedies like Nemesis, the Greek mythological spirit of divine retribution against those who succumb to hubris and greed, playing itself out again, as Professor Jessica Kennedy-Allison had expounded in her undergrad Humanities lectures, so many times.

Part Two - Be Koz -

- Chapter 2 -

*DoubleSpeak: First they steal the words,
then they steal the meaning.*
- George Orwell in his book 1984

Moody Seaport, Washington State
October 10, 2001 Thursday 3:08 pm -.5 Kilometers from Ground Zero

I go by Koz. Michaelangelo Kozlov—to my close friends, Mickey, or MAK. To my Ex, ATM.

I'm a filmmaker. In my past life, representing mostly Fortune 500 clients, like Big Tobacco, intent on shaping the discourse of the *vox populi*. A merchant of doubt, I had specialized in the dark art of manufacturing consent, creating hundreds of poisonous position campaign ads and “documentaries” with a tendentious, often polemic political Point of View. A mercenary paladin—have camera will travel.

That is, until about a month after September 11, 2001. Up to 9/11, I was still *very* angry, *very* bitter and had grown gratuitously cynical, from having lost everything I thought mattered most, including the love of my life—brutally murdered back in 1985, when I was sucker-punched by a Misanthropic Miz Kismet. Karmic blow back is a 'bitch'.

9/11 more than demolished the Dual Phallic Monuments erected to American Capitalism, massacring 3,000 martyrs on our home court—orphanning all of us. Violated in the promising morning light of day, in the safety of *our own house*, now and forever held emotional hostage by *jihad*. A testosterone laced attempt at a Grand Emasculation, a *macho* kick in the gonads, to render the Great Satan impotent. Was God asleep? Even Allah must have wept.

A Day of Infamy 2.0. The date now belongs to history as, *A Tuesday Mourning, the eleventh of never*, forever dismantling American Invincibility. The Western Deity of technology had empowered the powerless, the ignored. New rules. Welcome to the world of asymmetric warfare, the new equalizer against 'superior force'. The delivery of blow back with no small irony through the democracy, the off-the-shelf availability of technology. A technological Frankenstein released into the wild, against its Western Creator. The new normal.

Almost immediately, the media began inflicting massive sensory mayhem through a constant 24-7 bombardment of our senses. Great Balls of Fire, over and over again, shamelessly appropriating the solemn and sacred into a vulgar obscenity—all on the pretense of *news*. And in

some perverse twisted way, those flying silver marvels, monuments to Western innovation, on 9/11 became the guided missiles of misguided Muslim misanthropes. Delivering Air Mail, a mega-business opportunity—Special Delivery paranoia in perpetuity—a windfall of profane profits to the sacred bottom line of Corporate media.

Inviting and inciting a simplistic Cineplex reality of causation and Rambo revenge—the commoditization of fear and paranoia. Evil as a brand is created, competitively marketed, inanely sold like soap, non-stop on cable *news* channels—in the process paralyzing our humanity, resurrecting the Crusades and spawning wholesale Islamophobia.

Frankly, it was the genesis of my epiphany, the opening of my eyes, to the reality that I was nothing more than a propagandist pimp—a dissemler and purveyor of the same skewed, unreality that was driving the collective paranoia and fear mongering of the masses.

It brought into painfully clear focus, that I was a charter member of the Unreality Industry Inc. that was manipulating and exploiting the fear and anxiety of an emotionally traumatized post 9/11 public—for cynical political advantage and yes, personal monetary gain. Big time. Eventually, making it pretty damn hard to look myself in the mirror.

My dubious gene pool is half-Italian, from the neck up, half-Russian, and the third half, according to my barely over 5 foot tall Russian *Babuska, zhiraf*, or giraffe. Christened after Michelangelo Caravaggio, the great Renaissance painter and rascal of Milano, Italy, by way of my maternal grandfather, Michael Caravaggio of South Philly. Also, birthplace of *moi* and the Italian Stallion, Rocky Balboa, Patron Saint of Philadelphia. *Yo Adrian!* On the paternal Kozlov side, the Cossacks of the Don region of the Ukraine and Southern Russia, the pre-revolution Tzar's barbarous mercenary militia.

Both branches of the rather *tall* family tree sprouting inveterate Philly Philanderers, begs one of life's more persistent questions. Does a uh...*bad* apple always fall not very far from the tree? To perfectly mangle a metaphor. Your call.

Since my internet *nom de guerre* is the *portmanteau* kozmick, naturally it's Kozmick Productions. Yeah I know, a little too cute by half. Just about what you'd expect, from a narcissist.

If all fiction is essentially, a lie, then it would seem to me that a good storyteller, must first be a good liar. If that's the requisite *bon fides*, standing at six and a half feet, uniquely qualifies me to tell decidedly tall tales. After 1985, I had been a professional propagandist—a *fixer*, at times, I admit bordering on the pathological. First producing banal "soap" commercials for the top 10 Broadcast TV markets, including The Big Apple and *El Lay*, for last 9 years now infomercial docs. Selling soap or lies, the process is all the same.

But the Big Bucks had flowed into Kozmick Productions on two year cycles from campaign ads for so-called elections. Since the

Kennedy-Nixon era, TV had become the increasingly dominate medium for political advertising—from the 70s, exponentially so. Why? Because it works. Big time. Statistically, the best ROI, Return on Investment, per dollar spent per vote bought. Nationally, about sixty percent of all advertising and marketing \$\$\$\$ are spent on TV, mostly negative attack ads. Predominately on broadcast networks, but now increasingly on satellite networks, like CNN and from 1997, obscene ad revenues in particular for ultra-right wing Fox "News" Channel. Not only do the Networks make huge profits, but everybody has their snout in the trough—it's non-stop feeding time at the pig pen.

From the early 90s the proliferation of TV as the preeminent medium for political campaign ads began to even insinuate itself into elections for state and local governments, like city and county council, mayor, local initiatives and referenda, including the negative scorched-earth brand of attack ads. Some would later cite this profound change in the advertising media landscape as the genesis of the wholesale polarization of the political process, which had even seeped down to the local government level. Even though the negative attack ads tactically in the short run achieved the desired victory, in the strategic long term, the strident radicalization of the ideology often burdened the ability to effectively govern—to allow any form of compromise for fear of the third-rail accusation of being labeled a *flip-flopper*—or a RINO, Republican In Name Only.

The local cable companies could now offer relatively inexpensive spot TV advertising, because of low operational overhead at a relatively low CPM, or cost per thousand, narrowly targeted by specific cable system demographics. This allowed the advertiser for the most part, to only pay for their target demographic CPM. Inserting political ads at a local level for state, regional and local elections became a huge profit center for essentially selling air, on local 'avails', where the cable company inserts an ad over the national feed, about 3 minutes per hour allocated on satellite networks like CNN that cost them absolutely nothing. Exploiting the vanity of the local mom-and-pop businesses 'to be on TV', with those charmingly cheesy :30 ads. Pure profit capitalized by pretend populism.

The ads could be customized almost to a granular level to appeal to specific demographics inherent in each cable service area heavily correlated with increased efforts at redistricting, or gerrymandering. It reinforced the tried and true campaign axiom, that "all politics are local".

The Big Ad and PR Agencies, could charge exorbitant rates for the "creative" and on top of that, receive about a 15% commission on all media placed, on radio, TV and print, on millions of \$\$\$. About six months before the actual election during primaries, because we had become *very* good at what we do, we had started getting calls from the Big Five national ad agencies, cueing up for production work. Mostly writing and producing :30 ads, our niche, the specialty of the house—

nuanced euphemisms for borderline slanderous, but still exceedingly effective; "*Are you lying now...or were you lying then? Do you still beat your wife?*" kinda stuff. Our job description was hit-men for the Media Mafia—contract assassins of character.

With the rationalization 'Just responding to the *invisible hand of the market*', like the rest of media we've had our snouts deeply submerged in the trough. We justified our piranha participation with, *Hey...if we don't, somebody else will pickup the obscene amounts of money just laying on the table*. And by the way, it had made us a *very* nice living.

My dubious storyteller skills aside, although I'm certainly no Melville, Herman and I do have a few things in common—one *very big* thing in particular, an exceedingly large, and *very* angry, hairless albino mammal, *Hawkus Shapirus*. More later on the corporate ship of fools of the doomed Pequod and my inevitable collision course with its tyrannical monomaniacal Captain.

So, it's just about a month since the attack on the Twin Towers of Power, and it's coming up on the second anniversary of the WTO, The Battle in Seattle of November 1999. The whole week before, there had been very heavy social network traffic, buzzing with activists postings. Social justice advocates planned to trek to Seattle *en masse* from all over the U.S. to disrupt and attempt to stymie the conference through non-violent civil disobedience. Because Seattle is only about an hour and a half away, we had decided to 'spec it'—as an indy news stringer.

After viewing some of our powerful *verite* in-the-trenches footage on national broadcast news, we were contacted by an ad agency representing a consortium of NGO Big Business PACs to produce a doc. Not normally a good ideological fit, but because of post 9/11 collective anxiety and mass uncertainty, the bottom had fallen out of the economy, literally overnight with many clients canceling production work.

The phone was so dead, a few times a day, I'd pick it up to listen for dial-tone just to confirm it was still working. The job was not exactly our cup of tea, more like hemlock, but because we had bills to pay, and a mortgage etcetera, we reluctantly bent our increasingly malleable scruples to stay in business. So, we took the job. Besides, the money was *very* good.

As a business operator, during slow economic times, it's amazing how basic economic survival can so easily twist one's high-minded principles, insinuating itself into every facet of American business life. In commiserating with our contemporaries, it seemed that the only organizations with money, indeed lots of money to spend on production were, as always, the far right conservative PACs.

It was supposed to be a seemingly harmless political position piece, to create a new snappier melody for the same old tired libretto. The intent was to enter it into some of the national film festivals in the

category of documentary, including SIFF, the Seattle International Film Festival the city where the first major shot had been fired in opposition to Globalism, and the WTO, the World Trade Organization. We didn't figure there was a chance in hell SIFF would even consider it, so it seemed like a safe proposition, that no nobody we really cared about would even see the damn thing, thus preserving our *simpatico* progressive image with some of the more liberal NGOs and PACs. So this was to be billed as *the real story* behind the Battle in Seattle that exposed the dark and sinister forces of the anti-American, unpatriotic radical left.

The title of this one hour shameless infomercial is "Globalism—the New Capitalism—Get on the Train or Get Out of the Way". The client, who refers to abortion rights advocates as 'baby killers', does not do nuance.

So it was time to play offense. They decided to go "all-in" while they still owned the White House, since trade policy, free or otherwise, delegated and controlled under the powers reserved to the Executive Branch, nominally, that would be Dubya's job. The film would devolve into a zealous and relentless jeremiad for International Free Market Capitalism, which some of the leading liberal elite intellectuals, lefties like Ralph Nader, Noam Chomsky and Howard Zinn deemed tantamount to domestic imperialism.

Where to start? When in doubt, wave Old Glory while sprinkling a few, now Faux News coined epithets, like 'liberal' and 'social programs', hurled like a cat spitting up a hairball. So what started out as a relatively innocuous documentary, as the wave of client change orders started coming in from the rough cut, evolved to a rather strident ultra-right tract. But there was no turning back now for us. Out of a professional ethic, we needed to see it through. The worst negative rap a small production company can suffer is that it did not meet the standards of the client. The client is *never* wrong even when they are a total jackass. The production community is relatively small, and bad news, like being considered *hard to work with*, especially when it is promulgated with the help of your competition can travel literally at the speed of light. In our business, reputations are like pianos—hard to lift and easy to drop.

So for the client it was gloves off. Time to spin the colossal WTO PR disaster into some Socialist anti-Capitalism UN-American narrative that would have legs.

Me and my partner, Ad Hoc Shapiro, aka Hawk, were just finishing up the online edit at our production facility in Moody Seaport. Aside from the obvious derivation, from Hoc, the Hawkster also sports a considerable aquiline beak—*not a big nose...just a small face*, he explains.

"Koz...man, don't *even* want my name linked with this dog. If Daddy ever saw a Shapiro connected to something like this, he'd

probably disown me...again," Hawk says in his incongruously high almost *castrato voce*.

"Hey Hawk, it's not *that* bad. So I take it you have some fundamental...ideological disagreements with the content of the message?" I say.

"You could say that. To paraphrase da man, Marshall McLuhan, 'the medium *is da ma-ssage*' of this shameless radical right screed," Hawk says.

"Well don't hold back, man. Whattya really think?" I ask.

"Man...the only question I have for you, is how come you *don't* have a major problem with it?"

"I didn't say I agree with it. But hey, it's a livin'. It's payin' the rent and keepin' us a float at least until the economy turns around and it'd be bad, no *very* bad for *bidness* if we didn't finish it. But if I'da known what we were gettin' into with all the change orders and such, and the extremist POV, yea, I probably would have passed on it. The good news is that I doubt any major film festival would even consider this shameless tract," I say.

"*Jezus* man, now that the right is emboldened by the recent Coronation of the witless Dauphin, King George the Younger, they ain't wastin' any time," Hawk says.

"Yeap...gotta admit they're pullin' out all the stops, way over the top. And Dubya's the perfect foil, for the *tres* far right agenda of "Bush's Brain", Carl Rove, the *Maestro* of Mean," I say.

"Doublin' down on the mass jingoism from 9-1-1 "

"And the Battle in Seattle." I add.

"Amazing. That Rove could sell an ex-frat-boy town clown, a notorious party-hearty guy, some BS burning bush, pun intended, religious conversion," says the Hawkster.

"Born again...and reinvented. So I take it you're not enthralled with our new Commander in Chief?" I say.

"An affable dunce," Hawk says.

"Thereby insulting the whole of uh...dunce-dum. So...not buyin' his *faux* John-Wayne complete with the macho saunter?" I say.

"Not on yer life, Pilgrim," doing an uncanny Duke. "Sometimes your laser-like logic is just...stupefyin'," Hawk says.

"Tsk tsk...just a lucky guess. Got some issues with his qualifications I take it?" I say.

"Ya think? His main asset is he's *raht neighborly*. Dubya's the kinda good ol' boy ya'll 'd like to hang out with at a Sunday tailgatin' at Dallas Cowboy Stadium," Hawk says.

"As the Texans say, 'all hat'. Well, I would have to concede that he's not exactly, a uh...towering intellect compared to the smarts of the previous prez, Bubba Clinton," I say.

"Ha...his low-bandwidth, one notch above a V-I, the other V-I, the Village Idiot. The guy's a former college Ivy League silver-spoon

cheerleader. A transplanted Brahmin now Tex-Mex. Born-again, for *Chrisakes*. New meaning to C-i-C, Cheerleader in Chief," Hawk whines.

Moody Seaport's a tony maritime enclave strategically situated on the Puget Sound in the Pacific Northwest, Washington state, about 50 miles South of YVR airport Vancouver B.C. and about 100 miles North of SEATAC airport, Seattle.

It was dubbed from the eponymous first mate James Paul Moody of the maiden and only voyage of the "unsinkable" luxury-liner, The Titanic. Moody was a young Junior Officer who heroically perished with over 1,500 souls in the frigid waters of the Atlantic on that April night of 1912. He had selflessly declined to board a lifeboat to make room for some steerage class women.

Formerly known as Cascadia City, 'the City of Subdued Excitement', it was renamed as an homage to honor the heroism of the Mayor's nephew. It is now the home of the Moody University "Fightin' Titans", the Titanic Bookstore, Titanic Tiny Tots Daycare, Titanic Body Sculpting and Weight Loss Clinic, not to forget the Iceberg Bar and Grill, billed as *your last stop before going home*. You get the idea.

It seemed a brilliant strategy at the time—a masterstroke of marketing by the City Fathers to capitalize on the *zeitgeist* of romantic fascination of the heroic self-sacrifice of young Moody on that 'Night to Remember'. Perhaps even becoming a magnanimous magnet to attract 'the right kind of people' to settle and develop Cascadia City. To transform it from just another backwater lumber mill, commercial fishing town with all the enchantment of a Rotarian Destination Resort, to an upscale Arcadia by the sea.

But a series of calamitous bizarre local disasters, only added to the 'Moody Blues' of melancholia from the dark, rainy interminable duct-tape-blue-tarp winters, with the only half-joking shibboleth 'the Repository of Repressed Emotion'. There were some of the pallid Moody Moon-tan Elders, that believed perhaps the name of the town would have been better left unchanged.

The most recent of which was the massive escape of chlorine gas from the local paper mill in 1989, in which some middle-management genius thought it would be the highest and best use of resource, to capture the gas used in the manufacturing process of paper, store it in large railroad tankers, and sell it. A brilliant example of the economic efficiencies and maximization of capital resources, that was '*perfectly safe*', they had told the City Fathers. A position they steadfastly championed, even after the sirens at the mill began screaming the warning of the escaping lethal poisonous chlorine gas from tankers cars that had '*somehow derailed, a regrettable and unforeseeable, therefore unpreventable accident.*'

Twelve people died, and thousands of were sickened, with some nearer to ground zero, requiring long-term hospitalization for permanent

respiratory damage. "Bhopal Light", a variation on the theme of the '84 Bhopal India chlorine gas escape—which ultimately killed almost 19,000 with severe respiratory injury to over 550,000 "unlucky" innocent men, women and children. Had Moody Seaport inherited the curse of The Titanic? Or was this just another tragic example of man's unsinkable capacity for hubris?

Sorry...some obvious Attention Deficit issues here. With my dyslexia, a potent cocktail for cognitive dysfunction. As you may have already noticed, I'm easily distracted. Not good in my line of work. Gawd...I hope they find a dyslexia for cure...soon.

Now...where was I?

Okay, so we're in the final stages of tweaking and fine tuning the production in time to get it on FEDEX overnight for submission to the SIFF.

Hawk is running the non-linear video editing software. His thick meaty hands and knotty fingers, belie his dexterity, flying unerringly over the keyboard with the casual virtuosity reminiscent of another masterful keyboard artist, the brilliant Canuck pianist Glen Gould.

I am manually sliding the audio level fader on the sound board, for ambient audio track 2, while watching action on the huge preview monitor, a process called 'sweetening' the audio. I am momentarily distracted by the glare of reflection, the glistening sweat of the back of Hawk's immense shaved skull. Absent a neck, it begins at the ears, at the massively developed trapezes muscles which only serve to accentuate a large dent, a divot. It is adorned with an angry-looking six inch transverse scar garnished with a very realistic tattoo of a zipper, with a crude cursive inscription, "*in case of a seizure, open here*", a souvenir of the Free Speech Movement protests at UC Berkeley in 1964, where we had first met.

The day before, had been anything but typical. On that Thursday morning in early December, the UCB campus was crackling with political fomentation—lots of FSM speeches, student protests, chants and placards.

A twenty-two year old philosophy major, a charismatic orator named Mario Savio had just given his now legendary impromptu impassioned "Bodies upon the gears" speech at Sproul Hall.

On our way over to the Student Union to commiserate with some fellow activists—the unmistakable pungent odor of tear gas. Suddenly a crowd of about fifty students, were running pell-mell towards us from Sather Gate, being pursued by cops in riot gear, brandishing batons. Two cops had cornered one totally defenseless guy, straddling him, they were whaling on one Ad Hoc Shapiro, mercilessly with their batons with no indication of let-up. Sensing the potential lethality of the blows, my roommate and I exchanged a wordless "*oh*

shit, bad idea, but I guess we better stop this" glance of affirmation and intervened.

Now, we were all irrevocably committed. Eventually—Goodbye basketball scholarship. Goodbye Berkeley. Goodbye student deferment. And Hello Draft Board.

So, we're about five minutes into the film, where the protestors have overturned cars and buses, torched SPD police cars, good stuff, lots of folks, many with black ski masks, manically racing around with anti-WTO banners and signs, screaming slogans like "Down with Capitalism!", and my personal fav "TAX-iderm the Rich!" looking every bit like violent anti-capitalist, anarchists thugs with fire and smoke and explosions—lots of orange explosions made even more dramatic against the ink black night sky.

"Back up 60 seconds...and hit record."

"Okay...audio track 2...pre-roll, five-four-three," says Hawk, then a silent two-count, with a hand cue signaling the in-point.

I am slowly ramping the fader up, to emphasize the incredibly loud noise from the chaos and pandemonium...

KA-B-O-O-OM!

The deafening roar of a massive explosion much, *much* louder than the audio. The whole room shudders and shakes reverberating about 30 seconds with secondary shock waves and more explosions. The windows rattle—the lights are flickering.

Oso, a mixed Great Pyrenees-Newfie, my constant companion is startled from his sprawled slumber, in his customary spot usually near, more often under my feet. He springs up to his full stature of over three feet, nudges my right leg with his huge white Great Pyrenees head seemingly grafted on to his enormous black Newfoundland body, and starts to whine then his signature *basso profundo* "what the hell is goin' on?" bark. *Yeap, well said, boy.*

"Now *that's* what I call realistic sound effects," says the Hawkster.

"I'm not that good *goddammit!* Something's happened! Something very big and very bad...maybe *The Big One*. Let's check it out!" I say.

We scurry outside, with Oso in tow. Immediately we see a huge plume of black smoke, angrily bellowing skyward already several hundred feet high. It is very close...scary close, maybe half a *klick*, or kilometer.

"What the *fuck* could cause such a massive explosion?" says Hawk.

"Gotta be some kinda accelerant...gasoline...maybe a commercial jet cratered. It's close...real close...let's get over there.

There's gotta be some serious casualties...see what we can do to help. And throw the cameras into the truck," I say.

We sprint to the pick-up, and as I open the passenger door Oso automatically leaps into his accustomed place, the passenger seat. I pull him out by the collar, to the rear tail gate, where with a muffled whine of disapproval, he effortlessly jumps into the rear bed of the truck. Hawk throws the video camera, and a digital still camera into the crew cab. I am barely able to jump in, before Hawk slams it in drive, burning rubber as we race toward the now huge black ominous plume. In less than 3 minutes, we are at the entrance of a public park which appears to be ground zero of the blast, Moody Falls Park.

We skid to a stop in the parking lot. The classic Depression Era stone bridge with graceful arches that traverses the stream, just past the waterfall normally viewable, is barely discernible in the roiling oil-black smoke. As we open the truck doors, the intense heat of the fire assaults us, like stepping into a blast furnace. The sooty smoke is now starting to engulf us—we're having a hard time breathing. We can now hear a series of not-so-distant secondary explosions. I'm beginning to wonder if this is such a good idea. I look at Hawk. He just shakes his head.

"Let's get the hell outta here man, before this whole thing blows...there ain't nothing we can do for anybody in that," yells Hawk over the roar nodding toward the fire.

"Okay...guess you're right. Poor bastards. Whatever caused it, like 9/11...fire's a lousy way to go, man," I shout.

Then, as a hopeful afterthought, straining to see, fighting through the stinging tears of my smoke-filled eyes, I think I detect some movement on the bridge. Then it disappears in the smoke. Then it appears again. Yes, there's someone on the bridge, coming towards us, moving very slowly, carrying something.

"There's some movement on the bridge...someone might be alive," I yell.

I throw open the door, and start to run toward the bridge when suddenly out of the smoke a car comes barreling out of nowhere. Tires squealing, it barely misses me as I leap out of the way, it's brake lights are the last thing I can make out as it speeds off, casting a ghostly red glow on to a wall of dense black smoke.

I run toward the bridge, coughing and choking. Just as I get to the bridge, I can see this charred black mass, staggering like a drunk, very slowly toward me, carrying something unrecognizable in its arms.

When I am within about 20 feet from this thing, I can begin make out that it is a human figure, or what's left of it, skin hanging from its bones, no hair and where a face used to be, an indistinguishable charred black mass. The mass screams out something I can not decipher, but I know that it's not English.

"*Sera don nee!...sera don nee!*" it yells.

"What-the-hell happened?" I yell over the roar of the fire.

Then, a rapid long string of words that I do not recognize—they sound Aramaic.

"I can't understand you...can you speak English?" I shout.

"In the name of Allah...I..." it cries back.

Then as I get closer, it collapses in a heap as the charred mass in its arms falls to the ground in front of it. I am close enough now that I can make out the forms. In front of me is the charred obviously lifeless body of a young child and from what remains of the jeans and sport shoes, expensive Air Jordan's probably a boy. I immediately realize there is nothing that can be done for it.

I kneel down beside the other charred mass, which I can now barely discern is a young man, now laying on his side, writhing in pain, screaming in agony, third degree burns over most of his body.

His body is so burnt I can not even find an undamaged location to grab on to...to try to move him.

KA-B-O-O-OM!

He screams, "*Allahu-u-Akbar!* There is a long exhale, as his body goes limp. Then the unmistakable death-rattle.

The concussion of the shock wave of a huge secondary explosion catapults me backwards 15 feet into the air. I land flat on my back with force of a platform high dive into an empty pool, on to a huge mid-river boulder knocking the wind out of me, hitting the back of my head hard. Although I am completely disoriented and immobile, I now have the vague sensation of being underwater, face down, the icy cold water of the stream snaps me back to semi-consciousness, but I still can not move. I become aware of a tugging on my right pant leg, pulling me backwards forcing the cold water up my nose, and down my throat into my lungs. I am now half on the shore, with my face still in the water, when I am flipped over like a dead fish, and dragged completely out of the water. Gasping for air, coughing and sputtering, I force open my eyes and see Oso's immense white head, whining, his big pink tongue slapping against my face.

As I push him away, I hear Hawk's familiar falsetto voice, "Oso, good boy...back off now boy, I've gott'em."

Then I have the sensation of being effortlessly lifted up like large stuffed Panda Bear, walked up the river bank, then being gently laid out in the back of the truck with my head laying on the open tailgate. I briefly pass out.

Like one of my 60s bad LSD trips, my desperate attempt to reconstruct what happened is futile. The intense heat—a blast furnace—the cloying smell of burnt flesh, dominate my consciousness. Every breath feels like a blow torch turned on my lungs.

Like a getaway driver at a bank heist gone very bad Hawk floors it. In a daze, laying on my back, I am starting to see a few patches of

brilliant blue sky. My left ear pressed against the hard-steel bed of the pick-up amplifies the din of squealing tires—the high rpm whine of the engine drowning out the ambient pandemonium. Then the surreal sensation of a lightness of being, as an eerie equanimity washes over me, floating ever upward, looking down at the inferno. But my mystical migration is rudely interrupted by Oso's, half-barking whimper in my right ear. Then, again with the big wet sandpaper tongue lapping my face summons me back to reality, activating the deep primal instinct to survive—evinced in me a sense that it is not yet time. Then, all black.

Its appetite for death and destruction momentarily satiated, The Monster, re-gathers itself, accelerating down the creek toward the unsuspecting populace of downtown Moody Seaport.

As It greedily races unimpeded down Moody Creek, through the car-laden overpass, and ultimately to the Moody Bay estuary, with no warning other than a rumbling, some would later describe as a bestial growling. It will engulf several buildings down by the waterfront. "Spontaneous combustion" is the technical term of art used by the Fire Chief Ted Frawley. His hair, somehow perfect, dressed in his official polished brass-buttoned department best normally reserved for parades and awards ceremonies.

Within less than two hours after the initial blast, in front of a hastily assembled cluster of microphones, tangle of wires and TV cameras, the ceaseless click and flash of cameras punctuates the Chief's "media moment" debut. Mustering his most serious game face for the cameras, he obliges the media—the unspoken duty to provide disaster reality TV worthy of prime-time.

Behind a practiced expression of empathetic gravity, barely able to conceal their prurient lust for a good "if it bleeds, it leads" story, "*Spontaneous combustion levels town*" will become the lead line sound-byte of the perfectly coiffed broadcast carbon-copy news anchors and eye-candy anchoresses. Within three hours, sleepy little Moody Seaport is massively invaded by legions of ravenous mass media, dozens of huge semi-trailers each with several satellite dish uplinks.

By the time the gasoline finally burns itself off, several hours later in the Bay, 26 innocents will have been senselessly killed and scores injured, some of whom months later would still be hospitalized with horrific second and third degree burns.

- Chapter 3 -

*Purple haze all in my brain...
Lately things just don't seem the same
Actin' funny, but I don't know why.
Excuse me while I kiss the sky.
-Purple Haze - Jimi Hendrix*

Moody Seaport, Washington State
October 12, 2001 Saturday 10:36 PM
An ICU hospital room at St. Paul's Hospital

My eyes seem super-glued shut as I struggle to open first the left with not much success, then the right, with a lot more effort I have a little more success and manage to get it only half open, only to see through the dried gritty detritus of mucus, a blurred image—a massive face peering down at me—no hair anywhere, no eyebrows, a huge watermelon of a cranium. It's Mr Clean. It is my worst nightmare. I have awakened trapped in some beyond banal TV soap commercial. I now fully appreciate Joyce's, *history is a nightmare from which I am trying to awake.*"

"Does your face hurt you...it's killing me," says the Hawk, in a bad attempt at humor and a worse attempt at a Groucho Marx impression about two octaves too high.

"Only hurts when I laugh...not much danger of that with your tired *shtick*," I'm barely able to whisper, each word scrapping out of my throat like a wood rasp on my larynx.

"*Waaater...waaater...*" I plead, like a febrile survivor from the clutches of Death Valley.

Hawk pours me a glass with a straw.

I toss the straw out, and down the whole glass. "*Mo-o-re...*" I say. I chug another glass, which now allows me to speak above a whisper, "What the *hell* happened?"

"A gasoline pipeline blew, man. Secondary blast...you got some serious air...and hang time," says Hawk in his normal soprano high pitch register. Despite his enormous bulk, after the merciless beating he took in Berkeley, in which his larynx was crushed, his voice has remained incongruously high pitched; when excited, rivaling Rene Fleming hitting a high 'C'.

As I try to focus my eyes, I can begin to make out the vague outline of my surroundings. The first thing I notice is the tubes, lots and

lots of tubes and wires, too many to count, emanating from both sides of the bed, all terminating at the same nexus in various orifices and bandaged appendages of my body. Ordinarily, not a good sign.

As I instinctively struggle to sit up, Hawk's massive paw gently but firmly forces my head back against the pillow.

"Where's *Osito*? He okay?" I ask.

"He's fine...when you did your double back-layout, and landed on the boulder, you slid into the creek...he beat me to ya. Jumped right in that icy water, with those webbed paws, swam about thirty feet in nothin' flat...hauled you out by your pants," says Hawk.

"That's my *boooy*. Where's Big Dawg now?"

"He's in the truck...hospital rules prohibit animals in the patient's rooms," says Hawk.

"Obviously they make exceptions."

"Hardy har har...you're a riot, Alice...a regular riot," Hawk says a la Ralph Cramden.

Then like a scene from Hitchcock's *Birds*, The White-coats start appearing, first two, then three and four, like scavengers, staring at me curiously like some sort of road-kill.

One of The White-coats, who seems to be the alpha of the flock, says, "*Mister* Kozlov, can you hear me okay? I am Doctor Khan, your Neurologist."

Now I know I'm in deep bird do-do. The only time anyone ever calls me *Mister* is when I am about to get reamed. Like the time I made the Dean's List, that would be the other Dean's List at UCB or my dance with the Draft Board back in '65.

Doctor Khan is a fifty-ish, short slight man with an olive complexion, deep-set coal black eyes under dark bushy eyebrows and thick unruly raven hair. After detecting a slight sing-song quality of his speech, I decide he's probably East Indian. Obviously not a central casting white-coat candidate for one of big tobacco's infamous "*Seven out of ten doctors recommend Menthol Kool cigarettes*" adverts.

"Hey Doc, Mister Kozlov's my old man. Like I'm *the Koz*...or Mick, if like...you're into the whole familiar bedside manner thing. So am I a serious candidate for last rites?"

"As you wish, Mr the Koz...and yes, you had a very close call," the Doc says.

"Okay. So, level with me...what's up Doc?"

"You have sustained a serious concussion from major trauma sustained from severe dorsal cranial impact," Doctor Khan says.

"Hey doc...a little less with the sustains...and cut to the chase," I say.

Whereupon Hawk does a hand puppet reenactment with one hand slowly rising up into the air, and then after rotating palm up, pausing dramatically, comes crashing into the other hand with a loud

slap of the two huge slabs of meat, then sliding off, complete a with wily coyote crash and burn sound effect.

"Degree of difficulty, 3.6...but as you probably already know, the Russian judge scored you very low," says Hawk.

"Ha! Yea...my old man one of the judges? Ruskie...a tough crowd," I say.

Doctor Khan is not amused by the puppet show, although I do detect a fleeting smirk from the one Cute Lady White Coat. But the Doc is all business now, and says in a very ominous tone, mustering his gravest doctor face.

"This is the kind of injury that you must take very seriously. We still do not know if you have sustained brain damage...there is much more testing that needs to be done, EEG, CAT scan, and MRI before we can definitively diagnose the extent of your neurological damage, if any."

Again with the *sustains* and way too many of God's Waiting Room acronyms, just short of DOA.

This draws a synchronous and sagacious nod from the flock of White Coats, perched behind Doctor Khan, apparently *da Big Bird*.

"Brain damage? Well hell...the way you were talking, I thought it might be something like...*serious*. Since sixteen, like I've been brainin' my gourd on door jambs. So where do we go from here, Doc?"

Again, no response, not even the scintilla of a smile from the Doc, and nothing from Cute Lady White Coat, whose face seems to momentarily darken.

"Mr Koz, I don't think you and your colleague here appreciate the gravity of your situation. I was hoping that you would start cooperating and taking your predicament more seriously. Okay? The most important thing is that you get some rest. I'm going to administer some medications that will relax you and calm down your brain activity...so the imaging tests can be completed."

"Good luck with that...might wanna double the recommended dosage, Doc," Hawk cuts in.

"You'll need to get a great deal of rejuvenating rest, and avoid getting into a state of excitement or worse, agitation by trying to recall the events that led to this injury. In short, little or no talking...until I believe you are ready. Despite their considerable, frankly bordering on rather aggressive persistence, I will not permit you to be interviewed by the local police or the FBI...certainly not the media which is very intent indeed on speaking with you," Doctor Khan says.

Now he's got my full attention, even for a barely shy of a clinical A-D-D., with 'neurological damage' complete with a sprinkling of 'major' and 'severe' and '*gravity*', the forces of which is what got me here in the first place.

Upon hearing 'police' and 'FBI' I look quizzically at Hawk, "FBI?"

"Say da secret wuyd and winna hun'd dollas, FBI, congradulations Mr Koz. Howbout a big hand for our lucky contestant!" says Hawk flashing his bald eyebrows, again with the Groucho "You Bet Your Life" routine. There is no applause, not a smile, not even a smirk from the choir of White Coats. Cute Lady White Coat manages a fleeting roll of her eyes, then in a millisecond it is gone. Very tough crowd.

"I'm going to give you an injection...you will lapse into a very deep and rejuvenating sleep for at least 12 hours, then we'll reevaluate your brain sine waves to see if they are calming down somewhat," Doctor Khan says.

As Doctor Khan is preparing the syringe, two men march through the door, the first, a Fast-Food-Fastso poured into a sausage of a Uniform, with pretentious dark aviator sunglasses that might have been cool maybe 20 years ago, and the obligatory motorcycle cop mustache framing an arrogant smirk that reeks of attitude from across the room.

What is it with these officious Barney Fife small town cops? Forget the cop-donut cliché, this super-size specimen of a walking Winnebago has obviously graduated to the "hard stuff"—a daily diet of at least two Double Whoppers with cheese, with extra mayo, a bucket of French fries, washed down with Giant 64 oz. Big Gulp. He is followed by a Short Suit, a rooster in a rumpled cadet-size J-C Penny's suit with shiny elbows—a classic high school PE coach type, with the requisite crew-cut. *What? No clipboard and whistle?*

Seeing the men enter, Dr Khan says, "I have already instructed you men. You can not have access to my patient, until I feel he is in a satisfactory enough condition to answer your questions, until it is approved by me you will be prohibited from access, is that clear? Now please leave."

"Yeah, sure Doc...but..." Short Suit starts to say.

Suddenly Hawk glides between me and the two men with the silent lightning speed and grace of Bruce Lee. Hawk—more than even a blood brother could ever be, who would lay down in traffic for me, and I for him, is now on maximum protective alert, involuntarily, unconsciously the ropey vascular sinew of his considerable muscle mass is starting to tense into full readiness—full attack dog mode.

"What do you *not* understand about *leave*? Lemme translate it for ya...get the *hell* outta here. Now!" says Hawk.

Both the men, momentarily taken by surprise, retreat a few steps back, then the Uniform, regaining his composure, probably out of habit, rests his right hand on his baton. He looks like a one-man-band-of mayhem, with all manner of other deadly police regalia adorning his John Brown belt. Quickly, a little too quickly, he takes a step forward and starts to say something.

"I'm..." he barely gets it out.

"Don't!" I yell knowing what's coming.

But, it's too late. Hawk closes the ten feet separating the men from him in one giant stealthy movement, the only audible sound is a collective gasp from the Choir of White Coats witnessing a human lethal weapon being unleashed. Hawk, now has the Uniform on his back, his one hand clamped on the wrist of the hand now clutching baton, the other, vise-like, around his neck. The Uniform's face is now starting to cycle through the rainbow starting with red ending at blue. The startling sight of the whites of his bulging eyes, as they roll back into his head, draws an audible shriek from the Cute Lady White Coat. Apparently not the kind of stuff an intern usually sees on residency rounds. The room grows very silent, as the Choir along with the good Doctor Khan are standing motionless, speechless, in a synchronized jaw-dropped trance.

The Short Suit now draws his foot-long elephant gun of a service revolver from under his suit coat, screaming "Call off your dog *goddammit!* That's a Cascadia County Sheriff that he's attacking and I'm a Federal Officer, FBI. Tell him to stand down!" brandishing his weapon toward Hawk while flashing his badge from his breast suit pocket with his other noticeably shaking hand.

"Release Hawk! Release! " I command Rottweiler man.

Hawk, upon hearing "release", starts to loosen his grip on the neck of the Uniform, enough for the Uniform to force out a loud gasp for air, the only sound in the room. Slowly some color starts to return to the contorted face of the Uniform.

"*Platz brav! Platz! Gute Hund*, Hawk...I'm okay," I reassuringly say, just loud enough in German, so Hawk can hear *Down boy! Down! Good dog.*

Hawk hearing my words of reassurance, slowly releases the Uniform and in one effortless cat-like movement springs to his feet, landing about five feet away in a perfectly balanced 'crouching tiger' stance, staring down on the Uniform as if he were dog feces he had stepped in.

Another collective sigh of relief from the Chorus, the deafening sound of awkward silence, signifies to me that it would probably be a good time for me to defuse the situation with a little of my not-so-legendary humor. Sensing that I am dealing with two career cop caricatures who have been watching too much Reality Cop TV, I decide to proceed slowly, tactfully, so they can keep up.

"Uh," I eloquently start out. Sensing they are still following me, I continue my clinical dissertation on PTSD.

"As you may have noticed, my colleague Hawk here, has some issues with authority figures in uniforms, especially uniforms wielding batons. Oh...and for future reference, I might mention that he has a highly developed sense of protectiveness, in particular toward me," I diplomatically proffer.

I then nod to the Short Suit, whose hand has now stopped shaking, indicating that it's his turn to speak since the Uniform is still

laying on the floor gasping for air, I shouldn't be expected to carry the whole conversation, especially in my fragile condition.

Nothing. Total silence, except for the Uniform now sputtering obscenities as he struggles to his feet while adjusting his John Brown, frantically searching for his sunglasses, probably in an attempt to mask the fear and humiliation still present in his eyes from being effortlessly pinned on his back by Rottweiler-man.

My impeccable sense of timing tells me to forge ahead.

"It might help relieve some growing tension that I'm starting to experience, counter-productive to my healing...if you were to stow that cannon away," I say while melodramatically throwing my bandaged head back, mopping my brow with the back of my hand, which draws another fleeting eye roll from Cute Lady White Coat. Scarlet O'Hara *eat ya haart out*.

The Uniform, now standing upright, is desperately trying to regain his composure and his imaginary control of the situation. As he re-affixes his aviator glasses, the frames bent in the scuffle, he's the only one in the room unaware that the glasses rest comically askew on his face, he says nodding at Hawk, "I'm going to arrest this...this menace...this pit bull...for assaulting a police officer and..."

"Rottie...actually," I correct him.

"Huh...what the...?" Uniform muses.

"We like to think of Hawk as more of a Rottweiler. The wide head, indicative of a much more intelligent breed, and I might add, possessed with an uncanny discerning judge of character...before deciding to eat someone's face," I say.

The Short Suit, slowly, with practiced affectation holsters his Dirty Harry .357 Magnum. Hmm, the shorter the cop, the longer the gun. Very Freudian.

Lightly grasping the quaking-with-anger shoulder of the Uniform, Short Suit says "Office Gillespie, I'm sure this uh...incident is just an unfortunate misunderstanding. Perhaps it would be more productive for the investigation if we were to try to put this regrettable incident behind us...all of us."

"You see, gentlemen, my colleague's perhaps by some standards somewhat extreme reaction to Officer Gillespie here...to his seemingly threatening gesture triggered the fight or flight response not so uncommon to those carrying the curse of PTSD...from past traumatic incidents of police brutality," I explain.

"Lemme translate for you two morons. PTSD...Pig Traumatic Stress Disorder," adds Hawk with a wicked smile, indicating he's not yet quite done with the Uniform. Mr Nuance.

This causes the grasp on the shoulder of the Uniform to escalate to more of a restraining maneuver.

"Unfortunate term of art, that...Pig, retained from our early days of activism in the 60s. I do apologize for my colleague's insensitive reference to your noble profession of public service," I tactfully add.

Hmm. Everything you need for the famous Mexican Standoff scene in the Magnificent Seven, except for Mexicans, but then the *bandito* masterfully played by Eli Wallach, was a Polish Jew from Brooklyn.

In the Unreality Industry, especially the commercials and political propaganda stuff we had been shamelessly grinding out in the past as hired guns for the Media Mafia, the truth was a commodity that was bought and sold, and was seldom what it was tendentiously manipulated to be.

With no small degree of hypocrisy, like 60s radical leftist activist Jerry Rubin, we had sold-out. Hanging a hard, very *right* turn in the 80s, drunk on Uncle Milty Martinis—an Endless Happy Hour of Milton Friedman free-for-all economics. First, reinvented as Reagan Democrats, then by slow accretion, like many of the increasingly prospering counter-culture Rads, the more money we made, the more Republican we became. That was how we had made the big bucks all those years, and we made no excuses for the obscene wealth and luxury that we had enjoyed that accompanied our dubious moral transformation.

I cast my best wan gaze toward the good Doctor Khan, nodding. He along with the rest of the Choir is transfixed, still trying to process the last 5 minutes fraught with lethal mayhem. When someone physically witnesses violent, lethal behavior in the flesh, they are always amazed by the visceral violation of their senses, the sickening loud sound of colliding muscle and bone of the bodies, the ferocity of the groans, grunts of exertion by the combatants, and the vicious rapidity of movement, like two lions in mortal combat. Hollywood's depiction of violence void of the ambient scent of testosterone is just a cheap ersatz facsimile, because deep down inside you realize, "it's just a movie."

"Uh, Doc...when I nod at you, that's your cue to talk, to say something...preferably doctorly," I say.

This snaps him out of his trance and clearing his throat, "Uh...yes," hearing his own voice a full octave above normal, he starts again, an artificially full octave below his normal register, "despite the recent turn of events, which in fact may have caused a harmful serious stress response uh...including to Mr Mick here, I remain convicted that I will not allow Mr Mick to be available to answer any more of your questions, until I feel his medical condition is sufficiently satisfactory to do so," Doctor Khan admonishes.

"While you're coddling this...this person, those *goddam-terrsts* could be plotin' to blow up another city. And I dun-giva-shit about all

this medical bullshit, I..", the Uniform starts to say when he's interrupted by the Short Suit.

"Officer Gillespie, since the FBI is the lead agency in this investigation, I'm going to have to ask you to wait outside while I confer with the good Doctor here to examine our options for proceeding with the investigation," says the Short Suit.

- Chapter 4 -

So spake the grisly terror...
- Paradise Lost - John Milton

Well, there it is. *Terrsts*. So that's what all the fuss is about.

The Uniform gives one last futile attempt at intimidation of Hawk, with a jut of his jaw, and through the risible, crookedly perched sunglasses he unleashes the practiced ten second cop dead stare, then pivots and struts out of the room. More playground posturing. Men *will be* boys. Lady White Coat, is now visibly trying to stifle her laughter, tears streaming down her face. It is then, that I decide she might be worth getting to know—always was a sucker for a looker with a highly honed sense of the ironic.

Again while automatically flashing the badge, "I am Federal *Special* Agent Charles Cunningham, working out of the Seattle FBI district office."

"Well how *special* for you. Got dat already...move on!" Hawk says impatiently still coming down from his adrenalin high.

With a patronizing smile, Suit continues, "Due to the preceding uh...encounter with Officer Gillespie, I feel that I should clarify the hierarchy of jurisdiction and authority of this investigation. Let me take this opportunity to make it perfectly that Officer Gillispie's role is essentially to provide local knowledge, support and logistics *only*."

"What a shame. I thought Jethro there and Hawk we were on their way to having a *very* powerful male bonding experience," I say.

"So Super-sized Sherlock, out there is basically what, a caddy?" the Hawkster says.

"For lack of a better term, correct. Any further contact and information that you can provide should be made directly with me. Some of what I am about to tell you, must not be released to the media, for fear of causing a panic. In our preliminary investigation, we have sufficient reason to believe that the explosion that you gentlemen witnessed, may have been an act of terrorism against the *'merican* Homeland. We believe that a person or persons plotted to explode the Cascade Petroleum Pipeline to cause widespread property damage, and the death of many innocent *'mericans*. The primary known suspect is one Hassan Mohamed Tehrani, of Iranian and Islamic origins whose Canadian passport indicates his current address was in Vancouver British Columbia.

His car was located in the parking lot of the scene. We have positive ID on his burnt cadaver, found in close proximity to the initial point of ignition of the pipeline, probably by a small explosive charge detonated by a remote device, like the cell phone found on his body.

We're still working on the forensics of the detonation device and explosive medium. We have confirmed that he was an Electrical Engineering major at UBC Vancouver, and quite capable technically of engineering an I-E-D...an improvised explosive device, for remote detonation. Our records further indicate Tehrani was detained and interviewed at the Peace Arch Crossing onto U.S. soil by an alert U.S. Customs and Immigration Officer about one hour before the blast, who detected an unusual degree of nervousness and suspicious behavior. But, regrettably, without sufficient legal grounds, he was released after about a half-hour of questioning," the Short Suit says.

"And this has what to do, if anything, with us?" says Hawk.

"You and Mr Kozlov are material witnesses to the aftermath this heinous crime. We understand that you witnessed the presence of another vehicle, that just after the initial explosion, would have appeared to be trying to flee the crime scene. Since Mr Kozlov was apparently almost struck by that vehicle, we believe enlisting the cooperation of you and Mr Kozlov, would be our best hope in attempting to identify the license plate, make, model and year of that vehicle to identify its occupant or occupants as possible accomplices," the Short Suit says.

"Uh...Chuck. You heard the Doc. *Mr Mick* ain't in *no* condition to talk to *you*...end of story. Full stop. And as far as me cooperating with the cops or the Feds? Got a better chance of winning the lotto...*without* buyin' a ticket," says Hawk.

The patina of politeness now gone, the pasty smile evaporates, as he tries, unconvincingly, to summon his best J. Edgar Hoover game face, with contrived earnestness, "This is a matter of utmost National Security. There could be many lives at risk. I had hoped that you would voluntarily cooperate, but if you will not, I can compel your testimony with a court order. So I would strongly advise you to reconsider your position, or..."

Just about then his patience wearing thin after overhearing all this verbal jousting, the Uniform swaggers back in, "Enough of this *bullshit*...let's just take this falsetto albino to the slammer for assaulting a police officer."

"Well, well, if it isn't the Supersized Barney Fife makin' mit da big wuyds. Not bad. Here's your new words for the day. *Intentional infringement of civil rights*," Hawk says.

"Unless you start *fully* cooperating and I mean *right now*...you'll be hearing from the Justice Department, and I personally will be recommending filing charges against you and this...hairless albino gorilla in a man-suit for obstruction of justice."

“And here's few more words to make your day. Simon, Gabriel Shapiro, and my personal fav, *punitive damages* for attempted intimidation and threat of retaliation under color of police authority," I say.

The Short Suit, turning pale, says, "Uh...*the* Simon Gabriel Shapiro?"

"Bingo...Chuckles! Yeap...S. G. Shapiro, the *one* and *only*, also known as Sui Generis Shapiro alias Daddy," says Hawk through a derisive smile framing his pointy mouse-teeth. A dream come true. I had always secretly yearned for the opportunity to use that old Borscht Belt throwaway uh...tautology "*I believe you know my attorney Mr Shapiro?*"

Now, even the mere mention of the name S. G. Shapiro inspires an uncommon fear and more than an equal measure of loathing among U.S. government law enforcement and lawyers, most especially the Justice Department, who have felt the wrath of his sword, meting out his firebrand sense of Constitutional justice.

He is a legendary lion in U.S. Con Law. Having given a legal wood-shedding to the U.S. Justice Department lawyers in front of the Supremes on many occasions. President Bush, 41 nominated him Chief Justice of United States Court of Appeals, Second Circuit to attempt to preempt him out of circulation, only to have the nominations "Borked" by the Senate, which only succeeded in pissing him off even further. A bane and boil on the backside of those in the U.S. government, who would attempt to *trample on the constitutional rights of the powerless*, he lived to take on "Uncle Sammy". He makes William Kunstler, the legendary lawyer for marginalized social outcasts, look like a pusillanimous pussycat.

He is also the father of one Ad Hoc Shapiro, my pal. Literally conceived by his Papa for the sole purpose to perpetuate the name of the great legal legacy of the famous Shapiro's of New York. Impressive pedigree—his mother, Bridgette Fontaine was Canadian from Francophone Montreal, a ballerina in the Canadian National Ballet, who when performing in NYC, met the beguiling and dashing S. G. who literally charmed her tutu off. As a child Hawk often summered in Montreal, with French his second language. At least four generations of lawyers—all very successful and all *very* wealthy. So Hawk's *raison d'etre* was the last clear biological chance for the aging legal giant to perpetuate the Shapiro Brand.

In early American juris mythology it is rumored that it was Simon Shapiro The Elder who, in what would become de facto precedent for the American Indian Treaty tradition, negotiated with the Indians on behalf of the Pilgrims, to trade the aboriginals for food and sustenance in exchange for the worthless shiny brass buttons and belt buckles of the notoriously parsimonious proto-capitalist Calvinists, enabling the Pilgrims to survive the first winter at Plymouth Rock. They would later repay the Indians for their generous largesse by seizing their

land without fair compensation and infecting their relatively pristine vulnerable immune systems with all manner of deadly European microbes. Lawyers—the second oldest profession.

So A. H. Shapiro, breezing through law school without breaking a sweat, was dutifully following the August family tradition of a career in the law, a scary smart legal savant, another *Sui Generis*, with a sobriquet sometimes derisively whispered, never to his face, "A Boy Named Sui", because even though he was this massive man-child, he had taken ballet class as a college elective, and was smitten in particular with the strength, grace and pure athleticism of the legendary Mikhail Baryshnikov, principal dancer for the Kirov Ballet of Leningrad. This meshed nicely with his study of the balletic martial arts of Karate and Tae Kwon Do. When the trajectory of our impetuous idealistic youth fortuitously, violently collided with the vicious blows of a cop's baton, he was third year at UC Berkeley Boalt School of Law.

It was supposed to have been a peaceful non-violent SDS demonstration for the First Amendments Free Speech Rights of students on the UCB campus in 1964. He was well on his way to *summa cum laude*, of course specializing in Con Law, when the campus cop scrambled his considerable brains with that baton.

The gratuitous brutal beating that Hawk sustained to his skull caused the onset of unpredictable bouts of inexplicable rage and erratic violent behavior, occasionally followed by epic epileptic *gran mall* seizures. End of Law School. End of Family Tradition. And almost End of Story, as he spiraled into a deep suicidal depression from having disappointed his not-so understanding, demanding Daddy.

That was when I took him under my wing, to try to distract him from his crippling self-destructive depression. Wholly unsympathetic to the "excuses" proffered by Hawk, the "law school dropout"; it would ultimately result in the death of the legendary, prestigious family brand, and an uneasy peace with protracted episodes of silent estrangement between the Hawkster and S. G.

According to an ancient Chinese proverb, the person whose life you have saved is indebted to you for the rest of their days but moreover, you through the act of saving their life, are now responsible for their life. Or, the Judeo-Christian flavor—being your brother's keeper. So for over thirty years, I had been Hawk's brother and keeper and now, whether I liked it or not, I was going to be the charge of this man-child who could do a 'Rubic's Cube' in Guinness Book record time, but couldn't figure out how to pay his cell phone bill on time.

"Okay...smart guys play your cutesy little games, have your fun...go ahead and lawyer up. But this isn't over," sputters The Short Suit, as he does a hasty about face, and stomps out of the room, with the Uniform in tow.

"Uh...that *really* went well. Apparently Chuckles and Jethro do not share our appreciation for playful and if I do say so myself, exceedingly clever *bons mots*...a trifle too nuanced?" I say.

"And why do I get the feeling that neither of them was impressed with our *nonpareil* command of daytime TV Trivia?" Hawk says.

Doctor Khan, now sensing the final flourish of this bad vaudevillian farce, does a volume check by clearing his throat, "Uh...hem" then seemingly satisfied with timbre and amplitude, desperately attempting to regain control of his carefully cultivated omniscient doctor persona, seizes command of the situation with, "Okay gentlemen now that we are, *hopefully*, through with the theatrics, I must insist that we forge ahead here. Mr Mick, I'm *now* going to give you this injection of a very powerful drug to induce a deep coma-like sleep. I must warn you that some patients report side effects ranging from mild euphoria, to the equivalent of an episode akin to a what you might call an LSD bad...uh journey, I believe is the term of art."

"Okay...Doc. Look, could ya give us just a minute here, in private, we've got a few things to discuss, before you knock me out. Can you come back in about an hour?" I say.

"*Mister Koz*, as your doctor, I must warn you that unless you are willing to follow my instructions explicitly, I cannot guarantee that your capricious behavior will not exacerbate your injuries," he turns to leave, as he is walking out, " Okay. *One hour*," says Dr. Khan over his shoulder.

"*Sheez*...what grouch," Hawk says a la Ed Norton from *The Honeyymooners*, while holding up the front page of the local fish wrap, The Moody Seaport Sentinel. The huge bold headline reads, *Terrorist Attack kills 26, Scores Injured*. He then flips the paper below the fold, and gestures a la Vanna White, to an article, "This is from the local paper the day after the blast. It went AP and UPI, including The Vancouver Sun," Hawk then begins to read:

Local Man Injured While Heroically coming to the aid of victims of Terrorist act.

Michaelangelo Kozlov of Moody Seaport was seriously injured on October 10th, while trying to go to the aid of victims of the pipeline blast at Moody Seaport Falls Park, said his business associate, A.H. Shapiro who was with him at the scene, when he "rushed head-long into the fiery maelstrom", he told this reporter.

Mr Shapiro related the fact that Mr Kozlov narrowly missed being struck by a car, fleeing the scene at a high rate of speed just after the blast. It is believed by authorities that the

occupant(s) of that vehicle may have been accomplices to the terrorist's attack, in which it is alleged that the prime suspect is a Mr Hassan Mohammed Tehrani, of Vancouver BC., reportedly deceased from injuries sustained in the explosion. He is alleged to have detonated a bomb using his mobile phone, that ruptured the gasoline pipeline, causing the massive explosion.

Mr Shapiro stated, "because of the heavy smoke and low visibility", Mr Kozlov was not able to discern any further information about the identity of the car or the possible co-conspirators. Mr Kozlov was the last person to talk to Mr Tehrani before he expired at the scene. Authorities are eager to talk to Mr Kozlov.

Mr Kozlov is currently in Intensive Care at Saint Paul's Hospital with a severe concussion and possible traumatic brain injury stated his physician, Doctor Khan. His condition remains guarded but stable, he told the Sentinel.

"Downright heroic," says Hawk.

"Homeric, even...tisk...tisk," I say air-drumming my fingers.

"Man, I hate these *goddamn* hospitals, breeding grounds for staph infections. Seems like a lotta people enter hospitals vertical and leave horizontal, red-tag on the big toe. I'd like ta pull all these *friggin'* wires 'n tubes outta me and like *tout suite*...like *pronto* blow this place."

As I am expounding philosophical, I notice a man and woman, patiently standing in the doorway, for how long, I have no idea. Both appear to be in their mid-fifties. He is very dignified looking, tall and erect, with thick wavy gray hair, the strong chin and the deep-set smoldering eyes of an Omar Sharif, wearing a black well-tailored suit, a starched collar white shirt and black tie. She is quite a bit shorter, with mournful, kind eyes, full-figured, but dressed in a flattering elegant black tailored pants suit with sensible but expensive shoes—understated *haute couture* that shouts elegance and money.

"*Mee-ster* Kozlov?" he asks.

"Who wants to know?" snarls the Hawkster.

"That depends. If you're here to tell me I've just won the Super Mega-millyon lotto, uh...that *would* be me," I say.

"*Mee-ster* Kozlov, I am Doctor Amir Tehrani and this is my wife, Donya. We are the parents of Hassan Tehrani, may we please come in and talk with you. I promise you we won't take up much of your time, we would deeply appreciate any time you could spare us. As you know our son, Hassan, is being accused of a heinous crime of terrorism. We understand you talked to our son before he...*ascended* and we..."

I interrupt him, "Dr and Mrs Tehrani, is it? I'm very sorry, but what was said was in a language that I could not understand. It sounded Middle Eastern, to me. So I don't think I can be of much help to you. I am so sorry for your loss...now if you'll please excuse us, we have some business to take care of," I say.

Donya Tehrani steps forward, now close enough to the bed to touch me, with tears streaming down her face, "*Mee-ster*. Kozlov, our son is *no* terrorist...please if you could just give us a few minutes...we think he came down to Moody Seaport to see a friend, a lady friend that we had forbidden him to see any longer," when she is interrupted by the husband, "Donya...do not beg. You are causing me humiliation in front of these gentlemen. Thank you for your time Mr Kozlov. We won't take up any more of it. Come Donya, we must get back to Vancouver before the border shuts down for the night."

She stands there motionless, just staring at me. The pleading eyes of crestfallen mother of a fallen child. It doesn't matter what the child may have done—a serial murderer—it is always the same in any culture, in any language, the loss of child is unbearable. And always...always with the—*but he's a good boy*.

I look at Hawk, he looks at the forlorn Mrs Tehrani, back to me, shrugs, then nods his huge head.

"Okay...I guess we can give you few minutes," I relent.

She smiles with gratitude, "Thank you so very much. The girl's name is Jennifer something...he never did tell us her last name because our son was afraid Amir would contact her family and make a scene. All we know is that she is a student at Moody University. Because she is not a believer, we had insisted that he stop seeing her. He said he would honor his parents wishes. We thought it had ceased...apparently we were wrong. When we were contacted by the RCMP uh, the Royal Canadian Mounted Police that was investigating this in British Columbia we told them, about this Jennifer, they said it didn't matter. The U.S. government had proof that he was there and that there was conclusive evidence of a sophisticated bomb that caused the explosion, had been planted not far from where his car was parked. If you could remember anything...anything at all that he said when you found him, it might help us to find the truth...or even something about the car that might lead us to her. We think she was there...and she would be able to tell us what really happened on that horr-ible afternoon," she says.

"I wish I could remember but..." , before I can say another word, Hawk abruptly says to the man, "Leave us your contact info and if we think of anything, we'll get back to you."

"Thank you so very much for your kindness in indulging my wife," the dignified Doctor Amir Tehrani says handing Hawk a business card out of an expensive Moroccan leather billfold from his vest pocket.

"Exceeding thank yous...to you Mr Kozlov. We wish that Allah graces you with a rapid and complete recovery and we look forward to

hearing from you...*As-salamu alaykum*," Donya Tehrani says gently patting my wrist.

After they exit the room, "What the hell was *that* about, building up false hope in that poor distraught woman. We don't know anything about that car. You said it yourself in the newspaper that there was too much smoke to make out anything about the car," I say.

"*Au contraire mon ami*...that's not exactly what I said. What I did say was that because of the heavy smoke and low visibility, *Mr Kozlov was not able to discern any further information about the identity of the car*," Hawk says with that impish smile.

"So did *you* see something?" I say.

"Nope...not at the time but..." pausing dramatically "that new Sony Digital DSR-200 video cam sure did. I had it set on low light, high-gain...just like daylight," he says.

"You mean you were rolling the whole time and never told anybody including the cops and FBI...including me?" I say.

"Yeap...and yeap. And by the way, I just told you," he says with that impish man-child smile.

"*Goddammit* man, that's withholdin' evidence, obstruction of an investigation etcetera *and* etcetera. Man...if they find out, you're talking serious hard time in Toto-land Leavenworth," I say.

"Koz, there's something that stinks about this whole terrorist narrative. That this kid...a very wealthy grad student at UBC who apparently had everything to live for, would do something like this. Like man, some things just don't compute. So I didn't want the Feds to confiscate the footage until we had a chance to look into it a little. Besides, I didn't like that Fatso cop's attitude. He's got some major anger management issues...very unbecoming," he deadpans.

"Ah...maybe you could give him some pointers?" I say.

"Well actually..."

"*Have* you been watching Dr. Phil again on Oprah?" I say with feigned accusation, "so what's buggin' ya about this deal, man?" I say

"Busted. No...*but seriously folks*, when you jumped out of the truck, behaving as the trained professional that I am, I instinctively shouldered the camera...and was rolling just when that car almost had your lunch. I panned with it as it raced out of the parking lot, and got a decent shot of the rear of the car before it disappeared. So, I did a frame capture of the car, loaded it into Photoshop and *voila*, through the magic of digital sharpening and enhancing, I got a pretty clean image of the car, enough to be able to make out the plate number, and the make of the car, late model red Corvette. Washington state plates with a local dealer license plate frame...Cascadia Chevrolet," he says.

"Yeah...I take your point. Highly unlikely...a 'terrst's' nest, in North Cascadia County, Islamic anyway. And driving a Corvette? Not your typical terrorist's profile...or ride," I say.

"And get this, with a personal plate...*S-U-P-R-M-A-N*? I don't think so...and there's something else that stinks about this whole deal. If it happened the way the Feds say it did, how could an alleged terrorist, who is an electrical engineer be stupid enough blow himself up, using a remote detonation device? Not buyin-it. And why would he be carrying that young boy in his arms? What...terrorists remorse?" he says.

"Hmm...yeah, again, pretty thin...definitely malodorous," I say.

"One other thing...I had the highly directional shotgun microphone mounted on the camera on. I got all the audio between you and the kid. There's a lot of background noise, the roar of the fire etcetera, but I loaded it into the computer, Audacity, the open source sound editing program, and ran it through a bunch of high pass filters and was able to remove lot of the low frequency background noise, the rumbling and roar of the fire etcetera. If we were to play the cleaned up audio for Hassan's peeps, I'll bet they could tell us what he said to you before he died. Might tell us something," he says.

"Certainly more than we know now. Maybe after I get outta here, we can get Hassan's father to listen to it. Under no circumstances do I think they should ever see the video. Just too horrific to see the aftermath of your kid being barbequed alive. I don't think the mother could handle even hearing it...her kid's dying words. Dump the audio off the computer on to one of our portable MP3 players. If he's open to it, we'll run it up to Van City and have him listen to it...maybe translate it," I say.

Again, in the doorway, I see a man standing there, motionless, shoulders hunched over, just staring downward. Amazing what a little national press can do for a gal's popularity. He is maybe in his early thirties but it is hard to tell because of his disheveled appearance. With a three day beard, and dark circles under his reddened eyes, he's sporting a Tommy Hilfiger designer jogging suit, that looks slept in, bedroom slippers and a Rolex. His morning hair is all over the place, lank and oily.

I start to crack-wise with a " I am sorry no more autographs tonight...Elvis has left the building," but I reconsider because of his obviously emotionally drained and defeated appearance.

Hawk starts to say something, uh...Hawkish, but I wave him off.

"Can I help you?" I say.

There is a long pause, then he looks up at me with his eyes tearing up, with the obvious anguish and grief of someone who is going through a living hell, and just stares at me catatonically. For almost a full minute, the room is silent except for the buzzing and humming of the medical monitoring devices. Then he does the zombie shuffle towards us, coming to an unsteady stop, reeking of alcohol. He begins moving his lips, but no discernible words come out. Finally, he clears his throat, wipes the tears from his cheek with his sleeve, and says in a very low

voice, barely audible, "My name is John Allison...I am the District Attorney of Cascadia County."

"Can you speak a little louder Mr Allison, my hearing is not quite back to normal from the explosion. Can we get you some water?"

He shakes his head no.

"What can I do for you, Mr Allison?" I say.

Now seemingly more composed, and a little louder, "I'm sorry to bother you...but I just had to come here tonight...could not sleep...haven't slept for two days. I don't dare close my eyes tonight...for fear of the images that haunt me...of my wife and my two girls being killed...no...burned alive, from the...explosion. I am not here in my official capacity as DA. I...I...just need to know how da hell this could happen...how something like this could *ever* happen to my children...and my wife, the love of my life...to try to make some sense out of it. What kind of god is this Allah, that would command his followers to wage war...to slaughter innocent *'merican* women and children? How could my Lord Jesus and Savior, allow this evil thing to happen. Am I being punished? Tell me how this could...*why...why*, what kind of insanity caused the loss of my family...and shattered my life forever?"

A palpable pall of grief hangs over the room, rendering both Hawk and I speechless.

Finally, "Mr Allison, we're so very sorry for your loss...but unfortunately, we probably do not know much more than you. All we know, at the moment, is what the news has reported...that it was an act of terrorism. Honestly I can't remember much about what happened because of the head trauma," I say.

Hawk quickly adds, "An alleged act of terrorism."

John Allison just stares at us blankly, then says, "Okay...I...I just came here tonight...because I could not bear to be alone in our bed. Her lovely scent still on the bedding from makin' love that morning...a beautiful bright sunny morning...so full of promise. And her closet full of clothes and shoes...so many shoes, impossible to ever fill. Staring at the empty beds of my precious little girls. No more kiss goodnight from Daddy...gone...all gone, everywhere I look...toys and dolls...all over the house, ghostly reminders. I thought that somehow connecting with someone who survived this...this...might in some strange way help me to connect with my family. I know it doesn't make any sense, but...I...I won't take any more of your time."

John Allison, then slowly turns, head down, hunched over like a hundred year old man with the weight of the world on his shoulders, and drags his concrete feet out of the room.

"Poor bastard. All that stuff about Allah and innocent American civilians...and *his* Jesus? Probably not a particularly good time to bring up the Crusades...for *Chrissakes*?" Hawk says.

"Ya think? Maybe a trifle insensitive. After I get outta here, we definitely need to take a little drive up to Van City BC," I say.

Just about that time the good doctor Khan strolls into the room snapping his surgical glove cuff to get our attention. The squirting syringe would have been enough to get Hawk's undivided attention. Now wearing a no-more-doctor-nice-guy mischievous, determined look on his face, "Mister Koz?"

Seeing the needle, Hawk who is afraid of no man, unless he's wearing a white coat with a syringe in his hand, says, "Just leavin' doc, see ya Koz...sweet dreams."

Before I can even object, seizing the element of surprise he deftly inserts the needle of the syringe into the IV tube already connected to the vein in my right arm. Bingo. Almost instantaneously, I begin to feel the effects of the drug. Lights out. Suddenly, it's velvet black night. Like a runaway eighteen wheeler, I'm careening ninety miles an hour down a steep, winding, mountainous highway of 100 miles of bad road...faster...and faster, sliding tires squealing louder and louder with no headlights and no brakes. Maybe the Doc had it right. A very bad journey uh... trip would not do it justice.

Then, with the house lights dimming, the movie starts, making Francis Ford Coppola's masterwork surrealistic Apocalypse Now, the definitive anti-war film, look like an episode of the Muppets.

An incoherent tortured montage of...

The young Hassan Tehrani pleading with me, screaming in agony, helplessly watching him die a horrific death.

The limp lifeless body of the horribly burned little boy.

The cloying smell of burnt flesh still stubbornly lingering in my nostrils

Fast-forward >> to the past...

Part Three - Genesis: The Great Depression -

- Chapter 5 -

History does not repeat itself, but it does rhyme.
- Mark Twain

1915 - 1929 - The Roaring Twenties - Philadelphia PA

Michael Caravaggio, a first generation Italian who had immigrated from Sicily even at the age of sixteen, was an ambitious risk-taker. Despite the fact that he was the son of an immigrant barber, and that he never went past a grammar school education, while working in the barbershop as a child, eventually learning the trade, he had studied the manner and dress of the rich who frequented the barbershop. At twenty-two, a working class barber by day, by night, impeccably dressed, he was a man about town, affecting the persona of wealth and station of a "real estate developer". Michael is swarthy with a thick mane of jet black hair to accompany his Byronic rugged, somewhat pugilistic, good looks. He is tall, well-built with a certain primal appeal that some women devour, the consummate rake.

A natural born actor, his gift for mimicry serves him well in his nightly masquerades, hobnobbing with the rich. Because of his flamboyant, sensual style on the dance floor, he is a much sought after dance partner.

In 1915, he meets Teresa Lauria at a party—a woman, a girl really, four years younger, who comes from a cultured second generation Italian family with class and money. He decides to pursue her. He needs a classy arm-piece, a woman who would reinforce and give credibility to his charade. And he needs someone with elegance, aristocratic manners and asset that could entertain his wealthy prospective real estate clients. Despite being naturally shy and diffident, she is a beautiful and talented musician, an accomplished classical pianist, who is smitten by Michael's charms.

Although Teresa's father saw through Michael Caravaggio from their first meeting, Teresa is powerless to resist his every impulse, including pre-marital sex. She becomes pregnant, not by accident by the cunning seducer, and to avoid a family scandal, they are married. Seven months later, a "premature" Maria Pia Caravaggio is born. By 1928, there are five children, who Michael Caravaggio delights in showing off, on Sundays when he, Tess and the children get all dressed up, and parade down the street to attend Sunday Mass at Saint Francis Catholic Church. Like Italian aristocracy strolling the *passaggiata* around the

piazza, he would take great pride in "*fara bella figura*" making a good impression, or 'looking good', self-consciously so.

Maria Caravaggio, the oldest child, at an early age, shows interest in music and art. The family is doing very well financially; her father ostentatiously indulges the family in cultural activities, including the symphony, opera, and the frequent trips to museums in his new touring car with polished brass handles, especially art museums, like the Philadelphia Museum of Art, where the proud Italian patriarch would assemble his suitably sartorial children for exhibit around the paintings by Michelangelo Caravaggio. Ever the showman, he would proclaim loudly, for everyone in the room to hear, that he, Michael Caravaggio is a direct descendant of The Great Michelangelo. Then pointing to his then 5 year old duly impressed son, gesturing flamboyantly, "There...that *magnifico* work of art is by your famous ancestor, your namesake, Michelangelo CARA-VAG-GIO," pretentiously exaggerating every syllable for his hapless captive audience. The spelling of his only son's name, vulgarly amended to "Michaelangelo", to satisfy his monstrous ego and proclaim ownership of his chattel children.

It turns out that the painting was only a 17th century copy of the painting "The Incredulity of the Apostle Thomas". But the pompous patriarch was never known for his modesty, or to ever allow the facts to interfere with his shameless self-promotion. But Maria, or Pia as she was called by her family, was quite smitten by the painting, the dramatic *chiaroscuro*, the brilliant colors of the palette, the spiritual sentiment that reached down to her very soul. So at the age of 9, she begins to draw incessantly. From then on, something within the very core of her DNA compels her to make art.

The Roaring Twenties, was a feeding frenzy of speculation of stocks and bonds, and real estate, and Michael Caravaggio was roaring with the best of them. It was post Gilded Age; the Robber Barons retained unfettered free-reign over the unregulated economy. Real estate speculation was rampant as the bubble continued to get bigger and bigger, no one believed that it could ever burst. He and his partner leveraged many real estate properties by what amounted to a pyramid scheme. He would identify greedy, yet gullible investors who wanted to cash-in on the real estate boom, and draw them in with his boundless self-confidence and charm. But, Michael's carefully cultivated persona of success and money, like most things Michael Caravaggio, was all facade.

Recognizing that his greatest business asset is his looks, his irrepressible charm and his flashy sartorial splendor, his main target was the many older, usually widowed or divorced lonely women who possessed money, "more dollars than sense" he would joke to his partner. They are smitten by his practiced pretense of elegance and class, but mostly by the attentiveness and indulgences he pays to the forlorn

women. He has an uncanny nose for vulnerability. He can sniff it out, often with the first encounter, a bow, and a kiss on the hand is his entrée. He has developed a finely honed sense just in this brief first encounter. If the woman is receptive—whether her hand lingers, and when he releases it with a gentle squeeze—if it is reciprocated.

He is a shameless libertine, who delights in the thrill of the conquest. It devastates Teresa, that many nights he does not come home, and when he does it would be for a change of clothes, some clean starched shirts which she has dutifully laundered, and then be gone again for several days at a time, with no explanation. Often in social situations, he would humiliate Teresa, with brazen overtures to other women. When she confronts Michael about his dalliances, he patronizingly dismisses her as being overly-jealous. Once a beautiful young woman, after over ten years of constant emotional degradation and five children, she begins to lose her looks, further eroding her plummeting self-esteem.

Fall 1930 - One year after The Great Crash

In front of a large expensive home in an upscale neighborhood in Philadelphia, a large moving van, with several men in uniforms and hats ironically emblazoned with "Brotherly Love Moving" are busily carrying furniture and belongings, obviously hastily packed, into the large moving van.

Huddled against Teresa Caravaggio on the front porch, are her five children: Maria 15, Renata 13, Rita 12, Michaelangelo 11, and Marcella 9.

The Sheriff, holding an eviction notice, is gently trying to console and restrain a crying Teresa, now 4 months pregnant, as the Steinway piano is now exiting the front door into the moving van. All the furnishings, fine china and silver, are being auctioned off to pay off the personal debt of the family.

"Mrs Caravaggio, I'm sorry, but you'll have to vacate the premises *now*. Do you have any place, like family where you and the children can go?" says the Sheriff.

Teresa, in shock says, "No place...no one."

"In that case ma'am, you and the children will have to spend the night at the jail, until we can make other arrangements. Come on kids, get in the car," the Sheriff says.

In a house across the street, a young boy about 11, is kneeling in front of the mother and father, staring out the front window, watching the eviction unfold.

"Serves that show-boat son-of-bitch right. Caravaggio...Mr Big Shot Real Estate Developer. Should put the bastard in jail...deserting his family like that, with her pregnant and all," the man says.

Maria Pia Caravaggio, the eldest child is stoically standing next to her hysterical mother with a single suitcase, which now contains

everything in the world she owns. Next to her, younger brother Michaelangelo, standing impassively, staring out across the street making eye contact with his pal and playmate in the window, he slowly raises his hand and waves good-bye.

Fighting tears Maria says, "Mikie, I will *never* allow myself, our family, to be humiliated like this again...*ever*."

"Now with Papa gone, I guess it's up to you and me, Pia to take care of the rest of the family, to keep the family together," says Michaelangelo.

Teresa, Maria and the children are herded into the police car. As they are driven away to the police station, Maria's tear stained face is pressed against the rear window, like many of the innocent victims of the Great Depression, mere write-offs by the plutocrats, as collateral damage of their greed and abject avarice. As the police car turns the corner, the life of an upper middle-class abundance, slowly vanishes into the distance for the Caravaggios. And, for many families, never to return to their lives again.

Winter - 1932

A small two bedroom apartment in a ramshackle neighborhood in South Philadelphia - late afternoon

It is two years later, Christmas eve—Maria is now almost 17. Teresa, mercifully, has lost the baby; a miscarriage at 5 months. They are now living in a 3rd story tenement on public assistance. Renata, Rita and Marcella, like puppies are huddled together trying to get warm under an old heavy quilt on a mattress thrown on the floor. The cast iron stove for heat, is now cold to the touch as they have had to choose between buying coal for heat, or buying what little food they can afford. The children are emaciated, unrelenting hunger is their constant companion.

Maria has suddenly become a stunningly beautiful woman. She is quite tall, slender with ample breasts, long raven hair, penetrating green eyes and exotic, gypsy looks. She is briskly walking in circles about the room, in a heavy coat trying to stay warm. Michaelangelo, now 12, has assumed the role of the man of the house. He is tall for his age, with blond hair and blue eyes, but skinny from undernourishment. He has fashioned an old beat-up wagon out of found materials—painted it red, with white letters on the side, "Mikie's Delivery".

Mikie is standing behind his mother, Teresa, sitting on a chair at the window, bending down whispering to her, while massaging her neck and shoulders, laughing and joking with her, which brings a faint if seldom, smile to her face.

"Mommy, I've just got one more delivery to make, down the street, then Mr Kelly said I could take a wagon full of coal and a bunch of groceries for wages. Tonight we'll have a real Christmas dinner...and a fire in the stove," Mikie says.

Teresa, sitting impassively, shows a glimmer of emotion, and patting Mikie's hand on her shoulder, looks up at him and smiles wanly.

Maria says, "Mikie, can you be back in hour?"

"Sure Pia, count on it. I'll leave right now," irrepressible can-do Mikie says.

"Yeah...Christmas dinner!" Renata, Rita and Marcella yell in chorus.

Mikie puts on his tattered, dark much-too-big man's overcoat, a dark knit cap and threadbare gloves, picks up his little wagon and the proud little provider swaggers out the door singing "Jingle bells".

About an hour and a half later, it is now dark and snowing very heavily. As the snowfall increases, the evening is punctuated with the frequent sound of wheels of cars and trucks spinning futilely on the street below. Everyone is in a hurry to get to the safety of their home for Christmas Eve.

Maria is getting concerned, *it's been over an hour, where are you Mikie? If I'm late, they'll fire me.* Because of Teresa's growing emotional instability, Maria does not dare leave Teresa with the younger children, without her or Mikie present.

Maria can see the faint reflection of her mother's face in the window pane, expectantly looking down at the street below for Mikie. Teresa suddenly spies the white letters on the side of Mikie's red wagon in the darkness, but can barely make him out in the dark clothing. His pale white face suddenly appears out of the darkness as he looks up to the window at his mother and smiles broadly, waving to her wildly, proudly pointing to the contents of the wagon. He's in a hurry.

"There's Mikie! He's got a wagon full of goodies!" yells Teresa.

Maria, rushes over to the window behind Teresa.

Seeing the reflection of her mother smiling happily, admiringly, warms her heart in an otherwise bleak winter of discontent of constant hunger and privation.

While Mikie is still looking up, he steps off the curb to cross the street.

"Mikie! Lookout!" they both scream. But of course, he cannot hear them.

Mikie does not see the big A&P delivery truck until just before the impact.

Mikie's reverie is interrupted by the frantic blast of the truck's loud horn, but it is too late. He then looks back up at the window at Teresa and Maria, his expression calm and almost resigned, just before the impact violently pushes him out of view.

The little red wagon explodes on impact sending groceries and coal into the air. The truck bumper catches his overcoat waist tie, dragging him under the truck for fifty feet. Finally, it comes to rest. Neither the front of the truck, nor Mikie are visible from the window. Teresa is frozen in the chair, paralyzed with fear and dread.

Maria immediately runs out the door, down the stairs to the street below, yelling, " *Mikie! Mikie! I'm coming Mikie. Oh God. No!...please God! Hang on Mikie.*"

Maria is the first to get to Michaelangelo. The truck driver, speechless in shock, is staring down at the contorted rag-doll body. In the huge black overcoat, Mikie looks so tiny, a mere *bambino*. Mikie opens his eyes, he is still alive, barely. Maria, sobbing, does not feel the cold slush on her bare knees as she kneels down, lifts him up to her bosom rocking him back and forth. For the past two years she's been Michaelangelo's and the other children's surrogate mother.

"Somebody call an ambulance! Oh Mikie, why didn't you look!" Maria cries.

"Pia, I'm sorry. I was late...I just wanted ta get...I'm so cold. Pia, please hold me," Mikie whispers.

"Shh...Mikie, don't try to talk," says Maria, tears streaming down her face as she holds him even more tightly against her. The nearing ambulance siren of help, of hope, now a wailing death knell. Mikie's eyes tell Maria that he knows that it will be too late.

"Pia...tell mommy I love her...take care her for me," says Mikie as the life slowly ebbs from his emaciated little body.

Rocking back and forth, sobbing hysterically as Maria cradles his lifeless body in her arms, little Mikie's lifeless eyes, piercing her very soul.

"Oh Mikie...my little man!" cries Maria.

Maria senses someone slowly inching closer. She looks up to see Teresa standing there motionless. She is shivering from the cold, with an emotionless, blank stare. Without so much as a word, or a tear, she pivots slowly and shuffles away into the darkness.

One week later

Saint Anthony's Catholic Church, Philadelphia

The small very modest casket is laying in state in the transept, in front of the altar. The church is full with those who have come to pay their final respects to Michaelangelo Caravaggio, age twelve. In his short life he has left a large imprint on everyone that ever came in contact with him, including Father Patrick O'Brien, the pastor of Saint Anthony's. Father O'Brien is a large, voluble and virile man in his early

thirties. He is classic Irish handsome, with intense piercing robin's egg eyes, with shining thick black hair, ample black eyelashes and a strong pugnacious Irish chin. After graduating from the University of Dublin, Trinity College, founded in 1592, a classmate and friend of Samuel Beckett, with such distinguished literary alumnus as Oscar Wilde, Father Patrick had immigrated to America from Northern Ireland just after the Irish War of Independence, in 1922. And like Beckett, Shaw and Wilde, and most Irish, deeply imbedded in his DNA is an eloquence—a passion for the music of the spoken word.

He grew up hearing the horrific stories of starvation and privation of the Irish people, during the "Great Potato Famine" in Ireland in the mid-19th century and the ensuing great Irish Diaspora to America. In the grand literary tradition, the Irish, notoriously never allowed the facts to interfere with the telling of a good story—known for their embrace of the ancient Irish custom of always leaving a story better than when they found it before passing it on to the next generation. By the time Patrick O'Brien had heard it many, many times, it had swelled into a cabal by the British government, at Irish Genocide. It was then a widespread view, bordering on mythology, that the treatment of the famine by the British was a deliberate murder of the Irish and discussions often contained the mantra, "The Almighty, indeed, sent the potato blight, but the English created the Famine."

Having experienced the terrible injustice and inhumanity visited upon the Irish Catholics of partitioned Northern Ireland by the British first-hand, has imbued him with an imperative of social justice. These profound injustices contributed to his deep and abiding sense of fairness and egalitarianism, which impelled him toward the priesthood, relieving his reservations, temporarily at least, for taking the vow of celibacy, that is until he encounters one Maria Caravaggio.

During these difficult times, the Catholic Church is one of the few remaining sanctuaries for many families who were the innocent victims of the excesses and vicissitudes that caused The Great Depression. The Church was oftentimes the only institution left for the poor and infirmed, that could provide spiritual, emotional and economic sustenance, often the last resort for many, in providing the bare necessities for mere survival, including food and clothing.

Father O'Brien has a particularly close connection to the Caravaggio family. Mikie had served mass on Sundays, as an altar boy. Because Mikie's father had deserted the family, Father Patrick had become a surrogate father for Mikie, as the irrepressible Mikie had more or less adopted him. "You have no choice, Father Pat," he had said with that impish smile. He idolized Father Pat, and often discussed joining the priesthood himself.

But there was another more compelling reason for his connection to the family—a deep physical attraction to Mikie's older sister Maria. Being afflicted by the 'curse of the Irish', on many a long

lonely night in the darkness of his of room, after single-handedly consuming almost a fifth of Irish Whiskey after dinner, he would often fall asleep, involuntarily indulging in sexual fantasies toward the beautiful much younger Maria Caravaggio, the next morning leaving him with a massive hangover, but far worse, with a feeling of unassuageable guilt.

Watching Maria, kneeling while praying in the dim flickering candle light, he is reminded of the Madonna, The Mother of Christ. Sometimes the temptation to act on his erotic impulse toward Maria was so overwhelming, it would take all the self-control that he could muster, not to reveal his feelings for her, calling into question the very vows of celibacy. The most difficult part of the situation was that he knew Maria could sense his attraction to her and that it was mutual. And when just casually talking with Pia, as her family called her, her natural musty scent intoxicated him—just her mere touch, innocently, playfully on his arm, would instantaneously awaken his manhood.

Father O'Brien has just finished saying Mass for Mikie. The comforting organ music is now winding down. The pleasant soothing scent of incense and votive candles is omnipresent. He then takes the pulpit. Seated in the front row pew, is Mikie's mother, Teresa, wearing a tattered black dress, with a black pill-box hat tragically askew with a drawn veil. Next to her, is Maria, also in black, then the rest of the children Renata, Rita and Marcella. All of them are sobbing, except the mother, Teresa, sitting impassively, staring catatonically straight ahead, seemingly oblivious to the moment.

Conspicuously absent is the father, Michael Caravaggio.

Father Patrick is himself fighting the tears. As he looks out over the congregation, he says to himself...*God...please help me get through this*. He mounts the pulpit. He is then joined by the congregation as he recites, while moving his right hand to the sign of the cross, "In the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost. Amen."

Now, sufficiently composed he starts, "Michaelangelo Caravaggio the loving son of Teresa and Michael Caravaggio, and loving brother to Maria, Renata, Rita and Marcella." He pauses, he has not had time to prepare his remarks. Allowing the grief to wash over him, he is hoping for some divine inspiration, to bring the right words not from his mind, but his heart. Then with an evanescent smile, he remembers the words of the sagacious, old Irish priest in Ireland. *The best way to help yer flock, laddy is to get yer head out of yer uh...pulpit*. He then steps down from the pulpit to stand beside the casket.

Closer to his flock now, and to Mikie, steadying himself with his left hand resting on the casket he continues, "While the Good Lord has allowed us to borrow Mikie's joyful company for only a short twelve years, even though Mikie's body has left us, the living, behind...his kind and loving spirit will always be with us. He was good laddy...always

willing to help others less fortunate, and always with that mischievous smile that could light up this church...indeed a whole cathedral.

So let the death of Mikie not be in vain. Let it serve as a cautionary parable for future generations of Mikie's. Poor little Mikie. Twas not the A&P truck that killed him on that fateful Christmas Eve. No...tis older than Scripture. The Seven Deadly Sins, rapacious greed, gluttony and pride...feeding the other sins, that senselessly took this young, hopeful unfinished life," he says, gently caressing the casket.

It is not Father Patrick speaking now. It is as if he is a vessel being channeled for some much larger narrative, for victims of the Great Famine, the Great Depression and poverty and privation everywhere than the single tragic death of a twelve year old boy.

He continues, "A profound hubris fueled by the perverse priority of productivity and prosperity...at all social costs. Huge factories of inhumanity...sweat shops, that deplete the human spirit and deprive men of a decent living wage for them and their families. The unbridled worship of this ethic of *more...more...always more*. To them, an indomitable, invincible force, stronger than Nature...or even God.

The casualties of The Great War will be well-documented in history, the so-called War to end all wars. But, as horrid as they were, they pale in comparison to The Great Depression. While the actual wartime dead and wounded may be more easily assessed, The Great Depression has killed something far more difficult to measure—something sacred...the robbing of countless multitudes, generations of men, women and children of the ultimate measure of humanity, their self-respect and dignity. And for many, the worst sin of all, the death of hope.

The scars, the incalculable damage to the human spirit, caused by staggering disparity of wealth, the hunger and privation visited on the victims of the Great Crash will be with us forever. I will leave it up to God himself to forgive them...for I can not. But, let us never forget the *what*, and more importantly the *who*, that caused all this unnecessary human misery. Only God knows the *why*.

The ghosts of the same war profiteers, industrial tycoons that cause needless, unjust wars, are still with us today. They have learned *nothing* from the wanton death and destruction of The War. For in the end, all wars never decide who was right...but only who is left. Indeed, as it has been said, only the dead have seen the end of war. And when they were confronted then, as they are today about the catastrophic consequences of their colossal arrogance and avarice, that caused, not just the death of the economy, but far worse, of compassion...the justification is always the same. The survival of America, indeed all democracies depends on the dictates of social...indeed economic Darwinism, that only the strong *should* survive.

For countless millions...families were destroyed, the flickering flame of human potential extinguished. The mass emotional carnage and

the impoverishment of generations to follow...were and are, considered simple write-offs, merely the cost of doing business in the perpetuation of their Deity, known by the innocent sounding euphemism of Capitalism.

To them, the death of this beautiful twelve year old child, tirelessly working for scraps, heroically trying to feed his starving family, was nothing more than an unfortunate but necessary modern day equivalent of a human sacrifice...on the altar of Capitalism.

May God have mercy on their souls. I tremble for them...for the God I know, is surely just."

Winter - 1932 - about two months later

A small apartment in a ramshackle neighborhood in South Philadelphia - late afternoon.

Renata, Rita and Marcella have been sent to the bedroom. Maria is leaning against the wall by the bedroom door, suspiciously monitoring a discussion. Teresa is at her customary place by the window, staring blankly, seemingly oblivious to what is going on, perhaps still searching the darkness for the return of her only son.

Michael Caravaggio, dressed in his usual dapper manner, is sitting at the kitchen table—his perfectly blocked fawn fedora on the table. The impeccably tailored double-breasted beige pinstriped umber suit accentuates his broad shoulders. He's dabbing his eyes, and blowing his nose into an expensive silk handkerchief while he talks to a man in a business suit, seated across from him at the table, Mr Mario Garabaldi the lawyer for the A&P market.

Mario Garabaldi says, "Mr and Mrs Caravaggio, first, please allow me to express the deepest and most profound condolences from A&P Market for the loss of your son. A most unfortunate, and I must add, unpreventable accident. I am here today, to help your family in time of need, even though we feel we have absolutely *no* legal liability. As a token of our sympathy we are prepared to..." he is interrupted by Michael Caravaggio.

"He was my one, my only son. I was grooming him to take over my real estate...uh conglomerate. I loved that boy...such a good boy. His mother...she may never recover," the bereaved father says, giving the performance of a lifetime.

Maria is listening intently, while Teresa, impassively continues to stare out the window.

"While that *might* be the case...as I started to say, we are prepared to offer you eight hundred dollars...in exchange for a full release," Mr Garabaldi says.

"That is an outrage sir! Just look at this poor grieving mother, not to mention myself...an insult sir!" screams the father wildly waving his impeccably manicured hand toward Teresa.

Undeterred, Mr Garibaldi forges on, "I am empowered to write a check right here, right now...if... "

"Okay, *scusi signor* Garibaldi. Can we speak man to man, here as two *paisans*, unh? Despite our great loss, there is no reason to be adversarial here, is there uh...Mario. We both know what would happen if I get an attorney...unh? *Very* expensive for the A&P and very drawn out. So your best offer...how *mucha* today?" the vulpine Michael Carravaggio says.

"Mr Caravaggio...Michael, I think we understand each other perfectly *Si, paisano a paisano*," Mario Garibaldi says, "one thousand...today, right now in exchange for a full release of all claims, from you *and* the mother."

"Well, then...even though it is much less than we think is fair, to spare my family a long drawn-out ordeal, especially his poor distraught mother, we reluctantly accept your offer," Michael says with an appropriate measure of reluctance.

"Wait just a minute here! What about mother? Mikie was *more* her son. Mother, what do *you* think?" says Maria.

"Now, now Pia, don't get excited. I'm just looking out for the interests of the family. With this money we can start over, and be a family again," pleads the concerned father, apparently struck by the first bolt of paternal pangs of responsibility since he abandoned the family two years earlier.

"Where the hell were you when your *family* was starving to death? Living in this hell hole. Why do you think Mikie had to work, just a kid...scrounging for scraps to feed us? You deserted us...you *bastardo!*" Maria cries.

"The Crash wiped me out. I...we lost everything, all the real estate investments...worthless, overnight. And now, I'm staying with...a benefactor, until I can get back on my feet financially, and come and take care of all of you," Michael says.

"You mean Mrs Moneybags? Living the *la dolce vita*, while we're starving here? You gigolo! You're such a selfish *bastardo*, you couldn't even show up to your own son's funeral. Now, all of a sudden you're the grieving father. You louse!" Maria screams.

"Maria! Listen to your father! Don't you dare be disrespectful, he wants to take care of us now. That's all that matters," Teresa says.

"But mother...how could you *even*..." Maria says.

"*Vuoi stare zitto!* That's the end of it! Where do I sign?" says Teresa. Mr Garibaldi, seizing the moment has been quietly filling out the check and the release form.

"Mr and Mrs Caravaggio, please sign here. After you both sign, here is the check made out to you jointly," Mr Garibaldi says.

Teresa comes over to the table and signs the release after Michael. Mr Garibaldi slides the check across the table. Michael's hand immediately seizes upon it.

Mario Garibaldi, quickly places the signed release into his brief case and says, "*Grazie*. There is nothing more for me to do here. I'll just let myself out," says Garibaldi, as he hastily retreats out the door.

"Tess, *cara*, why don't you just endorse the back of this check so I can deposit into the bank right away," Michael implores.

"Don't do it, Mother. I'm begging you, please!" cries Maria.

Teresa, looking at Maria spitefully, endorses the check. Michael, immediately places it in his wallet from his suit vest pocket. He stands up, and adjusts his fedora to a rakish angle, straightens his tie, and hurriedly pulls on his expensive camel hair overcoat.

"Oh, Michael, now you can come back home. We'll have a big coming-home party. The children are always hungry...they need winter clothes, when are you coming back with the money?" Teresa says.

"Well now...I'd better get to the bank before it closes. Tess, *dolcita mia*, I've got some expenses to take care of. I'll be in touch," says Michael as he gives Teresa a quick peck on the cheek, and a patronizing pat on the head. He then begins backing toward the door, reaches for the door handle behind him, opens the door, and leaves, then as an afterthought sticks his head through the half-open door, and says with his trademark charming smile framing his perfect white pearls, "*Arrivederci*...give the children a big kiss from their father."

Maria follows him out the door, and confronts him in the hallway. She grabs his arm, spinning him around.

"What about Mom's share of that? When are you returning with it. I'll go the bank with you," Maria says.

"That will not be necessary...I'll be in touch. Well, well, well...while I've been away trying to regain my lost fortune, my little Pia has become quite the beautiful woman I see, yes..." he says with a lecherous grin, squeezing her arm, and then stroking her cheek with the back of his hand.

Maria pulls his hand way, and slaps his face, hard.

"Go to hell! You *bastardo*!" Maria yells.

Michael Caravaggio, unfazed, just shrugs his shoulders, and with a breezy laugh, turns and walks down the stairs, chuckling all the way down the stairs and to the bank.

One month later

Maria has just returned from looking for a job—she has been gone all day. She often leaves early in the morning, spending hours waiting in line to fill out an application for some menial job, only to find out after several hours of waiting with fifty or sixty other applicants, that the job has been filled.

Entering the front room she finds Teresa alone, the room darkened with the drapes pulled, sitting at the chair by the window, rocking back and forth. She is mumbling to herself, unintelligibly then suddenly yelling, "Mikie! Lookout! Lookout!"

Maria, is now in front of her, bending over to her. "Mother, please try to eat something, you're wasting away...you're going to get sick. You can't go on this way...you're starting to scare the children with these outbursts," says Maria.

Teresa just glares at her, with complete disdain.

"We're living like rats in this hell hole with nothing but garbage to eat! I send you out to bring back some food...to beg or do *what ever you have to do*, to feed us and you come back empty handed! Again!" Teresa screams.

"Mother, I...I just can't do it. I rather starve than become a common beggar or worse. I can't. I won't do it! Please mother, *never* ask me again to beg...or to sell my..."

"This is all your fault! First, you tell Mikie to hurry up. He'd be alive today. Then you run your father off. Mikie was the only man to ever take care of me and you killed him!"

Without warning, Teresa springs up, lightning quick, and with both hands, digs her fingernails into Maria's face, barely missing her eyes. Maria manages to fend her off momentarily, pushing her away, but Teresa, wiry and manically strong, recovers and is all over her again, screaming hysterically.

"You killed him! You killed him!" Teresa screams, wildly scratching and punching Maria.

Finally, Maria manages to break free, with blood streaming down her cheeks, crying hysterically, she bolts out the door down the stairs, to the street below.

She collects Renata, Rita and Marcella, playing jump rope on the street corner. Maria with girls in tow, half-walks half-runs to the house of Aunt Rose.

Maria frantically knocks on the front door. The front door opens to Aunt Rose, a short, slight woman in her early fifties with a kind face and lively dark Italian eyes. She is Teresa's older sister, by eight years. Aunt Rose, is shocked by the appearance of Maria, in a full sweat with dried blood on her face, her blouse torn, still trembling and panting frantically. Renata, Rita and Marcella, are in tears.

Hearing the commotion, Aunt Rose's son, Anthony comes to the front door just as Maria and the children are entering the house. Anthony, is about five years older than Maria. He's a short, wiry, compact young man, with a receding hairline. They are very close. Anthony is about the same height as Maria, and an excellent dancer. They enter dance contests together where prize money is awarded, a national past-time diversion for many during the Hard Times, occasionally even winning few bucks. But it is mostly for the chance to

get away from her terrible home situation, the heaviness of the immense unceasing responsibility of taking care of her mother and the children. It is a way for her to lose herself, in the music when she is out on that dance floor, doing the *au courant* dance steps to a full live orchestra, of a Duke Ellington songs like "Doin' the New Low Down", she is lost deep within herself, giving her a brief respite from the weight of her worries.

"Pia my God, you look terrible! What's happened, are you and the children alright? Come in, come in," says Aunt Rose as she herds Maria and the children into the kitchen, the most important room in every Italian home, where the scrumptious aroma of the ever-present big pot of tomato sauce simmering on the stove arouses pangs of hunger in Maria and the children. The smell of fresh baked rosemary bread permeates the kitchen and the rest of the house. It has been so long, since the children have had a complete meal where they felt satiated.

"Oh thank you Aunt Rose! Mother attacked me again, if I hadn't gotten away, I think she might have tried to kill me this time," Maria says on the verge of tears, restraining herself, trying desperately to maintain her image of strength and resolve in front of the children.

"Oh, Pia I'm so sorry dear. Here, you and the children sit down at the table. It must be over 20 blocks from your flat. I want to hear what happened but first, let's get you cleaned up," says Aunt Rose.

Anthony comes over to Maria, and placing his hand gently on her chin and turning it slowly toward the light, he just shakes his head, and says, "I don't think you'll need any stitches. You were lucky this time. And I don't think you'll have any scars...physical ones anyway. How do you expect us to win a jitterbug contest with you looking like you've just been in a street fight? Pia, that mother of yours, is nutso. One of these days she's going to *really* hurt you...or the kids," says Anthony.

"Teresa has finally gone over the edge...poor dear. She had problems before Michaelangelo died...abandoned by that, *bastardo*, then losing the *bambino*...but losing her *only* son," she says tilting her head from side to side, while gently applying a damp washcloth to the cuts and abrasions on Maria's otherwise beautiful unblemished olive skin, causing Maria to wince. But somehow she remains stoic, and does not cry out. Aunt Rose continues "well, now she is a danger to you, the children, and herself...we must do something. My nephew Nicky is an attorney. I'll call him right now!" says Aunt Rose.

Aunt Rose leaves the kitchen to the hallway to make a call on the hand-crank phone.

"Hello, may I speak to Mr Nicholas Lauria, please? Thank you." About 10 seconds later, "Nicky, this is your Aunt Rose. I'm fine...*si, bene*...how's your mama? Good. Nicky, we need some advice from a *concigliori*. Maybe you could stop by here on your way home from work tonight? About six? *Oh Grazie*. I'll have a plate of cannelloni waiting for you. *Ciao bella*," says Aunt Rose.

While Aunt Rose is talking on the phone, Maria and the children are sitting around the kitchen table. The girls are drinking a bottle of Coca-Cola with a straw, a rare treat.

Aunt Rose comes back in the kitchen, "Nicky's going to stop by in about an hour. In the meantime, Pia you and the girls have a plate of pasta, we'll have to get you home, soon, Anthony will drive you. Teresa, should NOT be left alone. Here Pia" handing her a long hat pin, " just in case *tuo padre, il bastardo* comes around again," says Aunt Rose.

After Maria and the children have consumed as much rigatoni pasta, Italian sausage and green and red marinated bell peppers and fresh hot bread with butter, as they can possibly hold, for the first time in a long time, they experience the contentment, that only a full stomach of Italian comfort food can bring. They adjourn to the parlor.

Anthony has put some jitterbug music on the Victrola, and Maria and Anthony are dancing wildly. Marie, Marcella and Rita are dancing with each other. Aunt Rose, is sitting in her rocking chair, crocheting, her head bobbing from side to side, tapping her toes. The door bell rings, Anthony turns off the music and leaves the parlor to answer the door. Aunt Rose gets up and puts another record on the player—a hauntingly lyrical aria from Puccini's *Turandot*, *Nessan Dorma, None Shall Sleep*, sung by the now departed legendary Italian tenor Enrico Caruso, and returns to her embroidery. Anthony returns to the parlor with Nick.

"Pia...cousin Nick. Tell him what's going on with your mother," Anthony says.

Nick Lauria, is in his late 20s. Tall, handsome well-dressed, with the poise and confidence of a young professional.

As he motions her toward the sofa, Nick says, "Hi Maria. I'm a lawyer, Aunt Rose tells me that your mother is behaving erratically and she might be capable of harming, you or the children. So tell me what's up and I'll see if I can help."

Maria joins Nick on the sofa. Opera music in background overwhelms the conversation. Maria, is gesturing wildly, crying while acting out the incident with her mother earlier in the day, pointing to her face. Nick's face changes from incredulity to sympathy. He is comfortingly stroking Maria's hand.

Finally, Nick says, "Involuntary commitment to a State Mental Hospital, can be a difficult but not impossible task."

"I have such mixed emotions about doing this Nicky. Committing her to a mental institution, but I just don't know what else to do. She could hurt herself...or worse the children. She has lost complete touch with reality," says Maria, starting to sob.

"Well, Pia I can't help you with the decision process, all I can do, because you are family, is give you my best counsel...the rest will have to be up to you. If you decide to go forward, stop by my office next week, and I'll prepare the documents to petition the court and tell you

exactly what you'll have to do to have her committed. It won't be easy," says Nick.

Nick pats Maria's hand again, and stands to leave. Aunt Rose approaches him with a covered dish of her legendary Cannelloni, Nicky's favorite. Standing on her tip-toes, she reaches up to caress his face, and says, "*Grazie...grazie mille, cara,*" and pulls his head down and gives him a tender kiss on the cheek.

Later that night in Saint Anthony's Catholic Church, just around the corner from her flat, Maria is lighting candles, fighting off the tears. Father O'Brien is quietly observing her in the warm glow of candle light—the Virgin Madonna. Her vulnerability stirs his loins, fueling his passion for her. She sits down in a pew, and begins sobbing hysterically. Feeling a hand gently on her shoulder, she turns to see the priest, standing there.

"Is there something wrong Maria? Would you like to talk about it?" says Father Patrick O'Brien. Facing him, searching his kind compassionate and inviting eyes, overcome by the complex emotions of her problem and her attraction to him, she throws herself into his arms, embracing him, her body trembling with emotion and desire against him. He is taken aback. He knows if he returns the embrace, there will be no turning back. He reluctantly, gently pushes her away.

"Maria, I...I wish. I can't...I'm so sorry..." he stops abruptly.

She is searching his eyes for some kind of affirmation. But, she only sees confusion, then painful resignation in his piercing blue eyes. Did she imagine his strong feelings for her? Maria now feels overwhelming confusion, then rejection and humiliation. For the first time, she realizes that they can never be together. Straightening her dress, she tries to compose herself. An awkward, moment. Both are frightened to acknowledge or even infer that there is something more to their relationship for fear of where it might lead.

Finally, regaining her dignity, again as a member of the flock, Maria says, "Oh, Father Pat...I feel so all alone, I don't know what to do. My mother's is so very sick. She is tormented with visions of the death of her son, her only son...she blames me. She desperately needs help. I am just so tired all the time. I have become afraid to even go to sleep at night for fear she'll attack me...or her young children."

It is the priest talking now, "Well, indeed a difficult...and a lonely decision, lass. You must pray and have faith and you'll receive your answer. But when ya pray...do not forget to move yer feet, lass," he says smiling faintly, "and *never* allow yourself to become a victim...*noli timere,*" Father O'Brien says.

"*noli timere* Father?" Maria says.

"Latin. Be not afraid."

Three months later

A Saturday—it is a sunny, exceptionally hot day. Philadelphia can be unbearably humid in the summer months. The humidity in the flat is enervating—everyone is in a full sweat. The air is still and suffocating. Teresa's condition has deteriorated significantly—she has now lost touch with reality completely. All day, she sits by the window, rocking back and forth—she is skin and bones, looking out the window waiting to glimpse her son, Mikie.

Maria is busily working in the kitchen, placing sandwiches in a picnic basket. The girls are in their swimsuits, cackling about going to the shore for the day.

"Mother, Anthony will be here in just a few minutes to drive us to the shore. Why don't you come with us...it is so unbearably hot in this flat. I don't know how you can stand to be in here," Maria says.

"Mother, please come with us...it'll be fun...a picnic," says Renata.

"Yea, mommy...please come, *please*. It'll be so much cooler at the beach near the water," says Rita. And Marcella, the youngest chimes in, " Oh pleeeeeeze, mommy!"

There is a rap on the door, Anthony lets himself in, " Everybody ready? Aunt Tess?"

Maria picks up the picnic basket, "Com'mon kids, let's go. Mother, please come...it'll be the first family outing we've had in ages. It's such a beautiful day."

"Let's get going, I'm double parked. Are you coming, Aunt Teresa?" Anthony says.

Teresa has now turned around in her chair, and is eyeing the expectant children—she is uncomfortably hot and sweaty from the oppressive heat. She pauses, then stands up, hesitatingly, "It's so *damn* hot in here. Okay...I guess I'll go," Teresa says.

Hearing this, Maria picks up the large heavy folded quilt she had purposely placed there, next to the mattress in the front room and places it under one arm, holding the picnic basket in the other hand.

"Yippee...mommy's coming," Renata and Rita gleefully scream.

This brings a wan smile to Teresa's face.

They all go out the door—the girls run out first, skipping and singing, with Teresa in between Anthony and Maria. She firmly locks the door behind her. The children are singing, " *She'll be coming 'round the mountain when she comes, when she comes, she'll be coming round the mountain.* "

They pile into Anthony's 1929 four-door Ford Model A sedan. Rita and Marcella are in the front seat with Anthony. Teresa in the middle of the rear seat between Maria and Renata—the quilt at Maria's feet. The front door windows are all the way down, the rear windows only half-down. Anthony is driving for about 5 minutes, when he spies a gas station with a pay phone and pulls in. As he gets out, he says over

his shoulder, "I've got to make a quick stop for the little boys room...be right back."

Anthony gets out, goes to the restroom, then to the phone booth. It had been pre-arranged that if they could get Teresa out of the house, he would call Doctor Badgely at Bayberry State Mental Hospital and alert him to prepare for their arrival with Teresa. He makes sure that he is out of sight from the car, and calls the number. He talks animatedly on the phone, then quickly hangs up.

Anthony returns to the driver seat, and without saying a word, quickly drives off. He looks in the rear view mirror, making eye contact with Maria, and nods.

"Can't we roll down these windows back here, it so hot," Teresa says.

"They don't go down any further, they're broken, Aunt Teresa, " Anthony says.

Teresa now senses that something is not quite right. She looks first at the left rear door, then the right, and sees that the window cranks and the door handles on the doors have been removed. Seeing this she begins to get suspicious and agitated.

"Turn around Anthony, I want to go back! I want to go back!" yells Teresa.

"Everything's alright Mother. Just relax...we'll be there in about half an hour," says Maria while stroking her hand.

"Stop the car! Now! Let me out Anthony. Stop the car!" screams Teresa.

Anthony, stoically continues to drive without saying a word.

Teresa leaps for the door over Renata. She screams, as Teresa is on top of her frantically grasping at the removed handles, beating on the door, screaming, "Let me out! Let me out!"

Maria quickly reaches down to floor, and in one motion, unfolds the heavy quilt, and pounces on the back of the outstretched Teresa, throwing the quilt around her. She pulls her off of the screaming Renata, and wraps the heavy quilt around the front of Teresa. Anthony, following all of this in the rear view mirror, pulls over, jumps out and opens the door on Maria's side. He quickly pulls off his belt, and wraps it around Teresa over the quilt. She is still slightly dazed and in shock, as he cinches the belt up tightly—a makeshift straitjacket, immobilizing her arms and dagger-like fingernails.

Teresa, now realizing that the outing is a ruse, is screaming and kicking frantically with Maria laying on top of her, Teresa's body and face pressed against the seat.

"Let me out...*Pleeeeee*! Let me out!" Teresa screams.

Anthony jumps back in the driver's seat and speeds off.

"Mother, calm down...please," pleads Maria trying to stroke her head, "shh...just try to relax...don't fight it. We'll be there soon. Step-on-it, Tony! I don't know how much longer I can hold her."

The next half-hour is an eternity—a living hell. Teresa is madly flailing and screaming the whole time. Maria is in tears. The children are crying hysterically. In the rear-view mirror, sweat is pouring down Anthony's forehead.

"There's the sign to the hospital," yells Anthony.

"Thank God!" says Maria.

Anthony swerves into the driveway at the sign Bayberry Hospital into the long circular drive up to the front entrance. He jumps out and runs inside, returning momentarily with a doctor, a nurse and two orderlies dressed in all-white. The orderlies and the nurse come around to Maria's side of the car and open the rear side door.

Things have calmed down somewhat after the interminable half-hour drive out in the country-side of Philadelphia to the hospital.

Teresa, is now totally spent, sweating profusely from trying to resist, and being wrapped up in the heavy quilt straitjacket in the sweltering heat. Teresa cannot see out the window—she is quietly sobbing now.

Maria, releases her hold on Teresa, as the orderly reaches in and gently helps Teresa on to her feet. Seeing the orderly in all white, she half-heartedly rallies, but she is totally exhausted, her lank hair drenched with sweat, she surrenders—her body goes limp. The orderlies and nurse gently walk her to the front entrance where the doctor is waiting. Maria is walking right behind her with Anthony. The children stay in the car—the only sound is the sniffling girls, crying, in the background.

Doctor Badgely, mid 50-ish Jungian looking, is holding a file in his hand. He calmly assesses the situation, and in a tranquil, reassuring voice, "I'm Doctor Badgely. You must be the eldest daughter, Maria? You have some documents for me?" he says to the orderlies, "Please remove that belt and quilt from Mrs Caravaggio. Now, that must feel better, eh?" consulting a file, "Tess is it? Everything's going to be fine...just try to relax, we're going to take good care of you here."

The belt and quilt removed, the orderlies are now holding Teresa on each side by her arms. She looks so small, so pathetically frail and defeated now—a threat to no one. Maria on the verge of tears, hesitant, registers indecision—she is desperately trying to keep her composure. Wiping her eyes and nose with the back of her trembling hand, with her other hand, Maria produces a thick stack of documents from her purse.

"Doctor Badgely, the papers, that you required. The finding by the judge, that my mother's mentally incompetent with a strong likelihood for violence, and poses a danger to her children and herself to do grave bodily harm," Maria says in a quivering voice.

"If you have any questions, you can contact our attorney, Mr Nicholas Lauria," she says handing papers to Doctor Badgely.

Quickly reviewing the documents, "Yes, everything appears to be in order. Now it would probably be best for your mother for you to say goodbye for now. You'll be able to visit her as often as you like."

Maria, now bending down in front of Teresa, puts her face close to her mother's to give her a goodbye kiss, tears streaming down her face, "Mother...I'm so sorry. I..."

Teresa, somehow manages to free her right arm from the grasp of an orderly, and slaps Maria, very hard, across the face, and says with bone-chilling slowness to Maria, "I *never*...want to see you *again*. *Ever!*"

"Oh Mommy...please, I had no choice, I...I..." says Maria, overcome with emotion.

Teresa, is now staring through Maria, totally impassive. Maria buries her face in Anthony's chest, and sobs uncontrollably, as the orderlies and nurse slowly walk Teresa Caravaggio into the entrance of the hospital, for the last time where she will live out the rest of her tormented 52 years, warehoused until her death at the age of 97.

Christmas Eve - A Catholic Hospital in Philadelphia

Maria's in a ward with two other recovering new mothers. After a very difficult three day delivery ordeal, she has just given birth to her second child. She is exhausted. Her hair is drenched in perspiration, her color ashen from loss of blood. She is sitting upright in the bed, waiting expectantly to see her newborn son.

The maternity nurse, Sister Mary, a Catholic Nun in a white habit enters carrying a bundled up baby. The maternity nurse blithely places the infant in Maria's outstretched arms, in bed.

"Maria, here's your baby boy. He's a long one. Doctor Swanson will be in soon," says Sister Mary.

Maria, beaming with joy, smiles and unsuspectingly folds back the swaddling clothes to reveal her son's face. Shock and horror—one eye is bulging out its socket—the other completely swollen shut, with the angry red imprint of a forcep going across his left eye, imbedded in his nose and forehead. The baby's breathing is very labored. He is whimpering like a sick puppy.

"Oh my God! My baby's eye...is it? Doctor! Doctor!" Maria screams.

Hearing the screams, Doctor Swanson, runs through the doorway. Seeing Maria with the baby in her arms, yells, "Nurse, this baby is supposed to be in the incubator! I left instructions *not* to show the baby to Mrs Kozlov, before I talked to her," then to Maria, "Mrs Kozlov, please calm down, the baby has a few problems...it was a very difficult delivery, let me..."

"A few problems...*what* kind of problems!" Maria shrieks.

"Your O-B was not available when the labor started, so the on-call doctor had to deliver him. We were very busy with 4 deliveries going on at one time. He said he had to resort to forceps to get him out," says Doctor Swanson.

"Oh Doctor...his eye...is it?" says Maria her lips trembling.

"We'll have to monitor that eye, closely. Frankly, I don't like the look of it. I think we can save it...there is one other thing Mrs Kozlov, your son was born with some sort of thick mucous in his lungs. Very unusual...we're going to have to take him from you now and put him in an incubator," he says feeling the baby's forehead "Nurse, he's burning up with fever. Please take the baby from Mrs Kozlov, and put him in the incubator...*now!*"

The maternity nurse reaches for the baby, but Maria refuses to give him up, studying her baby's face she is crying hysterically, worried that if he is taken away, she'll never see him again. Doctor Swanson intervenes, with a comforting, kind voice, "Let me have the baby. He'll be okay. Please Mrs Kozlov...it's for the baby's welfare. We *must* place him in the incubator...as soon as possible."

Maria reluctantly releases the baby, and watches as Doctor Swanson scurries out of the room with the baby. The maternity nurse, Sister Mary, hesitates, "I'm so sorry. No one told me about the incu..." She leans over Maria, grabs her hand and places a Rosary in it, and quickly exits the room, leaving Maria crying, and alone.

About 10 minutes later, Nikolai Kozlov, the father, walks through the door, smiling. Seeing Maria's emotional state, he rushes up to her, "Pia, are you alright, dear? What's going on here? How's the baby?" Nikolai says taking her hand while holding their 5 year old daughter Nancy, with the other arm.

"Oh, mommy what's my little brother's name? Where is he? Can I play with him now...huh?" cries Nancy.

Maria, still in considerable pain and emotionally wrung out, smiles wanly, "Soon...I hope dear. I think we'll name him, Michaelangelo."

"That's a funny name. Mic...Mica...I can't even say it. Why'd ja name him dat, mommy?" says Nancy.

"He'll be named after my dear brother Michaelangelo, your uncle. You can call him Mikie," Maria patiently says.

"Mommy I didn't know you have a brother. So I have an uncle?" says Nancy

"No dear, your Uncle is not alive. He was tragically killed at age twelve...on Christmas Eve...in an accident," Maria says.

"Oh..." says Nancy, her brow momentarily registering consternation, then almost instantaneously back to her normal, happy five-year-old expression of innocence.

"Oh Nicky, baby Michaelangelo...his left eye. They don't know if they can save it...and he's having problems breathing with a very high

fever. They took him away from me. They *took my baby...away!*" Maria says sobbing.

"Now, now Pia, I'm sure..." Nicky starts to say.

"Nicky, I hope you don't mind me naming him after my brother. He has exactly the same coloring, blonde hair, blue eyes. Long and skinny, he is the reincarnation of my brother Michaelangelo...and it's Christmas Eve," says Maria.

"If that will make you happy, Pia. That's an okay first name...after all, I guess he is half-wop," says Nicky.

Two hours later in the darkened maternity ward, after Doctor Swanson has given Maria a mild sedative to help her sleep to rejuvenate her body ravaged by the difficult delivery and the revelations about the baby's ill-health, she's slipped into a restless, fitful sleep.

Images of her mother Teresa looking into the camera, smiling, in happier times before the Great Crash, holding, a smiling, always happy Mikie as an infant.

Maria and Michaelangelo, laughing together, even in the face of all the adversity they had faced together trying to keep the family together. The awesome responsibility that had befallen them to care for their siblings and their mother, who had become totally dysfunctional as a parent after the desertion by their father.

How close they had become. Michaelangelo, irrepressible, always smiling, even in the face of terrible adversity. And when Maria was exhausted, and didn't think she could go on, for another day...or an even another hour, he'd crack a joke, and make her laugh. That beautiful impish smile, that could light up a room, and it would be enough to keep her going.

Maria, running down several flights of stairs to the street below, yelling, "I'm coming Mikie! Hold on!" Then finding him laying in the cold wet snow under the truck. Holding her dear sweet brother Michaelangelo in her arms as he lay dying, "I'm so cold Pia...please hold me..."

The images of her dying brother abruptly awaken her, "Don't go Mikie...don't leave me! Without you...I don't want to go on."

She is now wide awake, sitting upright in the hospital bed, drenched in perspiration.

"I can't lose him...again," Maria cries.

Maria is clutching the Rosary given to her by Sister Mary, "Oh God, I can't do this alone. I'll do anything you ask, just tell me what to do to save him."

Then the echoes of Father O'Brien, years earlier, "*Noli timere.*"

"Yes, Father. *Noli timere...be not afraid,*" Maria whispers making the sign of the cross.

April 1945:

Michaelangelo is back in the hospital, one of countless times that Maria has kept an all night vigil over her gravely ill son. Miraculously, his eye has been spared—his face is almost back to normal. Maria is physically and emotionally drained, working all day and staying at the hospital every night, she is monitoring his most recent crisis. It is always the same. The frantic wheezing—struggling for every breath as if it were his last. Sitting in a chair beside the hospital bed, about 2 AM, she has dozed off.

A hospital orderly Ella, a large matronly black woman with a kind face, enters the room emptying trash baskets—she is crying. The clanging and rustling sounds and Ella's sobbing awaken Maria.

"What's wrong Ella? Why are you crying?" says a drowsy Maria.

"Oh...I'm so sorry I woke you...hope I didn't wake the baby. Didn't you hear? FDR died tonight," says Ella between sobs, "He was such a great man...he cared for all of us...I feel like my own father just died."

With tears in her eyes, "Oh God, I loved him *more* than my own father...his kindness and empathy for us little folk. That WPA job kept me and my family alive," Maria says. The room is perfectly quiet, except for the sound of them both quietly sobbing, when Maria suddenly realizes—no wheezing sound. Michaelangelo is not breathing! She screams, "Ella, get the Doctor! Quick! He's stopped breathing!"

Ella runs from the room, screaming, "Doctor! Nurse, come quick...hurry!"

The doctor and nurse run into the room. Michaelangelo's face and tiny body are a dark gray, the color of death. Doctor Johnson rolls him over on his stomach and starts slapping on his back. A big green glob of mucous squirts out of his mouth—he is breathing again. His fragile little body heaving for air.

"Nurse, he's burning up with fever...we've got to get this fever down. Throw some ice in a basin with cold water...*now!*" Doctor Johnson screams.

Doctor Johnson scoops up Michaelangelo, running down the hall, with Maria trailing right behind him. The nurse is standing next to a large stainless steel basin, full of cold water and ice. He quickly, yet gently submerges his skinny little body. As he is screaming from shock

of the freezing temperature of the water, his lungs begin to clear, spewing enormous amounts of yellow and green mucous.

"Oh Doctor, what's going on? Is he okay? *Is he going to be alright?*" Maria pleads.

"We got to him just in time, but if we don't get his fever down, but quick, he could sustain brain damage," Doctor Johnson says above the screaming, shivering Michaelangelo, now turning blue from the icy water. After about five minutes, Doctor Johnson, removes him from the basin, handing him to the nurse, "Please dry him off...put him in some clean pajamas and put him back in his bed. And stay with him, until I or Mrs Kozlov return."

"Oh, Doctor, what's wrong with my baby? How much more can his frail little body take?" Maria cries.

"Mrs Kozlov, sadly, I've seen cases *like* this before...while doing pathology autopsies on young children...1938, Med School at Columbia," Doctor Johnson says with an alarming air of gravity, "Doctor Anderson, Director of Research there, dubbed this horrible disease, Cystic Fibrosis. "

"Autopsies? But Doctor...isn't there a cure?" Maria pleads.

"I'm so sorry, Mrs Kozlov. If it is CF, there is no known cure. We don't even have reliable diagnostic tests. About 1 in 200 white babies are born with it," he says.

"Nothing can be done? How...how long...would he have Doctor?"

"I am going to be honest with you...so you can prepare yourself for the possibility of... The life expectancy varies. Maybe, ten years. Most die before they reach five. We can't even be sure if your baby has it, but one thing *is* for sure. Get him to a warm dry climate, like California. He won't survive another winter here. I'm so sorry," Doctor Johnson says, then gently patting her on the shoulder, he turns and dejectedly walks away.

Maria returns to the bedside of her son. The nurse gives her a faint, forced smile of encouragement that they are taught in nursing school, and leaves. From the exhaustion of the near death episode, he has lapsed into a fitful sleep. He is now breathing on his own, but still wheezing and fighting for each breath, his lungs still filled with mucous. She reaches into her purse beside the bed, and pulls out the Rosary, given to her by the Nun, Sister Mary at his delivery. She grasps his skinny little hand, and wraps the beads of the Rosary around the long fingers and says a complete Rosary, "I won't let you die...not this time...my little man," all the while stroking his feverish forehead, *And when you pray, don't forget to move your feet, lassy.*

- Chapter 6 -

1955 - The San Fernando Valley - near Los Angeles, California

In 1946, to prolong Michaelangelo's life, the family moves to the temperate climate of Southern California.

Maria, young Michaelangelo, now almost 12, and daughter Nancy, now 17, are living in a run-down rented house in a lower middle class neighborhood. The father, Nikolai, has left the family about 2 years prior, being chased by his emotional demons compounded by his alcoholism, he has returned to Philadelphia.

Maria works two jobs, a clerk in a Hobby Shop, and a sales girl at J.C. Penny—both at minimum wage. Life is hard, but they are making it—barely. In between jobs, in the evenings and weekends, she paints commission portraits, for not much money, but it helps to satisfy her creative compulsion to make art.

Nancy, now in high school, is tall, and starting to develop into a beautiful young lady, with the dark dancing eyes and coloring of Gina Lollobrigida the sensual Italian actress. Michaelangelo, now entering puberty, has grown very tall, and very skinny. With blond hair and blue eyes, physically and in temperament, he is the incarnate of Maria's deceased brother, his namesake. Through lots of exercise, fresh air and sunshine of the temperate California climate he has "outgrown" his condition. He is relatively asymptomatic.

Since birth, mother and son have forged a very special bond. Michaelangelo's now about the same age of her brother when he was tragically killed. Maria has proactively treated his respiratory maladies, using intuitive, unorthodox methods all through his childhood. She fashions a rawhide necklace with a small sack of ground up Eucalyptus leaves and oil, which she makes him wear around his neck. He smells like a cough drop and is teased mercilessly by his contemporaries. But he is able to diffuse the taunting and disarm his antagonists with his quick witted sense of humor and good-natured but barbed retaliation—always with that 1000 watt smile.

On a Friday night Maria, Mikie and Nancy are sitting at the dining room table, just finishing up dinner. It has become the family Friday night ritual for Maria to make a big Italian dinner, pasta, fresh baked rosemary bread, complete with candlelight, and wine. In the background, opera is playing on the record player, an aria from Puccini's tragic tale of an oppressed artist, Tosca. In the opera, Floria Tosca is singing the classic aria, *Vissi d'arte, I Lived for My Art*, now

accompanied by Maria Caravaggio while sitting at the table, the candlelight flickering in her sad, luminous eyes...

Vissi d'arte, vissi d'amore,
I lived for my art, I lived for love

non feci mai male ad anima viva!
I never did harm to a living soul!

While singing Maria gets up from the table, walks over to the record player, and abruptly lifts up the turn table arm, turns and gazes pensively at the children.

Finally, she says, "Kids...there's something we need to talk about. Your father has been writing me long, emotional letters for the past six months...he wants to come back home. He insists that he's okay now, that he's worked through his problems, that he has stopped drinking and womanizing...and that he misses me and you kids terribly. He's very lonely...he says he's driving out to California, regardless. He'll be here probably by tomorrow afternoon."

Nancy says, "Mother...do you *really* think he's changed? I love daddy and I miss him, but I don't know *if* I can be around that sullen, negative attitude. He's so off and on...especially when he drinks. I don't know, mom."

Upon hearing the news of the possibility of his father's return, Mikie's face darkens, "This is starting to look like a 'B' as in Bad, movie that just keeps playing over and over. Leaves...comes back...leaves...comes back. We're managing okay without him. It ain't paradise, but I don't know if I could deal with that abuse again. Yea, I know he had it tough as a kid, growing up in a Catholic orphanage and all. But...if you do take him back...if he comes after me again after few shots of vodka, I'll just take so much of his bullshit."

Nancy chimes in, "Mom, you've worked so hard to make this place so homey and comfy, fixed it up out of almost nothing, used furniture...and your beautiful paintings. For the first time in my life, I don't have a knot in my stomach, when I come home from school."

Maria says, "Well, kids, I feel the same way. I'm very torn...I guess I still love your father, that's why we're having this family discussion. I just don't know what to do. But, I do know this. How much longer I can work two jobs at minimum wage...I just don't know. Sometimes, I'm so exhausted, I can barely get out of bed in the morning. At least your father...when he's working can contribute some income, but..."

Mikie interrupts her, "Top ten...Fugitive Father of Year the last two years, running. Okay mom, I know it sounds horrible, but if he can contribute a paycheck it might give you a chance to catch your breath a little, maybe even start painting seriously again," he says with that big

smile. "I say, give him one last chance. If the Prince of Darkness doesn't get it, he's outta here. And if he even lays a drunken finger on you again, I'm only a little skinny kid...but he's gotta sleep sometime...and I gotta a big Louisville slugger to help remind him."

"Mom, you just look so tired all the time. Okay, mom...one last chance. We love you mommy," Nancy says tearing up.

Maria reaches out with both her arms and draws her children toward her, with tears in her eyes, she gives them a big hug and a kiss on their foreheads, "Thank God for you kids...I don't know what I'd do without you," Maria says burying her face between her beloved's heads.

Nikolai Romanovich Kozlov was a classically trained, good but not great violinist. They had met at a Federal Art Project which was the Humanities and Arts arm of the Great Depression-era New Deal Works Progress Administration. It operated from August of 1935, until June of 1943 to provide employment for qualified artists, musicians, actors, and authors on local relief rolls. Reputed to have created more than 200,000 separate works, artists-created posters, murals and paintings. Some works still stand among the most-significant pieces of public art in the country. Maria and her family lived off her wage working as an artist—she became a very accomplished painter, mostly painting large complex murals depicting the plight of the working class, often with fifteen or twenty life-size images of toiling men and women.

She was smitten by Nicky's considerable charm, charisma...and his seductive violin playing. He was insufferably arrogant—a shameless poser who promoted himself as a Russian Prince with Royal Blood. He declared himself a third cousin removed of Nicholas Romanov The Second, who had been the Tzar of Russia, until ignominiously dethroned by the Russian Revolutionaries. In 1918, he and his entire family were executed—unceremoniously in a dank basement by the Bolsheviks, their bodies then destroyed by fire, the ashes buried.

Maria and Nicky were married in early 1938. When the children were growing up, they were constantly exposed to classical music and the arts. Maria stayed home to raise the children, and pursued her art, while Nicky the father pursued his "career" in music, and women in equal measure, performing as a member of the local symphony, playing second violin while incessantly fiddling around with its female members.

Most nights he was gone until late "rehearsing". With the temperament, and libertine morals of the infamous 19th century violinist Niccolo Paganini, his melancholic dark Slavic charm and tall, brooding good looks, was found very attractive by women. He was the Ruskie edition of Maria's own father who instead of Chianti, drank copious amounts of straight vodka. A "mean-drunk", after three or four shots, he would often mete out emotional and physical abuse to his family. It is a well-recognized psycho-sociological phenomenon that children often

end up marrying a facsimile of their parent, including personality and temperament, despite the abuse and often, the alcoholism they were subjected to. And like Maria's father he was an unrepentant and unabashed womanizer, often in front of Maria and the children. With his various jobs as a musician, they made enough to get by...just barely. Every month it was a struggle to pay the rent and put enough food on the table.

When the family relocated to Southern California because of Miki's poor health, the entertainment business in Hollywood was flourishing and there were many open positions for mega-studio orchestra musicians for film scores. The money was better, and work more plentiful.

With Nicky's exposure to the new-found '*la dolce vita*' in Hollywood, he was gone most nights, again "rehearsing". By the time she finally realized her mistake, and that Nicky was never going to change, she had two children, and as a devout Roman Catholic could never be granted a divorce. Coupled with the fact that she still deeply loved the charming and handsome Ruskie reprobate. Like most post-war women, she had few options to leave the marriage and support herself and her children. So she stuck it out, all the while honing her skill as an artist, eventually developing a non-intimidating method of teaching oil painting which would later propel her to international fame as teacher of painting on Public Television, "Paint Along with Pia."

Nicky would often be gone for several days at a time for out-of-town "location work". But like a bad dream, he always came back. When confronted by Maria about his obvious dalliances, he was always dismissive and accused Maria of being an overly possessive, jealous '*wop*'. He would then play the victim, act offended until she would threaten to throw him out of the house, in a rage sometimes piling his beautiful Italian suits and shoes in a heap by the living room door. The arguments were often, loud and violent. But Nicky, in his own self-centered way loved Maria and the children. Wanting to keep his family and home, he would always try to charm his way out of it—act contrite and promise to reform his behavior. They would go to bed and make up. And all would be okay for month or two, until the next volcanic eruption.

Saturday afternoon

An old beat-up Dodge sedan with Pennsylvania plates, freckled with red rust from years of road salt, pulls into the driveway. Nancy is washing dishes at the sink, looking out the window, when she sees her father pull up in the driveway.

"Mom, Daddy's here!" yells Nancy.

Nikolai Kozlov gets out of the car, unfolding his tall frame. As he begins to stretch his arms outward, the front door opens and Maria,

Mikie and Nancy, come out to greet him. Nicky smiles, and walks over to them, and throws his arms around Maria. He gives her a kiss, and a hug. Maria tentatively reciprocates.

"Hi Pia...put on some weight, unh? Hi kids, didya miss your daddy?" he says.

"Welcome...home Nicky," Maria says tentatively.

Nikolai then gives his daughter and his son, awkward hugs.

"How was the trip, Dad?" Mikie says.

"Geez...getta loada dem ears on dat kid, looks like Mickey Mouse...an' wit dem blue eyes and blond mop, you sure he's my kid, Pia? Yea...the drive was real long, especially in this slow old beater, about a week of driving. I'll get a newer one first thing...maybe a Caddy, something more suitable for a Prince," says Nicky without a trace of irony.

"Come on inside, we can get your things later," says Maria.

"Sure...here Mickey Mouse, catch," Nicky says tossing his toiletry case at the now Mickey. Nikolai and Maria walk through the front door into the living room, with Nancy and Mikie behind. From then on his father will call him Mickey Mouse, the Mickey which will stick with rest of the family replacing Mikie...for the rest of his life.

The living room is nicely decorated with used furniture that Maria has refinished, paintings she has done, and curtains she has made. Through her ability to make something beautiful from almost nothing, the home is comfortable and elegant for her and the children. She has placed fresh cut flowers in a vase, in anticipation of his arrival. The now, Mickey is now standing next to his mother.

Nikolai walks into the room, looking around contemptuously, at the furniture and the curtains. He then walks up to one of Maria's paintings and eying it critically, with a smug expression, he shakes his head side to side "I see your paintin' hasn't improved since I've been gone," then waving his hand in the general direction of the furniture, "Where did ya find all this junk? "

Mick drops the toiletry case. Maria grabs her son's hand, as her knees buckle momentarily. Mick and his mother exchange glances, he is the same arrogant, egomaniac. *Bastardo!* Muttered Maria just loud enough for Mick to hear. But it is too late now to reconsider. Maria must bide her time. Her son Michaelangelo just hangs his head, downcast. *Shit! It's already started.*

"I'm hungry...whatta ya got to eat? Got any vodka in the house?"

- Chapter 7 -

Summer 1964—Burbank, California

Maria and Mick are busily moving furniture and placing plastic over the carpet of their modest apartment. Setting up 4 folding easels and stools, Mick now about 6'6" is still very skinny.

"That ought ta do it, Mick...I think we can squeeze 4 students in here today," says Maria

"Yea...if you stand outside and yell through the open window over the traffic noise. You'll have to coordinate your lecture with the red light at the corner or the primal Picassos won't hear a word," says Mick

"Hmm...color coordinated lessons. I like it. Thanks for helping Mickey. Oh...this just came in the mail today for you," says Maria handing the envelope to Mick, who opens and reads it.

"Well, how about that," says Mick smiling broadly.

"What is it? Is it anything serious? You didn't get drafted, did you?" Maria says.

"It's from the head coach, at the University of California, at Berkeley. It's an offer for a full basketball scholarship. I can't believe it, but there's an if...a very big *if*...I can gain enough weight by the time the semester starts. Well I know what I'm going to be doing this summer...pumping iron, and eating like a fat boy. They also want physical exam to make sure I'm not damaged goods, I'd better get in to see Doctor Dave."

"Oh, Mickey, congratulations! How wonderful! I'm so happy and proud of you. Maybe you can write you father with the good news, I'm sure he'll be proud of you too," says Maria.

"Yea...he'd never admit it, but I guess in his own way...too bad isn't it. A guy with his talent and potential. He just could never make the right moves on the board," say Mick.

"Your poor father...so self-destructive. I'm so sorry you kids had to live under that dark cloud. You're *so* different from him, you can do anything you set your mind to," says Maria.

"Ya know, my high school coach, took me aside at the end of the season and said, *Kozlov, gain some weight...and the only thing that's missing in your game is a belief in yourself, you can be as good as you'll let yourself be.* Now that I've got a shot at a Division One University...I gotta admit, I'm a little intimidated by it. All those years of abuse...belittling us, you, me and Sis. My fate...to fail? Like I inherited a loser gene from the ol' man," Mick says.

"Oh Mickey, sometimes I wonder if I did the right thing, taking him back. I used to lay awake nights agonizing over it...what it did to you kids, I'm so sorry," Maria says choking up.

Mick walks over to his mom and gives her a big hug.

"Hey mom...don't you ever even think that. We had our backs to the wall. We had no options...survival remember? I was the one who told you to give him a chance," says Mick trying to console his mother.

"Okay, son. Since you're going away, maybe we should talk about the painting classes. Can't use the apartment anymore...too crowded, and I'm getting more students, every week. It's kinda fascinating...almost everyone interested in learning to paint, feels so intimidated by the process...by the art elite. You don't have to cut off your left ear to learn to paint. It should be fun and accessible to *everyone*, and that's what I intend to do...to share the joy of the creative experience with everyone and anyone. It's what has kept me going all these years. Mickey, what do think about renting a space to start a painting school, you know, sort of Sunday painters' classes. Fun, but without the academic orthodoxy?" says Maria.

"Hmm...Sunday Painters. I like it...I think the business could take off, and I like the idea. Democratize the process...give 'em a taste, and let them take it from there. But just remember that your talent and experience has value. People won't pay for the appetizer, if they can get it for free.

I've watched you teach for years, mom. You have a gift of simplifying, but most of all communicating it in a fun, non-intimidating way. If we can find a place early this summer, maybe we can put it all together before I have to leave in September. I say let's go for it, mom," says Mick

"Great. We'll start looking this week," says Maria.

"Okay mom, tomorrow afternoon, after I get in to see Doctor Dave for the physical for UCB," Mick says.

A Doctor's examining room

Mick is sitting on an examining table, leafing through a Sports Illustrated Magazine, the swimsuit edition, smiling when Doctor David Gardner walks in the room wearing a white coat and usual medical regalia. Doctor Gardner is an upbeat, 40-ish ex-jock.

"Hey Mick, how ya doin? Congratulations on your season. I saw a few of the games. You guys had a killer team," says Doc Gardner

"Thanks, Doc. Yeah...we did okay, won league and almost won the Regional CIF Championship," says Mick

"So...where are ya goin' to go to college?" Doc says.

"Well Doc, I just got a recruitment letter from UC Berkeley. They've offered me a full ride...if, I can put on about 20 lbs. to bang the

boards with the big boys...and they need an okay from you. Can I pull it off in 3 months?" says Mick.

"20 pounds? Honestly, Mick? 10 good pounds...maybe," Doc says.

"Doc, I eat like a piranha, but I am *so* damn tired of being skinny...the catcalls from the stands, the tired old Ichabod Crane jokes," says Mick.

Doctor Gardner smiles, "Mick...stick out your tongue, and say ahhh," Doc says inserting a tongue depressor.

"Sure Doc...my impression of a human zipper...ahhh...ahhh..." Mick says standing up sticking his tongue way out, arms at his sides.

"Okay...okay, you got me on that one," says the grinning Doc.

"Mick, there is one thing we *could* try, some geriatric anabolic steroids," Doc says.

"Anything Doc...I'm desperate."

"Okay. Mostly for old folks, who can't retain muscle mass. Here's the deal. I've heard that the Russian Olympic athletes have been popping these little white pills, Dianabol...huge muscle mass and strength gains off the charts," Doc says while stethoscoping Mick.

"You've definitely got my attention...tell me more," says Mick.

"*But*...there are two known immediate side effects. One, *extremely* aggressive, sometimes antisocial behavior...and two, spontaneous copious nose bleeds," Doc says.

"Not surprised...antisocial behavior...bloody noses, one usually follows the other," says Mick.

"And frankly, because these anabolic steroids are relatively new, we don't know much about the long term possible deleterious health consequences, if any. Harmful side effects often don't reveal themselves, sometimes for years, or even decades...so I'd advise you to go slow. If you start experiencing nasty side effects, back off...okay?" Doc says.

"Hey, Doc...that's it? Just a little white pill? So I grow a monobrow. I'm desperate...no gain, lotsa pain. No scholarship to UCB...no basketball and no school of architecture," says Mick.

"Okay then, here's a prescription. I'll get a letter out that you're good to go. Refills...give me a call. Good luck, Mick," says Doc handing him the prescription.

"Hey, thanks, Doc...really appreciate it. Hopefully, my new moniker, Mick the Mauler," say Mick shaking hands with the Doc.

Later that day

Mick is driving the older family used car. Maria has the classified newspaper rentals on her lap.

"Well, Mom...so far we're oh-for-four...you want to keep looking some more today?" Mick says.

"Every time I tell them that I'm divorced...*sorry, no husband, no lease*. Let's call it a day. I'll cook you a nice pasta dinner," Maria says.

"Sounds good to me. Starting today, I am the galloping gourmand," Mick says.

As the car rounds the corner about two blocks from the apartment across the street from Saint Ignatius Catholic Church, Maria screams, "Stop! Mick stop the car!"

Mick slams on the brakes.

"What?!" Mick says.

"Did you see that "For Rent" sign in the window back there?" Maria says.

"*Jezzuz*, mother, you scared the hell out of me. I thought we ran over a flock of Nuns," Mick says.

"Back up...quick!" Maria yells.

Mick, shaking his head, smiling, backs up to the front of a commercial building with four offices with large picture windows in each. Before the car stops moving, Maria jumps out and runs to the unit, peering into the front picture window. Mick joins her at the window.

"It's perfect! Plenty of room...good light, and just a short walk from the apartment. Let's go talk to someone," says Maria.

"Yep...and conveniently right across the street from Saint Obnoxious," says Mick nodding toward the Catholic Church.

Maria and Mick enter the office with "Fogerty Real Estate" painted on the window.

Mavis Beatrice McCoy, 40-ish, with big beehive hair, and movie make-up is sitting at a desk—day-glo pink lipstick about a half-inch above where her lips used to be, with permanently surprised penciled arched eyebrows. She's touching up her long fingernails with bright red polish, totally oblivious to Mick and Maria. The second, make that the first thing a healthy 18 year old male with a fertile female fantasy quotient notices, is the considerable cleavage. They are definitely the 'real McCoy'. Once drop-dead gorgeous, she's "still got game". With a cigarette dangling from her lips, eyes squinting from the wafting smoke, she's blithely singing along with a Hank Williams country music ballad, playing loudly on the radio:

*Your cheatin heart, will tell on you-ah-ooooo...
When tears come doooooown, Like falling rain...*

A desk nameplate reads "May Bea McCoy", then in smaller letters underneath..."May Bea Not, Buster."

"Excuse me...*excuse me!*" Maria yells over the music.

Mavis looks up. She's startled to see Mick's looming tall frame. She scans him up and down, then turns down the radio. "What kin I do fer ya? My yer a big-en. You're going to be quite a man...if in y'ever grow into dem feet," says Mavis looking up at Mick, smiling warmly.

"Well, May...you know what they say about men with big feet don't ya? Maybe...maybe not, only one way to find out," Mick says.

"Ah...*excuse me*. I'd like to talk to someone about the office rental," says Maria.

"Sure, honey," says May Bea smiling mischievously at Mick looking him up and down. Then looking over to Maria, "and just who shall I say isuh, callin'? " She asks.

"Maria Kozlov...and this is my son Mick," Maria says very business-like.

"Pleased to make yer 'quantence, Mick...and Maria," says May Bea.

May Bea struggles up, wearing a skirt maybe ten years too tight, and spike-heels her way with a nice side to side saunter to an office in the back, returning with the landlord. Ed Fogerty, is middle-aged round, very short, with a W.C. Fields whiskey nose and a body to match, preceded by a cloud of smoke from a huge stogy grafted to sausage turquoise-ringed fingers. Wearing some kind of reptile skin boots with two inch heels, a country and western shirt with opalescent snaps just about ready to blow out at the waistline, and a turquoise boulder bolotie. He looks like a walking 50s Sears and Roebuck catalog...for dwarfs. All this stacked under a comically out-of-scale ten gallon Stetson.

"Ed, this here's uh...Maria...Ko...uh Koz...and this here long drinka water is her son Mick," she says.

"*Missus*...Maria Kozlov," says Maria.

Ed Fogerty shakes Maria's hand, then Mick steps up to him, dwarfing him, engulfs his hand with his huge mitt. Fogerty, immediately uncomfortable with the size disparity retreats.

"Uh...so, yer interested in the rental? What do you want to use it for? Ya know, we're pret-ty part-icaler around here," warns Ed Fogerty.

Mick, looking around at the very pedestrian decor, spies on the wall, a cheaply framed Remington print, a landscape of a hunched cowboy on horseback somewhere in the plains. Trying to make small talk...cowboy to cowboy, "I can sure see that...you have a Remington," Mick says.

"Yeap...keep it in the back Loaded and cocked...just in case. Never know when them *damn* Commies are going to try invade the good ol' U. S. of A," says Ed Fogerty.

As Mick starts to respond, Maria jabs him in the ribs with her elbow.

"Uh...Mr Fogerty, I'm an artist and a teacher. I'm looking for a place to teach students how to paint and..." starts Maria.

Ed Fogerty interrupts, "*No* goddam Beatnik Commies...with them beards, hanging around here. No siree."

"No. No...all my students are very established members of the community, like the wife of the Mayor of Burbank and the wife of Congressman Robert Resnick," says Maria.

"Hmm...so, where does your husband work?" says Ed Fogerty

"Uh...he's on the road most of time. I doubt that you'll *ever* see him," Maria says.

"Well, I don't know..." he says hesitatingly "But what's he do?" Ed Fogerty asks.

"Vanish...uh...Vanishing Man, a very uh...*manly* magazine, you would of course know what I mean, about the rugged Western-John-Wayne types...sadly, a disappearing breed of man... in the ol' U S of A. He's the CEO, I'm sure you've heard of it," says Mick.

"Uh...well of course. Yeah I've...heard of it," says a bemused Ed, mustering his most manly voice.

"Hmm...well, Okay. First and last, security deposit...let's see, \$650, up front. Fill out the lease...you and your husband sign it, along with a check, and you can move in," he says.

"Thanks. I'll have everything back to you in about a week...my husband's...*away*," says Maria.

They leave the office and get into the car.

"Well, congratulations, mom, looks like you've got yourself a studio!" Mick says as May Bea removes the "For Rent" sign from the window of the unit.

"Thanks...one minor detail. I haven't a clue how we're going to come up with the \$650. CEO of Vanishing Man?" Maria say with a giggle.

"Yep, Chief *Escape* Officer," Mick says with that same impish grin of her dearly departed brother, Mikie, as he starts the car and pulls away from the curb.

That same evening, Maria and Mick are sitting at the candlelit dinning room table. Opera music is playing softly in the background. Mick pours some Chianti into the glasses.

"Mom...a toast," he raises his glass, "to life...no insurance...so always eat dessert first," Mick says. Maria and Mick raise their glasses to toast.

"Mickey...that's it!" Maria screams as she slams her glass down, jumps up and runs to the credenza in the dining room, wildly pulling drawers open, throwing papers into the air. Mick is incredulous.

"Mom...have you lost it?! Have you been like secretly stashing desserts?" Mick says. Finally, she finds a large brown accordion envelope—opening it, she sits down at the table.

"Yes...here it is, a life insurance policy. Remember when I won first prize for the Toastmistress National Speech Contest? I had a choice of a European cruise...or a life insurance policy. I got it for you kids, in case anything happened to me...with your father," she's reading out loud now "Death Benefit \$1000...Okay...okay, surrender cash value...\$850.

But I'm so torn. Should I cash it in? I was saving it for you kids," Maria says.

"Well, that cruise would've done you a whole lot more good getting away from the Prince of Darkness...one way. Mom, the best thing you can do for your kids is for you to be happy and independent, doing what you love. *Of course*, you should cash it in," Mick says.

Maria picks up the lease from the dining room table and signs it. "Okay then...it's settled. Now, I've just got to cash it in...probably take about a week or so to get the money. By the way, Mickey, sign your fathers name, 'Nikolai Kozlov', right under my signature on the lease," says Maria.

"So...you want the Prince's autograph? Ironic...impersonating a person, who is impersonating...a person. Okay," with great flourish and fanfare, he signs the lease mimicking his father's glowering expression. "This is probably the nicest thing he *never* did for you," Mick says.

"Not a bad impression of the Prince, except the expression needs a little work...not quite dark enough," Maria says.

"Now how about some pasta. All this 'creative financin' sure makes a Manly Man hungry," Mick says.

"Yep...pasta power...comin' right up. It's going to take a ton of work to get that place ready. We've only got a month and about three hundred bucks. Unfortunately son, The Sunday Painter's School will have to defer your compensation. Can we pull if off?" Maria says.

"Sure...count on it mom. As long as my compensation package includes all the pasta and meatballs I can eat. By the way, we'll have to work around my afternoon weight room workouts...and my painting and sculpture classes at UCLA Extension, two nights a week," says Mick, again with the same can-do irrepressibility of Maria's brother Mikie.

While Maria is in the kitchen, furiously whipping up a big pot of pasta, Mick opens a pill bottle labeled Dianabol and shakes out one small white pill, hesitates, then another, and downs them both with wine.

About two weeks later

Mick is working out with weights, doing bench presses. He is experiencing incredible gains in strength in just one week. Bill, a very muscular friend, working out with him, is spotting him.

"Jeez man, what the hell's got into you all of sudden, you're lifting a 75 pounds more than your best," says Bill.

"One more rep!" he grimaces, as he places the bar on the bench press rack. "I've got just 10 weeks to get strong enough to bang wit da big boys," Mick says, panting heavily.

Suddenly, Mick's nose explodes—blood gushing out all over his shirt. He grabs a towel to his nose to stem the bleeding.

"Hey Koz, that's like the third bloody nose you've had this week. What's going on, man?" Bill says.

"I told you, man...mind your own *goddamn* business. I know what I'm doing!"

Mick jumps up and storms out of the gym to the shower area.

His nosebleed finally abated, he takes a long hot shower for 15 minutes. As he is drying off, with just a towel wrapped around his waist...he's standing in front of the mirror, posing and flexing his newly developed arm and chest muscles, smiling admiringly, *Yeah baby...hide the women and children. Mick the Mauler is in town.*

Mick and Maria now undertake the project of remodeling the office space to teaching studio:

— *Mick - painting, wiping his brow, he gets paint all over his face. Maria, also painting, laughing at Mick. Mick, laughing, dabs Maria's nose with the paint brush.*

— *Mick assembling easels with a screwdriver, checking the blisters on his hands, with a mountain of discarded boxes, when a delivery truck arrives with 10 more cartons; utility tables to assemble.*

— *Mick sitting against the wall, head back, with a wet towel covered with blood.*

— *Maria sewing the awning for the front window, and antiquing a plaster lamp. Happy and smiling.*

— *Maria and Mick, exhausted and collapsed on the floor, laughing hysterically.*

The transformation is finally complete, with little time, or money to spare before the Grand Opening of the Sunday Painters School of Art.

It's late evening, and Mick is standing with his arm around Maria's shoulder looking at the front of the Studio from the street. One of Maria's paintings in the front picture window, with a spotlight on it, is framed with gold leaf letters on the window "Sunday Painter's School of Art". Maria has planted colorful Azaleas in the front, and there are several hanging pots with colorful flowers. Visible through the front door, numerous easels, stools and tables arrayed, ready for students. It looks positively smashing.

"Well mom, we did it...with two days to spare before the High Noon Big Bash on Saturday," Mick says.

"Oh, Mickey..." Maria says hugging Mick about the waist, "it looks so...*molto elegante*. I'm so proud of you, you really came through."

"Thanks...it was a team effort. How many are you expecting on Saturday?" Mick says.

"Sent out about 100 of your silk screen invitations. They got a great response...but I'll be encouraged if 50 actually show up. Our neighbors and Fogerty and May Bea got one too. I sure hope this works. After paying for the food, jazz trio and booze, we're down to our last twenty five bucks. I contacted the L.A. Times, the Calendar Arts section *did they 'know about the emerging avante garde art movement...the Left Bank of Burbank?* I think they bought it," Maria says.

"Yeap...a regular Left Coast Greenwich Village, in downtown Burbank?" Mick says.

"They promised to send someone out...with pictures, so no jeans and tennis shoes, *capisci?*" Maria says with a good-natured *mamma mia* scold.

"Sì, mom...*capisco*," Mick says.

"Let's celebrate! I'll buy you the biggest steak in town. Dinner and a movie. I'd like to see "The Ten Commandments" again, with that dreamboat, Charlton Heston as Moses," Maria says.

"Mom, that'll be, what...the third time, for God's sake?" Mick says.

"I know...I know. But it's not for me. Since you're going to be leaving the nest, where I can't keep an eye on you, I thought this would be a good last minute refresher course. You know...*Honor thy father and mostly thy mother...and do not commit adultery...remember the Sabbath Day to keep it holy.*"

"That's my *mamma mia*, you never quit do ya. Okay...here's the deal. In the major leagues, one for three, that's .333, it's considered an All-star batting average. So...all I can tell ya is that while I'm gone, I promise to maintain a .333 batting average. I'll let you figure out how that shakes out. Deal?" Mick says.

"Looks like you win...this time, anyway," Maria says with a motherly *this is not over* raised eyebrow.

"Okay then...you got a date, mom. Real red meat...a big thick juicy steak. Far out! So Saturday it's *show time!* And I've gotta little surprise for ya," Mick says.

In February 1963, Cinerama Inc. unveiled a radically new design for theaters in Hollywood, to screen its movies. Based on the geodesic dome developed by R. Buckminster Fuller, costing half as much to build as conventional theaters of comparable size, and in half the time. With its 86 foot wide screen, advanced acoustics and 70mm film capability, the Cinerama Dome remained a favorite for film premieres and "event" showings.

Maria and Mick are seated near an aisle, to accommodate Mick's long legs. The theater darkens, the overture music swells and the opening credits start.

"Man, it's really hot in here. What's with the air conditioning? I'm in a full sweat," Mick says.

"Well it does take place in the desert...adds to the realism, dear. How was your steak?" Maria says.

"Excellent! Your lobster? Mick says.

"Wonderful, way too much though...doggie bag's, in my purse," Maria says patting her carpetbag purse, big enough for any contingency including pestilence, famine or flood.

The movie starts—it's a long one, about three and a half-hours. About three hours into the film, the lobster in Maria's purse is really starting to ripen—a very strong fishy smell. Mick is sniffing the air, looking at Maria, who is rapt, totally oblivious. Finally, the money scene, very dramatic and very serious, where Moses parts the Red Sea, the violin music swells, there are fish flopping all around on the now bare sea floor, on that huge wrap-around screen.

For 1956, very realistic cutting-edge CGI, computer generated imagery, from famous Hollywood Director Cecile B. DeMille. Mick taps Maria's knee to get her attention, and points to her purse, and holds his nose. She opens it, and the eye-watering unmistakable aroma of spoiled fish—of Biblical proportions—leaps out of her purse.

Suddenly from behind.

"Oye, mein Gott...this is sooo reeel, I can actually smell da fishes!" a woman cries.

First Maria, then a chain reaction of Mick, initially a barely contained chortle. They are trying desperately to stifle their laughter so as not to make a scene in the crowded theater during the Big Denouement. While Moses is working his Major Mojo mit da Red Sea, tears are streaming down their cheeks.

There is a loud "Shhhh!!!" from behind them. That makes matters even worse. Maria leans over and says to Mick, "if I try to not laugh any longer...I'm going to pee my pants!" Whereupon Mick laughs even harder.

Finally, from directly behind them, "SHH!!! YOU HEATHENS!"

Maria explodes with laughter, followed by Mick. The audience *en masse* is now yelling, "Shut up...Shh!...somebody call the manager!"

Then, Mick is hit behind his right ear, by something very cold and hard, it's an ice cream Bon Bon.

"That does it...definitely an Old Testament kinda mob. Let's get the hell outta of here before they stone us...with Bon Bons," Mick whispers to Maria. Maria, now hysterical, is weak from laughter, her legs like limp linguine. Mick grabs Maria's arm and helps her out of her seat, clutching her purse, amid catcalls and boos from the audience, he says, "Madam...shame on you...you're coming with me...right now!"

Taking advantage of the pitch black scene on the screen, Mick says loudly, scolding the now totally hysterical Maria mustering his most serious managerial tone loud enough for the entire audience to hear, "Very sorry for the interruption folks. I am removing this...this

blasphemer...from the theater right now. As manager, I am offering all of you a complete refund...and free Bon Bons, for everyone...right after the performance. Just go to concession counter and tell them I sent ya. Thank you for your indulgence."

Mick, half-walking, half-dragging the weak kneed Maria, to a chorus of cheers and applause of appreciation, hikes up the aisle of the dark theater into the lobby, where Maria throws her purse to Mick, and bolts to the Ladies Restroom.

Saturday - High Noon

The Grand Opening of the Sunday Painters School of Art

Mick is awkwardly struggling with something from the trunk of his car, parked directly in front of the Studio. Grunting and groaning he is carrying something very large, wrapped in a white sheet. Maria is inside, setting out the refreshments. She is radiant, in a hot pink dress, with her hair up and artsy huge hoop earrings. There is a bevy of activity as Burbank's Beautiful People are starting to arrive in very expensive Caddies, Lincolns, T-birds *en mass*.

It's a hot August day—Mick in a full sweat, struggles up to the front entrance of the Studio, where he lays down his mysterious cargo in the front garden. Standing there catching his breath, two men, wearing loud identical Hawaiian sport shirts walk up to him. Frank Gwynne is the larger of the two, 30-ish with flawlessly coiffed hair, and Umberto Galvan, a small 20-ish Latin, obviously effeminate man.

"Hi there...I'm Frank Gwynne, Dog's World Magazine," he says.

"Yea, the art world is...dog eat dog, but..." Mick starts to wax.

"Uh...we're neighbors," Frank says, pointing to the 'Dog's World' letters painted on the front window of the next unit.

The diminutive Umberto Galvan steps very close to Mick, looks up at him fluttering his mascara'd eyes—offering his hand as a woman might, "Me nahme es Umbert-Ooooh...iya doo haaair..."

"Hi guys. I'm Mick...Kozlov. Thanks for coming," Mick says extending his huge hand to Umberto. As Mick attempts to release his large hand from the delicate perfectly manicured hand of Umberto, he continues to hold on, finally, reluctantly Umberto lets go.

"Can we give you a hand with that?" Frank says.

"Great, thanks. Man, it's hot," Mick says.

Mick removes his sport coat and begins to roll up his shirt sleeves. He now has muscles. Umberto is all eyes on him. Mick yanks the sheet off, revealing an almost full-sized sculpture, done in plaster of Paris of a very well-built man, head to toe, arms bound behind the torso, jaw at a grotesque angle, who obviously has just been executed by hanging. There is plasterized rope with a hangman's knot shooting straight up from his neck. His genitals are well defined and ample.

"Oh, my *gawd!*" Umberto shrieks with delight.

Frank eying the torso up and down, says, "Very uh ...impressive. A self-portrait?"

Mick, totally naive and oblivious to the sexual preference of his two new friends, says, "Nope...kinda hard to pose for yourself,"

Frank says, "Too bad...eh Umberto?"

"So if you guys could just grab a hold, and give him a lift, I'll tie the rope to this beam overhead. It's pretty heavy so get a good strong hold," Mick says.

As Mick picks up the torso by the rope, Umberto enthusiastically pounces on it, grabbing it by the penis, while Frank gets behind it with a hand on each buttock. Mick now fully extended, has just finished tying the rope off, when Ed Fogerty and May Bea come out of their unit to join the party, only to witness this tableau of depravity. Fogerty freezes in his tracks, while May Bea bursts out laughing.

"Oh...*my gawd!*" she screams.

"Hi, May Bea...Ed. Hey, thanks for coming to the Grand Opening," says Mick.

"Okay, Umberto...you can let go now. Umberto...Umberto!?"

Frank pries Umberto's hands away, "*Sooo Sorrrrry* about that, Mick. A little Doggie Dogma here...the little Chihuahua will *always* try to hump the biggest dog on the block. His eyes are always bigger than his...you know what,"

Maria hearing the commotion, emerges from the front door just in time to see Ed Fogerty, cycling through five shades of red. She quickly moves in to defuse the situation. Seeing the hanging sculpture for the first time, she immediately starts to laugh, until she realizes that ol' Fogerty's about to go into cardiac arrest.

"Hey mom...well, here's your surprise. Been working on it for months...my evening sculpture class at UCLA," Mick says proudly.

"Well Mickey, I'm definitely surprised. I'm uh...speechless," Maria says.

"Like it Mom? It's called...'Hung Man'. It's a protest against capital punishment. Hey, how 'bout a political sculpture garden here? What do you think, Ed?" says Mick deciding to have a little fun with Mr Ed.

"Looks pretty uh...*well-hung*, to me," say Mays Bea, with tears streaming, mascara now starting to make dark tracks in the thick pancake make-up. Umberto fake faints into the arms of Frank.

Fogerty is clutching at his bolo tie, sputtering "You...can't... Take it down! *Right now!* Maria, tell your son to take it down. Now Goddammit!" screams the apoplectic Ed Fogerty.

"Well, I guess if political art is supposed to stimulate a sense of social outrage, and uh...liberate one's emotions, two 'Oh my Gawds', and one 'Goddammit'...then I think my work is done here," says a grinning Mick.

"Oh come on Ed...I kinda like it. It adds a certain, uh 'mascalini' touch that's been kinda missin 'round here," says May Bea giggling like a school girl.

"Stifle it, May Bea!" yells Ed Fogerty.

Maria intervenes. She steps in between them just as Fogerty is about to lunge at Mick.

"Ed...I'm really sorry about this...misunderstanding. Can you excuse us for a minute? Mick, can I have a word with you inside. Please...*Now!*" Maria says.

Inside the studio:

Punctuated by an occasional flashbulb, over seventy-five of Burbank's well-dressed aristocracy, with a sprinkling of a few Pier One Nehru suits and Tie-dye outfits to go with the artsy spirit, are now getting into the scene. Chatting and laughing, looking at the art work and picking up class sign-up brochures. With the champagne copiously flowing including the members of the jazz trio, now starting to get loose, everyone's having a good time.

Maria takes Mick by the arm as they go inside. Once inside out of sight, Maria explodes with laughter...bent over double, tears streaming down her face.

"Geez mom...something I said? Ed looks kinda upset. Ya think maybe he's in favor of the death penalty?" Mick says with that same impish Mikie smile.

Maria says, trying to catch her breath, "If he wasn't before...he is now. Yours. Listen Mickey, park the gallows humor and stay away from Ed for a while...I'll take care of this. Okay? And thanks for the thought son, it's really an...*interesting* piece. Anyway, the party's a great success. I've already got 40 new students," Maria say bursting into laughter again.

The party's over. It is an unqualified business success. She signs up over 50 new students. A good time was had by all, with lots of good press coverage for the gala, perhaps only, cultural event of the season of Downtown Burbank. With the Mayor of Burbank and his wife in attendance, it will make front-page above the fold of the Burbank Bugle. Mick and Maria are now cleaning up, with Frank and Umberto "helping". Frank is finishing-off the remaining partially filled glasses of champagne, while Umberto is following Mick around like a puppy.

"Hey mom...great party!" giving her a big hug, "Today we take Burbank. Tomorrow the world!" Mick says with a theatrical maniacal laugh.

Looking around the studio, "For the first time in my life, I have a sense of *hope*...peace...and independence about my life...our life.

"Thank you, son for everything you've done," Maria says tearfully, hugging Mick.

Umberto breaks down and begins to cry, joining in hugging Maria and Mick with Frank just rolling his glassy bloodshot eyes while upending another unfinished champagne glass.

As Maria and Mick lock up the Studio and walk back to the apartment two blocks away, happy and laughing, they do not notice an old car, motor idling parked down the street, lights-off, for the last hour. The car with Pennsylvania plates slowly pulls away into the darkness.

Later that night—the Studio is locked up for the night. "Hung Man" has been retired for the evening. Eerily bathed by red and green exteriors floodlights, his male declaration has been decorated with a strategically placed hanging potted Azalea by Maria to temporarily appease Fogerty. Nope, not a scintilla of social outrage among the conspicuously affluent buffed Ob-livias and Biffs, not even a raised eyebrow of social conscience. Tough crowd. Suddenly, out of the darkness a hand, with long red finger nails, reaches up with nail clippers, cutting the macramé strings suspending the pot; then a loud crash, accompanied by the unmistakable cackling, wicked laugh of May Bea McCoy. *May be not buster...*

The apartment—a few days later

Mick and Maria are sitting at the dining room table, just finishing up breakfast. There's a pile of duffel bags and a large suitcase by the front door. Mick is now about 215 pounds.

"Still hungry? There's a lot more in there," Maria always the *mamma mia* says.

"Thanks mom...that was great. I'm absolutely stuffed. I'd better get myself ready, they'll be here soon," Mick says.

He stands up and wraps his long arms tightly around his mother, "Well, I guess this is T-T-F-N...Ta Ta For Now. I'll try to get home for Christmas, depending on game scheduling," Mick says.

"Oh, Mickey...I'm going to really miss you, son," Maria says.

"Me too, mom...but I guess it's time to leave the nest, eh? I've gained the weight, now I guess it's up to me. I know you'll be okay, now. You've got a lot of students, and a steady income, just don't work too hard...okay?" Mick says.

"Okay son. How ya gettin' up to Berkeley?"

"I answered an ad in the paper...looking for a student to share gas money...don't know anything more about them. I'll get up there a week early, get registered and get a place, then I'll get you all the contact info. I just hope that my high school transcripts got processed in time."

"Do you have enough money?" Maria says.

"I'm fine, mom...thanks for the extra dough. Very generous compensation, considering I would have done it for nuthin, for *mama mia carissima*. But, thanks again, I can sure use it up there," Mick says.

The doorbell rings, Mick opens the door. Cameron Glen is a short, very slight, 20-ish long-stringy-haired hippie. With him is an 18-ish, Haight-Ashbury chic beauty, with long straight golden hair. She's tall and slender with large full pendulous breasts, obviously bra-less. Mick makes eye contact with her large, sensual doe eyes. He invites them in.

"I'm Mick, this is my mom."

"Cool, man...like I'm Cam, this is my ol' lady Moonstar. Ready to go man? Gotta hit the road, ya know man...if we wanna like make Berkeley tonight."

Mick walks over to Maria, they hug.

"Please...*pleeeeeaze*, call me when you get up there. Okay?" Maria says.

"Sure...love ya mom," Mick says giving her a gentle kiss on her cheek.

"Love you, son," Maria says gently caressing Mick's face as they part.

"Okay, let's hit it," Mick says.

They each grab a bag and go down the stairs. Maria runs over to the window facing the street below, and sees them throwing the bags into a old beat-up multi-colored VW bus with crudely painted peace symbols all over it. Maria now in tears, registers concern on her face. Mick gets in the front, and just before they drive off he looks up at her and waves—just like Mikie had seconds before he was hit by the A&P truck on that Christmas Eve.

As they drive off, tears streaming down her face, Maria runs to the next window, keeping Mick in sight as long as possible.

The Sunday Painter School Studio - About two weeks later about 10 PM

"Well class, this is a good place to stop for this evening. Let's clean up and put the wet paintings on the drying racks," Maria says standing at the front of the class by her easel, just completing an evening class. There are eight students, all painting a vase of Azaleas, now cleaning up, and packing up to leave.

Ruthy, one of her students, an old friend, lingers behind. She is a little unsteady on her feet and slurring her words.

"Pia, I really enjoyed the class tonight. But I don't seem to be able to get the color right on those Azaleas. Can you have a look at mine?" says Ruthy.

"Sure, Ruthy," says Maria looking at the painting "Okay...I see the problem. A little more alizarin crimson...there, that'll do it."

"Oh, thanks Pia. I'm in no hurry to go home, would you like to get something to eat?" says Ruthy.

"Oh, Ruthy, thanks but I'm absolutely exhausted...a splitting headache. This is my sixth 3 hour class this week, my second today. I've still got a lot of cleanup to do tonight," says Maria.

"Can I help? Maria, I really don't feel like going home. Fred's probably there by now, drunk. I just don't feel like dealing with him," says Ruthy starting to tear up.

"Oh Ruthy, thanks, but there's nothing you can help me with. Ruthy, I hope I don't offend you by saying that I would prefer you didn't drink while in the class. Some of the other students are a bit put-off by it. Okay?" Maria says.

"Okay, Maria...sorry, I probably should be getting home, or Fred'll think I've been out foolin' around, and make me pay for it," says Ruthy.

"I'm so sorry, Ruthy. Maybe we can talk another time, when I'm not quite so beat. It's getting late, can you do me favor and lock the door on the way out?" Maria says.

"Sure...see ya next Thursday night," Ruthy says.

Ruthy gathers up her stuff, and in her condition, goes out the door without locking it. Working away, Maria is just finishing up, when the door flies open.

"Well...well...well, if it ain't that cute little art-eest...every night, just paintin' away. All work and no play? Hey...that doesn't look so hard," the drunk slurs.

"I'm sorry...we're closed. Please leave...*now!*"

The drunk staggers toward Maria. He picks up a palette knife, and dipping it in paint, spreads it very thickly on the canvas.

"See...told ya. Nothing to it. Time for my private lesson...a nude."

As he lunges for Maria, she grabs the open jar of turpentine on the table and throws it in his face, "Not tonight...Picasso, I've got a headache. Here's one for the road."

"Oh *gawd...ooohhh*. I can't see. You bitch, you blinded me! *Goddammit!*" screams the drunk.

The drunk reels back, staggering around knocking over easels and chairs, rubbing his eyes with both hands, screaming. Maria spins him around, and bum-rushes him out the door. Writhing in pain, he lays down on the sidewalk. She locks the door, runs to the telephone, and calls the police, who are there within minutes.

About an hour later in front of the studio, Maria is standing outside, as the police are loading the cuffed drunk into the patrol car. The scene is eerily illuminated by the flashing red lights. The drunk's vision now restored, he yells out the rear window of the patrol car as it pulls away, "This ain't over...you don't know who you're messin' with, lady. I know where you live!"

Maria utterly exhausted, still shaken, massages her throbbing temples. An hour later after finishing cleaning up, locks the door to the studio and somehow trudges back to the apartment.

About midnight, Maria has collapsed on the sofa, in the darkened living room with a wet towel on her forehead with a massive migraine. In her haste to get off her feet and lay down, the front door is left slightly ajar. The door slowly opens. A shadowy figure, silently moves toward Maria still lying on the sofa. Suddenly, Maria senses there is someone in the room, and opens her eyes to see a silhouetted large male figure looming over her in the dark—she cannot make out who it is. Maria, startled, tries to sit up, to resist, but her head is pounding with such pain, she collapses, slouching back down.

"I'm back," the familiar voice says.

Totally spent from the evening, she lays there resigned to her fate, "Nicky? Is it you, Nicky?"

Nicky is now bending over her, his face very close to Maria's. She can now make out that familiar tormented febrile face, eyes frantically searching hers for some sign of affirmation, the saccharine scent of vodka on his breath, unshaven with beads of sweat dripping on her, his hair soaked with sweat.

"I...I've come home, Pia...I love..."

"Nicky...Stop! Stop! This is *not* your home anymore. Nicky...you have to leave, NOW!" Maria says. Nicky begins to get agitated and draws closer.

"You are...*my wife!* You can't talk to me that way," Nicky yells.

"Not anymore Nicky. We are *divorced*...for over a year now. Right after you left, for the umpteenth time," Maria calmly says.

Nicky moves his hands toward her menacingly. Maria continues "It's over, Nicky. I don't care *what* you do to me. All those years living in terror with my mother...and then with you. I'll *never* go back with you! *Ever!* So do *whatever* it is you're going to do...just get it over with. I'd rather be *dead* than to be with you...for an hour...a minute," closing her eyes, and turning her face away from him.

Nicky, now silent, half-heartedly lunges, then stops. Staring at Maria, her obvious disdain and revulsion, he finally realizes that it is futile. He slowly stands up. Maria, opens her eyes, and unflinchingly, coldly stares at him.

"Okay Pia. But never forget you're still my wife...forever. Be careful what you wish for. I can't...won't...live without you! If I can't have you...the cops will bring you my clothes in the morning...from the river," Nicky melodramatic says as he has threatened many times before.

Nicky angrily exits, slamming the front door shut. Maria struggles up and staggers to the bathroom. The only sound in the darkened apartment now—vomiting, then dry retching, and sobbing.

Part Four - Berkeley and Beyond -

- Chapter 8 -

*But you're gonna have to serve somebody, yes indeed
You're gonna have to serve somebody,
It may be the devil or it may be the Lord
But you're gonna have to serve somebody...*
- Gotta Serve Somebody - Bob Dylan

1964—UCB Berkeley California

A run-down one bedroom, ramshackle apartment on Bancroft Way, right across the street from the entrance to the UCB campus not far from Sproul Hall and Sather Gate.

Byron Brawley, with prescribed Cal-chic scraggly beard and long hair is a junior at UCB. He and Mick attended the same high school. As jocks Mick, who is two years behind, had struck up a friendship with the charismatic Brawley who was always able to get his hands on six-packs of the 16 once green cans of stout Ranier Ale, "Green Death" for under-age Mick, because he worked at a liquor store part-time evenings. And he was always good for a stimulating discussion on literature and the arts.

So Mick had run into Brawley, a few days after he arrived at Berkeley. An ex-high school football linebacker, who loves to hit and if he can, hurt. He is seemingly impervious to pain. He relishes taking a hard hit—he's cocky, stocky, very strong and athletic with a reputation in high school as being a little 'off center' scrapper aka 'Brawler Brawley', with a serious mean-streak always just below the surface.

Despite his proclivity for violence, when he is sober he's got an erudite sense of humor, and is generally fun to be around, in spite of the Jekyll-Hyde switch, about three beers below the surface.

But his brash behavior and pugilistic penchants belie a brilliant intellect. He is an expert on the Baroque Music period, J. S. and the rest of the Bach Boys, Handel, Scarlatti, Vivaldi and Telemann et al. An English Lit major with an emphasis on Geoffrey Chaucer on whom he intends to do his Master's Thesis—he is a natural raconteur and mimic.

His retelling of the infamous Miller's Tale, about Nicholas, a student, relentlessly trying to sleep with his landlord's wife, Alison, is executed with a perfect spot-on Old English cockney accent. His ruggedly handsome looks, roguish behavior and his eloquence both in writing and speech is reminiscent of the great American Beat writer, Jack Kerouac.

But, when he drinks, his dark side with the unpredictably short fuse, often erupts into indiscriminate fisticuffs with anyone within swinging distance. Mick knows they're in for long night, when after a few drinks, he deliberately baits the biggest, meanest looking guy in the place, by brazenly hitting on his girlfriend. If the guy protests, Brawley usually opens the dialogue with his planned prelude to violence—something like, "Hey...ass-breath...don't interrupt me while I'm talking to this very lovely lady that's obviously waaay outta yer league." No matter what is said after that, it's usually followed up with "care to step outside to discuss it...and get your ugly mug rearranged?" After "the two minute warning", it's usually over in less than two minutes. Before the other guy can even get his hands up, from out of nowhere Brawley usually lands a sucker punch. Hard...very hard. Then pouncing on top of the poor son-of-bitch, furiously raining punches, lefts and rights, until he's beaten him unconscious, barely working up a sweat, usually unscathed.

No one that's hung out with Brawley can ever remember him losing a 'fight', the secret of which Brawley says *"ninety percent of winnin' a street fight is always land the first punch...hard."* Mean. Very mean, and scary for Mick to think if he should unleash that sadistic streak on him. But Mick like many of Brawley's friends, curiously finds the element of unpredictability and danger, the adrenal high of the potential for random vicarious violence always just below the surface, somehow seductive, in an inchoate primal way.

Mick and Byron Brawley are hangin' out at his apartment, having a beer.

"So, Koz...did you like talk to the coach, man?" Byron Brawley says.

"Yea, he says my transcripts didn't get processed in time, some bullshit about admission records being delayed by some radical student sit-in demonstration, closing down the administration building for over a week...so I can't get enough of my classes for the Fall Semester to be eligible to play. Said he was 'real sorry', but he can't get me on scholarship or even give me any help until the next semester. I can practice with the team, but I am pretty much on my own, for living expenses," says Mick.

"Well that exactly sucks...like, what ya gonna do now, man?"

"I'm kinda in a bind. Guess I'd better find a job, and a place to hang and just pray that I don't lose my 2S student deferment. That thing in Vietnam is starting to get real ugly. I haven't even told mom...don't wanta worry her," Mick says.

"Well, man...my roommate here, a law student, just got busted for possession of pot. Booted his ass out of law school, so he's outta here. You can move in here until you can figure things out...a good location, the Student Union is right across the street and the gym is just down the road. I'm at the library most of time, anyway," Byron says.

"Thanks, man. Yea, if it's okay, I'll crash here for a while...good thing I ran into ya at Sather Gate or I'd really be screwed. Barely recognized ya with that 'hair hat' from the last time I saw you in high school with the crew cut...what, two years ago? Anything goin' on tonight?" Mick says.

"Yea...Frat Rush Parties all this week. That means kegs...lots of free beer and the coed chickies will be on da loose, checking out the scene. And there's a rally in front of Sproul Hall...this afternoon," Byron says.

"Hey, Byron, who were those people I saw you with...demonstrating at Sather Gate. That guy that was doing all the talking, sounded *very* with it," Mick says.

"Mario Savio...he's *real* with it, man. Very balsy, from New York. He's speaking again this afternoon, at the rally at Sproul Plaza...should be a cast of thousands. The SDS and the FSM will be there big-time," says Byron.

"SDS? FSM?"

"Students for a Democratic Society...Free Speech Movement," Byron says.

"So what's their beef?" Mick says.

"Well man...free speech. Like, when you're on campus, the Bill of Rights, is suspended...so your rights to express yourself publicly are subject to the college thought police. Not good, man, especially for the black students that are demonstrating, going up against the establishment on civil rights...equal Ops, the stuff 300,000 of us marched for in D.C...in August of '63, when Martin Luther King gave his famous 'I have a dream' speech. I get goose-bumps just thinkin' about it," Byron says.

"I wouldn't mind hearing that guy Savio again," Mick says.

"Yea...agreed. Stuff a few beers in your pockets, and let's head over. Want to get there early so we're right where the action is. But first, let's do a doobie...just to get into a pol-iti-CAL frame of mind," Byron says.

Byron and Mick stuff a few bottles of beer in their coats. Byron pulls a joint out of his huge green army surplus parka, and lights it up. He takes a long drag and hands it to Mick.

Mick takes the joint...hesitates, smiling, "First time for everything." He pulls a deep drag and starts coughing violently, but immediately begins to feel the high. Brawley just laughs as Mick hands it back, and he takes another long pull on it, then snips the end off and leaves it in the ashtray.

"You'll get used to it, man. It's a cool, mellow high, a lot cheaper than booze...and, like, no drivin' the bus," Byron says.

Mick looks at Byron quizzically.

Byron continues, "Ya know...after a sixer of Green Death Rainier Ale, like clutching the toilet seat, while ya ralph your guts out,"

he says mimicking holding a toilet seat, "Come on...let's get out of this dump. Time to elevate our consciousness to a higher plane as we enter da political lab-OR-ratory of BIZ-erk-ley. Welcome to my world, my man," as Byron and Mick head over to Sproul Plaza.

Because they are drinking beer from bottles, Mick and Byron stay at the back of the crowd now starting to gather at the steps of Sproul Hall. Feeling a hand on his shoulder, Mick turns around...to see a long and lean black guy, about 6'2" now with his arms folded, lime green bell-bottom trousers, with a fuchsia long-point collared shirt, framing a finger-thick gold rope chain. Setting a high outrageous-fashion standard for the future blaxplotation Super-flies, including a ponderously full Afro. He's looking at Mick like he knows him. He looks familiar but Mick can't quite place him.

"Hey, man...do I know you?" Mick says.

Then that electric smile, with a row of perfect white pearls, "Koz...you don't recognize me do ya man? The CIF Championship two years ago...like *swish*," Gabriel Sweet says grinning, holding out his right hand for the ritual cool black brother's hand shake, which takes almost thirty seconds to get through. Gabriel Sweet was a year ahead of Mick, when they played in the Semi-finals for the 1A Southern California CIF (California Interscholastic Federation). Yin versus Yang. Sweet went to *Cocoa* Compton High School in South Central L.A, with a gym so old, sometimes they'd get rained out. Mick, to *Very Vanilla* Glendale High sporting a Sportplex gym. Compton eventually cruised through the Championship, after barely beating Glendale in the semis, in double over-time, a buzzer beater by Sweet Gabe, with Mick hanging all over him. A fall away desperation jumper from about 22 ft...*swish*...with his standard mocking grin after the sweet sound of *pop* of pure shooters, as it hits nothing but bottom of the net...*Sweeet...baby!* His, quickness, hops, high arching jump shot with a quick release were legendary, deadly accurate from anywhere over 20 ft. Sweet was one of the most highly recruited prep B-ballers from California. He ended up at UCB, but Mick heard that he became academically ineligible after his freshman year. After that, like many of the best high school athletes, who couldn't be bothered with mundane activities like attending classes and passing tests, he faded into obscurity.

"Holy shit...Sweet Gabe? Man, I didn't recognize you with da Afro-hair-hat...cool threads...nice understated look. You hijack a clothing shipment to 'Pimps-are-us'?" says Mick smiling.

"Yea man...like dig it...Oakland Shattuck-Ave-Chic...like clothes don't make the man...clothes *are* da man. Watcha doin' here man?" the always grinning Sweet Gabe says.

"Hitched a full-ride...B-ball, that is until they screwed up my transcripts. So looks like I'll be red-shirtin' first semester freshman year...workout with the team, scrimmage, until next semester if I can

find a job 'til then. "What's up with you man? You playin' anywhere, college ball?" says Mick.

"Nawh...gave it up man. Didn't dig the book scene. All I wanted to do was party hearty and play hoops in Divy One...on my way to da NBA. But the damn profs weren't diggin' it. So, now I'm playing some serious semi-pro ball evenings just to keep in playin' shape...which allows me to pursue my day-time uh...pharmaceu-TILE dispensary practice. Got a walk-on try-out with the NBA...SF Warriors, next week. Hey man, if you're not doin' nuthin' tomorrow night...like checkout Mossy...Mosswood Playground, under da lights...on Webster...downtown Oakland, evenings from seven on. Five on five full court, wit da bruthas. Winnah stays on. Some of the best B-ball in the Bay Area, maybe da uni-VERSE...NBA scouts in reglar 'tendance.

I'll make the intro. They won't let wonder-bread-honkies even on da court...until they can see you got game. You can play on my team...and bring your 'A' game," Gabe says. Oakland's near-mythical McClymonds High School was a hothouse for young black gifted basketball alums like USF's and Boston Celtics' perennial all-star 6' 9" Bill Russell, and Atlanta Hawks' 6' 8" Paul Silas, who frequented the Mossy pick-up B-ball scene when home for the summer.

"Deal...been awhile. I could use a good workout. Whatcha doing here, man...like on campus?" says Mick.

"Supportin' da cause of the Black Power Brutha's...Huey Newton, and just doing a lil' bidness...while I'm at it," Gabe says smiling while rubbing his nose with his gold and diamond studded index finger.

"By the way...this here's my roommie, Byron Brawley," Mick says.

Gabe intuits from Brawley's body language, about threes beers in by now, and that all too familiar up-and-down baleful stare, that he's not diggin' his action. They exchange uneasy nods. Gabe, whiffing malevolence in the air, hurriedly says, "Okay man, like I gotta get to mingling here...lotsa bread to be made...later man," again with the Byzantine, but this time much abbreviated handshake. Wise move, Your Sweetness...very wise move.

Mosswood Park basketball court:

After a suicidal flat-out ride, between, around stopped traffic, through "STOP" signs on the back of Brawley's *Vespa* motor scooter, Mick clutching his basketball, holding on to Brawley for dear-life with the other arm, they arrive around six-thirty with Mick drenched in full stress-sweat.

"Aside from da mota scoota, not a bad Marlon Bran-flakes *The Wild One*...terrorizing the town," says Mick stepping on to his rubbery legs.

"Uh...I coulda bin a contenda...a sum-body...instead of a bum," doing a wicked Method Marlon from *On the Waterfront*.

A few of the black young-gun wannabes are taking shots, hoping to impress some of the major players, to get picked for a team. Mick immediately notices that he's one of the few, make that only, white guy at the park, dressed to play. The court is asphalt, with the boundary lines in many places almost worn-off or non-existent. It appears to be regulation length and width. The basket backboards are weathered wood, with rusty rims and galvanized chain nets. There are two banks of lights, with half of the bulbs dark, bathing the "court", with two groups of weathered bleachers on one side, which are already beginning to fill up, predominately with black folks lugging all manner of coolers and blaring boom-boxes of pervasive Motown. Diana Ross and the Supremes, The Four Tops, Marvin Gay and Lil' Stevie Wonder, and the August anthemic "Heat Wave" by Martha and the Vandelas.

There are a few pockets of white folks, some of which are carrying notebooks or clipboards, presumably either college or NBA scouts. There's a sign-up sheet on a clipboard with a tethered pencil laying on the first row of the bleacher.

At about seven-fifteen, the serious players start to show up. Like royalty, they arrive fashionably late, greeting each other, basking in the local lore of mythical Mossy. Gabriel Sweet finally shows up, staying in perfect character for his audience, he 'pimp rolls' over to the conspicuous white-interloper, sans brutha-shake, "Yo Koz...like we're up after the first game, to twenty-two, by four, winnah holds the court until beat or calls it a night."

Mick hands him his ball. Gabe from about 25 feet, without even warming up, launches a rainbow arching jump shot with gentle backspin rotation, turns to Mick, and says with that Sweet-smirk...*wish...swееееет*...about two seconds before the ball pops the bottom of the chain net...*ching*. Pure. He struts over to mingle with the other black players, the bruthas, with lots a high-fivin', good-natured pimpin', laughing and joking. Mick walks over the bleachers and takes a seat, next to Brawley, now getting dangerously near three beers, taking it all in.

"We're a long way from Honkie-ville Glendale, Toto," Brawley says.

Some of the players, are older, but still look like they got game. You can tell by the deference paid to them by the young-guns, that they're treated like venerated elders. Court sages holding forth. Mick recognizes several Division One college players, UCB, USF and Stanford, and a few NBA guys from the Warriors and the L.A. Lakers....all of them starters, many all-league performers.

Mick says, "winner stays on? Could be a very short night."

A black stretch limo, with smoked windows and flashers frantically blinking, slowly, almost presidentially, pulls right in front of

the bleachers. A low murmur starts to build from the crowd. Gabe walks over to where Mick and Byron are sitting.

"Well lookie here...King Kong's comin' out tonight for a little workout. Figured he might show up tonight...for a lil' fresh meat."

"King Kong? Why they call 'em that?" Mick naively asks.

"You'll see soon 'nuf." The suspense is palpably building. Finally, the rear door facing the bleachers flies open. Some very large black guys spring out. They're all 6'4" or more, in matching warm-ups.

Mick says, "So which one of those rather large Nigerian gentlemen is Mr Kong?"

"Sheeit, man...doe's is just da ball boys...they jus' scrimmage and during the warm-up, shag balls. They don't even play...didn't make the cut," says Gabe with a grin.

Just about then, another five guys pile out, all them bigger than the first group. There is one guy who's only about 6'4" maybe 220 pounds. Mick says, "So who's the runt?"

"Oh that's Marcellus Jackson, All-American at Ohio State last year...he's da point guard."

They start a warm-up drill, doing lay-in's. About five minutes into it, they start putting on a show for the bleachers. Everyone is now doing spectacular dunks, effortless reverse two handed...three-sixties, you name it. Each one more spectacular than the last, to the *oohhs* and *aahhs* of the crowd.

Then, a hush falls over the crowd as King Kong, makes his Grand Entrance. First, one very large sneakered foot appears. A major misnomer—there's no way something that big could a) ever sneak, and b) can be called a foot which is supposed to be 12 inches. This thing's about 16 inches long, followed by the second, shaking the ground on impact. His hulking mass is sartorially turned-out in a XXX-XX Tall custom-tailored Adidas Gold La may, warm-up suit with a monogrammed *Bodacious* at a chic slant, tastefully accessorized with a matching gold front tooth. As he unfolds from the limo, there is collective gasp from the crowd—they immediately start chanting....*Bo! Bo! Bo!*

Mr Black, appears to be at least 6'11" plus another 6 inches of Afro, tilting the Toledo's just a few pounds shy of a half-ton pickup truck. The last guy out of the limo is Jewish-looking, not to be redundant—very short, balding, wearing a big stogey in his mug, a Kosher clone wannabe of the legendary Boston Celtics coach Red Auerbach.

Mick guesses, *Hmm...must be the coach, or da money man. Just because it's cliché doesn't mean it ain't true.*

"Holy Toledo, man...must weigh 'em on a truck scale. Looks like he's got da same fashion consultant as Sweetness," Mick says.

"Mr Bodacious B Black...alias King Kong. Any questions?" His Sweetness says.

"Now that you mentioned it...aside from the obvious, I do see a certain almost alarming resemblance...the same bellicose expression of perturbation, displayed atop the Empire State Building...while swatting at bi-planes," Brawley analogizes.

"Seriously...never heard of him, where'd he play?" Mick says.

"U of A."

"University of Alabama? Man, they sure grow 'em big down South," Mick says.

"Uh...Un-rehab-ables of Attica, man. He was like All-PCL...Prison-Corrections League, 15 years running. By the way, you'll be guardin' The Bo tonight. And, you can drive to his left...'cause he's blind in that eye, from a prison knife fight," Gabe says without a hint of irony.

Well, there it is. Sweet's token honkie Mick, trying to stop uh...Mr Kong, would be tonight's comedy warm-up act for the bruthas.

"So what's the middle initial "B" stand for?"

"No one's ever had the balls to ask after a brutha once joked that the "B" proly stood for *Bekins*, as in the moving van...just once," says Gabe.

"Thanks for the potentially life-saving tips, man. By the way what was he in for?" Mick says.

"Armed robbery...liquor store. Picked outta da line-up by da owner. Says he was framed...a case of mistaken identity. His shyster lawyer say dat da lineup was uh...prejudiced. All da otha guys was only 6 feet tall," Gabe says.

"Like 'yer honah, ma client resents da allegation...and resents da alligator," Brawley says, with a spot-on imitation of an old Amos-and-Andy Kingfish-ism ominously punctuated with the pull-top *poooosh* of his fourth beer.

After talking with Gabe, one of the elders, about 6'4", in-shape wiry, with a comparatively modest Afro, wanders over to where Mick is sitting. "Hey man, I'm Charles Washington. Gabe says you'll be playing with us," he says without a trace of street-Ebonics, extending his hand minus the ceremonial hand-jive. His eyes are intelligent, intense, invitingly ironic.

"Hey, man...I'm Mick Kozlov. Friends call me Koz...this is Byron," Mick says taking his firm but friendly, long hand.

"Charles," Byron says shaking his hand with uncharacteristic receptivity. Hmm...instant recognition by two intelligent fellow travelers.

"Yeah, man like I've seen ya at Sather Gate a few times when Brother Mario Savio was like tellin' it."

"Yeah...seen you around with Savio," Byron says, "you a student here?"

"I'm second year at Berkeley Law, Boalt. In my spare time...*ha*, president of the local chapter of SNCC, Student Nonviolent

Coordinating Committee. Played a little B-ball here a few years back," he says with an affable smile.

"Yeah...C-Wash, lead the league in scoring and rebounds...second team All-American if I remember right?" Mick says.

"That was then...different priorities now. I'm just out playin' for fun, now. Too much like a full-time job then, man...*waaaaay* too intense and serious, so now I play for the right reasons. Choreography on the court...creative expression, like ballet without the leotards and to stay in shape. What's your course of study for you two cats?"

"Byron's second year...English Lit major. If I ever get enough of my classes, got a ride to play B-ball here...pre-architecture," I say.

"So you know Savio?" Brawley now shifting seamlessly into his intellectual intensity.

"Yeah...Mario's a special cat...smart. A philosophy major, a natural born but reluctant orator...and leader. Wouldn't think it by the looks of 'em, until he get's it goin'. Pure as they come, man. Totally guileless," C-Wash says almost reverentially.

"We heard him rappin' again, last night...wouldn't mind meetin' him, and having a sit-down. I think that goes for Koz too," Brawley says.

"Yeah, man count me in...maybe you could set something up. The four of us at La Val's Pizza...only place takes my bogus I.D. The first pitcher of brew is on us," Mick says.

"See what I can do, man...so how do I get a hold of you cats?" C-Wash says.

"Post it on the bulletin board at the Student Union. Just print "KOZ" in big block letters, the date and time, and we'll be there, man," Mick says.

"Okay Koz...check it out, tomorrow sometime after noon," C-Wash says.

While all this has been going on, the first game on the bill is about to start.

Bo disrobes his warm-up to more *oohhs* and *aahhs* from the bleachers. Apparently, The Bo has occupied the considerable time on his hands by pumping iron...a man needs to channel his considerable abundance of spare time and testosterone into a healthy hobby.

Working out with friends...and dumbbells, seemed like a relatively harmless alternative to say, the infamous Attica past-time, riots. He is a polished black onyx sculpture. Like one of those kinesiology charts showing all the muscle groups, perfectly defined. Even his muscles have muscles.

Also, now on the court, two very large black gentlemen, wearing striped referee shirts with lariat whistles have mysteriously appeared bearing an uncanny resemblance to two of the first guys out of the black limo.

Just before the game starts, Mick notices the coach, the Auerbach clone giving a final inspirational message, on a clipboard with a diagram of a basketball court imprinted. No need for frivolous "X's" and "O's" here. He just scribbles "3B"...the starting five synchronously nods. Just in case anybody has forgotten, most especially Mr Black he restates the strategy, "Ball, Bo...Basket." They break with an ominous, under the circumstances ironical "No prisoners!" They quickly dispatch the other team in about 15 minutes, with a final score of 22 to 2, the single 2 points, an errant accidental tip-in by Bo in the course of sweeping the boards. Bo scores all 16 of his total points from about 3 feet encamped in the key, mostly with thunderous dunks. Marcellus Jackson is allowed to score the remaining 6 points with dazzling drives likewise finished with spectacular dunks. The other three guys on the team are merely cosmetic formality.

"Let's go...we're up," Gabe yells.

Bo having his smoke break prematurely interrupted, shakes his massive head, takes one last deep drag on his cigarette, then angrily crushes it beneath his behemoth foot. Not a particularly good start for establishing an open channel of communication.

Brawley does his Mel Brooks bit about the sacrificial Christians just before being feed to the lions, huddling in the 'dressing room' of the Roman Coliseum, rapping on the dungeon door, "Christians...five minutes!"

Time for the warm-up act.

Mick assumes his defensive position on the court, as Marcellus Jackson dribbles the ball up-court. Mick is standing in deep shadow behind The Bo, about 3 feet from the basket with his hand gently resting against his taut, steel-hard back muscles, totally eclipsed from what's going on in the front court. Suddenly, Mick senses that Bo now has the ball...presumably step two of three, of the 3B offense. Then Bo, apparently bored from the tedium of the previous game, goes off-script and bounces the ball...twice, then jumps up in a spinning motion toward the rim. Mick determined not to be intimidated, in retrospect a potentially career ending decision, decides that he'll foul The Bo, *to send a message...early*. Mick hitches a ride on to the shoulders of, the now Mr Kong, and feels himself being propelled upward, with his head on a collision course with the rim.

"Fifth floor...men's haberdashery...I believe this my floor...excuse me...comin' through..." he lets go just as the ball is slammed through, bouncing off Mick's head, about 10 feet in the air. Message—*Returned to Sender. Address Unknown.*

Less than two minutes into the game, and the stand-up comedy act already has 'em rollin' in da aisles. At this rate he's almost guaranteed a return engagement.

On offense, Sweet Gabe drains an automatic 20 footer and we're all tied up.

The next time down court, Mick decides to front guard The Bo, to deny him getting the ball. Stop step two of three, theoretically no step three. Made perfect sense...at the time. The Bo is momentarily bemused by this brilliant defensive strategy. In the meantime he's occupied the key area for well-over 15 seconds beyond the regulation allowed 3 seconds. Mick starts screaming at the referee, jumping up and down, "3 seconds! 3 seconds...come on ref...call it!"

The referee finally blows his whistle. Points at Mick, and forms the hand gesture of a "T" signifying a technical foul on Mick.

"How the hell can you *even* make that call...for just jumping into the air? That's *such* bullshit! He's been campin' under the basket...all night for *Chrissakes*."

The ref looks at Mick, "The technical did not occur from you jumpin' *up*. It was when you came *down*, dat da infraction *o-ccurred*...and no mo' *fuckin' pro-fanity* or I'll toss yer honky ass," the ref sneers. Pretty funny stuff. Mick himself is involuntarily forced to join in with the chorus of knee-slapping laughter coming from the bleachers.

The game goes back and forth for about 30 minutes, 20 to Bo's 22. Both C-Wash and Sweetness are keeping them in the game with some devastating outside shooting. The Bo, not used to playing over 15 minutes straight, without a smoke break, is starting to tire, as evidenced by a deafening labored panting. Just as Bo goes up for a dunk, to end it, a flash-bulb goes off causing Mr Kong to hit the heel of the rim with the ball, with the rebound miraculously careening about 10 feet, into Mick's outstretched hands. A hush falls over the crowd. Bo stares at Mick in utter disbelief.

"Ah du baleeve dat ya'll got sum-thin' dat belongs to *me*." A talkin' King Kong ladies and gentlemen...the first Isaac-Hayes-utterance from Mr Kong of the entire performance.

He then reaches over to where Mick is standing, also in amazement, clamps the ball and everything near it including Mick's hands, with both of his gigantic paws, picks up the ball with Mick still attached, and starts a violent shaking motion. The problem of course is that Mick cannot let go because his hands are pinned under Mr Kong's. Finally, Mick is tossed free, like a rag-doll on to the tarmac. More laughter. That Mick, determined to revive the dying art of slapstick...or literally, die trying.

The Bo, now unmolested by pesky mosquito Mick, exhausted from a hard day at the office, standing flatfooted stuffs the ball. Mercifully. Game over.

Mick, now laying on his back, somewhat in shock, checks out his left hand where intense pain seems to be emanating. Two fingers are at a very unnatural angle. They are dislocated, one at the second joint of his ring finger, and the little finger at the first joint.

Mick screams at the ref, "Whattya call that, ref!?"

The ref says, "I'd call dat seriously stupid, man. If I was ya'll...I'd lay *per-fectly* still...like, play *dead*, man, so as not to uh...further *in-fer-iate* The Bo no mo'."

Brawley springs up, runs over to Mick, and kneeling down, seeing the dislocated fingers, grabs first the ring finger, before Mick can protest, pulls it back into the place, then does the same thing with the little finger.

"Owh...owh! fuck me," Mick screams in pain with tears streaming down his face, but the pain now begins to subside.

"Sorry man...had to do it quick. The longer they're out of joint the longer it takes to heal," Brawley says.

Mick is slowly escorted to a seat at the bleachers by Brawley.

"You want me to take care of that big gorilla?" Brawley says with that familiar intense look of mayhem. Mick realizes Brawley's patented sucker punch would probably land somewhere around Mr Kong's navel, plus he's way above even Brawley's considerable punching weight.

"Not unless you're packin'...besides, shootin' Mr Kong there...probably just piss 'em off even more. And tell my booking agent dat this uh...prestigious outdoor venue, it is now officially off da list," says Mick.

"Yea...tough crowd. I take your point, he's probably got me by maybe...what, a quarter of ton?" agrees Brawley, revealing an unprecedented prudential sense of non-invincibility. Hmm...must have run out of beer.

Mick stands up, "Okay, ladies and gentlemen that concludes tonight's performance...thanks, you've been a great audience. Ya'll come back, now. And don't forget to tip your uh...pusher," Mick says loud enough for bleachers to hear.

To a smattering of applause, as Mick and Byron walk off the court, he waves to the crowd, thus adding but a mere brief honky footnote, to the already rich lore of Mossy. Gabriel Sweet flashes a smile of appreciation toward Mick, for exceeding even his expectations for an entertaining night of comedy relief.

C-Wash walks over, "You okay Koz? I'll say this much for ya. Ya got balls...more than ya got sense, man," with an easygoing admiring smile.

"Yea...that was *real* special, man. Time to split. Always leave 'em laughin', and wantin' more," Mick says.

"Okay man, like get some ice on that right away...I'll be in touch," C-Wash says paternally patting Mick on the butt.

Two nights later: La Val's Pizza Parlor

Since 1951, La Val's is a Berkeley institution. A local watering-hole for Cal students. Good pizza, cheap pitchers of beer and relatively relaxed drinking ID scrutiny compared to Larry Blake's Rathskeller basement bar on Telegraph, both just a few blocks from campus.

Mick and Brawley arrive at La Val's about 9 PM, on the appointed day left on the SU bulletin board by Charles Washington. It's Friday night, which kicks off two days of non-stop partying and hook-ups, so the place is humming, crowded and buzzing with activity with boundless adolescent energy. Pitchers of beer, sometimes three or four on tray are being hustled by waitresses, barely able to keep up with the guzzling students after a week of classes. There is a constant cacophony of yelling and laughing, an occasional scream of feigned protest from a coed being groped by a drunken frat boy, over a background of the captivatingly simplistic lyrics of Motown:

The Drifters, On Broadway—

*Oh when the sun beats down and burns the tar up on the roof
And your shoes get so hot you wish your tired feet were fire
proof*

*Under the boardwalk, down by the sea, yeah
On a blanket with my baby is where I'll be...*

The Ronettes, Be My Baby—

*The night we met I knew I needed you so
And if I had the chance I'd never let you go
So won't you say you love me? I'll make you so proud of me
We'll make 'em turn their heads every place we go...*

The room is dimly lighted with red glass flickering candlelight on each table, a thick pall of cigarette smoke hangs over the room, with an occasional whiff of pot downwind from the men's room.

They get lucky and score a four-top toward the back where it is a little more quiet. Within five minutes, Mick spots Charles walk through the front door, accompanied by a relatively average height and compact Mario Savio. Mick stands up and waves his left hand with two of the fingers in splints with conspicuous white bandages, and catches C-Wash's attention.

C-Wash and Savio make their way through the crowd with several of the students acknowledging them both, with handshakes and congratulatory pats on the back. The crowd, mostly white, with a few blacks who appear to be jocks, for the most part are dressed hippie-chic, with lots of hair, beards, beads, and tie-dye.

At the table, Brawley stands up, as Charles makes the introductions.

"Mario, this is Byron...the guy I told you about. He's been at a lot of the demonstrations. And this wounded warrior here, is Koz...both are *muy simpatico* to the movement," C-Wash says.

Handshakes all around, with Savio making direct eye-contact with those intense smoldering, penetrating eyes. Everyone grabs a seat, as Brawley, the oldest looking and less likely to be 'carded', motions to a waitress. She gracefully slips and slides, almost balletically through the bustling crowd to the table. She is obviously harried from the demanding and often rude students, yelling for more beer, so she does not bother to check ID's. Despite her stressed demeanor, one can tell she's a beauty with short blonde, tousled happy hair, and the trim, lean body of a lady jock, maybe volleyball or track, probably a student.

No chit-chat...no exchange of pleasantries. "Whattya want fellas?" she yells over the din of the crowd.

Brawley orders a pitcher of dark beer, with four glasses, without a further word, she disappears into the pulsating mass of bodies.

Then as if on cue, the twangy voice of iconic chronicler of social unrest, the poet turned troubadour Bob Dylan begins singing the timely, layered and chewy lyrics of *The Times They Are a-Changin'*.

*Gather 'round people
Wherever you roam
And admit that the waters
Around you have grown*

*And accept it that soon
You'll be drenched to the bone
If your time to you
Is worth savin'*

*Then you better start swimmin'
Or you'll sink like a stone
For the times they are a-changin'
Come writers and critics
Who prophesize with your pen
Keep your eyes wide
The chance won't come again*

*Don't speak too soon
For the wheel's still in spin
And there's no tellin' who
That it's namin'*

*For the loser now
Will be later to win*

For the times they, they are a-changin'...

Mario Savio was born in New York City in 1942 to a Sicilian steel worker father. Both his parents were devout Catholics and, as an altar boy, Savio was planning to become a priest. Savio's part in the protest on the Berkeley campus started when former student Jack Weinberg was manning a table for the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE). The University police had just put him in a police car when someone from the surrounding crowd yelled "sit down". Savio, along with others during the 32-hour sit-in, took off his shoes and climbed on top of the car and spoke with words that roused the crowd into frenzy.

The waitress returns. Still no frivolous small talk, she deftly places the pitcher and four glasses on the table, and says, "That'll be three-seventy five," for the first time openly eying Brawley.

Byron lays down a five, with smile and says, "Keep it...by the way, who does your choreography? Very impressive." She briefly returns the smile, pauses then, "You need anything else...I mean anything, just let me know," and with a wink, scribbles something on the back of a napkin, and leaving it on the table, vanishes again into the throbbing mob. Brawley routinely files the unread napkin, into his shirt pocket, along with the countless others. With his rugged good-looks and natural charisma, the man is a male magnet for women.

"How *do* you *do* it...gotta line-up program to keep the names straight?" Mick asks.

"I rely heavily on the use of generics...like *honey*, *baby* *etcetera*...usually it's just one date, part of my coed-conservation catch and release program. But she definitely could be a keeper," Brawley says with a licentious smile.

Mick fills all four glasses, then raises his glass, "To the cause, the major cause, from the minor Koz," Koz says.

They all clink glasses and take a long pull on the dark beer.

"So, you mind if I call you Mario, Mario?" Brawley says.

"Sss-ure...Bbb-yrone..." Savio answers, face flushed with red which validates that he is not clowning around.

As a child, Savio was inflicted with a stammer which he had worked diligently to overcome. But occasionally in social situations, especially with people whom he does not know, he is initially painfully shy and sometimes stammers until he is comfortable with them, or he has something compelling to say to a throng of hundreds, sometimes thousands of students, then the stammer miraculously vanishes.

C-Wash tactfully adds, "Mario here's not used to speakin' in small intimate gatherings, which sometimes makes him a little nervous. Reverse stage fright," exchanging a grin with Savio, diffusing the social unease hanging in the air. Mick can see there is a deep personal connection and mutual respect between C-Wash and Savio.

"Mario, so how did you end up at Cal?" Byron asks.

"Lll-ong story. I had grown up in New York, so initially I went to Manhattan College, a Catholic college taught by Christian Brothers, sixty-sixty-one, then I transferred to Queens College...New York, a little more cosmopolitan and free-thinking which is where I first got a taste of student activism. In the summer of '63, I went down to Mexico to work with the poor. My first exposure to Third World living conditions...that is until I went down to the South...to Mississippi. Anyway, while in Mexico, my family had relocated to Southern California.

"Why Biz-erkley?" Byron asks.

"Man...I was like *really* ready for a change from the East Coast, so I decided to have a look at some schools out West. Initially I considered UCLA, but I found myself increasingly drawn to Berkeley for reasons that were at least partially political, where in the 50s students had been expressing dissent against the arms race, the cold war and the legacy of McCarthyism. It was an exciting place, man...a hotbed of political activism and I was attracted to UC Berkeley's beauty, with its trees, streams and scenic overlooks of the San Francisco Bay. It was...and still is entrancing. So in the Fall of '63, I arrived at UCB a young and naive philosophy major." Now, with not a trace of stammer.

"How did you get involved in student activism at Cal?" Mick asks.

"About half-way through the first semester, I started attending meetings of University Friends of SNCC, the predominantly African American student group battling racism in the deep South. From there I became involved in a tutoring project, which SNCC and CORE, the Congress of Racial Equality helped to organize...teachin' black high school and elementary students in West Berkeley. It was my first exposure with political repression and the fear the movements for social change, in particular the civil rights movement by blacks, had evoked among conservatives. For me, the civil rights movement had a powerful appeal because it offered a new and serious role for students. It connected with my passion for social justice. Man...seeing those TV images of civil rights activists facing those police dogs in Birmingham...left me both ashamed and inspired. Ashamed that America was so bigoted inspired me to join the movement to battle racism. So in the summer of '64 a lot of us whites, who had never experienced racism, went to Mississippi to see it, feel it...and touch it...first hand," Savio says.

"Were you there when, Michael Schwerner, James Chaney and Andrew Goodman were killed?" Byron asks.

"Yeah...that was a tough one. At first, we didn't know for sure that they had been murdered, but Bob Moses said that the likelihood was very high. I remember Bob who was leading the cause down there, who had himself had been mercilessly beaten almost to death, giving us activists a little talk on the perilous reality of the Jim Crow South. He said...*some of you may want to reconsider you commitment to the*

Mississippi Project. People have been killed. You can go back home...and no one will look down on you for doing it.

When Bob Moses spoke, everyone understood that he was a man speaking from his heart...and being very careful about what he said. His courage...patience and genuine love...and determination to come to real terms with the lives of people who had been made economic outcasts...well it was awe inspiring. I wanted to be like Bob Moses. I wanted to *be* Bob Moses. So although several did leave, with no recrimination, that night Marshall Ganz, a fellow activist and I had a long discussion. It was one of the most memorable in my life, because despite our own fear of the potential for serious injury or even death, as this was not some threat in the abstract...*we might die...I might die.* We both made the choice to go on. We volunteered to go to McComb, one of the most violent areas. McComb got so violent and Klan activity so threatening that the leadership delayed sending the group to McComb, and instead to Holmes County for a few weeks," Savio says with deep reflection in his intense eyes.

"So what were you hoping to accomplish down there, Mario" Mick says.

"Well Mick, our work mainly focused on voter registration. Most local blacks were either landless farmers or residents of local towns who depended on whites for their employment...and feared any attempt to register would antagonize their white bosses, costing them their jobs. They were warned by the whites...never to speak to the Northern agitators," Savio says.

"The final step in the voter registration process is the most difficult. This involves prospective black voters going into hostile white territory downtown to register," C-Wash adds, who has been silent through most of the evening allowing Savio to speak, all the while gazing at Savio with obvious unashamed admiration for this white man, who was and is, risking his life for *the cause*...the egalitarian civil rights of *his* people.

"Some of the blacks seeking to vote were elderly...and inspiring. The most powerful event I witnessed was when I brought an old man down to Lexington to attempt to register to vote. This very elderly black farmer, a man of about 60 or 70, hard to tell down there...the life of a sharecropper is hard...very hard. I had personally recruited him. He went into the registrar's office wearing an old beat-up hat...he was stooped. He went up to the desk. I had to wait by the door because Mississippi law required the registrant to go through the process alone. He took off his hat and very politely, with a kind of shuffling manner held his hat...and just stood there...patiently waiting to be acknowledged by the registrar who happened to be the local Sheriff's wife.

She started in on him.

What you want boy?

I want to redish, maam..in a small deferential, almost obsequious voice. It's part of the dialect down there. They turned register into a two syllable word redish.

What's that you say boy?

I want to redish, ma'am.

What's redish...what you talkin' 'bout boy? We don't got no redish around here.

On and on, about the fact that he couldn't say register. But he never gave up. She finally had to give him the form, but she made him eat shit for it. She humiliated him...or she tried to. As I was watching this unbelievable injustice unfold, I thought...here's somebody who because of something I had done, was facing that kind of humiliation, maybe risking his life...his family's life. He must have been afraid...I know I was, yet he stood his ground. And I could only stand there. You're powerless to do anything...while this black gentleman who simply wanted to exercise his Constitutionally guaranteed rights, was being treated worse than a dog. It just tears up your insides. I was awed by the quiet dignity this elderly farmer had displayed...and horribly upset at being barred from aiding him.

"Hard to believe...that in this country...in the 1960s almost 100 years after the Civil War, that black people could be treated like that man. Sorry man, go on," Mick says naively, shaking his head.

"Yea...so anyway, in the course of witnessing this event of wanton injustice, I felt I had become an adult...a man, with a determination to stand up for freedom. That simple farmer's courage, changed my life," Savio says choking up, his eyes tearing.

"Were there any acts of violence against you and the others?" Brawley asks.

"One in particular stands out because of the response of local police...or lack of it, because it was emblematic of their bigoted attitude. We were in Jackson...Robert Osman and I had just had lunch. We met up with a young black man who said he would lead us to the meeting place of some of the civil rights organizations. We must have made an easy target. A black and two whites walking and talking together through the streets of this segregated city. An old gray Chevy owned by a Klan member pulled up to the curb ahead of where we were walking. Two white males sprang from the vehicle...both had brown wooden billy clubs. They came at us...we ran...and they chased us. I was struck twice on rear part of my left shoulder...it was a glancing blow. When I turned around toward the intersection, I could see Robert Osman being beaten on the back with billy clubs. He was doubled up with his hands clasped over his head. Since Osman was committed to non-violence he did not use force to resist...instead protecting himself only by covering his head. He suffered serious injuries to his back, ribs, knee and arm. While neither the young black man nor I required medical attention, Osman was hospitalized.

This is the part that'll kill ya...literally. I managed to get the license number of the car used by the assailants and called the police. The Jackson Police blamed *us* for the assault saying, *We don't call 'em Negroes...down here...they're Niggers. And go on back to where you came from and stop causing all this trouble down here...or you'll get in a lot more trouble before you leave Mississippi.*" Savio says.

"Hey Mario...look at the time, man. We'd better get shakin'," C-Wash says standing up. Mario, standing up, smiles and says, "I hope I haven't gone on too long here...once I get wound up. And I hope you two will join us, in the movement. In any case...nice connectin' with ya both. Thanks for the beer, the next one's on us," Mario says shaking both Brawley's and Mick's hand.

After they were gone, as Brawley and Mick were finishing the pitcher of beer, Brawley says, "So whatta think, man?"

"Pure...man. I want to be like Mario Savio. No...I want to *be* Mario Savio," Mick says smiling.

Brawley, faintly smiling, slowly nods his head in affirmation, "Diggin' it, man...that cat...both of 'em, got more moral and physical courage than I'll *ever* have. Savio and C-Wash are true heroes of social justice. Committed, humble servants to the cause of universal human rights. Inspiring shit, man...*abso-fucking-lutely* inspiring. To all the Mario Savio's and Charles Washington's in the world," Brawley says raising his glass to Mick's, with both of them chugging the final glass of the pitcher.

"Ready to split, man?" Mick says.

"Hey man, you go ahead. I've got a little social business to attend to. Catch up with ya later," Brawley says smiling.

"Dig it...excellent choice. Do everything I would do...later, man," Mick says standing up to leave.

"Everything...and more," Brawley smiles.

Walking back to the apartment alone that night, under the starlit night, gave Mick the opportunity to reflect on the encounter with the 'accidental activist' Mario Savio, and his intellectual and spiritual fellow traveler, C-Wash. He was filled with a sense of wonderment and reverence for the millennia of struggle for social justice by men like The Christ, Mohammed, Buddha, Gandhi and Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and now up close and personal, Mario Savio and Charles Washington. Under these very same stars. Feeling as though he too, at some embryonic level was beginning to understand what it was to be a man—a universal man.

The infinite number of lives given...and taken for the cause of human rights through history. Brawley and Mick would have several more of these powerfully enlightening meetings with Savio and C-Wash.

Mick, who was chronologically at least two years younger than the others, but intellectually decades behind in maturity, for the most part sat quietly and just observed and listened to the profound

enlightenment of their erudite discussion and towering intellect. It was positively transcendent.

Michaelangelo's Great Awakening. Greek philosophy, the Classics, the law, literature, music, art...everything and anything. Mick was enthralled with the back-and-forth, sometimes intense, occasionally heated, but always civil and respectful, often leavened with humor and irony. Mick was deeply grateful for having the opportunity to have the door opened for him to the whole new and exciting world of ideas on subjects like the diverse political theories of government, Plato, Aristotle, Hume, Locke, Kant...and an endless list of great thinkers, philosophers, artists, writers and poets, and composers.

When Mick had some free time he would spend hours at the UC Library which had a *non-pareil* collection of music—the fusion of Jazz with Classical in Gershwin's Rhapsody in Blue. Opera, including all of Puccini's lyrical operas, arias like Vissi d'arte from Tosca which Mick grew up listening to. In particular, the Baroque and Romantic periods—all of which was available to listen to on LP vinyl records on a turntable with earphones. Seated in comfortable over-stuffed wing chairs surrounded by the musty scent of literally thousands of books, a repository of vast stores of knowledge and wisdom in the rich, dark mahogany bookcases. He was in bibliophilic heaven.

Mick was particularly stirred by the Romantic period of Russian composers, the piano concertos of Sergei Rachmaninov, also quite tall, *'six and a half feet of scowl'*, which seemed to resonate with his core Russian Cossack DNA. His erotic Piano Concerto Number 3 was like making love...long slow lyrical *Intermezzo: Adagio* passages followed by a playfully seductive quickening of tempo, *Allegro ma non tanto*. (*It* lively, but not so much).

Those discussions in which Mick eventually began to participate and contribute, helped him to begin to form his own ideas on abstract concepts like social justice—it broadened and deepened his cultural literacy and world view immeasurably. During these discussions, there was little or no intellectual *bravura* or pedantic posturing. And all three of them were generous and encouraging of Mick's participation, and patiently listened and answered Mick's many questions, which to them at the time must have seemed rather *jejune* and inane.

As Mick's relatively puerile priorities began to become reshaped, the words from his first meeting with C-Wash begin to reverberate, *That was then. My priorities have changed. I'm just out playin' for fun...now...too much like a full-time job then, man. Waaaaay too intense...and serious, so now I play for the right reasons*. And Mick now understood completely what C-Wash was saying when he witnessed his effortless athletic *pas seul* as he would leap into the air, seemingly defying gravity, in a suspended state of blissful grace, waiting for his mere mortal defenders to fall victim to Newton's Law—no showboat dunk—just gently laying the ball in, high above the rim.

There are very few earthlings born with this gift. The legendary Russian ballet dancer, Mikhail Nikolaevich Baryshnikov, C-Wash, Elgin Baylor, 'Elegant Elg' of Seattle University, who had become Mick's B-ball role model, and later, perhaps the greatest of all—the great Julius Irving, alias 'Doctor J', all possessed serious hang time.

As a consequence of the kind inclusiveness he received, a deep psychic bond was formed, far more than intellectual, with those three young idealistic men—'the best and brightest', which he would cherish for the rest of his life. Even after the lives of all three of these brilliant young men still in their prime of life were to be prematurely abbreviated.

Mick would not see Brawley for two days, until he finally shows up at the pad with the blonde beauty from La Val's. Her name was Angie, and she was even more beautiful under scrutiny of daylight, with intelligent, smiling warm brown eyes cast in a wondrous gaze upon one Byron Brawley, heart-breaker *par excellence*.

But Mick begins to suspect that maybe Brawley had finally met his match. She was also an English major, and a gymnast whose events were the uneven parallel bars and the balletic floor exercise which accounted for her purposeful yet graceful movements...and her compact, sinewy trim appearance. Unbeknownst to Brawley, she had observed him in a class on Gustave Flaubert's ribald classic debut novel, *Madame Bovary* in its native French—not only smitten by his rugged handsomeness and self-assured manner, but his incisive insights and witty eloquence he had displayed during class discussion of the reading material. It was the classic case of the hunter chasing his prey...until he himself, was caught.

After spending some time with them, Mick had the distinct sense that Angie, also resolutely independent, was not only Brawley's athletic equal, but intellectually as well. So, from that time on Mick didn't see much of Brawley around the pad.

- Chapter 9 -

There's a time when the operation of the machine becomes so odious, makes you so sick at heart that you can't take part! You can't even passively take part! And you've got to put your bodies upon the gears and upon the wheels, upon the levers, upon all the apparatus—and you've got to make it stop!

- Mario Savio – Student activist and patriot

December 2, 1964 about noon - the steps of Sproul Hall - UCB

The students started gathering around 11AM in front of Sproul Hall for the scheduled rally which was to start at noon. By noon, there are about 6,000 undergrad and grad students, faculty and Teaching Assistants, many of whom had gone on strike in solidarity with the FSM. At the time there was a total enrollment at UC of about 27,000 undergrad and grad students. The heavy-handed response by the UC Administration in gratuitously singling out the leadership of the FSM for expulsion and suspension from the relatively docile, unsuccessful November rally was perceived as arbitrary, vindictive and grossly unfair. It energized and motivated many of the students in response. The crowd is in an angry, confrontational mood.

Mick and Brawley, who have arrived about 20 minutes earlier, connect with Charles Washington. He asks them if they intend to participate in the take-over and sit-in. They both acknowledge their commitment.

To which C-Wash responds, "Ya know....from the way it looks, there will be no shortage of students willing to do the sit-in, but you two would be more valuable to the movement by remaining outside of the building, to be our eyes and ears...to bear witness and to duly note the activity of the media and in particular the police. We're almost certain that the administration will bring the police into this, which is what we're hoping for. To call attention to this fight...regionally and nationally, just like in Alabama and Mississippi. It was a major turning point in the civil right movement. I know I can trust both of you to be accurate and meticulous about memorializing this, probably the most important and hopefully decisive political action by the FSM thus far. If you have a camera, take pictures, a lot of pictures, make notes about what was said and who said it. It could become invaluable if things gets really ugly here...which it has the potential to be."

Mick says, "Well C-Wash...if you and Mario think the cause is better served by our doing that, I'm okay with it. I'll go back and get my camera and buy film, a lot of film, and shoot it."

Brawley says, "Okay, Charles...I'll make notes and cover media and police participation and work the local media angle. I hear that Berkeley's listener-supported radio station, KPFA, is going to broadcast the rally and air a documentary on the FSM crisis."

"Thanks, man. I'll tell Mario you two cats are on board. This is uncharted territory, man...wish us luck, we're going to need it."

Then Charles Washington, gives Mick and Byron each a long farewell hug, like a warrior preparing to go into battle against overwhelming odds, and disappears into the throng to be with his compatriot Mario Savio, whom he has obviously become very protective of.

The first speakers are FSM Steering Committee members, Martin Roysner, Michael Rossman and Steve Weisman. They set the stage with a history of the movement, exhorting the students to not just passively observe, but to actively participate in the rally and the scheduled take-over and sit-in of Sproul Hall.

Then Charles Powell, the UC student body president takes the podium, who compounds the anger of the students by opposing the sit-in to a chorus of boos and cat-calls. He is perceived as a proxy for the Administration and the UC President Clark Kerr. His plea for the students to disband and leave is dismissed as a sell-out to the First and Fourteen Amendment interests of the undergrad students that the FSM had been championing for the last several months.

Mick and Brawley, have returned in time to catch the speech by student body president Powell, just before Mario Savio is to speak. Mick takes a position from above, looking down on the faces of the crowd with a day-pack full of camera gear and film. Brawley, wearing an old beat-up 'cub-reporter' fedora, with a hastily scribbled "Press" on the back of a business card, inserted into the ribboned hat band begins to mingle in the crowd. Mick is taking photos of students using a telephoto lens, faculty and administration, mostly *verite* 'react' shots during the speeches. Brawley is interviewing students, and the generally reticent faculty, making copious notes, mostly about the issues championed by the FSM, and how they plan to respond to them.

Mario Savio now takes the podium, and begins to speak. His first words address the speech just given by SB president Powell:

You know, I just wanna say one brief thing about something the previous speaker said. I didn't wanna spend too much time on that 'cause I don't think it's important enough. But one thing is worth considering.

He's the—He's the nominal head of an organization supposedly representative of the undergraduates. Whereas in fact under the current director it derives—its authority is delegated power from the Administration. It's totally unrepresentative of the graduate students and TAs.

But he made the following statement, I quote. 'I would ask all those who are not definitely committed to the FSM cause to stay away from demonstration.' Alright, now listen to this, 'For all upper division students who are interested in alleviating the TA shortage problem, I would encourage you to offer your services to Department Chairmen and Advisers.' That has two things: A strike breaker and a fink.

I'd like to say—like to say one other thing about a union problem. Upstairs you may have noticed they're ready on the 2nd floor of Sproul Hall, Locals 40 and 127 of the Painters Union are painting the inside of the 2nd floor of Sproul Hall. Now, apparently that action had been planned some time in the past. I've tried to contact those unions. Unfortunately—and it tears my heart out—they're as bureaucratized as the Administration. It's difficult to get through to anyone in authority there. Very sad. We're still—We're still making an attempt. Those people up there have no desire to interfere with what we're doing. I would ask that they be considered and that they not be heckled in any way. And I think that—you know—while there's unfortunately no sense of—no sense of solidarity at this point between unions and students, there at least need be no—you know—excessively hard feelings between the two groups.

Now, there are at least two ways in which sit-ins and civil disobedience and whatever—least two major ways in which it can occur. One, when a law exists, is promulgated, which is totally unacceptable to people and they violate it again and again and again till it's rescinded, appealed. Alright, but there's another way. There's another way. Sometimes, the form of the law is such as to render impossible its effective violation—as a method to have it repealed. Sometimes, the grievances of people are more—extend more—to more than just the law, extend to a whole mode of arbitrary power, a whole mode of arbitrary exercise of arbitrary power.

And that's what we have here. We have an autocracy which—which runs this university. It's managed. We were told the following: If President Kerr actually tried to get something more liberal out of the Regents in his telephone conversation, why didn't he make some public statement to that effect? And the answer we received—from a well-meaning liberal—was the following: He said, 'Would you ever imagine the manager of a firm making a statement publicly in opposition to his Board of Directors?' That's the answer.

Now Savio begins to more forcefully address the issue of student sovereignty. He is starting to gain some of his legendary rhetorical momentum:

Well I ask you to consider—if this is a firm, and if the Board of Regents are the Board of Directors, and if President Kerr in fact is the manager, then I tell you something—the faculty are a bunch of employees and we're the raw material! But we're a bunch of raw materials that don't mean to be—have any process upon us. Don't mean to be made into any product! Don't mean—Don't mean to end up being bought by some clients of the University, be they the government, be they industry, be they organized labor, be they anyone! We're human beings!

*And that—that brings me to the second mode of civil disobedience. There's a time when the operation of the machine becomes so odious, makes you so sick at heart that you can't take part! You can't even passively take part! And you've got to put your bodies upon the gears and upon the wheels, upon the levers, upon all the apparatus—and you've got to make it stop! And you've got to indicate to the people who run it, to the people who own it—that unless you're free the machine will be prevented from working at all!! That doesn't mean—I know it will be interpreted to mean, unfortunately, by the bigots who run *The Examiner*, for example. That doesn't mean that you have to break anything. One thousand people sitting down some place, not letting anybody by, not letting anything happen, can stop any machine, including this machine! And it will stop!!*

We're gonna do the following—and the greater the number of people, the safer they'll be and the more effective it will be. We're going, once again, to march

up to the 2nd floor of Sproul Hall. And we're gonna conduct our lives for a while in the 2nd floor of Sproul Hall. We'll show movies, for example. We tried to get Un Chant d'Amour and they shut them off. Unfortunately, that's tied up in the court because of a lot of squeamish moral mothers for a moral America and other people on the outside. The same people who get all their ideas out of the San Francisco Examiner. Sad, sad. But, Mr Landau—Mr Landau has gotten us some other films.

Likewise, we'll do something—we'll do something which hasn't occurred at this University in a good long time! We're going to have real classes up there! There's gonna be freedom schools conducted up there! We're going to have classes on the 1st and 14th amendments!! We're gonna spend our time learning about the things this University is afraid that we know! We're going to learn about freedom up there, and we're going to learn by doing!!

Now, we've had some good, long rallies. [Rally organizers inform Savio that Joan Baez has arrived.] Just one moment. We've had some good, long rallies. And I think I'm sicker of rallies than anyone else here. She's not going to be long. I'd like to introduce one last person—one last person before we enter Sproul Hall. Yeah. And the person is Joan Baez...

Joan Baez had just appeared at UC Berkeley to a sell-out crowd, where she had sung a full repertoire of social-conscience folk music, including Bob Dylan's elegiac *The Times They Are a-Changin'*. With Joan Baez's inspiring folk music and a touch of celebrity, the movement is rising to the occasion on December 2. Joan Baez, the muse...the female troubadour of social justice was part of the patriotic framework—the FSM equivalent of waving the American flag.

She was the lone female voice at the rally. She played a role that accorded with her own pacifism but also with traditional gender roles—that is, after male speakers revved up the crowd's anger, so as to incite and justify mass civil disobedience, Baez gently calmed things down in the name of love. After singing her first song, Baez told the crowd as they prepared to march into Sproul Hall:

The only thing that occurs to me, seeing all you people out there...I don't know how many of you intend to come inside with us...but that is that you muster up as much love as you possibly can, and as little hatred and as little violence, and as little "angries" as you can, although I know it's been

exasperating. The more love you can feel, the more chance there is for it to be a success.

As the rally ends, Savio too adopts this calmer tone, urging that students walk slowly into Sproul, which they do, giving the procession an almost religious solemnity—protesters not storming the building but entering in a dignified manner, while singing “We Shall Overcome,” following the amplified sound of Baez’s angelic voice. Baez, Savio, and the other FSM speakers tapped into a powerful sense of idealism concerning freedom, democracy, and student rights, activated by a semester of grievances against the administration. More than a thousand protesters marched into Sproul Hall.

As anticipated by the leadership of FSM, on the evening of December 2nd, President Kerr calls the Governor of California, Edmund G. Brown. Responding to erroneous and manufactured reports of student violence, Brown speaks on the phone with, Alameda County assistant district attorney Edwin Meese III. Meese seconds a call for arrests, telling the governor that “temporizing would only make the eventual blow off more dangerous.” Governor Brown further responds by authorizing the police invasion so that “there will be no anarchy, and that is what has developed at the University of California.” This results in massive use of police power: 200 Alameda County deputy sheriffs, 150 state highway patrol officers, 50 Berkeley police, and 37 campus police mobilize to clear Sproul Hall on December 3, at three o’clock in the morning which is done deliberately so as to minimize media coverage.

At about 11 PM, Mick and Brawley return to the apartment on Bancroft Way, just across the street from the campus, less than a five minute walk to Sproul Hall. They've been there for almost 12 hours, so they intend to get some nourishment and a little sleep. The Berkeley campus police have a presence, but they number less than 50.

Considering that there are approximately now only about 800 students sitting-in on the several floors of Sproul Hall, it's unlikely that they will attempt any kind of police action, at least until the morning.

About 1 AM, they are awakened by the sound of sirens. When they step out on to Bancroft Way, going East against the one-way traffic, they see processions of law enforcement cars, ambulances, army personnel trucks and buses, loaded with cops, some in riot gear, with flashing red lights eerily illuminating the buildings. They immediately realize that the UC Administration has called in a massive police response. There is a parade of patrol cars emblazoned with Alameda County Sheriff insignias—too many to count, along with numerous California Highway Patrol vehicles and Berkeley Police cars. The massive show of force is obviously designed to intimidate the protestors

and deter anyone sympathetic to their cause from participating, not only on this day, but in the future.

Mick and Brawley, grab their gear and run over to Sproul Hall, where they observe a command center has been set up. There must be close to 500 cops—their sneering and smirking expressions, exudes an air of hostility and resentment among the cops, as they are getting themselves psyched up to deal with the 'hippie anarchists'. Derisive laughter and a lot of macho posturing along with a palpable atmosphere of expectation of inflicting some physical pain on the 'little commie bastards', is all-pervasive.

Because they are perceived as press, they are able to get close enough to overhear the commander of the operation loudly addressing about 20 uniformed squad leaders:

Gentlemen, our mission today is to respond to an order from the Governor of the State of California to restore order and remove trespassers unlawfully assembled on property of the State of California. We'll mobilize at 14:30, at which time the chief of campus police will then enter the building with a bullhorn, and recite the necessary legal notice, giving the demonstrators 30 minutes to peacefully and in an orderly manner, leave the building, or they will be subject to arrest and prosecution for trespassing, and failure to disband an unlawful assembly. By 15:00 hours, if the protestors have not disbanded or indicated an intention, willingness and an ability to do so, because they are the lead law enforcement agency requesting assistance, the first wave of Berkeley campus police will begin physically removing demonstrators.

Because the campus cops can recognize the protestor's leadership on sight, especially this trouble-maker Mario Savio along with his co-conspirators...they will be identified and removed first to hopefully weaken the resolve of the others. They will be escorted, carried or dragged by any means necessary for removal, and placed in to the waiting buses with wrist restraints, behind their back and taken to the county jail where they will be processed, booked and placed in detention. The second wave will be the City of Berkeley police, then the Alameda county sheriffs, and finally the California State highway patrol, will be the final wave if necessary.

Additionally, just in case some of the protestors or persons sympathetic to their cause, including faculty, outside of Sproul Hall attempt to provide any assistance to the protestors, or resistance to the operation, there will be a force of about 100 officers in full riot gear in reserve, with tear gas, standing by at

the ready. Any questions?"

"What if they resist arrest while we attempt to remove them?" one of the officers asks.

If they resist using any force whatsoever including hands or fists...or kicking...or biting, then use whatever reasonable force is necessary to subdue and remove them from the building, making sure to note which one of the uh...anarchists hooligans failed to comply and resisted arrest...especially with force for future prosecution for resisting arrest, and attacking a police officer. Any other questions?" the commander says.

Again hearing none he continues:

Men...our goal is to have these unwashed rabble-rousers cleared out of the building before, 18:00 hours before the media is even awake. Our intel tells us that there are about 800 to 1,000 protestors. With the almost 500 officers we've got standing by, we should have it cleared out no later than 6 AM...the buses loaded and gone before the sun even rises and media has had its first cups of coffee.

Any other questions? With no other questions he says, *Okay...explain the mission and the rules of engagement to your men, and tell them 'at ease' until about 14:00 hours...at which time they should start preparing for engagement. Okay...it's 13:36 hours...and mark.*

Brawley says, "Koz, I'm going to sneak into Sproul the back way, and give Mario and Charles a heads-up on the cops. Can you stay here and keep an eye on the developing situation? Be back in about 20 minutes...I hope."

"Got it...give 'em my best, man."

Brawley casually walks around the back of Sproul Hall so as not to attract any attention from the cops, knocks on a locked rear door, where he is let-in by one of the protestors providing security. He makes his way to Savio and Washington, who are in a heated discussion with some members of the Steering Committee on the second floor of Sproul. He catches Washington's eye, and beckons him over.

"What news have you from the front?" C-Wash says with a twinkle in his eye.

"Il n'est pas bon...mon Capitain uh...not good. Maybe you should get Mario over here so I can fill ya both in," Brawley says.

C-Wash calls over to Mario, who breaks off the discussion with the others, and walks over to C-Wash and Brawley.

"Byron...howya doin' man? What's it look like out there?" Mario says.

"Honestly man? Does the name George Armstrong Custer like mean anything to you two cats?" Brawley says with grin. Both men

despite the enormity and major stress of the situation, manage a smile, which cuts some of the thick tension in the air.

Brawley updates the two men on the planned massive police action by the UC administration. They both listen intently, asking a few questions, nodding thoughtfully.

"Good...then it won't even be a fair fight. We've got 'em right where we want 'em," Savio says, "because no amount of force can ever withstand the power of the truth. That's what you and Koz will be doing...bearing witness to the truth. Truth to power brothers!" he says shooting his arm skyward into a fist.

When they are finished, Brawley says, "I've gotta get back...Koz's keepin' an eye on things, takin' lots of pictures. I'll try to get back with more info later if I can. You cats be cool...now. They're going to try to single you out early to attempt to demoralize the others. I just want you to know that there is a prevailing attitude of almost festive hostility among those cops...be careful, man...*very careful*. They're just lookin' for even the slightest excuse to beat on somebody, most especially the FSM leadership. Okay? Later, man."

Savio and Washington thank Brawley—they exchange handshakes and hugs. Brawley disappears out the back door into the early morning darkness.

2:00 AM Sproul Hall

Mick and Brawley, make their way to the back entrance of Sproul Hall, with the intent of being inside to record the event, when the cops initiate their action. But when they reach the rear of the building, they are surprised to find that the police have already set up a perimeter around the entire rear of the building, to prevent any of the protestors from escaping.

"We're screwed, unless we can bluff our way into the building...or the pigs will have their way 'em," Brawley says.

"Yeah man, no tellin' how much damage they can do to those kids...with no eyes or ears of the press to worry about. Let's go for it. Since neither one of us has press credentials, tell 'em we're independent news stringers on assignment from that conservative rag San Francisco Examiner," Mick says.

The San Francisco Examiner has a notoriously conservative bias slant on the news—it has been virulently derogatory in its criticism of the FSM and particularly harsh on Mario Savio.

Brawley brazenly walks up to the one of the officers with chevron stripes on his sleeve, and announces, "Good evening uh...mornin' officers. We're independent news gatherers on assignment for The San Francisco Examiner. We'd like to gain access to Sproul to cover the removal of those anarchists bastards...when they get what they deserve!"

The cop says, "Sorry...my orders are that *no one* goes in...and *no one* comes out. No press is allowed...during this official police action sanctioned by the governor of the State of California."

"And...why's that?" Mick asks.

The cop answers with pat almost rote response, indicating that the cops have anticipated this possibility and would try to preclude the press from reporting on it by bluffing the pretense of safety. "We dunno what those hooligans are capable of...they could have weapons, and if they try to resist arrest, there could be a violent physical confrontation that could put bystanders, like the press at risk for serious injury...or worse."

"We'll take our chances. We'll sign a release absolving the police of any liability," Brawley counters.

The cop just smiles, looks them both over—up and down, "San Francisco Examiner my ass. Get your hippie asses outta here, like right now before I arrest the both of you for interfering with a police officer in the discharge of his official duty."

Brawley says, "You can't keep the press out, man...that's unconstitutional! First Amendment freedom of the press. We have a legal right...and a duty to be present...and..."

The officer, when confronted by the legality of his actions, now with mean belligerent eyes, nodding to another cop standing nearby, "Is that right...just watch me. Officer Wainwright, escort this two *esteemed* members of the press around to the front of the building, where they can exercise they First Amendment rights up their ass. And if they protest in any way...arrest their asses and throw 'em in the bus, where they will be joined shortly by their pals."

As Mick and Brawley are escorted to the front of Sproul Hall, Brawley starts to say something to the cop, but Mick, grabs his arm, and whispers in his ear, "Hey man...be cool. We'll be of no use to anybody, with our asses just sittin' in a bus. Let's just do what we can do," Brawley grudgingly nods in agreement.

2:30 AM Sproul Hall

The Chief of the Berkeley campus police, with bullhorn in hand surrounded by a phalanx of cops, climbs the stairs to the front entry of Sproul Hall, and disappears through the massive metal front entry doors.

Ten minutes later, to a growing chorus of voices singing *We Shall Overcome*, emanating from the now open windows of the several floors of Sproul, louder and louder, the campus police chief with his entourage, exits the front entrance and walks down to the command center, just shaking his head. Soon, all the sympathetic faculty and students outside are joining in, including Mick and Brawley:

We shall overcome, we shall overcome,

: : Michaelangelo's Renaissance — m.a.kominsky : :

*We shall overcome someday;
Oh, deep in my heart, I do believe,*

*We shall overcome someday.
The Lord will see us through, The Lord will see us through,
The Lord will see us through someday;
Oh, deep in my heart, I do believe,
We shall overcome someday.*

*We're on to victory, We're on to victory,
We're on to victory someday;
Oh, deep in my heart, I do believe,
We're on to victory someday.*

*We'll walk hand in hand, we'll walk hand in hand,
We'll walk hand in hand someday;
Oh, deep in my heart, I do believe,
We'll walk hand in hand someday.*

*We are not afraid, we are not afraid,
We are not afraid today;
Oh, deep in my heart, I do believe,
We are not afraid today.*

*The truth shall make us free, the truth shall make us free,
The truth shall make us free someday;
Oh, deep in my heart, I do believe,*

The truth shall make us free someday...

3:00 AM Sproul Hall

About 40 Berkeley campus police enter Sproul Hall. Within 5 minutes, the cops in groups of two or three are carrying, sometimes dragging the completely limp bodies of protestors out of the entrance, down the stairs to a processing area, where they are identified, cuffed with wrist restraints and then placed on to one of the many waiting buses.

Mick is busy taking pictures, as one by one the protestors exit. It is very slow going because few of the protestors are ambulatory and many provide no resistance or assistance to the cops in the transport of their bodies. As each protestor comes out, they are greeted with applause. Within 10 minutes, both Mario Savio and Charles Washington, bodies totally limp offering no resistance exit, to a thunderous applause and the chant, "Free Speech! Free Speech! Free Speech!"

The police deliberately and with forethought, drag them both down the front steps, so that their backsides are being bounced against the concrete steps, hitting their lower backs and spine with a percussive blow at each step. Mick has positioned himself at the bottom of the steps—he is taking photos as fast as the camera will allow. He catches Mario's Savio's and C-Wash's eye. They both smile, and flash Mick a "V" peace sign with their fingers. Some of the students and faculty are yelling, "Police brutality! Police brutality! Stop the police brutality!" as the protestor's faces wince with the impact of each successive step.

It will take the police almost 11 hours to remove all 800 protestors. Because of the widespread media coverage, regional and national newspaper coverage, and the imagery on prime time broadcast news, the December 2nd sit-in at Sproul Hall UC Berkeley will ultimately lead to a victory for the FSM, with the UC administration being forced to revise its rules regarding political speech on campus, and will inspire and spawn countless other demonstrations in colleges and universities, not just in the U.S., but internationally.

The political activism at Berkeley will come to be viewed by many historians as the watershed moment in 20th century American history as the genesis of the transformation of anti-establishment, anti-government political dissension—spreading like wildfire on American college campuses—eventually proliferating and galvanizing the general public to question, and if necessary, confront governmental dogma with civil disobedience.

A new progressive idealism based on equality of civil rights and social justice would begin to emerge, which would usher in recently elected president Lyndon Johnson's liberal political agenda, known as the Great Society, resulting in passage of two key pieces of legislation—The Civil Rights Act of 1964, and The Voting Rights Act of 1965.

After about 5 hours, Mick has run out gas—and film. Having had nothing to eat and coming down from the adrenal rush of the stress of the event, both he and Brawley are exhausted from witnessing the nerve-racking events of the day.

They decide that nothing more can be done, and head over toward the Student Union, to get something to eat and to commiserate with some of the other student activists, when they start to sense a ruckus, along with the unmistakable pungent odor of tear gas. Suddenly a crowd of about fifty students, are running pell-mell towards them, from Sather Gate, being pursued by cops in riot gear, brandishing batons. Two cops had cornered one totally defenseless guy...straddling him, whaling on him mercilessly with their batons with no indication of let-up. Sensing the potential lethality of the blows, they exchange a wordless "*oh shit, bad idea...but I guess we better stop this*" glance of affirmation.

Brawley and Mick both grab a cop by the back of their riot vests, and pull them off. The one campus cop then turns his mayhem on

Brawley, and starts chasing him, a futile exercise in his riot gear. The other cop's baton on the back swing has caught Mick on his left forehead, opening a nasty gash and blackening his eye. When the cop spins around to face his interloper, Mick's face is momentarily revealed to him. This confirms that what started out as a bad idea, can only get worse. As he draws his baton back, Mick kicks him in the groin, hard which brings him to his knees, but the aborted blow lands on his left knee. But it gives them a brief window of opportunity to escape, as Mick half-hobbles and half-drags the immense mass of the victim into a dark basement stairwell.

Mick can hear the cop yelling with a fierce vehemence, "I'll remember you...you fuckers are history...expelled!" yells the groaning campus cop as they retreated, huddled into the obscurity and safety of darkness.

Mick begins to survey the condition of this very large, bald cranium, bleeding profusely from a long vertical gash on the back. He turns him over to inspect him from the front. His totally hairless face, no eyebrows or eyelashes has got deep cut at the bridge of his nose, which is also bleeding profusely into his eyes. He is desperately rubbing his eyes with the back of his hand to clear his eyes.

"Hey man...can you hear me...are you okay?" Mick yells.

"*Jezuz Christ* man, you don't have to yell. I might be blind but I ain't deaf...does it look like I'm okay? And what the *hell's* going on with my voice? All of sudden I sound like a *castrato*," Ad Hoc Shapiro says.

"Looks like you took a pretty good shot on the front of your neck...the larynx area. My guess is that this is probably not going to be remembered as one of the high points of your matriculation experience at Berkeley. And...you're probably going to have one helluva of a massive headache tomorrow, like an order of magnitude of Ten Tequila hangovers. I'm Koz...come here often?" Mick says.

"Yeah...great place to meet engaging people. A real kick in head, and a regular riot, man...Hawk...Hawk Shapiro," Hawk says smiling extending his massive bloody paw engulfing Mick's considerable hand.

"Take off your sweat shirt, man," Mick says.

"So soon? But I hardly know ya...just because I'm damaged doesn't mean I can be taken advantage of...or that I'm easy," Hawk says facetiously batting his lash-less eyes, while pulling off his 2X white sweatshirt emblazoned with UC Berkeley Bears, revealing his massively developed muscles.

"Sorry man...wrong plumbing *pour moi*. Okay...I'm going to tear the sleeves into strips for bandages to try to stem the bleeding from the back of your head...but it's definitely gonna take some stitches," Mick says.

"*Quel dommage*. Guess my luck has changed after all...from bad to worse," Hawks grins.

Mick tears both sleeves off, then into long strips, he tosses the sleeveless sweatshirt back to Hawk, and says, "Here ya go man, put that on. So, what occasioned the visitation of that pig's baton on your melon?"

"Might've been something I said that referenced his mother's proclivity toward indiscriminate fornication with farm animals or possibly that rock that hit him right square on his helmet, uh...the other helmet. Shit man...nobody was challenging the cops gratuitous use of force. I guess my outrage of watching those pigs draggin' those peaceful protestors down those stairs, just for standing up for their First Amendment rights...got the better of me," Hawk says.

"That would probably do it. You an undergrad or grad?" Mick says.

"Grad...second year law...Boalt Hall, or was," Hawk says.

"So...do you know Charles Washington?" Mick says while bandaging Hawk's head which stems some of the bleeding.

"Yeah, man...he's been in some of my con law classes. Smart cat...and non-violent...courageous as hell. When they started to drag him down those stairs, I guess I just lost it. Hey, man I'm starting to feel light headed...and nauseous...with a monster pain in my..." Hawk says.

Suddenly, Hawk's eyes start to roll back into his head, and he goes into a momentary seizure, then lapses into unconsciousness.

About five minutes later, after he had eluded his pursuer, Brawley circles around and finds Mick and Hawk. Together they carry and drag Hawk's unconscious immense bulk to the hospital. The police, anticipating the need for medical care of the student protestors, have a cop waiting in the ER with a camera. Mick and Brawley disregarding their own welfare, immediately upon entering the emergency room, begin yelling for a doctor. The nurses immediately place an oxygen mask on him, rush him into an operating room. They wait around for over an hour, until the attending physician comes out.

"How's he doin', doc?" Mick asks.

"Your friend is in critical condition. He's suffered a brain aneurysm...probably from multiple severe head trauma. We've managed to stabilize his condition. He's going to be hospitalized...for quite a while. Sorry to have to tell you this, but sometimes accompanying a major aneurysm there is a possibility of brain damage and permanent mental impairment. You didn't get him to the hospital any time too soon...another half-hour and I don't think he would have made it. I'll need your names for the medical report...and get some facts surrounding his injuries. What happened to him?"

"He was just exercising his constitutional rights doc...in a very rough neighborhood for free speech," Brawley says.

"Your names?" the doctor says.

"Clark Kerr...with two 'R's'," says the chancellor of UC Berkeley, the FSM antagonist.

“Of course you are...” the Doc says.

“I’m Charles Powell...with two “I”s. Gotta run doc...take good care of ‘em...we’ll check back later,” says the anti-FSM, UCB student body president.

“Un-huh...” the Doc says not even bothering to write anything down.

They abruptly leave before the doctor can extract any more information from them.

Thus, would be the beginning of, an at times rambunctious, life-long friendship, more of a brotherhood, between Michaelangelo Kozlov, and one Ad Hoc, “Hawk” Shapiro.

Eventually, for Mick, resulting in Goodbye basketball scholarship. Goodbye Berkeley. Goodbye student deferment. And, Hello Draft Board.

- Chapter 10 -

Burbank - late afternoon

Maria is in the studio, after a class, tidying up preparing for the evening class, when her eye catches the still life of azaleas on the drying rack that the drunk had painted on with the palette knife. She walks over to it, and notices how the depth of the thick paint creates a texture and dramatic shadows. She places the painting on her easel, and with palette knife, begins applying thick paint over the existing brushwork. Very quickly the painting comes alive. Now, she is furiously, *angrily*, mixing bold colors, and rapidly applying the thick paint with slashing, broad aggressive strokes. Epiphany. Sometimes the Muse shows up when you least expect her—looking nothing like you could ever imagine. *Madam Muse—a drunk in drag?* she says to herself smiling.

The Studio - later that day

The students are starting to arrive for the evening class. Three students are standing in front of Maria's heavy impasto still life of azaleas on the wall drying rack. It is the same subject that they had all painted together as a class the week before.

"Wow, I wish my painting looked like that. Look at the texture...it looks almost three dimensional," says one student.

"The colors are so alive...and yummy. I like the looseness of the style...sort of impressionistic. Maria...can you teach us to paint like this? It's brilliant! What was your inspiration?" says another student.

Maria comes over to the students. She smiles slyly, "A visitation from the Patron Saint of Painting. Our Lady of uh...Turpentine. Okay, class, let's get started. Tonight were going to paint apples...luscious, red apples. I hope you all brought a lot of paint..." she says pointing a palette knife loaded with thick red paint, " 'cause you're going to need it."

January 1965 - Maria's apartment - night

Maria's eyes slowly flutter open—the illuminated clock on the night stand of her darkened bedroom says 2:35 AM as the hinges on the closed bedroom door begin to creak. The door is slowly swinging open. Her breathing becomes rapid and shallow, her heart racing with beads of sweat sprouting on her brow. *Will I ever be free of the torment and the potential for violence from Nicky?* A large dark shadowy figure, slowly

methodically moves toward the bed. She hears heavy, labored breathing, as the shadowy figure advances toward her and quietly kneels down next to her, Maria pulls a rolling pin from under the pillow, and in one quick motion swings wildly and hits the intruder.

"Ouch...ooh...*Goddammit!*" the shadow man yells.

Maria fumbles on the night stand light. She sees a fully-bearded man with shaggy hair, dressed in baggy, dirty clothes.

"Get away from me! I've got a rolling pin!" Maria yells, arm cocked.

"Yeah...like, I hadn't noticed? You losin' it...living alone?" the interloper says, rubbing his head.

The voice is familiar but she cannot place the face with the full beard and black and blue bruises all over it. His left eye is swollen and black and blue.

"Mickey?" Maria says.

"Yeah...who da hell did ya think it was? *Giacomo* the Ripper?" Mick says still rubbing his head.

Maria throws her arms around Mick neck and hugs him, "Oh, I'm so sorry...did I do that? Are you okay son?" Maria cries, touching the cheek under his blackened eye.

Mick reaches over and picks up the rolling pin, looks at to see if there's any blood, and tosses on the floor, and starts laughing. Maria now joins him in a chorus of hysterical laughing as they hug each other.

"*Jezus*, mother didya join the Holy Rollers...or what? Na, mom...you didn't do that one. It's a long story. I am so tired...I just want to go to my room and sleep for about a week. Okay?" Mick says.

"Okay son...we can talk over breakfast," Maria says.

Mick gives her another hug, stands up and goes down the hall to his room with a slight limp.

"Oh, Mickey, be..." Maria yells, followed by a loud crash.

"Oww...*Goddammit!* Again! *JeZUZ Christ!*" Mick yells.

Mick reappears in the doorway rubbing his head.

"...careful about the lamps...hanging from the..." Maria says trailing off.

"Honest to gawd, mother...one of these days you're going to kill me," Mick says, from the doorway rubbing head again.

"...ceiling...plaster Renaissance lamps, I'm gold leafing. It wouldn't have killed you to call, ya know," says Maria with mock indignation, "Gawd...you look awful...like you've been through hell."

"Thanks...not nearly as bad as I feel. I called several times...just rang and rang. Anyway, hell was starting to look pretty damn good. Good night, ma," says Mick rubbing his head as he heads toward his bedroom.

Mick is sitting at the dining room table with a cup of coffee in front of him. He downs a small white pill with a swig of coffee. Maria exits the kitchen with mounds of eggs, potatoes, bacon and toast. She places the food in front of Mick and sits across from him.

"Mick, are you okay? You were sleeping so soundly...then suddenly, I heard you screaming and yelling. When I checked on you...guess you were sleepwalking...in some sort of a fight. You had thrown the mattress on the floor...wildly punching it. It really scared me, son. I was afraid to startle you out of your sleep. You finally collapsed on the mattress...exhausted, and went back into a deep sleep. I hope I didn't put you into a coma," Maria says.

As Mick is devouring the food, he pauses, looks up at Maria, trying to change the subject and lighten the moment. He rubs his head, then, rolling his eyes, feigns a seizure...spasmodically jerking his entire body.

Then, talking into his cupped hands, "*Calling all cars...be on the look-out for a middle-age woman with a madam butterfly hairdo...wanted for assault and battery. She is armed...with a rolling pin and considered dangerous...that is all.*"

"*Very funny!* Mick, *I'm serious...what's going on? I hadn't heard from you in weeks...I was sick with worry. Then you show up looking like a homeless refugee from a hippie commune...all those cuts and bruises?*" Maria says.

Mick's eyes tear up as he looks at Maria, then looks away. He pushes the breakfast plates away, and takes a long swallow of his coffee, and recomposes himself, putting his elbows on the table cradling his head in his hands.

"Your son's a radical...anarchist criminal according to the FBI...that's what J. Edgar Hoover calls *us*," Mick says proudly defiant.

"FBI? *Us*? What the hell happened up there?" Maria pleads.

"Berkeley...was is in some ways...a disaster. After coach told me I couldn't get into school with enough units to be eligible to play basketball that semester, I ran into a guy I went to high school with...graduated two years earlier. Byron Brawley. He offered to put me up. About two months later...it was a sunny afternoon, we went to what was supposed to be a peaceful, non-violent student demonstration in front of the administration building. The protest organizers, some friends of ours, Mario Savio and Charles Washington were leading a demonstration...a sit-in...a take-over of Sproul Hall. There was about six thousand of us, outside Sproul Hall...arms inter-twined, chanting, *FREE SPEECH! FREE SPEECH! FREE SPEECH!* Then they lead almost 1000 students, peacefully, calmly into the building for the sit-in while singing *We shall overcome*.

Mario and Charles had asked Byron and I to record the event...ya know for posterity. Byron interviewing bystanders and faculty...me taking pictures. After it was almost over, Byron and I were

walking back to the Student Union, when we see some cops chasing several students...in full riot gear. Two of the cops had this poor kid cornered...and they were beating on him pretty good...like to have killed him. So Byron and I intervened. Byron pulled the one cop off, who ran after him...I grabbed the other. But he got few licks in...and got a good look at my mug before I incapacitated him."

Maria eyes are now tearing up, "My gawd...I'm afraid to ask...did you injure him...seriously or worse?" she asks.

"Nah...the pig's okay, but the student they beat up was in pretty bad shape...blood everywhere. He was unconscious when Byron and I dragged him to the hospital. He had a serious head injury...maybe brain damage. They're weren't sure if he'd even make it...or if he does, if he's going to have a life-long mental impairment. At the hospital, the cops had cameras...taking pictures of anyone who might have been involved in the demonstration. I was sure they must have got one of me...and Byron, 'cause we waited around for over an hour to make sure he was okay.

About a week later, I went to the hospital to check on the student...A. H. Shapiro is his name. He's a law student...or was...now that his brains are scrambled?

Anyway, they had to open the back of his head to relieve the pressure...from the internal bleeding. He's got like fifty stitches in the back of his head...said he'd been arrested and expelled, but he didn't rat on me. I wasn't sure that they could ID me, but the cops probably had a picture of me...and I knew if I stuck around there in Berkeley it would be just a matter of time before that campus cop would see me around and identify me and they'd arrest me. I knew I had to get the hell out of there. So I can't go back there for a while...at least this 'til blows over...like maybe never. Byron's still up there in school, working with Charles Washington at SNCC. I don't think the cop that chased him can positively identify him. He shaved off his beard in case they've got his picture at the hospital.

So anyway...I split and hitchhiked down here. I didn't want to wake you, so I let myself in with my key."

Maria is staring at Mick, with tears streaming down her face, she says, "Oh...Mickey I'm so sorry. I just had a terrible feeling about Berkeley...like a premonition that day you drove off as I watched you leave from the window. I just wanted to chase you down to yell...*no...don't go*. It was like reliving the nightmare of the death of my dear brother, your namesake, Mikie...all over again. I wish the hell you'd never gone up there."

"Mom...I don't regret having gone to Berkeley...or what I did. I did what I had to do...what you always taught me. I did the right thing. Byron and I got involved in something very important...much larger than my little personal problems. I met some very courageous and committed

people...Mario and Charles...the best and the brightest, persecuted for just trying to do the right thing, to assert their constitutional rights and for the civil rights of blacks in the South. For the most basic human right...to vote. I'm a changed person, Mom. I see the world in a whole different light now. The injustice of the whole friggin' system...the unfairness of it, controlled by the rich and powerful...and the oppressive government. There's no turning away...or going back now," Mick says.

She gets up and takes a stack of mail out of the drawer of the credenza, and solemnly places it in front of Mick.

Mick stares at the letter on top and slowly opens it and begins reading, "I've been drafted...the NBA it ain't. *You are hereby directed to present yourself for Armed Forces Physical Examination by reporting at the Selective Service Center in Los Angeles March 9, 1965,*" Mick says handing the letter to Maria.

"My son, wandering around in the jungles of Vietnam...with a bull's-eye on his back? Over my dead body. No way!" Maria cries.

"Over somebody's dead body. A very inviting *tall* target...stickin' out like a sore very long thumb. Yeap...now mothers get to watch on TV, while the *fucking* military industrial complex grinds up their young...and for what? They're not going to get me to kill some poor little rice patty rube, just to fatten up their already obscene bottom line. At Berkeley, it's *hell no...we won't go!*" says defiantly.

"What are you going do, Mickey?"

"I don't know mom...I really don't. But no way am I going to Vietnam. I guess I could go to Canada, like a lot of the draftees...but that seems like a chicken-shit way out. I guess I'll just have to appear as ordered, and refuse induction...on the basis of being a conscientious objector and see where that goes. Might mean some jail time. But hell no...I won't go. Period."

"Oh son...I'm just sick with worry. But I'll support any decision you make," Maria says as she comes around behind him and gives him a hug.

Mick decides, if he doesn't get drafted, he will enroll at UCLA, in the spring, so that means it's time to make some money for the next semester to save for tuition and books, and buy a more reliable car to commute to Westwood.

He is working out, five times a week with weights at the local YMCA, and still taking steroids. He body is dramatically changing. He now weighs about 245 pounds, of solid muscle. He responds to an ad in the L.A. Times for a warehouseman at Sears and Roebuck mail order fulfillment center in East Los Angeles. Because of his size and strength he is immediately hired to work on the South dock, unloading rolls of heavy carpet and linoleum. In a sheet metal oven of a warehouse, the work is grueling—doing heavy lifting all day long, but the money's good and it keeps him in shape. In the process he is exposed to a whole new

world of working class Latinos and Blacks. Mick is humbled by their quiet dignity and work ethic...never complaining...never missing a day's work or being late.

They are very appreciative of having a steady good paying job with benefits including medical insurance. Mick becomes fast friends with several who graciously invite him to their modest homes for dinners and Sunday family barbeques. Children are plentiful, well-groomed and polite. Beautiful, healthy and boundlessly happy in a supportive atmosphere of love, joy and lots of laughter, with many *tias y tios*, aunts and uncles, and *abuelos*, grandparents lovingly doting over them.

The kids are enthralled with Mick's relatively enormous size and after the initial shyness wears off, they climb all over *El Gigante*...The Giant, like a jungle-jim, giggling and competing to sit on his lap, And when he playfully tosses them up in the air, and calls them *mis camarones pequeños*, my little shrimps, they shriek with delight.

Working with Latinos he begins to hone his Spanish. They patiently tutor him, learning many idioms, which he often mangles to the laughter of his new *compadres*, and in the process becomes fairly fluent in *español* which increases the bond between them.

He is struck by their sense of commitment to family and community and the joy taken in simple pleasures like family gatherings. It opens his eyes to a whole new world of working class folks tirelessly toiling to make a better life for their children. The quiet unspoken patient resignation to get their kids an education, perhaps, even college with the hope of realizing the American Dream of each generation moving up the social ladder, one agonizing wrung at a time. To be all that they can be—to make a better life for each successive generation, one generation at a time.

He continues to play basketball in industrial leagues three nights a week, just to keep his skill set up, and to stay in condition. At one of the games in a recreation league, he plays against a team sponsored by a one of the more popular local top 40 radio stations KRLA. He does a few slam dunks and puts on some dazzling moves which brings some "oohhs and aahhs" from the crowd, playfully clowning with some of the opposing players.

After the game, he is approached by one of the disc jockeys, Charlie O'Donnell, to play as a ringer on the team for charity benefits around the L.A. metro area, for marketing and promotional purposes for the station—sort of a Honky Harlem Globetrotters, dubbed the KRLA Apes. Mick's roll is to work out some funny routines with Charlie to get a laugh, sometimes at the expense of the other team, which is usually the faculty of ex-jocks and coaches at local high school benefits to raise money for some cause. He gets paid handsomely, by the game, for entertaining the crowd with thunderous dunks and clowning around with

the on-air radio personalities, including Charlie 'O' and Casey Kasem, ending with everyone passing out promotional T-shirts and hats to the audience, emblazoned with KRLA. By now Mick, at six-foot-six weighing in at about 250 pounds of well-defined muscle, with long hair and beard, is an imposing physical specimen and a bit of a heartthrob with cheerleader coeds of the various high schools venues they play.

It's great fun...all the guys on the team are on-air personalities...loose, zany and very funny. After the games, they consume voluminous pitchers of beer and prodigious amounts of pizza and tell endless hilarious jokes and stories complete with dialects.

From 1958 Charlie O'Donnell, born, and raised a tough street kid from Philadelphia, whose legendary velvet baritone voice could "peel wallpaper", was the sidekick to Dick Clark on the highly popular with teens, American Bandstand, nationally syndicated weekday afternoons from WFIL TV, Philly. In 1964, when he came to L.A. KRLA was battling KFWB for the "Top Rocker" spot, and due to Charlie's efforts 1110 AM became a major force in a very competitive market. Mick and Charlie connect immediately as they are both born in Philly, and have the same edgy South Philly cynical sense of humor, in Mick's case deeply embedded in his DNA—they become fast and long-time friends.

Occasional celebrity "guest" players who contributed their time to bolster the attendance gate included comics Bill Cosby, a good B-ball player, also from Philly, and the fall-down funny Richie Pryor, who was just beginning to make a name for himself doing stand-up, before his then radical manic 'niggah' routines.

One night, the KRLA Apes had a gig at a local high school, in Glendale.

Richie Pryor is advertised as making an appearance, so it's a sell-out crowd—the gym is packed with Young Republican crew-cuts and bouffants. Glendale, a bedroom community of L.A. was a highly affluent, gentrified de facto James Crow WASP enclave, whose concept of ethnic diversity consists of a few token country club Jews—Blacks were allowed within city limits if they were out of town before sundown. As they pull into the high school parking lot, Mick says to Richie, "Dig it man...nothing older than a year or two. Mercedes, Porsche, BMW. A decidedly Germanic *leit motif*, perhaps a harbinger. Uh...any questions about why last year George Lincoln Rockwell picked this WASP nest for the West Coast headquarters of the American Nazi Party?"

"Yea, man. Looks like a Nazi new car lot," Richie says.

The de facto segregation in the North, of exclusive suburbs like Glendale, California, even though absent the overt physical violence, in some ways was no less insidious and emotionally pathological for the Blacks, as in the deep South. While there may have been a patina of civility and racial acceptance, the dirty and dark truth is if you were a

Black man caught driving in town after sundown, the police would pull you over, and subject you to all manner of harassment, sometimes threatening arrest for a minor infraction like a broken taillight...mysteriously working before the pull-over, sometimes resulting in a costly impounding of the vehicle.

Often, after a long interrogation about the purpose of their visit, with no probable cause, an unwarranted search of the vehicle including the trunk on suspicion of burglary was done as a routine matter. They then, 'for your own safety', would be 'escorted' by the police to the city limits. But the message was loud and clear—unless you're white, Anglo-Saxon, your kind ain't welcome. The unspoken Jim Crow mantra; *Now, if you're white you're alright...if you're Brown you can stick around...but if you're Black. Git back!*

The policy of rampant de facto 'redlining', the practice of denying, or charging more for housing, services such as banking, insurance, access to health care, or denying jobs to residents in particular on racial bias and prejudice, employing a complex sinister lexicon of code words to avoid prosecution, was always just below the thin veneer of civility.

During the warm-up, the girl cheerleaders come over, and start to openly flirt with Mick, wanting to feel his biceps etcetera, and touching Richie's Afro, asking for autographs. Richie gets 'em laughing, and they begin fawning over him, much to the open resentment of the members of the other team. In the course of the regular warm-up routine of the Apes, doing lay-ups, Richie leans over to Mick and says, "Hey man...notice anything...unusual about da crowd?" riffing in his high-pitched patented paternalistic white-man mimic.

Mick scans the crowd, and notices that there is not one Black person in the entire audience.

"Now that you mention it Richie, there does seem to be a conspicuous absence of people of uh...color, in attendance," Mick says.

"*Sheit*, man. The only color I'm seein' is red...rednecks. There ain't one Black brutha in the whole fuckin' gym. What is this...a fund raiser for the local chapter of the American Nazi Party?" Richie says.

Then the all-very-white coaches and faculty start warming up. They are reeking with the smell of alcohol—they've obviously been drinking. Their eyes are red and they're raucously laughing, pointing at Richie. Not a good sign. Mick and Richie walk up to Charlie O, "Who booked this gig...the Glendale Grand Wizard?" Richie says.

Mick takes Charlie aside, "Hey man...these guys are all loaded...and there's a mean vibe coming from them...toward Richie."

"The marketing manager booked it. His old high school. It'll probably be okay...*I hope*. Just in case keep on eye out for Richie," Charlie says.

"Like...that marketing guy any relation to Joseph Goebbels? Hey man, I played against this Wonder-bread high school. The fact that it's

named after a Hoover tell ya anything? Welcome to my ol' hood, man...Glendale, aka Green-dale," Mick says drawing dollar signs in the air.

"Herbert or J. Edgar?" Charlie says.

"Hoover as in vacuum, man...as in sucks big time," Mick says

The referee blows the whistle to start the game, with Richie on the bench.

From the opening tip-off, it becomes obvious to Mick and the other Apes, that the other team is not only not playing in the spirit of fun, they are out to prove something. They're making excessively hard fouls, to the amusement and applause of the crowd, which only encourages their gratuitously aggressive play. Mick calls time out.

"Hey Charlie...didn't these guys get the memo...that this ain't supposed serious? What the hell happened to fun?" Mick says.

"Yea, I know man...that one Neanderthal asshole that's guardin' me is holding on to me...pushin' and shovin' non-stop. If he don't knock it off...I'm going to clock him. Let's put Richie in the game, clown around a little...maybe loosen things up," Charlie says.

Richie takes the floor. A kid in the front row of the bleachers does a bad imitation of a monkey, playing to the crowd, jumping up and down, scratching himself, drawing a big laugh from the bleachers, which of course only encourages several others to join in with the monkey mimicry. Monkey see...monkey do. Its racist intent is not lost on Mick or Richie.

Mick, now tiring of the charade of a charitable cause, decides to send a message to the other team...*so you guys want to play some serious B-ball, huh? Okay...game on.*

Charlie O throws a perfect lob pass which Mick catches mid-air, and slam dunks, hitting the Neanderthal, standing under the basket squarely in the face, drawing an "ooooh" and a laugh from the crowd. The next play on the other end, in retaliation and an escalation of hostilities, Neanderthal bulls his way over Charlie for lay-in, which the last second Mick jumps high and blocks, spiking it hard, again in his face. Now the crowd is really getting into it...wildly cheering, *in your face...in your face.* Apparently he's not much more popular with his own locals. His face is now glowing red, no small measure, from humiliation.

After the first half, the Apes have built up a 10 point lead...mostly on baskets from Mick and Charlie. But there is a growing ominous aura of malevolence emanating from the other bench.

At the start of the second half Mick, grabs a rebound and spots Charlie breaking down court. Mick throws a long baseball pass to Charlie who has a clear path to the basket. He goes up for an uncontested lay-in, when suddenly Neanderthal barrels underneath him, while Charlie's in mid-air, and undercuts him, flipping him upside down. This kind of egregious foul is considered to be one of the worst fouls in

basketball. The equivalent of an unprovoked street mugging—it is strictly taboo to undercut a defenseless player in mid-air because of the high probability for serious injury. The last split second, Charlie miraculously manages to get his feet under him, but lands very hard with a loud thud. Mick seeing this immediately sprints down court and arrives just in time to witness the South Philly tough street kid kick in. As soon as he hits the floor, Charlie bounces up and bull-charges Neanderthal, tackling him.

While Richie is just standing there enjoying this farce unfold, one of the stocky crew cut football coaches runs up behind him, and with no warning, delivers a cheap shot cross body block from behind, sprawling Richie on the floor. Mick, seeing this grabs the coach around the neck restraining him from behind as he's getting up.

"Hey...you chicken shit. That's unnecessary roughness. The penalty...a free kick," he whispers in his ear.

"Get off of me...you niggah luva. I ain't done with that smart-ass uppity niggah," the coach yells with a thick Southern drawl.

"...and automatic loss of possession of...balls. You're cracker ass is so done," Mick calmly says.

As all the attention of the referees is on Charlie and Neanderthal rolling around on the floor, Mick spins him around, and at close quarters, inconspicuously knees him in the groin. He drops like a stone, rolling on the floor writhing in pain, holding his genitals.

You can take the boy out of the South...

Referee whistles are now blowing non-stop, as both benches empty on to the floor. After Charlie has got some serious licks in on Neanderthal, Mick tears Charlie off of him. It takes about five minutes, to finally restore order—Charlie is awarded two free throws.

Mick goes over to Richie and helps him up.

"Hey Richie...havin' fun so far?" Mick says.

"Dunno how much more of dis kinda fun I can take, man...so where's the next gig, Selma Alabama?" Richie says.

"This is the dress rehearsal...welcome to Selma North," Mick says.

When the players line up on the key for the free throws, Neanderthal is closest to the basket, beside him is Richie Pryor. Richie is leaning in toward Neanderthal, whispering something in his ear, non-stop. Neanderthal's face is getting redder and redder by the second. While the free throw is in the air, Richie deftly slides behind Neanderthal, and perfectly timed with the *swish*, pulls his shorts down around his ankles, exposing his huge, very white and very hairy bare butt, adorned with only a jockey strap. This draws a huge round of laughter, hoots and cheering from the crowd. All the Apes including Mick are now in convulsive laughter. Even some of Neanderthal's teammates can't restrain themselves.

Richie, is now taking theatrical bows to the audience, while Neanderthal, instinctively covers his front with one hand, and then with the other hand is struggling to get his shorts up. Finally, he gets them up, and sees Richie mugging for the audience. With his small mean pig eyes filled with mayhem, he lunges at Richie, but Richie's too quick and evades him, continuing with his antics.

"Run! Richie, run!" Mick yells.

Neanderthal recovers and starts chasing Richie, but Richie is doing his best Cassius Clay and Neanderthal is Sonny Liston. While Cassius, is being chased around the gym, Sonny like an awkward bear cub, is making a complete fool of himself trying to catch him. Cassius now running backwards, is mercilessly taunting him. The gym is in complete chaos. Referee's whistles are blowing non-stop. Richie takes one victory lap around the gym, then into the locker room, with all the Apes following him, as Neanderthal's teammates tackle him, and restrain him until he finally calms down. Game over. No T-shirts? No hats? No promo? No shit.

In the locker room, everyone quickly dresses without showering. They jump into their cars, and make good their get-away. On the way back, they stop at their customary watering hole pizza joint where the fun begins, with Richie doing his side-splitting re-enactment over *beaucoup* beer and pizza.

"Hey, Richie...so wuddya say to Neanderthal that could spark such a...recalcitrant reaction?" asks Mick, Richie's new straight-man.

"Apparently is he is overly sensitive about his phallic uh ...shortcomings and the imagery of his wifey indulging in sexual fantasies...particularly with uh...well-endowed multiple Nigerian gentlemen," Richie says, slipping seamlessly into his high-pitched white-man *shtick*.

- Chapter 11 -

Sunday night - March 7th 1965

Mick and Maria are watching the Sundays Night Movie on ABC, Judgment at Nuremberg, when suddenly the programming is interrupted by the coverage of the march from Selma to Montgomery Alabama. The shocking video images of the brutality visited upon the peaceful Black marchers are horrific. The first march had taken place that Sunday, on March 7, 1965.

About ten in the evening, the phone rings for about 10 rings. Maria glances at it, but doesn't acknowledge or respond to it. She seems intent on ignoring it.

"Mom...you gonna get that?" Mick asks.

"Just ignore it...it's probably a wrong number," Maria says.

After 20 or so rings, Mick gets up and answers the phone.

"Hello...hello? Who is this?"

There is no answer just the sound of heavy breathing...then *click*.

"Mom...that's probably why I couldn't reach you. What the hell's going on here?" Mick says.

"It's nothing...let's not talk about it now. Maybe later...too much going on with you to go into it," Maria says

Five minutes later, the phone begins to ring again, this time Mick jumps up, angrily answering, "Who the hell *is* this...*goddammit!*" Mick yells into the receiver.

"Koz? That you, man?" the voice says.

"Yeah...this is the Koz. Who the hell are you?" Mick yells.

"This is Byron, Mick...I got some really bad news for ya, man," Byron Brawley says haltingly.

"Byron...sorry 'bout that man. Mom's been getting these harassing phone calls. What's up?" Mick asks.

"You been followin' that march from Selma to Montgomery...Alabama. It's all over the news, and on TV?" Byron asks.

"Yea...we were just watching the coverage on TV...brutal man."

"I just connected with Mario Savio. He said you should probably know, since you and Charles Washington were so close. C-Wash went down there...to help John Lewis chairman of SNCC, organize a march from Selma to the capital...Montgomery. They marched over the Edmund Petus bridge, about six hundred of 'em...with John Lewis and Charles leading the march, where they were met by

about 200 Alabama State Troopers...just waitin' for 'em in riot gear with gas masks...some mounted on horseback.

They were ordered to disperse. They refused to turn around. They were being totally non-violent in their demonstration...they just simply wanted the right to peacefully march to Montgomery, about 50 miles away to petition the governor's office on voting rights issues for Blacks. Without any further warning, the troopers waded right into 'em... swinging billy clubs on the men...and the women and children...and with tear gas...and dogs. They didn't have a chance man. C-Wash, we're guessing because he was so much taller, bigger was perceived as more of threat...was one of the first attacked.

The fuckin' pigs beat on 'em...savagely. By the time it was over, C-Wash had been laying there unconscious for at least half an hour before anyone could check on him. He never regained consciousness, man...he died tonight. Those fuckin' cracker cops beat 'em to death!" Brawley says half-sobbing.

"C-Wash...*dead*?" Mick says in disbelief.

"Yeah...man, anyway I thought you should know. I'm calling from a payphone. I gotta hang up now...sorry man," Brawley says, choking up. *Click*.

Mick slowly places the receiver on the phone and starts to tear up. *Charles Washington...gone*.

Maria seeing that Mick is emotionally distraught, ashen, with tears streaming down his face asks, "What's happened Mickey...you look like you just lost your best friend?"

"Yea...something like that mom. I can't talk about it right now," Mick says, as he walks back to his bedroom, closes the door and slowly collapses on the edge of the bed, cradling his head in his hands, and begins to sob uncontrollably.

It became known as "Bloody Sunday" when over 600 marchers, protesting the death of Jimmie Lee Jackson and ongoing exclusion from the electoral process, were attacked by state and local police with billy clubs and tear gas.

Jimmie Lee Jackson was a civil rights' protestor who was shot and killed by an Alabama State Trooper James Bonard Fowlerin in 1965. Jackson was unarmed. His death inspired the Selma to Montgomery marches, an important event in the American Civil Rights movement. He was 26 years old. Jimmie Lee Jackson was a deacon of the St. James Baptist Church in Marion, Alabama, ordained in summer 1964. Jackson had tried to register to vote without success for four years. Jackson was inspired by Martin Luther King, Jr, who had touched off a campaign against Alabama restrictions on Negro voting and attended meetings several nights a week at Zion's Chapel Methodist Church. This desire to vote led to his death at the hands of an Alabama State Trooper and to the inspiration for the Selma to Montgomery marches

The unintended consequences of the news coverage of the abject brutality by the Alabama government to thwart the marchers was, in some ways, an accidental watershed for the civil rights movements. The unprecedented compelling moving images with audio, captured the sound and the fury of the gratuitous violence used by the Alabama state troopers against the defenseless, non-violent marchers, sounding a clarion call to rest of America for justice...as never before.

It is widely believed that the comprehensive television coverage of the assassination of John F. Kennedy on November 22, 1963, is considered the technological genesis of the capacity to almost instantaneously connect with, shape, manipulate and eventually exploit the raw emotions of the public. It would signal the arrival of a new and perhaps to some, a threat to the traditional corporately controlled status quo of media. If released, untamed into the wilds of raw democracy, the technology of visual media, could become a powerful, even dangerous, democratic agent of political change.

The unparalleled seemingly magical ability to arouse public awareness and emotions at near real-time through the broadcast transmission medium over the air waves, through essentially a microscopic electronic beam scanning back and forth across a TV screen of 525 lines 30 times per second transmitted to the far reaches of America, and the world, unleashed a powerful technology, and ultimately a pathological weapon, in the hands of the manufacturers of consent—Unreality Industry Inc.

So, like most technology it was a good-news versus bad-news proposition. Possessed of a seemingly limitless capacity to provoke a profound shift of collective consciousness in positive ways, later the high concentration of corporate media ownership of both content and delivery mechanisms, in some cases within the same market, would begin to subtly, insidiously shape the discourse of public discussion and opinion, including the electoral process, often resulting in the manipulation of the electorate voting against its own self-interest.

Some would later compare the heroic sacrifices of the marchers on that "Bloody Sunday" as sacrificial lambs that were martyred for the good of the civil rights movement. The civil rights leadership, recognizing the inherent, albeit unintended opportunity in the unprecedented shocking visceral impact of this tragic incident in history, would wisely decide to channel and capitalize on the ensuing, intense national outrage. It would ultimately turn the tide in forcing the U.S. government to finally seek legislative remedy to protect voting civil rights for all minorities in America, manifesting the Voting Rights Act of 1965.

But, it must not go unsaid, that it was primarily precipitated by the sacrifices, for centuries, of countless heroic "ordinary" Black people,

along with many White brethren who, in some cases gave their lives for the vision of Jesus Christ's Sermon on the Mount—a shining City on the Hill.

For it was predominately through of the leadership of Christian churches particularly the Black churches in the South, that was at the forefront in exhorting the world to fully and unconditionally recognize for all men, the vision of the Founding Fathers embodied in the Declaration of Independence:

We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.

The second march, "Turn Around Tuesday" was held the following Tuesday, March 9th, and resulted in 2,500 protesters turning around after crossing the Edmund Pettus Bridge. Immediately after "Bloody Sunday," Reverend King and others from SCLC, Southern Christian Leadership Conference, began organizing a second march to be held on Tuesday, March 9, 1965. They issued a call for clergy and citizens from across the country to join them. Awakened to issues of civil and voting rights by years of Civil Rights struggles, from the Montgomery Bus Boycott to Freedom Summer, and shocked by the television images of "Bloody Sunday," thousands of common people of good will, including hundreds of non-black ministers of all Christian sects, Catholic priests and nuns, responded to SCLC's call.

To prevent another outbreak of violence, SCLC attempted to gain a court order that would prohibit the police from interfering. Instead of issuing the court order, Federal District Court Judge Frank Johnson issued a restraining order, preventing the march from taking place until he could hold additional hearings later in the week. There was also insufficient infrastructure in place to support a long march, one for which the marchers were ill-equipped.

Based on past experience, SCLC was confident that Judge Johnson would eventually lift the restraining order and they did not want to alienate one of the few Southern judges who was often sympathetic to their cause, by violating his injunction. Further, a person who violates a court order may be punished for contempt even if the order is later reversed, so the SCLC leadership decided to demur.

That evening, three white ministers who had come for the march were attacked by four members of the Ku Klux Klan and beaten with clubs. The worst injured was James Reeb, a white Unitarian Universalist minister from Boston. Selma's public hospital refused to treat Rev. Reeb, who had to be taken to Birmingham's University Hospital, two hours away. Reeb died on Thursday, March 11 at University Hospital with his wife by his side.

On Thursday, March 25, under the protection of thousands of federalized Alabama National Guardsmen and police ordered by president Johnson, 25,000 people marched from St. Jude to the steps of the State Capitol Building where Reverend King delivered the speech "How Long, Not Long":

The end we seek, is a society at peace with itself, a society that can live with its conscience. I know you are asking today, How long will it take? I come to say to you this afternoon however difficult the moment, however frustrating the hour, it will not be long.

After delivering the speech, King and the marchers approached the entrance to the capitol with a petition for Governor Wallace. A line of state troopers blocked the door. One of them announced that the governor wasn't in. Undeterred, the marchers remained at the entrance until one of Wallace's secretaries appeared and took the petition.

Later that night, Viola Liuzzo, a 40 year-old white mother of five from Detroit who had come to Alabama to support voting rights for Blacks, was assassinated by Ku Klux Klan members while she was ferrying marchers back to Selma from Montgomery.

Liuzzo was horrified by the images of the aborted march on March 7, 1965. Nine days later, she took part in a protest at Wayne State. She then called her husband to tell him she would be traveling to Selma, saying that the struggle "was everybody's fight."

Viola Liuzzo decided to take the fight to Selma, the current center of the civil rights movement. Leaving her husband and children in the care of her family and friends, The Southern Christian Leadership Conference received Liuzzo, and tasked her with delivering aid to various locations, and recruiting and transporting volunteers and marchers

After the march concluded on March 25, Liuzzo, assisted by Leroy Moton, a 19-year-old Black man, helped drive local marchers to African American colleges and to their homes in her 1963 Oldsmobile. As they were driving along Route 80, a car tried to force them off the road. The car with four Klan members then pulled up alongside Liuzzo's car and shot directly at her, hitting her twice in the head, killing her instantly. Her car veered into a ditch and crashed into a fence.

The four Birmingham chapter Ku Klux Klan members had traveled to Selma for the purpose of interfering with the campaign, even at the cost of murder. They believed the loudest message conveying their views would be sent if they killed a non-southern activist, in order to discourage future outside supporters. Their opportunity for such action took place when they came upon Liuzzo and Moton. Although Moton was covered with blood, the bullets had missed him. He lay motionless when the Klansmen reached the car to check on their victims. After the

car left, for the next half hour he began running, searching for help, eventually flagging down a truck that was bringing civil rights workers back to Selma.

Among the Klansmen in the car from which the shots were fired was FBI informant Gary Rowe. Despite Rowe's eyewitness testimony, the three members of the Ku Klux Klan were acquitted of murder by an all-white Alabama jury.

Afterward, J. Edgar Hoover's FBI smear machine COINTELPRO operation scurrilously spread false rumors that Liuzzo was a member of the Communist Party and abandoned her children to have sexual relationships with African Americans involved in the civil rights movement.

Ultimately, after all the beatings and the martyring of Black women and children, and men, including one 23 year old Charles Tyrone Washington, one of the best and brightest of any color, even after the KKK bombing death of four young girls at the Baptist Church in Birmingham—sadly, it took the death of innocent Northern white folks to finally galvanize the country's outrage over the draconian tactics of wanton violence by the Southern Segregationists.

On March 15, 1965, president Lyndon Johnson presented a bill to a joint session of Congress. The bill itself would later pass and become the Voting Rights Act. Johnson's speech in front of Congress was considered to be a defining moment for the civil rights movement.

Even if we pass this bill, the battle will not be over. What happened in Selma is part of a far larger movement which reaches into every section and state of America. It is the effort of American Negroes to secure for themselves the full blessings of American life. Their cause must be our cause, too, because it is not just Negroes but really it is all of us who must overcome the crippling legacy of bigotry and injustice.

And we shall overcome.

The bill became law at a ceremony attended by many civil rights leaders, including iconic activists Martin Luther King Jr and Rosa Parks, at the signing of the Voting Rights Act on August 6, 1965. This act prohibited most of the unfair practices used to prevent Blacks, and other minorities from registering to vote, and provided for federal registrars to go to Alabama and other states with a history of voting-related discrimination to ensure that the law was implemented.

On a Tuesday, June 25th 2013, the Supreme Court systematically stacked by the various Republican administrations over the years with conservative appointees, ruled that states no longer can be judged by voting discrimination that went on decades ago, a decision

that argues "*the country has fundamentally changed since the racially motivated laws of the civil rights' era.*"

In a 5-4 ruling, with all the progressive justices dissenting, the majority of conservative justices said the Voting Rights Act's requirement that mainly Southern states must undergo special scrutiny before changing their voting laws is based on a 40-year-old formula *that is no longer relevant to changing racial circumstances.*

Subsequent the decision, almost overnight, many states in the South enacted legislation which ostensibly was designed to discourage and gratuitously encumber the process of voter registration, under the pretense of preventing, essentially non-existent voter fraud—again targeted at the Black population—the de facto resurrection of one Mr James Crow.

Mutantur, quanto magis haec eadem manere... The more things change...the more they stay the same.

- Chapter 12 -

Tuesday - March 9th 1965

Early Morning - Selective Service Induction Center - Los Angeles, California

Mick is standing in a long line, with about 40 young draftee recruits, ages 18 to early 20s, all in their underwear and T-shirts, each holding their manila envelope pre-induction packets and empty urine specimens vials. Many are Black or Hispanic; almost all obviously from the lower economic class. A white, stocky rooster of a sergeant is strutting up and down the lines, exhorting and badgering with a thick Southern drawl—a real cracker. One theory holds that the term derives from the "cracking" of whips, by white foremen in the antebellum South against African slaves.

"Okay you grunts...keep it movin'! Those of you fortunate to be selected to serve yo cuntry...get used to it. Yo ass belongs to Uncle Sam. Any of you *ladies* who *intend* to refuse induction, step out of line...*now!* And we'll have a little chat...man-to-woman like," the sergeant yells.

Mick, bearded with long hair, takes a long deep breath, looks up and down the line, then steps out, along with only one other white, very slight young man, with shoulder length hair, causing a collective murmur up and down the line. Cranking his bull-neck, the sergeant puts his face right in Mick's and sputters, "Well, well, well...what *have* we got hiya? Missy...kinda big...for a girlie. I didn't say to step out of line if'n y'all need a Kotex. Y'all just won first prize for stupidity. Now...I'll repeat it so's even a moron like y'all can unnastan'...is you *refusin' induction!*"

"Thanks y'all...now dats reel white of ya. But y'all know where you kin put dat der prize...and dat goes fo da box a cracka jacks it comes in, as I dun much care for...jack...*asses*...or *crackas* fo dat matta, uh...boss. Oh...and stayin' in line? Redefines stupid," Mick says.

This draws a big laugh from the line, especially from the Blacks.

"You boys best shut up, now...an' knock off dat laughin' if y'all know what's good fer ya," he yells at the line. "Okay...smart ass. Jez keep it up. Now, missy...if you've got the balls, which I doubt...repeat your refusal and with *suh!*"

The other man returns to the line.

"*I refuse induction* on moral grounds uh...massa *suh!*" Mick yells.

"Okay, Mary Jane, walk this way...the *grave*, in every sense of da word, consequences are about to be made clea in ways even yo stupid

ass kin unnstan'. Then your sorry ass *will* be mine, ya hea, boy? Walk dis way, boy," he says motioning his hand to follow.

Mick shrugs okay, and falls in behind, mimicking the smug strutting sergeant's walk. This draws another big laugh from the line, prompting the sergeant to spin around—he is not amused.

"Just following orders...*suh!*," Mick says.

They enter a door, with "CO Screening", which slams shut behind them.

Tuesday March 9, 1965 about 6 PM

Marie's apartment

The three main national broadcast networks, had been interrupting the regular programming all-day with non-stop TV coverage of the horrific sound and images, of the first and second march, from Selma to Montgomery.

In the same somber, sober voice, avuncular Walter Cronkite, the trusted CBS six-o'clock news anchorman, that had announced with a chilling professional equanimity, that president John F. Kennedy, America's equivalent to royalty, had just been pronounced dead—is giving some background on the marches. Mick, haggard and sad-looking, lets himself into the living room where Maria is transfixed in front of the TV. His long hair and beard replaced with a GI haircut and a clean shave.

Sitting in the dark, in tears, Maria's face is etched in the eerie flickering glow of the TV.

Without looking up, "Hi son...you heard about the march today? They turned them back...again...been cryin' all day," Maria says.

"Yea, mom...at the Draft Board," Mick says.

Maria turns the TV volume down, and looks up at Mick.

"My God...your hair...are you drafted!?" Maria cries.

Mick joins Maria on the sofa. On the TV they are showing archival footage of the first Sunday march, with the cops chasing down the defenseless marchers, as Mick begins:

At first, I refused induction, mom...they made me sit around, for about 2 hours, trying to sweat me...hoping I would have a change of heart. Then, finally a young black officer calls me into his little crypt and confirms with me that I'm refusing induction. He's looking over my file, in the meantime this sergeant, obviously from the deep South, who had called me out of line was talking to some other soldiers, loud enough that everyone could overhear him, saying things about the Selma march...how "dem Selma...White niggahs this... and Black niggahs that, got the beatin' they deserved" and how today they had turned back "those niggahs and dem Northern agitatas...showed 'em who's boss."

The expression on the face of that young Black officer was getting more and more angry and agitated the longer that sergeant carried on with his bigoted tirade. Finally, when he looks up from the file at me, I can see he's extremely upset.

I say, "I think I know how you feel, man. On the Sunday Selma march, I lost one of my best friends...a Black man...we were at Berkeley together...Charles Washington. He was helping John Lewis organize the march...so he was right up front...they were totally non-violent and peaceful, man. He was one of the first to get attacked. He never had a chance to even protect himself, man. Those fuckin' cracker pigs literally beat him to death. He died that night. In the news...on TV...not a word was mentioned about his death. And why do you think that is?

'Cause he wasn't White, maybe? He was a law student, man...smart, dedicated...and courageous. But because he was a Black man, somehow his life, has less value? Fuckin' tragedy, man. Now they want to send the Black man to fight their imperialist wars for 'em...half-way around world...when he's not even allowed to sit a White lunch counter in Montgomery, the capital of Alabama."

Mick says his voice cracking with emotion.

The Black officer's eyes, began to tear up. Just about then, that sergeant walks over to the doorway of his office and yells in, "Hey...you got this fuckin' hippie processed yet, boy?"

The young Black officer, looks up...he just stares at him for about 10 seconds, then jumps up and starts to walk over toward the sergeant, with both of his fists clinched. I got up, and managed to step in between. He was strong...his rage was so intense. I could barely restrain him. He wanted to do some serious damage to the cracker sergeant. I whispered in his ear, "Not here, man...not now, not here." Finally, he calmed down and went back to his seat behind the desk.

"That's right boy...you jus sit yo sif down...in da back of da bus. You do not even want any paart of me," the sergeant says, his lips curling in to an ugly mean smile, then turns around and struts off.

Absolute silence. Even though the other soldiers had witnessed

: : Michaelangelo's Renaissance — m.a.kominsky : :

this humiliating incident, probably one of many regularly heaped upon Black soldiers by White officers, they had tacitly tolerated if not condoned it with their deafening silence.

Even after president Harry S. Truman had ordered the desegregation of the U.S. military in 1948 with Executive Order 9981, virulent de facto Jim Crow attitudes and practices were still very prevalent in 1965 in all branches of the U.S. military.

Time stood still, for about a minute, then the guy seems to melt, like he'd taken a punch to his gut.

"You okay, man?" I said.

Finally, after about a minute, he says, "Yea...close the door."

I closed the door and sat back down.

He looked at me, fighting the tears and said, "Thanks...I'll settle up with that cracker later. The whole fuckin's world's gone mad, man...JFK...Malcom X...dead. Now Selma...and they expect me to send our bruthas over there? For what...just so's Whitey can buy bigger mansions...fancy cars...and 'spensive yachts? Man, do you have ANY idea what happens when you refuse?...heavy shit man. Like you could be facin' tooth-brushing latrines for 2 years in Leaven-fucking-worth," he says.

"Oh my God, Mickey...are you going to prison?" Maria cries. "So let me finish, mom."

Then he says in a low voice, "Look man...you put on the questionnaire that you're six foot six? Here's the deal. Get back in line and I'll tear up this Conscientious Objector Referral. Go through the exam...and make sure you don't slouch when they measure yer ass. And pray beaucoup...if you see that sergeant...yes SUH...no SUH...duty, honor, country 'n shit. Got it? Now get the hell outta here. This lil' chat NEVER happened."

"So...please! Please! Tell me...did you get drafted?" Maria breathlessly cries.

Mick stands up, at full attention and delivers a smart military salute, then doing his best John Wayne, "At ease...at ease, lil' lady.

I answered the call of duty for my country...yeap, you *NEVER stand so tall*, as when you are called upon to protect America's shores from invasion by that Commy Super-power...Vietnam. Your son measured up, thanks to my extra hair hat, 6 foot six and one-quarter inches. You're now looking at a proud...4F. Unfit to serve, 4F as in *four-*

ever. Too tall...by *one quarter* inch. On the way home, I decided it was time to get back in school...getta a real job, so I gotta a haircut and shave," Mick says with an impish grin.

"Oh, Mickey!" she screams, playfully slapping him, "You scared me to death!"

With tears of joy streaming down her cheeks, Maria jumps up and hugs Mick tightly.

"Hey mom...this calls for a celebration!" Mick says hugging his mother, rocking her back and forth.

"We've got a lot to be thankful for! I hope you know that it was my prayers and candles to Saint Anthony that delivered you," she says making the sign of the cross.

"Yeap...musta been those 100 candles. Nobody does that Catholic vood-oo...like you d-oo, mom," Mick says.

"Time to celebrate...a feast to give thanks to Saint Anthony. I just wish your sister could be here...she was worried sick about this. Anyway, you can invite some of your buddies," Maria says.

"That sounds great, mom. But I'm warning ya...these guys can really eat. And how 'bout instead of this Saint Annoyance...March 17th is Saint Patrick's Day. More of *mick* kinda saint as I intend to get *very* drunk," Mick says.

"Then Saint Patrick's Day it is...Italian style, of course," Maria says.

- Chapter 13 -

Saint Patrick's Day—Maria's apartment

From early morning and all through the day, while sipping Chianti, Maria is busily working in the kitchen, making all of Mickey's favorites, joyously singing Italian arias, accompanying the vinyl LP records on the Hi-Fi. The air is permeated with the scrumptious aroma of fresh-baked rosemary bread and pasta sauce.

All day long, Mick is breaking off pieces of the still hot, fresh bread, and dipping it into the huge pot of brilliant alizarin crimson tomato sauce, simmering on the stove since morning. Meatballs, sweet Italian sausage, veal scaloppini, roasted Italian bell peppers, marinated in fresh garlic and basil in olive oil. Mozzarella cheese wrapped in prosciutto antipasto, brushetta with marinated artichoke hearts and marinated mushrooms, on melted cheese, toasted to perfection, with baskets full of fresh bread. And bottles and bottles of Chianti, just waiting to be uncorked. The smells are *magnifico!*

At about seven o'clock, before the guests arrive, Maria walks into the living room, "Well, Mickey...whatta ya think?" she says giving a slow turn around.

"Wow! Ain't like no momma, I've *ever* seen...and she can cook too, folks! Smashing...positively smashing, mom," Mick says.

She has transformed herself from a *trattoria mamma mia* into beautiful *avant garde* artist, albeit a toned-down a la Left Bank in Burbank, with her raven hair piled up on top of her head, her large luminous green eyes sparkling in the flickering candlelight, in a hot-pink shift, with hoop earrings. Even at 49, she's still a looker—positively beguiling.

Maria's entertaining everyone with her stories about some incidents in class—they are rapt and enchanted by her. It is the first time, in a very long time, that he has seen his mother quite so happy. She is obviously in her element as the gracious, vivacious witty hostess. It brings tears to his eyes to see her enjoying herself so unreservedly, so completely, which she could never do as long as the Ruskie Prince of Darkness, alias Mick's father, was in her life. A natural born raconteur, whenever she has an audience, her larger than life personality flourishes. With lots of wine and good food, and the buzz of several simultaneous, naturally flowing conversations punctuated by raucous laughter, everyone is in a festive, happy mood.

Maria, Mick, Charlie O'Donnell and his wife, and his very tall and big buddies, Steve, John and Bill, B-ball teammates, are sitting around the candle-lit dining room table, when there is a lull in the music. Charlie O, now feeling pretty good from the Chianti, starts singing in the beautiful sonorous voice of an Irish tenor to Maria, an Italian rendition of When Irish Eyes Are Smiling:

*When Italian Eyes Are Smiling, sure 'tis like a morn in spring.
In the lilt of Italian laughter, you can hear the angels sing.
When Italian hearts are happy, all the world seems bright and
gay,
And When Italian Eyes Are Smiling, sure, they steal your heart
away...*

Everyone applauds. Maria blushes, reaches over and gives Charlie a big kiss on the cheek.

"Here's to the Irish...the most charming men in the world...next to the Italians, of course," Mick says raising his glass of wine to the others in a toast, which Charlie with feigned indignation, affecting a thick Irish brogue says "Ya know where I come from, them's fightin' words...Mickey, m' lad," with a toothy Irish smile.

"Anybody still hungry?" Maria asks, followed by a loud chorus of *NO!* from the guests.

"Couldn't eat another bite...sure beats the hell outta boiled potatoes, corned beef and cabbage. Twas da best dammed Saint Paddy's Day...ever. The antipasti, the veal and pasta. *Gracie...molto gracie,*" the ever-charming Charlie says.

"And...the candlelight and the opera...very cool. Thanks, Missus K," Bill says.

"Rigoleto and Rigatoni...specialty of the house. *Bravisima, mamma mia!* Thanks, mom," Mick says.

Everyone joins Mick in clapping as Maria curtsies.

The opera music, the great food and wine, the sense of family and the good times shared, the ceaseless laughter, over a delicious Italian feast, stirs within Maria a sense of nostalgia, even longing, to connect with her Caravaggio Italian roots.

At about 1 AM, the party finally begins to break up, with Mick shaking hands at the door as they are leaving, the phone rings. The phone continues to ring as Mick closes the door.

Two minutes later, the phone rings and rings again, Mick finally answers it this time.

"Hello? Hello? Whoever the hell this is...knock it off and grow up!" silence except for heavy breathing.

Mick is just about to hang-up, when a thin, frail female voice says, *"I just called...thought I dialed the number wrong. Is Pia there?"*

"Mom...it's for you...some woman," Mick says.

Maria picks up the phone, "Hello?"

"Oh, Pia..." the voice says, sobbing, *"I feel so all alone...so useless...unhappy...I just called to tell you...goodbye..."*

"Ruthy? Is that you dear? What's going on?"

"Oh...I made a big Saint Patrick's Day dinner...it was supposed to be a surprise for Fred...'cause he's Irish, I thought it would make him happy...but Fred, as usual got mean drunk. He threw the whole corned beef brisket at me....told me I was worthless...that I couldn't even boil a dinner without ruining it. He slapped me and called me a whore...in front of my own children! I just can't take it anymore Maria...thanks for the all years of friendship and kindness...I've taken some pills...goodbye Pia," Ruthy says sobbing.

"No! Wait Ruthy...you can't. Please...let's talk about it. Where are you right now!?" Maria pleads.

"I'm not sure...some motel, it doesn't matter...it's too late for talking now. I've already taken a lot of pills," Ruthy sobs.

Maria gestures to Mick to pick up the other phone to listen in.

"Ruthy, look out the window...tell me what you see," Maria says.

"Oh...I don't know...a Dairy Queen and...a gas station, a Shell..." Ruthy says, her word growing increasingly slurred.

Mick hangs up the phone.

"It's the Lamplighter Inn, just around the block, keep her talking...I'm on my way!" he says.

Mick sprints out the door, down the stairs.

"Ruthy, are you still there...keep talking to me, honey...we can get some help for you. Stay with me...please Ruthy," Maria says.

"I'm getting very sleepy now, Maria if I stay around here, I can never get away from...him...someday he'll kill..." Ruthy mumbles, her voice trailing off.

"You can't let that *bastardo* ruin your life! You have so much to live for...your children."

Maria hears the phone drop to the floor...complete silence.

"Ruthy! Ruthy! Talk to me!" Maria screams into the phone.

After several minutes, which seem like an eternity, still clutching the phone, Maria now hears the sound of a familiar voice.

"Mom...Ruthy's still alive. The night manager let me in. I've got her up...while walking her around, she vomited up whatever she took. I called an ambulance, I think she's going to make it, mom. We didn't get here any too soon," Mick says still out of breath.

Maria can now hear the distant wailing of approaching sirens.

"Oh, thank God, Mickey...come on home son."

"Okay...as soon as the ambulance shows up. I think I may have just set the unofficial world record for the 400 meters. Well now...can't say this was boring Saint Paddy's Day, can we now, lass," Mick says with an Irish brogue.

Just the way Mickey says it, gives her a chill. It rekindles memories of her love for Father Patrick O'Brien when she was a young woman—and his unspoken but palpable passion for her. And he, out of guilt, the classic kind of Catholic guilt that the church had carefully, expertly cultivated for centuries, had chosen to uphold his duty to the flock, to affirm his vow of celibacy, breaking not just one, but two hearts in the process.

His kindness to her and her family, during those very dark days of The Great Depression, especially toward her little brother, Mikie. His powerful, heart-felt eulogy at her brother's memorial service. *What if things had been different. If Patrick O'Brien could have...would have. If she had never met Nicolas Kozlov. How different her life might have been...if...if...*

Maria, now realizes that her exhortations to Ruthy were as much to herself. To live for her children—for herself, to get on with her life, to be the most that she could be—where ever that might take her.

Thanks Ruthy. Ya know...I think we're both going to be just fine now...just fine...

- Chapter 14 -

A hot Summer night about 11 PM - about 5 months later

Maria is working at the studio, looking at the books with her checkbook out, when Mick shows up.

"Hi, mom...burnin' it huh...how's it goin'?" Mick says.

"Hi, Mickey...well to be honest, not great. I didn't count on most of my students, taking the summer off, for vacations, with their kids...my revenues are really down. Not worth it to stay open in the summer...almost as much work for a class of 2 as it is with 10," Maria says.

The phone starts to ring—it rings incessantly, but Maria again acts totally oblivious to it. Finally, Maria reaches over and hangs it up without answering it.

"So what's the deal with the phone...again? Are you going to tell me what the hell is going on?" Mick says.

"Oh...it's just some secret admirer...nothing for you to be concerned about. I don't want to talk about it right now. I'm kinda beat, been working the same long hours, but for a lot less money," Maria says tiredly.

"Hey mom...sounds to me like you've got a severe case of V-D," Mick says.

"I beg your pardon...unless you can get it from dreams. It's been a long time, son. I haven't even been on a date...for so-o-o long," Maria says indignantly.

"V-D...and D...Vacation Deficit Disorder. Why don't you shut down for a month or so, and take some time off...ya know, kinda recharge your batteries...and take a break away from the paint and solvents. Maybe your headaches will subside," Mick says.

"Oh, how I'd love to get away from Burbank...from this tediously predictable suburbia even if it's just for a few weeks...maybe see my roots...Italy. We'll see...how's work?" Maria says.

The phone starts to ring again. Same response from Maria. Mick finally reaches over and picks it up.

"Hello? Hello?" *click*

"Mom this is startin' to freak me out, more than a little. I'm going to get to the bottom this...with or without your help. Why won't you just tell me what's going on?" Mick says.

"There's nothing you or anyone can do...it's best for everyone, including you. And especially me...if we just live with it, for now. Please, Mickey. It's a closed subject," Maria says.

"Okay. But I don't like it. And if it goes on for much longer I'm definitely going to find out what's going on...even if I have to get the police involved.

Anyway, I found a better job today in West L.A., with the phone company...a lineman. I can work days...or nights, and get some night classes until I can save enough money to go full-time. Pay's much better, and it's working outside all day in the fresh air and sunshine, in mostly Santa Monica and Malibu on Pacific Coast Highway, instead of being stuck inside that oven of a warehouse. And it's close to UCLA. I found a place with some fellow students, right on campus...so I'll probably move out there the end of the month. I'll apply to UCLA full time next year. And, oh...I bought some newer wheels today. More reliable...very cool," Mick says.

"Oh Mickey, I'm so happy that you're going back to school. When things pick up in the fall, I should be able to help you out a little, with books and tuition."

"Thanks, mom. That's really sweet of you to offer...but I should be okay," Mick says walking over to his mother and giving her a hug. Maria realizing that Mick is always more vulnerable when being hugged by his mother, decides to go for it.

Looking up at her son towering above her, batting her green eyes, with that disarmingly charming 1000 watt smile she says, "Mickey, son...since you'll be moving out, do you think you could teach me to drive before you leave? I could drive the old beast to go to the market...art supplies and errands," Maria says.

"Mom, I don't know. Took a day of intensive training for the blender...just to figure out slice and dice. Stick with fewer moving parts...like that rolling pin," Mick says,

"Slice, dice, schmice. Oh, Mickey...it wouldn't *kill* you to take me out in the car, a few times, would it?" Maria pleads.

Then Mick suddenly feels a bone-chilling foreshadowing. *Kill me? Nah. Seriously maim...a distinct possibility...*

Maria knows, that if she is persistent, that it's almost impossible for Mickey to refuse her anything, sooner or later he'll give in. When Maria sets her mono-mind on something, for most mere mortal males, resistance is futile.

Maria has many wonderful qualities and talents, but mechanical aptitude is most definitely not among them, coupled with the fact that she is not very good at multi-tasking...a necessary skill for driving a car. As an artist she can be easily distracted, mid-sentence, by the wonders of nature like the "beautiful oranges and ochres" of the fluttering wings of a nearby Monarch butterfly. The thought of Maria on the loose in a lethal 4,000 pound misguided missile is a terrifying proposition.

So Mick rationalizes his dubious decision to teach his mother to drive as an altruistic, almost act of heroism and self-sacrifice. The soldier throwing his body on the live grenade to shield his comrades—to

save not just Maria from herself, but the many innocent men women and children that could unwittingly find themselves within Maria's potential range of highway mayhem. After years of being the foil of the strong-willed, sometimes obstinate Maria in her many crazy escapades, Mick realizes there is no way he can possibly disabuse his sometimes monomaniacal mother of it—unless maybe after the first lesson, a scare can be thrown in to her, enough to cause her to reconsider.

He decides to cut to the chase, and give in to the inevitable. In this case, the sooner the better before she can seek outside lessons from some poor unwitting instructor. So against his better judgment, to keep the peace, he reluctantly concedes.

"Well...okay, mom. But let's take my new car. It'll be easier for you learn on. It's safer and the brakes are better. How about tomorrow after work about 4:30?" Mick says.

"Oh thanks, Mickey. It'll be fun...you'll see," Maria says hugging him tightly.

Fun? If you consider Hitchcock's *Psycho* a romantic comedy. Okay. *Fasten your seat belts...it's going to be a bumpy ride. Click.*

Time for Mick's and Maria's Great Adventure.

- Chapter 15 -

Mick and Maria's Fun Adventure

Maria is sitting behind the wheel for the first time ever, with Mick as navigator in Mick's '62 perfect Pontiac Catalina coupe.

"Okay, mom. What's the first thing you need to remember, when you get behind the wheel?" Mick asks.

"Oh thanks dear," Maria says adjusting the rear view mirror to a better position to carefully arrange her considerable hair, "very thoughtful of them to put that mirror in such a convenient place," she says carefully patting her hair in place.

"Uh...mom, that *might* be the tenth. *The* first thing, and *even more important* than how your hair looks, is for you to fasten your seat belt," Mick patiently explains.

"But won't it rumple my dress? I just had it dry-cleaned, ya know," Maria says.

"Mom, if God forbid you have an accident...without your seat belt, your dress will be more than rumpled," Mick says his patience already beginning to wane.

"Accident? Not to worry dear," then Maria reaches into her prodigious purse, and places a magnetic plastic statue of St. Christopher, the patron saint of travel, on the dashboard, drapes a rosary from it, and makes a sign of the cross.

"What? No Holy Water? "

"Ya know that's not a bad idea, son...next time. And I'm really glad to see that you're finally are getting some religion. But with Saint Christopher...and Saint Anthony on board, we should be safe enough," Maria says.

Realizing that this discussion is going nowhere, Mick reaches over and fastens the seat belt on his mother, and then himself, and sensing some premonition of doom, cinches both tightly.

"Okay, mom...place both hands on the wheel...at ten and two o'clock. This will be the normal position of your hands while driving...keeping both hands on the wheel at all times. Now turn the ignition key to the right, to start the motor." Maria just sits there.

"Mom...what are you waiting for?" Mick says.

"Well...I didn't want to take my hands off the wheel...just in case you were testing me, dear," she explains.

"Just while you're actually moving...okay?" Mick says.

Maria reaches over and turns the key to right, the powerful motor roars to life, but the starter motor continues grinding noisily against the flywheel, as Maria keeps the key turned to the right.

"Release the key!" Mick yells.

"Well...you didn't tell me *that* silly," Maria says, finally letting the key spring back.

Mick is already starting to seriously rethink his decision.

With a deep sigh he says, "Okay...with your foot on the brake, slide the gearshift into "D" for Drive. Look in the rear view mirror and tell me what you see?"

"Well honestly...my hair just looks a fright," she says.

"Mother...this may come as a shock but the rear view mirror is mainly for looking to the uh...rear. Not to check your hair," Mick says.

"But I thought Drive meant that we were going forward...not backward, Mickey," she says.

Mick reaches over and adjusts the mirror, and says, "Tell me when you can see a car coming from the rear," he says.

"Any car in particular I should be looking for?" she says.

"You're looking to see if anybody is coming up from behind you before you pull out into traffic," he says.

"Oh...okay. There we go...no problem. Nobody back there that I recognize," she says adjusting the mirror.

"Okay...now using the turn signal lever, flip it so that your left blinker is on...and slowly pull away from the curb," he says.

Maria flips on the right blinker and floors the accelerator, moving very fast from the curb, screeching the tires.

"Whoa...slow down girl. Gently press the accelerator. And I said left...not right," Mick yells.

"The accelerator...is that the one on the left...or the right?"

"If it matters...it's the one and *only* right," he says rolling his eyes, "Okay let's practice some *right* turns. Put on your *right* blinker, and turn *right* at the next corner," he says trying desperately to remain calm.

Maria puts the left blinker on...and starts looking to the left.

"Mom...the *other right*. I said *right*," he says pointing, "not *left*."

Maria corrects and turns right, hopping over the curb with the right rear wheel.

"See, told ya...easy. Isn't this fun?" Maria says.

Copious beads of sweat are now beginning to sprout on Mick's forehead. As they drive around the block a few times Maria is now able to at least miss the curb when turning right.

"Mom...very important. Just ahead...stay to the RIGHT here or you'll end up on the on-ramp to the fast lane on the Hollywood Freeway at rush hour, not for the faint of heart, mom," Mick says.

Of course, Maria bears to the left—they immediately they find themselves in the fast lane on the Hollywood Freeway going 20 miles per hour.

"Jesus mother! Step on the gas! Hard...get movin'. Uh...the pedal to the far right!" he yells.

Perfect. Mick can just hear his buddies, *hey, did ya hear? Koz got 'rear ended'...in Hollywood. Ha! Ha!*

And, of course, Maria steps on the brake. They are now sitting in the car at a full stop in the fast lane of the freeway, horns blaring, and tires screeching as driver after driver takes evasive action, cursing, swerving around them, at 60 plus miles per hour.

"Don't they see my winker *winking*? Some people...just shouldn't be allowed to drive," Maria says.

Mick, is now is in a full sweat. Maria's oblivious.

"Good point...*now* Goooo! Step on it! *First right*...or last rites. *Jezus Christ*...where's a Goddamn Priest when you need one," Mick says.

It was then, that Mick saw it...a sign from God? A big green sign..."Barham Blvd" just to the right of them. Divine intervention?

A spectacular near miss by a huge UPS delivery truck.

"*Jezus Christ, lady!*" the angry driver yells out his open side door.

Yeap, that confirms it...a true religious experience. A sign of deliverance.

Mick, now speechless, jabs toward the off-ramp sign with his right hand, like Moses, pointing to the Promised Land.

"Mom, turn *right*...not *left right, but right right*. Head for that off-ramp. *Do y it now!*" Mick yells.

"All-*right* son...you don't have to raise your voice, it makes me a little nervous," she says.

Miraculously, The Red Sea of cars parts. Remember this is the *Hollywood Freeway*. Maria, making the sign of the cross, fumbles on the left blinker and makes her one and only perfect right hand turn at 5 miles per hour traversing across 4 lanes of high speed traffic, bumping over the shoulder, across the ivy, and down on to the off-ramp.

"Mother...pull over...to the *right*. *Now please!*" Mick yells.

"*Right* right or *Left* right?" she says

"Just pull over, *anywhere!*" Mick screams.

Maria pulls over to the side of the road and comes to an abrupt stop, lurching Mick forward, straining his seat belt.

"Okay, dear, don't get *up-cited*. We were never in any danger. Saint Anthony was my co-pilot...you know, we haven't practiced any left turns, yet?"

They are somehow, miraculously unscathed. Mick is trying desperately to regain his composure.

"*Lesson over*, mom. I'll drive home. You might want to rethink this driving thing. Kinda tough to teach painting...in a body cast," Mick says.

"Is driving always *so*...noisy. Rude horns honking...and all that yelling and cursing," Maria says.

"Not for everyone...but you seem to have uh...the gift to bring it out in others," Mick says.

"Why thank you, son," she says blushing appreciatively. "See I told you it would be fun. Oh, I can hardly wait for my next lesson. Can we practice left turns next time? My that was...exhilarating. I think I'm having a hot flash," Maria says daintily dabbing her forehead with the back of her wrist.

"That makes two of us. Sure mom...just to make it even more *fun* we'll go at rush hour. Nothing more uh...exhilarating than turning left in front of on-coming traffic at rush hour," Mick sighs.

And that's how Mick got religion. Yeap...he found faith in the fast-lane. And so it is—Maria indeed has somebody up there, or somewhere, looking out for her. And Mick somehow knows, that when he leaves, that she'll be just fine. But Mick wouldn't be surprised if this Saint Tony guy started demanding hazardous duty pay. A-men.

- Chapter 16 -

Berkeley 1966

Byron Brawley's sitting at the bar nursing a beer waiting for Angie to get off her shift at La Val's. She's serving a table of rowdy jocks. One of them, Brawley recognizes is the star quarterback on the UCB football team. He has taken an interest in Angie. He's flirting with her, and after a few pitchers of beer, he gets bolder, and starts groping her. She tactfully tries to resist, but he's now showing off in front of his pals. Angie comes by where Brawley is sitting, and Brawley asks her if the guy is bothering her. She tells Brawley, she handled a lot of drunks—not to be too concerned because she's only got 15 minutes left on her shift.

She makes one final pass around the bar, when the QB grabs her and sits her on his lap, and grabs her breast. She jumps up and slaps his face, and tells him to cool it, with, "Forget it, meat head! I'm not interested!"

QB says, "Hey...you obviously don't know who I am. Who do you think you're talking to...you little slut?"

Hearing the commotion, Brawley walks over to the QB and says, "Hey man...the lady is not interested. Now why don't you just behave yourself."

The QB, about 6'4" at least 220 pounds, jumps up and says to Brawley, "Mind your own fuckin' business, asshole...if you know what's good for ya!"

Brawley just smiles, and says to Angie, "Come on Angie...let's get outta here. The class of the clientele is decidedly going downhill."

The QB grabs his arm to restrain him. Brawley just looks at his hand on his arm, and says with a faint smile and deadly calm, "I'd suggest that you *never* put your hands on me again...*ever*, unless you want to get your face changed."

Byron clamps his right hand around the wrist of QB and slowly, effortlessly peels it away.

Angie says, "Come on, Byron...let's just leave."

"Byron, huh? What kind of a faggot name is that? Hey honey...what you need is a real man," QB says and grabs Angie's arm. Byron steps in between Angie and QB, removes his hand from Angie, and gives him a shove backwards, "I guess you don't get it, man. Okay...but just so you know, once you start it, I'll be forced to finish it."

The QB's two teammates are egging him on now—it's too late for QB to back down.

One of the other jocks, says, "Ooooooh...bad ass. QB...why don't you take this faggot outside and teach him a lesson!"

Angie is now pleading with Byron, "Please Byron...just let it go. I'm okay. I don't want any trouble here. I don't want to lose my job."

"Yeah Bi-ron, as in Bi-sexual. Why don't you just get your little faggot ass outta here...and leave the girl here. I'm not done with her yet. Now, asshole before I kick your ass around this bar. Or...let's step outside and settle this man to woman uh...Bi-ron," QB says with a frat boy smirk.

Byron just smiles, looks at Angie, then says, "Lead the way hotshot. Oh, by the way this won't be a very fair fight."

"Sounds like he wants to *chickshit* out...brack brack brack," QB's pal says.

"Nope. Me...against *only* three of you? Consider yourself warned," Byron calmly says with faint smile.

"Ha! Okay, Bi-ron, you're dead, faggot," QB says.

QB struts toward the entrance, with his entourage in tow.

"Ang...you'd best leave now. I don't think you'll want to see this. This won't take long," Byron says smiling confidently.

Byron follows the QB out the door, despite Byron's warning, with Angie following. As soon as the towering QB, at least a head taller and 30 pounds heavier, reaches the sidewalk he turns around with a mean smirk on his face. Without any warning, Byron nails him, full-force with a left hand, in the gut, which doubles him over, immediately taking away the height advantage. He then brings an upper-cut from the floor, and catches him square on the chin, knocking him backwards. He lands on his back spread-eagled on the sidewalk with a thud, hitting the back of his head, out cold. It happens so fast, none of QB's pals even saw the punches. His pals are in shock, one of them kneels down, "Hey QB, you okay man?"

QB's glassy eyes open one at a time. He is still dazed, but now he's turning his head to the side, spitting broken teeth out, with copious amounts of blood. In less than 30 seconds it's over. The teammates storm Brawley, and wildly start swinging at him. He can see immediately that neither of them have ever been in a serious street fight before. He methodically, turns and faces one of the other attackers, knocks him down with a combination of two quick short punches, then turns on the other, who raises his hands, signaling that he wants no part of him. By now someone has called the Berkeley police, within less than a minute, a patrol car skids up to the sidewalk, red lights flashing. Two cops jump out, yelling "Everybody! Back off! Now!"

One cop kneels down next to QB, and says, "This guy's a mess. Hey...looks like the Cal quarterback Rusty Warren. What happened here?"

The other cop's got Brawley in a restraining hold with his arm behind his back. Brawley's unscathed. One of QB's teammates has got, what looks like a broken nose and facial cuts.

The guy who stayed out of it, who was doing all the big talk, tells the cops, "This fuckin' wild man, just attacked us, man. He went after QB first...for no reason. We were just sittin' in the bar, having few beers and some laughs with the waitress. She was comin' on to Rusty...flirtin' big time, when this asshole comes over and starts pimpin' us. We didn't want any trouble...so we decided to leave. He followed us out. That's when he went berserk...no warning...hits Rusty, and then attacks us!" bigmouth says.

Angie yells, "That's a lie! These assholes, picked a fight with Byron. He was just defending himself...and me. The big one...the QB, was coming on to me...grabbing me. Byron tried to deal with it peacefully but they were all drunk. He kept grabbing me...he wouldn't let it alone. He picked the fight with Byron!"

The one cop gets on the radio and calls for an ambulance, which arrives in less than 5 minutes. They take QB away on a gurney. His pals get into a car and follow the ambulance to the hospital. He then goes into the bar to try to find any witnesses to the fight. He is not surprised that 'nobody saw nuthin', as most of those at the bar at the time of the confrontation, have already cleared out, many because they're under legal drinking age and possess bogus IDs.

The other cop, restraining Brawley, cuffs his hands behind his back, walks him over to the patrol car, and roughly deposits him in the back seat, slamming the car door shut. He gets Angie's name and address, then gets into the right front seat of the patrol car and says to Brawley, "Okay tough guy...give me your name and date of birth and your address...and don't get cute. If you lie to a police officer, that's a separate offense. And reach around and pull out your wallet and lay it on the seat beside you...do it *now!*"

"Byron Vincent Brawley, date of birth, December 22, 1942. 1452 Durant St. Berkeley, 94702. Hey, man...this is bogus! Those guys started this, three against one. The quarterback...Warren, big man on campus groped my lady friend...I just tried to..."

"Shut up!...I'll let you know when you can talk," the cop says, he then reaches around for Brawley's wallet, now laying on the back seat beside him. The cop goes through his wallet until he finds a California driver's license. He gets on the radio, and calls in the information to the dispatcher. About a minute later, the dispatcher comes back, with a warrant out for an unpaid speeding ticket, and that Brawley has two priors—convictions for assault and battery in Glendale, California, both suspended for community service. Also, a recent arrest in Berkeley for trespassing and disturbing the peace while demonstrating on the UCB campus.

The cop reads him his rights, and places him under arrest for the traffic warrant, and due to serious nature of the injuries of the other party, which requires hospitalization, for suspicion of felony assault and battery.

Angie makes bail for Brawley, but she is ambivalent about the incident. At one level she is proud of Byron for the way he almost casually dispatched those three thugs, but a nagging disquiet remains. She has never seen this violent side of Byron Brawley before. The cold calculating warrior, who was capable of methodically inflicting grave physical harm, with almost savage ferocity. He shows no remorse for the damage he has done to Rusty Warren. On the contrary, he relishes it. He's glad he took that pompous ass, the big man on campus, down a notch or two.

The next day, the local papers, including the San Francisco Examiner, report that Rusty Warren, the star quarterback for the Berkeley Bears, is in the hospital. As a result of the unprovoked assault and battery upon him, corroborated by the testimony of his teammates, he will miss the big regional rivalry game, a homecoming game with Stanford that Saturday. *'The assailant is a student at UCB with an extensive record for violence'*, intentionally conflating it with his civil disobedience demonstrations on the Cal campus.

The Athletic Director at UCB tells the Deputy DA to throw the book at the violent student radical. It's now becoming a high-profile case, with the Deputy DA getting as much press mileage as he can for his own career path, with press releases like, *'...violence against peaceful students...particularly exemplary student athletes of the caliber of Rusty Warren will not be tolerated. An example must be made of this Byron V. Brawley, to send a message to those campus radicals that would indulge in such thuggish behavior.'*

About a month later, the overworked public defender assigned the case, a young guy maybe two years out of law school, with shaggy long hair wearing John Lennon glasses, and a huge caseload, sits down with Brawley and candidly lays out his options. He counsels Byron Brawley to accept a plea worked out with the Deputy DA.

"Here's the deal Byron. Look, man...I've checked with your profs. By all accounts you're a smart guy, who could have a potentially bright future...maybe someday as a tenured prof, if you can get past this charge without a conviction. I've negotiated a plea deal with the Deputy DA that if you agree to enlist in the army, he'll dismiss all charges, the record of your arrest will be expunged. Otherwise, if it goes to trial and you lose, he'll be asking for, and probably get a felony conviction. With your priors...the extent of the injury of the campus 'golden boy' and the testimony of his witnesses of the savagery of the attack, you might be looking at 24 months in county jail, plus two years probation. Plus you'll be convicted felon, which would just about guarantee that you could *never* have any career you might want at a University or any other

school job anywhere...including junior high school...unless it's a janitor sweeping floors. The press, most especially that conservative rag the SF Examiner has made this a *cause célèbre* against radical violent student activism...and you're the poster boy. I'd advise you to strongly consider takin' the deal," the PD says.

"Well...this is such bullshit man! Those assholes started it...I just finished it. So this is American justice huh? Whatever happened to a man's right to defend himself?"

"Well, it seems you have defended yourself a few too many times. And this last time more than a little uh...too vigorously and with the wrong cat...at the wrong place...and the wrong time. And justice has got not much if anything to do with it. Time for a reality check. And I gotta know soon...before they withdraw the plea offer," the PD says.

"So those are my choices, huh? Either way I'm fucked. But I guess if I have to take my chances between going to Vietnam or jail at least in Nam, I suppose I've got a fightin' chance...as opposed to a getting screwed over for certain. Ending up with a felony conviction on my record. I guess I've really got no choice. I'll take the deal," Byron says.

"Okay...here's how it works. Go down to the local Army recruitment office and enlist, bring back the documents and we'll present them to the Deputy DA," he says.

"Won't be necessary. I just got my draft notice. Cal expelled me about a month ago, for conduct unbecoming a student...most particularly for roughing the passer, the star quarterback. They notified the draft board immediately. My 2S deferment was rescinded...fast tracked. The model of bureaucratic efficiency, when they want to screw somebody over. So *hi ho hi ho...it's off to war I go*. Two years in the Army, has got to be better than even two months in jail," Byron says.

"Okay...I think I can get them to go along with that. Go down and get processed early. Tell them you can't wait to get into the war. Take the physical then get me the paperwork...pronto, okay?" the PD says.

The night before he is to report for his assignment the next morning, Byron spends with Angie. Just a quiet dinner for the two of them at their apartment in Berkeley. She is devastated by the proposition of Byron going to Vietnam. The casualties are starting to mount. Every day, there's a growing list of KIA's in the newspapers. They're mostly just kids, 18 to 22 years old.

"Oh Byron...don't go! We can go to Canada together. Leave tonight and be at the Canadian border in British Columbia, Vancouver in less than 10 hours. We can start a new life up there...just the two of us. You can get a job teaching. Please baby...don't go! I gotta a bad feeling about this," Angie cries.

"Baby...I know it's a tough call. But I can't run. I've never run from anyone...or anything in my life and I don't intend to start now. I

don't won't to be a fugitive the rest of my life, always looking over my shoulder, never being able to return for fear of being arrested. As much as I love you baby...and I want you with me, I couldn't subject you to that...your family and mine. It's just no good. Besides, if you haven't noticed I can take care of myself, okay? It's only one year, in country, it'll go fast. Don't worry baby, they can't kill me. Haven't you noticed? In-VINCE-ible, is my middle name," he says smiling, trying desperately to lighten up the moment. "Then, when I'm back in the states or wherever they assign me...you can join me there," Byron says, hugging Angie tightly.

Angie is crying bitterly now, she knows she can't talk him out of it, "Okay baby. I just love you so much. My gawd...if anything should ever happen to you..."

They make passionate love all that night—as if it were for the last time.

The next morning Byron Brawley is on his way to boot camp for basic training at Fort Ord, Monterey Bay, California. At the bus terminal, while waiting for the bus, he calls his pal, Mick Kozlov from a pay phone to update him. He's now living back in L.A. after leaving Berkeley because of his run-in with the law at the Sproul Hall demonstration about a year earlier.

"Hey Koz...howya doin man?"

"Hey Byron...good to hear your voice! What's up, man?" Mick says

"Say listen...I can't talk long. I'm at the bus terminal waiting to ship out to Ord for basic. Just wanted to ask you for a favor since I'm going to be gone, you know like...you're in the army now...you're not behind a plow...etcetera. While I'm in Nam could you do me a favor and keep in touch with Angie for me. I've given her your phone number and address. Maybe you could keep an eye on her for me until I get back, man...ya know check in with her from time to time. If she needs anything...anything at all, take care of it, and I'll settle up when I get back. I'd sure appreciate it, pal

And Mick, if anything should happen to me... Anyway, once I get to basic, I'll send ya letter with all her contact info," Byron says.

"Sure, bro...not a problem. Don't worry about a thing. If Angie needs anything, anything at all...just have her contact me and I'm on it."

"Thanks, Mickey," a relieved Byron says. He very seldom calls him any other name than Mick or Koz.

"Hey Byron, you okay, man?"

"Yeah...I just got a chill down my spine. Not sure why. Anyway...I gotta run now. And thanks, man," Byron says.

"Hey Byron...I love ya brother. Man, it's a jungle out there, take care of yourself. And don't be hero," Mick says trying to cut the tension.

"Yeah...got it. Love you too, man. I'll be in touch," Byron says.

Click

Mick calls Angie from time to time, and sometimes when she's feeling low and lonely for Byron, she'll call him late at night, and Mick will try to cheer her up, sometimes even talking her down from the high solitary ledge of loneliness of so many loved one's left behind,

Byron has been in-country in Vietnam for over 11 months—and counting days. He's one of 4 squad leaders with 12 riflemen under his command, in a platoon of about 40 men. More than half of the soldiers in his squad are Black, or Hispanic. The rest are white, mostly from working class families, with some Southern boys from Mississippi, Arkansas and Tennessee. This causes some tension between the Northern Black *bruthas* and the Southern *Crackas*, when the Blacks play 'that loud jungle bunny' Motown music.

When Mick tells his mother Maria, that Byron and his squad are in country in Vietnam, Maria goes to Saint Ignatius Catholic church, and buys, 12 Saint Christopher medals, has the priest bless them with holy water, and gives them to Mick to send to Byron and his mates, along with a care package of delicacies, and some cassette tapes of Motown music that Mick puts together. Martha and the Vandellas's "Heat Wave" and "Nowhere to Run"...some Marvin Gay "How Sweet It Is to Be Loved by You" and "Ain't No Mountain High Enough" that the soldiers can play on their boom boxes.

Byron's company, Company B, 235th Infantry, consisting of about 150 to a 180 soldiers, is stationed in the jungles of the Kontum Province. There's a lot of Viet Cong activity there, with frequent fire fights and sniper action, with a high casualty rate—rugged wild jungle, with all manner of booby traps, bugs, snakes compounded by the constant oppressive humidity.

Mick includes a letter with the care package:

February 12, 1967

Hey Bro,

*Hope this finds you and your comrades well.
Enclosed is something from mom, that she thought
might give you and your buds some peace of mind.
She insisted...I've learned over the years that once
she sets her mind on something...fogitaboutit!*

*They are Saint Christopher medals blessed by a
priest...one for each guy in your squad. No obligation
to wear them...but you know mom...and her Catholic
voodoo...no one can do vo-DOO...like she DOO.
Mom's praying like over-time...and lighting, must be*

: : Michaelangelo's Renaissance — m.a.kominsky : :

hundreds of candles by now for you and your men to come home safely.

I've seen it first hand...powerful mojo, man.

Hope you enjoy the music...and the goodies.

I check on Angie from time to time...by phone or letter. She seems to be doing okay...as well as could be expected. She misses you terribly as we all do.

Mario Savio sends his best. He's still raisin' hell up at Berkeley...since we lost Brother Charles...my god...it will be two years, this March 7th. That one still hurts...bad.

Mario seems to have become more withdrawn and intense. I think he is a little disillusioned with the dissension of the leadership....political bullshit and I also think he's slowly phasing himself away from FSM. We occasionally exchange letters. He's very upset that you were forced to go over there...even though he is vehemently opposed to the war as are most of the students at Cal, he understands that you had few options. He asked for your address. I gave it to him. Said he'd write when he could find the time.

Okay...that's all for now, man.

Write when you get a chance...keep your head down. And don't be hero!

Luv ya Brutha,

Koz.

Byron calls the squad together and announces that he has something for them. He's carefully, referentially, lines up the medals on a table. He takes one Saint Christopher medal and puts it over his head and says, "Okay, men...these are Saint Christopher medals...for anybody that wants them. You can each take one...or not, doesn't matter to me. They're from a wonderful lady stateside, a mother who's praying for all of us...my buddy's mom. They've been blessed by a priest."

With death of one of the rifleman the previous week, from a Viet Cong sniper, the squad is now down to eleven, plus Byron.

Everyone of the soldiers in the squad, picks one up and puts it around their neck. No wise cracks. Each one of them is deeply touched with the thoughtfulness and generosity of it.

To a man, they all respect and admire Byron Brawley, as a leader and as a man. His character and courage which he has demonstrated in numerous firefights. His fairness and commitment to his men. He has never asked any man to do anything that he himself wouldn't do. They would follow him anywhere, including hell, which was never very far away.

On March 15th, The Ides of March, about 2 AM, Mick receives a phone call. It's Angie, crying hysterically, "*He's gone! Mick...he's gone.*"

"Angie? That you? What goin' on?" Mick says.

"Byron's dead...Mick...on March 12th, I just received the Telegram...Western Union. 'We regret to inform you that...' I can't even read it out loud, Mick. Oh gawd! Oh gawd! My Byron's ...gone!" Click.

Mick is in shock. He slowly cradles the phone. *Not again...C-Wash, and now Byron...so senseless. So goddamn senseless*, as his eyes start to well-up with tears.

He decides to let Angie grieve alone for a while before trying to call her back, as he's not in much better condition than she, certainly to be giving any kind of grief counseling.

Mick decides to drive up to Berkeley a few days later, to be with Angie. Just before he leaves, on March 21st, Mick receives a letter:

March 11th, 1967

Hey Koz,

Well, the Saint Christopher's were a big hit with the men...every one of them has been wearing them including moi. Tell mom...the men and I send a big hug and a thanks!

Don't know if they'll do any good, but since we've been wearing them...we haven't had any casualties. Keep your fingers...and anything else you got crossed.

I'm countin' days now, man. I'm short, only 17 more days and my tour of duty is up. One whole year, literally shot to hell. We take a position...they take it back. We kill each other over ridiculous swamp and jungle. It's all about body count. I'm so sick of this whole fuckin' business. But I can't show it in front of the men. Some of them are long...a lot of days left.

I just got a replacement for the kid who was killed by a sniper last month, a black kid, from believe it or not Selma Alabama. His name is Harold Jackson, he's barely 18 years old. What are the chances of that one? He says he was just a kid...ha...what is he now?...but he said he marched with his father on March 7th. Said he remembered C-Wash...he was the big one way up front...with John Lewis. Too weird man. Small fuckin' world, eh bro?

Anyway he's just a green kid...scared shitless of being over here as he should be. He asked about the Saint Christopher medals that all the guys were wearing. A good kid. The Crackas have been riding him pretty hard...they'd never try that shit with Northern Blacks. So I've had to straighten a few of them out on that score.

He's a good kid...I hope he makes it. They're all so fuckin' young, man. The first month is the most dangerous out here...until they can figure some things out.

Could you ask your mom to send another Saint Christopher medal...for me? I gave mine to the kid. You'd thought I gave him the medal of honor. He was so damn appreciative. I hope it gives him some peace of mind at least, as it has for me. Maybe...just maybe he'll survive this insanity.

Okay...gotta run...we've got a major search and destroy mission tomorrow morning at 06:00 hours. Gotta get everything ready...and check out, everybody's gear including rifles and ammo. It's the kid's first patrol, so I'll keep him close the first few times out.

Luv ya bro,

Byron

PS

Can't wait to see my Angie...and you and I are going to get VERY VERY drunk...for at least a week.

PPS

And if anything should happen to me...I know you'll take

: : Michaelangelo's Renaissance — m.a.kominsky : :

care of Angie for me. See ya soon, Mickey.

While up at Berkeley, to spend time with Angie trying to help her sort some things out, she receives notification from the US Army, that she was the named beneficiary on a large life insurance policy Byron Brawley had taken out.

She also receives notification of a recommendation of commendation:

March 12th, 1967 in Kontum Province, Vietnam.

AWARD OF THE SILVER STAR

For gallantry in action against a hostile force: on 12 March 1967, Specialist Four Byron Vincent Brawley was serving as a Squad Leader, in the Republic of Vietnam, when it came under heavy sniper fire from two enemy machine guns and an unknown number of snipers.

Specialist Four Brawley immediately maneuvered his lead machine gun team forward to engage the enemy positions. As soon as his gun placement had been firmly established, he moved to the flank to give supporting fire. After a few minutes of intense fire exchange, Specialist Four Brawley realized that the enemy could not be extricated from his present position.

Ignoring the threat to his life, he rose to his feet and charged the machine gun emplacement, placing a large and accurate volume of fire into it. Just as he reached the enemy gun, he was fatally wounded, but his heroic behavior created the diversion necessary for the remainder of his men to establish an assault and overrun the enemy.

Specialist Four Brawley's extraordinary courage, determination, and devotion to duty are in keeping with the highest tradition of the military service and reflect great credit upon himself, his unit, and the United States of America.

The decorations earned by SP4 Byron Vincent Brawley include: the Combat Infantryman Badge, the Parachute Badge, the Silver Star, the Bronze Star,

the Purple Heart, the National Defense Service Medal, the Vietnam Service Medal, the Vietnam Campaign Medal and the Vietnam Cross of Gallantry with Palm Unit Citation.

The cause of death was listed as Small Arms. At the time of his death Byron V. Brawley was 24 years of age. He was from Glendale, California.

Angie is very bitter about Byron's senseless death, and threatens to throw the medals into the trash.

Her constant mantra is, “For what? Tell me Mick, *for what did he die?*”

“Now I'm not religious, Angie, but one scripture does come to mind, I think it's John 15;13...and it goes something like this, *Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends.* He loved his men and was willing to make the ultimate sacrifice for them. Like many warriors...he died for his comrades, not for some abstract bullshit *devotion to duty in keeping with the highest tradition of the military service and reflect great credit upon himself, his unit, and the United States of America.*

“Mick...you were his best friend. He spoke of you often...like a brother. What the hell compelled him to always seek out conflict...and danger?” Angie tearfully asks.

“Angie, at some level I believe he became addicted to the adrenal high of danger...the fight or flight response. In his case *always* fight, the state of hyper-arousal intensified his life experience. And like most addictions, it feeds on its self...with each successive fix requiring more to satisfy the addiction.”

“But Mick...I thought he loved *me*...that he would have thought about me...us...before frivolously putting his life at risk. I guess in the end, he didn't. Maybe he was incapable of loving me, or anybody else to that degree,” Angie says tears streaming down her cheeks.

“Addiction...in its many forms, is a jealous mistress, Angie.”

Mick decides not to tell Angie that his last letter had the ring of precognition of his death...perhaps self-fulfilling.

“After spending a great deal of time with Byron, I sometimes wondered if deep down he had a death wish. I think he always sensed it—the siren call of the danger. A love affair with death, that ultimately it could only end in one way. Death, his constant companion patiently waiting...you might say, was his muse. He was a brilliant, bright shooting star...with an innate sense of the heroic. A star crossed warrior in the tradition of a mythic Greek Tragedy. And I and others will forever remember him as an ageless young brash, brilliant rascal who loved and lived life to its fullest, as we will always remember James Dean. Forever young.

Bad Boy Byron Brawley, the rebel...*with* a cause. Angie. I hope you too can remember him as he was, young, beautiful...larger than life.” Mick says hugging Angie tightly, both of them silently convulsing with grief.

While in the Bay Area, Mick looks up his old pal Hawk Shapiro who is now living and working in Livermore, at the Lawrence Livermore National Labs a federal research facility founded by the University of California in 1952, a Federally Funded Research and Development Center.

Mick wants to inform Hawk of the death of their dear friend Byron Brawley whom he had gotten to know after Brawley and Mick had rescued him from the vicious blows of the campus cop's baton during the FSM demonstrations at Berkeley in 1964. After the death of Charles Washington, he was devastated...now with this news, which Mick wants to break in person, he will be deeply saddened as will Mario Savio, now teaching math and philosophy at Sonoma State University.

After Hawk's promising law career was prematurely terminated, with most of his Mensa intellect thankfully still intact, even though he now has epileptic seizures from his traumatic brain injury from the fracturing of his skull, the frequency of his seizures can be controlled with medication.

But he is unable to pursue a career in the law, because he is now prone to occasional unpredictable violent fits of rage and episodes of emotional outbursts from TBI. So Hawk ends up at LLNL, a government think tank, initially doing research, where he's able to work for the most part in a solitary environment. After a few years he gravitates toward computer science. And always a very quick study, in a very short period of time he becomes a programming whiz, mastering coding for the CDC 6600, the flagship mainframe supercomputer of the 6000 series of computer systems manufactured by Control Data Corporation. The CDC 6600 is generally considered to be the first successful supercomputer, and Hawk is the now the System Administrator...*da man*.

Mick hasn't seen the Hawkster, in over a year, but they talk regularly on the phone, sometimes several times a month sometimes for hours at a time.

So after spending some time with Angie, after a quiet very private ceremony they scatter Byron's ashes over the San Francisco Bay from the iconic Golden Gate Bridge. Mick bids an emotional farewell to Angie. She's a tough lady and Mick has no doubt that she'll eventually be able to move on, but it will take some time, as one Byron Vincent Brawley will be one very tough act to follow. Mick, keeping his promise to his pal Byron, will continue to be available to talk to her anytime day or night, which Angie deeply appreciates.

Although Hawk outwardly seems to handle the news of Byron's passing okay, he excuses himself and goes for a long walk...alone. When Mick calls Mario Savio and breaks the news, he's devastated.

So Mick heads South back to L.A. after he and Hawk spend almost a week together, having picked up right where they had left off. He looks good and sounds emotionally healthy. Still practicing his martial arts regime, he's still incredibly strong and fit.

Hawk's still as cynical, and sarcastic as ever with the same acid wit. A good sign...of contentment. They will continue to stay in touch as only brothers would—for the rest of their lives.

Now it's also time for Mick...to move on.

Part Five - Northern Migration -

- Chapter 17 -

My migration to media, film making and video production began, quite accidentally, sometime in the early 1980s.

The checkered path of my meandering matriculation, consisted of an unguided tour of just about all the University of California campuses, initially UC Berkeley on a hoops athletic scholarship, then UCLA, ending with a brief stint at UCSB, before deciding to finally surrender to my incessant creative callings, always just below the surface deeply embedded in my Caravaggio DNA, to make art for art's sake. *Ha!*

Just out of college in the early-seventies, with a useless B.A. a Bastard of Arts, majoring in Industrial Design, then an M.F.A., Masturbation in Fine Arts in photography with a minor in painting from prestigious high-gloss Art Center College of Design in L.A. Like most art college grads, after I got the ridiculously expensive, but very worthless diploma, the reality of the value of an MFA to make even a half-way decent living from the arts, became painfully obvious when I went out into the real world, looking for a real job. I couldn't even find a position in the arts that would pay much more than minimum wage, painting—even with a roller.

About the only thing left was teaching, but being in a captive classroom situation never agreed with me as a student having cut many classes, mostly because of the inane rote lectures from tenured lifers. So how could I even hope to endure the torture of being in classroom as an instructor for years and agonizing years to come?

Then one morning, after 6 months of interviews for inane min-wage 'entry level' jobs like art museum intern, I saw a large display recruiting ad in the L.A. Times for an insurance claims adjuster, with a picture of a smiling guy wearing a coat and tie, carving a check for a smiling man and wife on a briefcase on the hood of his brand new company car, which came with the job.

So...since my inability to buy a car was causing some serious deleterious dating consequences with the ladies, I decided to become a Casualty and Property Claims Investigator. Eventually, an Examiner for a large international multi-lines insurance company, Global Lines Mutual, aka GLM, affectionately referred to by the claims staff as "*Good Luck Mutha-fucka*" for their policy of parsimonious payment of claims. I soon discovered I was born with a gift of negotiating, and still fiercely competitive from my college B-ball days, it became a blood sport of slam-dunkin' on my adversaries, the oftentimes predatory

personal injury attorneys. The cheaper I settled, the more they like me, the higher the promotion.

But after about 6 years, with my background, now a highly trained investigator, settling of large, mostly bodily injury claims many of which for Fortune 500 corporations, I decided to go out on my own as an Independent Claims or Public Adjustor. This enabled me to create exorbitant hourly billings like some of my "Attorney Bernie" lawyer friends. So I sat for, and passed the state exam for both Independent Insurance Claims Adjuster, and while I was at it, a California State Private Investigator license.

In the meantime to bolster my legal chops and credentials, I enrolled in a local law school, nights—University of West Los Angeles, taking the big three, torts, contracts and civil procedure, which have the most relevance in my work. Like some anonymous jailed career criminal bitterly said, *If you want to make crime pay...go to law school.*

I find that I have a natural affinity for the law. The dialectical process of honing one's critical thinking skills, the joy of formulating and synthesizing a sound, elegant legal argument, and the art of successfully, oftentimes forcefully, selling one's legal argument. The negotiation process, is the ultimate ego trip for most lawyers. But after completing a year, I decide that I have enough of dealing with attorney's monstrous egos all day, both of my clients and opposing attorneys, and the last thing I want, is to be around lawyers any more than I absolutely have to. I leave law school after completing the first year.

Living on the beach in Malibu with two, at least tolerable, attorneys pals and working in West Los Angeles, California near the Coed-Target-Rich University, UCLA was a great gig—a Charter Member of The 4S Club, Sun, Sand, Surf and of course, Sex.

Most of my business initially was defense work, to investigate including forensic still photography and videography, a skill which I had picked up along the way out of necessity. Also, occasionally negotiate and otherwise handle high exposure bodily injury and property claims made against multi-national corporations which were self-insured for the first 10 to 100 million bucks, like Big Oil or Tobacco.

After a few years, I soon realized where the big money was. I evolved away from insurance or defense work to working for high profile plaintiff attorneys as an investigator and all-around MF, not that MF; a Mr Fixit, often as a "claim administrator", mostly for civil suits, usually high value minimum 6 figure damages bodily injury cases, including some very lucrative high profile Class Action litigation.

It is here where I first got involved in film and video production, recording video of sworn depositions, creating trial presentations to "ameliorate the jurors' comprehension", then eventually creating trial visual aids, full color charts and graphs, and arrows, lots of very big red arrows, along with "compelling narratives" like showing a "day in the life" of some poor now quadriplegic bastard, trying to figure out how to

wipe his ass, after being broadsided by a freight train at a defective railroad crossing.

Guaranteed to make the defense attorneys beg the judge for an in-Chambers sidebar for settlement negotiation with the plaintiff counsel, uh...that would be us, as many of the jurors, tears unashamedly streaming down their faces, and that's just the men, malevolently glared at their Armani Asses as if they were something they just stepped in.

It was in August of 1971 about 2 AM, the petulant and frenzied tone of the phone, could only be my high-powered client and high-maintenance part-time paramour Vera Mirren Esq., proto-alpha female attorney. In typical subtle Vera-esque fashion, "Misha, get on the first plane this morning to Albuquerque, New Mexico."

"Thanks for asking, but no, no you didn't wake me, but damn I was just on the verge of cracking the code to Joyce's Finnigan's Wake. 'Spouse that can wait. Been by my bed for...ten years. What's up?"

"Good. Big case...multiple fatals...target defendant," salivating "can't talk now, 'cause I can hear Vlad's just about finished peeing. I'll call ya in the morning with details. Get some sleep...gonna need it."

Click. So much for pillow talk.

It is this fateful incident, which sends me to New Mexico to investigate an accident with the hopes of finding the surviving accident victim and signing him up with Ve-raptor, where I would meet Chief Leonard Eagle Feather and his daughter, Sora on a Navajo Indian Reservation. I had not a clue that it would be the beginning of a long and meandering, often tortuous journey of the reawakening of my conscience and my very soul, that would dramatically change my life forever.

Veruska, the diminutive in Russian for Vera, with her luxurious law office in Century City Plaza high rise looking out over the Pacific Ocean in the far distance, is a very forceful, notoriously ruthless, high-powered Personal Injury and Criminal Defense Attorney, living in a ridiculous ten bedroom mansion on Montana St. in exclusive Brentwood. It's heavily populated with major movers and shakers, particularly in the Hollywood film industry.

Married, but for some reason, obsessed with *moi*, her husband, is a very wealthy and powerful "real estate developer", Vladimir, alias Rad Vlad Mirrenoff anglicized to Mirren. He's a member of the Russian Mafia, nicknamed by law enforcement as "The Brothers Borscht".

Just the mere mention of the name Mirren in some dark underbelly circles, is cause for major fear and loathing when invoked. And Veruska capitalizes on it, effectively using it as the ultimate tool of intimidation, like for slow paying criminal defense clients billed at her ridiculously exorbitant hourly fee. And the brand becomes her backstop against male chauvinism in her negotiations with attorneys of the other side, including prosecuting Deputy District Attorneys, casting a

particularly ruthless and no-nonsense cache, which she exploits to her advantage.

This 6 foot tall lithe, blonde beauty, is built like a runway model with legs that go forever. Sinewy well-defined muscles, but with full breasts, with an insatiable libido, much like myself, which, hopefully is our well-kept little secret from her not-so-understanding Cro-Magnon hubby, Rad Vlad.

My mission, tasked by my not-so-little, and not-so-sweet *laskovaya moya* Ruskie paramour, was to get to the scene, get the police report, get pictures and statements, then sign up the surviving father as a client, before anyone else could step on her action. She had gotten a heads-up, in the middle of night when her house keeper, a cousin of the surviving father of the victims, was crying hysterically on the news over the phone of the horrific accident.

Veruska wasted no time in prying the contact information from her under the pretense of wanting to send condolence flowers to the bereaved family, which of course she never did. Rather, her first call was to mobilize her assets, that would be *moi*. Within an hour, she was on the phone with yours truly.

To get around the various state laws against this kind of brazen solicitation of personal injury clients, the altruistic legal assistance offered by Ms Mirren, of course solicited by the housekeeper, will be invoked as an *entre* to representation. And, if later scrutinized by the bar association, provide some semblance of compliance with the law as a defense against the possible allegation of yours truly being a "runner" or a "capper". The fact that Ms Mirren does not have a ticket to practice law in New Mexico, is a mere technicality. There will be dozens of NM attorneys lining up, just panting for the opportunity to rent out their shingle and soul, for the cache on their legal resume to include being 'co-counsel' with the star power of Vera Mirren for potentially one of the biggest P.I. cases in New Mexico's history.

I fly into Albuquerque, rent a car and drive to the accident scene, no more than 10 hours after the accident. A New Mexico Trailways common carrier passenger bus, had hit a pick-up truck with an Indian family—a father, wife and 5 children, on a dark and deserted highway late at night. The pick-up was driving South in the far right lane at about 50 mph on Interstate 25, on the way to Santa Fe.

According to the prelim police accident report from the New Mexico Highway Patrol, and some of the investigating officers still at the scene when I arrived, the bus driver had been driving for 13 hours straight in violation of Federal Interstate Regulations of a maximum 10 hours. The pick-up truck with a camper shell included 5 sleeping children.

The bus inexplicably drives right over the back of the pick-up. In the absence of a mechanical malfunction, the working proximate cause was that the driver had apparently fallen asleep at the wheel.

Mercifully, judging from the accounts of witnesses on the bus, they never knew what hit them. They died instantaneously

The mother fatally injured, dies in her husband's arms, while asking if her children are safe. The father, thrown clear, has miraculously escaped relatively unscathed. After the impact, the father in a state of shock, is seen by witnesses, passengers on the bus, wandering down the highway picking up some of the limbs of his children. Some would later say that he was truly...the unlucky one.

I arrive on the scene after the vehicles have been removed—the horrific aftermath with debris from the pickup, still scattered all over the Interstate, including clothing, little children's shoes, and dolls, and dried blood. It's a bad one.

I take numerous pictures, then drive to the NM Highway Patrol to get a preliminary accident report, the final of which because of the seriousness of the accident and multiple 'fatals' will not be ready for at least five days. But the prelim gives me enough facts to get started, most importantly including where the damaged vehicles were taken, because often in accidents of this magnitude with common carriers, they will attempt to control access to any and all vehicles involved—most especially photos by somebody other than the common carrier, which depending on their liability exposure, may never see the light of day.

I find out where the vehicles were towed, and drive out to the impound yard to get some photos of the bus and the other vehicle, or what's left of it. When I go into the office, and ask the dispatcher, who happens to be the owner, to see the vehicles I am refused access. Occasionally they are even successful, in having the accident scene photos, sometimes taken by the investigating police, to somehow 'misplace' the photos, especially when the victims were considered to be no 'great loss', like Native Americans.

Obviously the bus company has already paid the owner off, so that no photos can be taken. I argue vehemently, but to no avail—he won't budge. So I act like I've given up and leave. I park the rental car down the road where it's not visible, and hike back. By now, it is getting dark, and the office is closing. I sneak back about 1/4 of a mile along the chain link fence, and see the bus, and beside it a large blue tarp covering something, maybe 3 feet high. I throw my camera bag over the fence, and hop over. I pull back the tarp and there is the pick-up truck, I think. Totally flattened—it is almost unrecognizable. Judging by the impact the bus must have been doing at least 80 mph when it literally drove completely over the back of the pick-up. I take a whole roll of 36 shots of 35mm black and white photos, because it's starting to get dark, I'm having to use the flash.

The owner who lives on premises sees the flashes from the camera. He immediately realizes what's going on and looses his two Doberman Pinschers. I hear the barking snarling of the attacking dogs—they are on me very quickly. I run for my life, get to the fence, and

throw my camera bag over it. The last second I hop the fence just as a snarling dog reaches me grabbing and tearing my pant leg as I leap to the other side of the chain link fence. Laying on my back, out of breath from running and the sheer adrenaline rush from nearly being devoured, my face is now about a foot from the fence. On the other side I can feel the hot breath of the Doby, trying to force his pointed foaming snout through the chain link to eat my face.

After about 5 minutes, I am able to compose myself sufficiently to make sure I've got the film canisters I've shot. I unload the camera and put the last canister from the impound lot in my bag with the other one from the accident scene, and reload the camera in case I want to take some shots of the surviving father, if I can find him. I drive out to the reservation to try to make contact with surviving father and relatives. The reservation is near Santa Fe, New Mexico. I drive for an hour and half on US Hwy 25, along the same route as the scene of the accident that the family was on. By the time I get to the rez, it is getting dark, but with a full moon rising.

It is here where I would encounter Chief Leonard Eagle Feather, a cousin of the surviving father, for the first...but not the last time. On the rez, everyone is related, either by blood or otherwise. But more importantly, I will meet his daughter, Sora Eagle Feather; a 24 years old, beautiful and bright Native American woman, again not for the last time.

At the reservation, taking inventory, with one torn pants leg, I realize that I must look like I got the worst end of an encounter with a coyote. I change into another pair of jeans so as not to look too unprofessional.

It's now quite dark. There are several groups of young braves on a porch, sitting around, drinking beer, the pungent smell of pot is pervasive. It's only 8 PM but they are already stupid fall-down drunk. I start asking around, but everyone is very wary of a white man...any white man, especially in a new car. To them, after decades of invasive visits from Bureau of Indian Affairs officials, and Federal law enforcement like the FBI, any white man must look like an undercover cop...or worse, a narc—and trouble. Everybody I ask in the ramshackle reservation, sorely in need of major maintenance and repair, for directions to house of the father of the victims either ignores me, tells me they don't know or says *Ch'iidii off* in Navajo. Don't have to be a linguist to recognize the universal middle finger in any language.

Finally, the Chief, Eagle Feather, and his daughter Sora, hearing the commotion outside of his house, come outside and confront me. I tell him my business, that I represent an attorney who is a *dear friend* with the cousin of the father of the victims.

Sora, a little spitfire, wastes no time in laying in to me. Despite Sora's very assertive and protective attitude, in which she also tells me off, again with the *Ch'iidii*, I am smitten by her natural beauty. The

worst case is that my visit isn't a total loss, as I am learning a new and useful words in a new language.

I respectfully ask if I may come inside to discuss the matter. Probably more out of curiosity, with a wry smile, the Chief ushers me in. Sitting at a table is an Indian man maybe in his early 40s, hard to tell with Native Americans because of the hard life on the rez. His right arm is in a sling, head bandaged, his face full of contusions and abrasions.

"This is my cousin, Sherman Eagle Feather. He is the father and husband," the Chief says.

I walk over and hold out my hand, introducing myself. It is not reciprocated. Despite the chilly reception so far from everyone, to be successful at what I do, a lack of dogged determination is not an option. I refuse to give up and press on. I noisily slide out a chair, and take a seat at the table so I can engage Sherman Eagle Feather, eye to eye. I slide Vera Mirren's business card across the table.

"Mister Eagle Feather, I'm Mick Kozlov. I'm a licensed private investigator working for attorney Vera Mirren in Los Angeles, California. She is the good friend and employer of Nascha Eagle Feather, who I believe is your cousin. I'm here representing Ms Mirren, to try help you at the request of your cousin, during this, I'm sure, a very difficult time. Our mission is to assist you to get justice...from the party that has caused you and your family to suffer such a horrific loss."

Nothing...just a dull lifeless stare, like the 1000 yard stare of PTSD war vets back from Nam, staring into space like I am invisible.

I begin to explain the legalities of the situation and how I'm here representing one of the most powerful and successful personal injury plaintiff attorneys in the United States. I rote recite her impressive resume of high six-figure settlements and judgments, and tick off some cases, names of common carriers, like airlines, and mention how many millions of dollars she's won for her clients. Not impressed.

The Chief is inscrutable. He does not let on that he graduated from law school at UNM at Albuquerque and lets me dig myself into a hole, deeper and deeper. I spin the conversation to trying to convince the Chief and his daughter that I'm only here to try to help this poor unfortunate soul.

"It won't cost him a dime out of his own pocket for the attorney to get for him what he and his family so justly deserve...I hope that I can count on your help to convince your cousin Mr Eagle Feather here, to sign this legal representation retainer agreement...it would be the best for all concerned."

The Chief and Sora listen impassively, as I describe the representation agreement consciously leaving out the contingency percentages. No need to go into too much detail which might confuse or cause undue concern for the poor bastard. Yeah...right, Mr Concerned Capper.

The Chief scanning the agreement, says, "Very commendable of you and your boss to take such a...personal unselfish interest...such uncommon compassion from complete strangers for Sherman's loss, to get justice for him. Very impressive indeed. It says here that if the case goes to trial, that the attorney can take up to 50% of the total settlement...plus expenses, have I got that right?"

"Well...yes, but that's standard in the industry," I say, but hearing it out loud, instantly realizing my insensitive choice of words.

"Industry? What the hell do you think you're doing here! Do think this some kind of a game? Some factory operation to manufacture money for you and your boss? And you...you're nothing more than a..." she is interrupted by her father.

"A capper...a runner...I believe is the legal term of art," the Chief says smiling sardonically with a twinkle in his eye.

"...a scavenger, like a circling buzzard...over road kill, trying to make money off of other people's misery. Shame on you!" Sora Eagle Feather cries.

As I gaze upon the natural beauty of the face of the guileless Sora Eagle Feather, suddenly I feel ashamed for my behavior, for my attempts to exploit these poor Indian people...*just another white man trying to screw over the injuns.*

I guess I had always known in my hearts of hearts that what I was doing for V. Mirren, et al, was pretty low on the food chain. But for some unknown reason, maybe the image of a buzzard...picking over the bones of a carcass, which I would later ponder for many hours, disarms and stings me deeply. The way she says it...with such truth, honesty and conviction, for the first time I am actually forced to entertain the cold hard truth, that Sora Eagle Feather is speaking the painful reality about *me*...what I do...why I'm *really* here, and what kind of person that must make me.

The Chief then says, "Mr Kozlov, please tell your boss...thanks for her touching concern for Sherman Eagle Feather's welfare...but no thanks. I am a member of good standing with the New Mexico Bar, and that I will personally handle this case, for no compensation. I think we are done here. Sora will show you out."

My natural alpha instinct not to lose, reflexively I start to protest, "But..." then looking into Sora's intense eyes, I realize that I am outflanked by these noble Natives, and indeed, very 'done here'.

"Okay. Thank you for your time. I am truly sorry for your loss...or if I offended anyone. I wish you and your client only the best. So...I'll be on my way. No need to show me out," I say.

There is not a hole deep enough for me to crawl into. I am suddenly overwhelmed by the dignity and grace of these so-called *primitive* First Nations people, who despite living in 'third world' conditions of poverty and privation, in America, the richest country in the world, in many ways are far more civilized than my society. There is

a tribal sense of cultural continuity, community and familial responsibility, egregiously lacking in my so-called civilized culture.

I get up to leave. Sora follows me out. Just outside the door, she lightly taps me on the shoulder—I stop and face her. Her stunning beauty is majestically revealed in the soft moonlight. High cheekbones and fine features—a sensual mouth with bee-stung lips, and long thick raven hair with wide-set, smoldering but somehow kind coal black eyes peering up at me. I am smitten.

Sora apologizes for her dismissive, harsh words, "I won't retract anything that I said in there...but it was very impolite and against our Indian customs to be so ungracious. I'm not sorry for what I said...but how I said it."

I say, "It is I that should be apologizing for coming here under these preten-...uh...circumstances."

I then reach into my camera bag hanging on my shoulder, and pull out the two canisters of film I had shot at the accident scene and the wrecking impound lot.

I take her hand and place the film canisters in it, then close her hand, "The insurance company will not pay without a major fight...every step of the way. It will be a very long and arduous battle, and it will be very expensive to get them to pay what they should. The bus company would never allow you to take or view photographs of the vehicles. Both those vehicles will be long gone by this time tomorrow...the whereabouts of the pickup somehow, mysteriously lost. But when the attorneys for the insurance company see that you have *these photos* of the scene and what was left of the pick-up...and the bus...the horrific impact from the excessive speed...and the scattered belongings of the children...I doubt that it will ever get in front of a jury."

Sora then reaches up and gently caresses my face, which sends an electric tingle down my spine, and says, "Thank you..." pauses, gazing into my eyes searchingly, then turns around and noiselessly like a lithe panther, disappears into the black night.

I stand there in the quiet darkness for a long time, my heart, inexplicably racing, until finally the distant cry of an infant in distress snaps me out of my trance.

I mindlessly get into the rental car, and sit there for another 5 minutes. *What the hell just happened in there? I'd been totally disarmed and out-manuevered by an old Indian man and his daughter. Me...the Koz...Mister Hardball, without so much as even a whimper. And exercising my new Navajo vocabulary, Ch'iidii it! Maybe it is time for a change...*

I decide that I could use a nice long drive to think about some things, and rather than drive back to the airport, I'll drive the rental car all the way back to L.A., and maybe see some country I've never seen. It will also give me some time to work out a few different plausible scenarios, concocting a story that I could tell the venomous Veruska

back in L.A., about how I couldn't find the prospective plaintiff let alone sign him up, or the wrecked vehicles, etcetera...etcetera.

On the way back, driving for hours on the miles and miles of endlessly long straight roads, with distant expansive horizons and big skies, allows me to set the cruise control and just let my mind go out to play. Recess on the playground of...*what if*. I begin to mentally massage the proposition of maybe some day getting the hell out of L.A.

On the map, I see this huge body of water, called Lake Tahoe, so I decide to check it out. From Highway 395, I take Highway 50 West, eventually to Sacramento, California, to Interstate 5 South, which is pretty much dry, straight and fast, all the way to L.A.

I first drive through the outskirts of Reno, famously billed as the Biggest Little City in the World, the largest city of Northern Nevada. Then Carson City, the state capitol, which still embraces that John Wayne Western rugged individualism, with lots of wide open spaces, cattle ranches, and all that goes with it—Stetsons, cowboys boots, and pick-up trucks with obligatory rifle racks. Nevada's idea of progressive thinking is legalized prostitution.

I begin my steep ascent West up Highway 50 through the rugged Sierra Nevada over the 7,000 feet Spooner Summit. When I finally descend into the Tahoe basin, my eyes are suddenly graced by the spectacular vision of the oceanic pristine Lake Tahoe, Nevada. The vivid teal blue of the Lake and the deep ultramarine cloudless sky is breath taking. I am immediately captivated by its awesome natural beauty, and decide to spend a few days there checking it out. Nestled in the picturesque snow covered Sierra Nevada, it is a huge fresh water lake formed by receding glaciers, millennia ago.

Hmm...seeing some business opportunity potential, my normal rational capitalistic mindset now revived, kicks back in at full tilt. Straddling the border of Nevada and California, I could perhaps set up a downsized practice for insurance and PI investigation, my investigative roots, with my legal place of business on the California side, like a PO Box which would allow me to use my California licenses, but I could live on the Nevada side. And because Nevada has no state income tax, all of my income, including and most especially my high income from my passive income investments, like stocks bonds, and rental property would not be subject to California state income tax. No small amount.

What better place to reinvent the Koz? And just in case, on some of those long lonely frigid nights of winter in my snowy mountain retreat might get a trifle boring, as a hedge—casinos, with 24/7 gambling, liquor and all the side dishes that come with it on the Nevada side of South Lake Tahoe. I could even start a Northern Chapter of The 4S Club—now, Sun, Snow, Skiing and of course, Sex

- Chapter 18 -

Sora Eagle Feather, half Hopi and half Navajo, is strikingly beautiful. Tall, for a Native American, she's a double for Joan Baez with a voice to match. True to her namesake, Sora in Navajo means 'singing bird soars', like her mother, who frequently sang at the tribal gatherings, and around the house. Raised on a Navajo Indian Reservation, as a child her father impressed upon her the value of an education as the only way to escape the rez.

Life on the rez was not easy. Her Hopi mother, Catori was a chronic alcoholic, who constantly fought with her father, Leonard Eagle Feather, over her addiction to alcohol. Her mother was only 17 years old when she got pregnant with Sora, the oldest of 3 children, a brother 2 years younger and a sister 3 years younger. After constant struggles with alcohol addiction, her mother finally loses her will to live, and dies of complications from diabetes, from a stroke at only 34 years old, with alcoholism accelerating her rapid deterioration.

Sora is only 16 years old when her mother dies. She is forced to take on the role of motherhood, to raise her younger siblings. It forever quells her appetite to have children of her own, as her young brother is born with a mental disability, probably from alcohol fetal syndrome, and requires almost custodial care. Her younger sister is also cursed with alcohol addiction. Her mother's premature and tragic death, and having to shoulder the responsibility of raising her siblings, motivates her even more to get off the rez, so she won't end up like her dear tragic mother, to whom she was very close and loved very much.

Unfortunately she has not escaped the genetic lottery, and is also cursed with the predisposing genes for alcoholism. After seeing how it ruined her mother's life, and those of her aunts and uncles, she resists it, tries to control it, but it never really goes away.

At the age of 22, in 1969 she graduated from a liberal arts College in Santa Fe, NM with a degree in Art and Music Therapy. She's living on the rez, after having taken care of her mentally impaired younger brother, who has died of cystic fibrosis at the age of 19, and working in the field of music and art therapy, until early 1972, when she decides it's finally time to 'get off the rez'.

So, she packs up her guitar and moves to Los Angeles to pursue a graduate degree in music ultimately to teach, and to ply her folk singing talents to pay for her education at University of California at Los Angeles, UCLA. It is in L.A. in mid 1972 while performing, as Nora Feather, singing folk songs, mostly original social justice themes that

she has written, while playing her guitar at a coffee house in Venice Beach that she re-encounters Mick Kozlov.

Mick and his paramour, Vera Mirren, are out for the evening to catch some live music, have some drinks and talk over some business, away from the chaos of the office. Mick intends to tell Vera that he wants to cut back on his work etcetera from her, to make some time for his art, photography and some painting—to get a life. It is not going well. Hearing the news that Mick is attempting to disengage with her, especially the etcetera, she's slamming down Vodka Martinis like water.

It is now almost one year since the first encounter with Sora Eagle Feather on the Indian Reservation in New Mexico. In front of a microphone stand, bathed in low-key theatrical light with a blue gel, she introduces herself as Nora Feather. Wearing theatrical make-up, her hair in bangs with her now trademark eagle feather hanging from her hair, which only Native Americans are legally allowed to possess, she looks very different now.

Mick, sitting at a table very close to the stage, is momentarily distracted from the conversation with Vera by the lovely rapturous singing voice of one Nora Feather. Mick's divided attention sparks an affront to overly sensitive Ms Mirren. She confronts Mick, and says, "I've heard enough of this touchy *feel-ly* folk shit...I'm ready to leave...now!"

"I'm not ready to leave right now Vera...I'd like to hear some more music. She's got quite a beautiful natural voice," Mick says.

"And that's not all that's beautiful...I can see how you're looking at her. Now for the last time...I'm leaving...and you *are* coming," Vera says dripping with childish jealousy.

"Hey Veruska...come on, lighten up will ya? Just another half-hour," Mick says.

"I drove...so we are leaving. *Now!*" she says standing up petulantly jingling the keys to her new Silver Mercedes 450SL.

"Since you drove...if you're so unhappy, then maybe you should leave. I'll grab a cab home," Mick says calmly which infuriates Vera even more.

Vera is now in full-spectrum tantrum mode, stamping her feet like a child, screaming, "Misha...I'm warning you...for the last time. Are you coming?"

"The last time...or penultimate time?" he says with a smile to try to lighten her up. But, her tantrum remains fully intact.

"Okay...I warned you!" she screams.

"Or what, Vera? You gonna sick your mad dog Rad Vlad on me? This conversation is over. I'll talk to you tomorrow, after you've cooled off enough to carry on an adult conversation. Good night...and drive carefully, you've had a lot to drink," Mick says with even more equanimity, then dismissively turning his back on her, looks toward the stage, which angers her even further. By now some of the other

customers are becoming annoyed with the histrionics. The guy at the next table yells, "Hey you two...why don't ya take it outside?"

Vera reaches over, grabs her unfinished drink from the cocktail table, and pours it over his head, yelling "Fuck you! Asshole!" causing quite a ruckus among the patrons trying to listen to the acoustic music. She pivots an about-face and with a quick time march, jostles her way through the crowded cocktail tables, knocking over several customers drinks.

Mick then stands up and says loud enough for the surrounding patrons, "Ladies and gentlemen...that concludes this evening's bonus vignette performance of Albee's, Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf." Which diffuses the situation, with laughter.

On the way home, Vera Mirren, driving like a banshee on San Vicente Blvd, wraps her new Merc around a tree on the meridian. Other than a few bumps and bruises, except for her ego, she was not seriously injured. But she was arrested for a DUI, of course blaming Mick for all her misfortune. That night, will mark the beginning of a tumultuous descent into a rancorous relationship hell for Mick in trying to distance himself from Ms. Vera Mirren Esq.

After Nora's set, Mick stands and applauds wildly. Because he is so tall he catches Nora's eye. She recognizes him almost immediately from almost a year ago at the rez.

Mick walks up to the stage and asks her if she'd care to join him, offering to buy her a cocktail. She declines the cocktail, but politely opts for a Virgin Mary.

She takes a seat at the table. She does not show her recognition of him, until finally with a newly acquired showbiz coyness, she says, "you look familiar...have we met?" knowing full well who he is. He smiles and says "Hey that's supposed to be my line...do I look that easy to you?" She blushes and smiles, then breaks into the popular song's opening lyrics, "Do You Know the Way to San Jose"...but with Santa Fe?:

*Do you know the way to Santa Fe?
I've been away so long. I may go wrong and lose my way.
Do you know the way to Santa Fe?
I'm going back to find some peace of mind in Santa Fe..*

*L.A. is a great big freeway.
Put a hundred down and buy a car.
In a week, maybe two, they'll make you a star
Weeks turn into years. how quick they pass
And all the stars that never were
Are parking cars and pumping gas...*

She laughs...that shallow showbiz smile all mouth and teeth, but her eyes belie a deep inner sadness, masking deep physic wounds. Her coal black eyes bore a hole through him. His spine tingles as it did on that moonlit night that they first met. "My God! Of course...you're Sora Eagle Feather...a year ago...in Santa Fe, New Mexico. I didn't recognize you with your hair...the make-up!" he says engulfing her delicate hand in both of his, shooting an electrical charge to her very core.

"Bingo...aka Nora Feather...my *nom de guerre*. My showbiz persona for marketing, etcetera."

As they get reacquainted the conversation turns to the lawsuit over the wrongful death of her cousin's family. Sora tells him, that at the mandatory pre-trial settlement conference, where up to that point, the insurance company had been stone-walling the family, her father, Chief Eagle Feather Esq., counsel for the plaintiff, wordlessly spreads 20 of the 8x10 black and white photos of the flattened pick-up truck and the accident site before it was sanitized by the insurance company, on the large long walnut conference table, for the insurance company defense lawyers. There was an audible gasp...then *Where did you get those photos?* The attorneys say in unison. Turns out that not only is a picture worth a thousand words...but about 250K each."

"So...got their attention, eh? They blinked?"

"Within a week, they made an offer for settlement, a *humanitarian overture*, to save the surviving father from the rigors of litigation, and having to relive the terrible tragedy that took his entire family that nightmare night. Over 5 million dollars, much of it going to an endowment for college tuition for Native Americans aspiring to go to college at UNM. It's called the Eagle Feather Foundation, set up by my father in the deceased children's names, who were robbed of the opportunity of ever fulfilling their dreams...their potential.

Almost on the anniversary of the accident having received his settlement check a week earlier, Father told me my cousin Sherman Eagle Feather, driving a brand new Ford pick-up with a factory camper shell he had bought just that morning with cash, on the same highway...at almost the same spot and the same time, he, '*driving at a very high rate of speed, inexplicably swerved into an overpass abutment and was killed instantly*', no more than 100 yards from where his family died.

The toxicology report said that his blood alcohol level was three times over the legal limit. The local paper wrote it off as just another *firewater fatality* of an injun. But we all knew that it wasn't the whiskey that killed him. It was survivor's guilt and grief...that finally took him," Sora says.

"How tragic...how totally heartbreaking. Seven lives," Mick says.

"My father and I, have often wondered what happened to you. We all owe you a great debt of gratitude for your kindness and

generosity in giving me those film canisters on that moonlit night on the rez," Sora says.

"Yes, I too remember it...like it was yesterday. The moonlight soft on your face...your raven hair...glistening. I...well I've thought about that night many times," Mick says.

They are both immediately smitten with each other. The romance blossoms and becomes fast and furious and within a month, Sora moves in with Mick, who had recently rented a house with a garage, which he has converted to a studio, in Venice Beach, an *avant garde* artists enclave, about 10 minutes West of Westwood and the UCLA campus.

Within 5 months, Sora learns that she is now almost 2 months pregnant. She cannot bear even the thought of having a child, especially at this time of her life, after having already experienced the overwhelming responsibility of being a surrogate mother. By the time the Supreme Court Decision in *Rowe vs Wade* "legalizing abortion", is decided in January of 1973, she is over 3 months along, past the first trimester. Legally, she would be forced to have the child, or to seek a "kitchen table" abortion. The initial holding of the trimester framework will later be rejected by the Court, and amended to a right to abortion until viability.

She agonizes over whether to tell Mick she is pregnant. She is now beginning to show, so much so that her careful measures of deception, soon will become futile.

Mick had often emphatically stated many times that he does not want children because of his own difficult childhood. When she does finally break the news that fateful night, he behaves badly...very badly, goes out and gets very drunk, and when he comes home, he says some very mean-spirited, abusive things to her.

Because he is terrified of any kind of commitment, and not prepared for a mature and loving relationship, out of fear, he goes into his usual attack mode. Being a successful hardball negotiator, which had served him well all those years in the professional legal arena, has honed his rhetorical scorched-earth attack skills, to intuit where the hidden buttons of rhetorical advantage reside, just waiting to be pressed.

The kicker was when he calls her a *stupid squaw* and stormed out of the house to stay with a pal. When he awakes the next day, badly hung-over but now lucid, he realizes how much he truly loves Sora Eagle Feather.

He heads home, feeling completely ashamed for how he has behaved, with the intent of apologizing. Willing to do anything to save the relationship, even flirting with the big "C" word practicing it out loud while driving home ...*com...uh...commit...commitment*, to try to salvage the emotional carnage that he had wrecked.

But alas, she had already packed and left, leaving only a short note behind:

December 21, 1972

Dear Mickey,

You have revealed a side of you that is very dark...and very hurtful. Your mean-spirited words have hurt me more deeply than a punch to the gut...more than you can ever know. I could never be with anyone who feels the way you do toward women...toward Native Americans. I do not want a child either, ultimately, it is my problem...so I'll take care it.

Do not try to find me...I never want see or hear from you again...and don't worry, I'll take care of "my situation" without your help...financial or otherwise.

Goodbye...

Sora

PS

Hope you have a REAL Happy Birthday.

Yes...it will definitely be one of his most memorable birthdays. Because of his selfish, self-absorbed narcissistic attitude, he had without conscience, already caused a lot of heartbreak in his short lifetime. A "serial heart breaker" his pals called him, which he took as a compliment. "How can you cause *so many* broken hearts?", his pals used to kid him. Which he perversely, arrogantly takes as a compliment, glibly replying, "Easy man, I just pace myself...one at a time."

But, this time was different, he had not broken just one heart, but two—hers and his. The whimsical parody song by Oscar Brown Jr, "But I Was Cool..." starts to play in his head...mirthlessly...

*I've always lived by this golden rule,
Whatever happens, don't blow your cool
You've got to have nerves of steel
Never show folks what you honestly feel
I've lived my whole life this way
For example, take yesterday.*

*I breezed home happy
Bringing her my pay
Her note read "so long sappy, I have ran away."
I threw myself down across our empty bed.*

And this is what I said

*But I Was Cool.
So I one-for-the-roaded it
At an all night bar
Wound up so loaded
I tore up my car
The judge threw the book at me
And when he read his sentence there I said*

But I Was Cool.

*So I said she's the only one I have to thank
So I found her and pulled my gun and fired point blank
The shot whistled straight passed that woman's head
And killed my hound dog dead*

But I Was Cool...

So...as usual, Shakespeare got there first, "*What a piece of work is a man!*" And when he says, man, he means, *man*. For the first time, he was now a casualty of his own capricious irresponsible behavior—himself, collateral damage from his wanton disregard for the hearts of others. Now—his very own *corazon espinado*, a speared heart. And he did not like the feeling of it, not one little bit. The sleepless nights, the constant dull ache of a deep sense of loss and longing, which he had never, ever experienced before.

He begins to realize what a bastard he had been all those years to all those women who had blindly entrusted him with their hearts, their hopeful emotions. A trust he had frivolously betrayed over and over again. All the indiscriminate pain and unhappiness he had caused, just to gratify his own ego. Bastard was far too kind of a word, rather *il bastardo*, for he was behaving with the same reckless narcissistic abandon—the incarnate of his Russian father and maternal Italian grandfather, both shameless philanderers. If there is a '*bastardo* gene', it was no longer recessive. He obviously was a carrier.

Saul Bellow had it right, when he penned the novel, "More Die of Heartbreak." Mick never quite got over losing her. Never again, to see those huge luminous ebony eyes of his beloved Sora Eagle Feather, gazing back at him, filled with love and hope—except in his dreams, of what could have been.

After leaving Mick, Sora Eagle Feather, feeling lost and alone, goes to stay with a girl-friend from school. For two weeks she wanders around aimlessly, grappling with the heart rending decision about having

an abortion. When she decides she can wait no longer, she decides to have the abortion.

Her friend knows of a "clinic" in Tijuana, Mexico, just across the border, where several of her young coed friends in a similar predicament, have gone. Her girlfriend offers to drive her there. When they get to the "clinic" they are met by a fat, dirty Mexican "Doctor" who leads them into his "operating room" which is nothing more than filthy, dimly lighted kitchen, where he first demands \$200, cash *solamente senorita*.

By the fourth month, she has been feeling a stirring within her belly. Yes, there is a living person in there with a beating heart...and a soul. *If only I hadn't waited so long...it would have been so much easier.*

Sora is so frightened and distressed by the unsavory and filthy conditions, that the last minute, she has a change of heart, and runs out to the car, crying hysterically to friend, "I can't do it! I just can't...please take me back to L.A. I just won't to go home to my Father...my family."

She returns to L.A. to pack her things, and catches the first Greyhound bus to Santa Fe New Mexico, to her Father and to the reservation family.

Her Father, Chief Leonard Eagle Feather and the extended Indian family receive her with open arms. Being in the warm, nurturing environment of the other mothers on the reservation, reaffirms her decision to bring the baby to term.

Despite the reality that she still loves Mick Kozlov deeply, she is still emotionally damaged from his insensitive, mean-spirited words and the rancorous parting.

After Sora had left, Mick sinks into a deep depression. He can't concentrate on his legal work, and instead, expresses his personal grief and deep emotional sense of loss, in a series of 10 very large oil paintings on canvas, called the Sora Series. They are very edgy—dark with somber colors—filled with Native American iconography, subtly incorporated into his unique abstract expressionist style. They immediately sell out the local gallery.

In the meantime, Mick tries desperately to find her. He contacts her father, who has been instructed by Sora, never to tell Mick that she is living on the rez, and most emphatically about their child together, which he reluctantly honors.

When the child is born, upon seeing the newborn, she is overwhelmed with love for her beautiful baby boy. He looks like baby pictures of Mick as an infant. He is very long, but quite under weight and sickly, probably due to the mother's drinking and incessant smoking of cigarettes, to deal with the stress of her situation. The alcoholism, always just below surface, laying dormant waiting to be triggered, surfaces with a vengeance. In those days, no one totally realized the danger of smoking, or fetal alcohol syndrome on the unborn fetus.

She decides to stay on the rez, with her people—with the Clan Mothers lovingly helping to raise her son. In the meantime, she becomes deeply involved in her father's efforts to stop a pipeline by a big energy corporation National Petroleum Inc, NPI, that would pass directly through a part of New Mexico that is Navajo Land, with possible damage to sacred sites, and in the event of accidental discharge, causing pollution, and surface water and well contamination, which could lead to health risks among their communities for decades.

She becomes a strong advocate for Indian rights, often speaking at rallies. She begins to find her voice as an advocate for her people's rights, social justice and becomes an articulate and an effective speaker.

She also begins to attract some national attention with her original songs she performs about the broken treaties with the white man, and the many injustices visited upon the Native Americans in particular by the government, and the exploitation of the First Nations by corporations. Because of her increasing celebrity and national notoriety, she is beginning to be perceived as a threat not only to the local energy projects, but perhaps even a larger threat to corporate expansion of energy projects on Indian land nationally.

- Chapter 19 -

1974 Mick's Northern Migration to Lake Tahoe...for his health.

By now, after channeling my grief, and deep depression from losing Sora by getting back into my painting and art, I had somewhat emotionally recovered and rebounded.

But, after the rancorous break-up with Veruska that night at the bar in Venice, when I had reconnected with Sora Eagle Feather, for months Veruska relentlessly stalked me. Midnight phone calls with an avalanche of vociferous voice messages, alternating between sobbing suicidal declarations of love, then venomous hate and threats of retribution—all left unanswered.

The crescendo had come, when she found out that I was living with Sora. Veruska finally figured out that we were history. My psychotic paramour, made good her threat. She informed hubby Vladimir that for years, I had been trying to force myself upon poor defenseless little Veruska. I could just imagine the hysterically sobbing schizophrenic Bette Davis performance. Veruska tearfully convulsing to Rad Vlad of the sexual liberties I had attempted to take with her, which she had of course heroically resisted.

All coming to a head that night in Venice, when in a drunken frenzy my increasingly aggressive sexual overtures had caused her such emotional trauma, that in trying to escape my brutish advances, recklessly racing home to the safety of her protector Vlad, she totaled her Mercedes getting herself busted for drunk driving in the process.

Obviously all my fault. I was not surprised to find out that I been listed by name on her statement on the police report for being the 'proximate cause', including being threatened with a lawsuit for negligence, for the damages, along with intentional infliction of emotional distress. All frivolous threats that went nowhere, intended to terrorize me. Lawyers.

So, on one typical monotonously bright and sunny L.A. morning, I found my pristine vintage Bahama Yellow '67 Porsche 911S Carrera looked like the New York Yankees had used it for batting practice—all the windows broken with every body panel spray-painted with the monogram "BB". Which, with my amazing investigative skills, I deduced to mean a calling card from the Brothers Borsch.

One doesn't have to be a particularly quick study—to draw *moi* any more of a *pictcha*. From his considerable notoriety, this was about as subtle a warning as the Rad One gives—an unmistakable dear-

deadman-walkin' memo to get-the-hell-outta-town...like yesterday. The next memo would probably include batting practice on my knee caps.

So after about 10 years of L.A. *dolce vita*, and with a little nudge, a highly motivational memorandum from the Rad One, I had finally decided that I had had enough of the old L.A. chestnut. The Four Seasons of California—Wildfire, Mudslide, Earthquake and Riots. And a fifth ubiquitous bonus season of Every-Hour-Is-Rush-Hour, from 2 PM on, the Un-Happy Hours—a taxiing Luftwaffe squadron of Beemers, Porsches and Mercs, poised for take-off—the drivers affecting the same practiced mask of long-suffering tolerance. On a good day averaging maybe 5 mph on the 405 San Diego Freeway 20 miles North and South eventually funneling into the Wilshire Blvd. off ramp—about a billion bucks per mile just in Kraut cars. All very Wagnerian.

So, I decided to collapse my business operation and escape from the vast and vapid wasteland of L.A. Growing increasingly weary of the non-stop, every-hour-is-Happy-Hour-somewhere partying and shallow cliché relationships of my life, I was ready to seek a deeper meaning in life, far away from L.A., and far, far away from Mr and Mrs Mayhem.

Lake Tahoe, where I had spent some time on the way back from New Mexico in 1972, was beginning to look more and more appealing. The more I thought about it, the better I liked the idea of being in another state, like Nevada about 400 miles North of Botox Babylon El Lay, where I could explore and embrace my inner-mountain man—to seek solace and refuge in the mountains, to find the *real* me. To take up the life of a mountain man sustaining myself someplace uh...*mountain-ish* to test my manliness, I would force myself to get by on a spare budget of about \$100 K a year, of course not counting stock dividends.

What better place for complete and total Koz-mick makeover than pristine Lake Tahoe. And with an added bonus of no Nevada state income tax.

Nestled in the picturesque Sierra Nevada mountains, *Sierra* from *Serrucha* in Espanol, serrated or jagged snow-covered mountains, it is a huge fresh water lake about 22 miles by 12 miles wide at an elevation of about six thousand feet. And just 3 hours by pick-up, 2 hours by Porsche, from the world famous cultural assets and restaurants of San Francisco, my favorite city.

But reinventions are not without potential unintended consequences—the inherent financial vagaries of major change, and of course finding all the good restaurants...a new barber.

Ahh...so, I would first have to prepare for The Koz's Great Adventure.

Of course, I would employ the same exhaustive process that has been so successful in my business over the years. Comprehensive and thorough research, with a bulleted prioritized checklist.

In 1972, I had seen Sidney Pollock's film "Jeremiah Johnson" with Robert Redford, ironically another Santa Monica boy. During the obligatory L.A. hour wait in line at the cinema in Westwood, I had an opportunity to observe 'the bea-u-tiful people' in their natural habitat.

The magnificently manicured and studiously-casual expensive plumage of the parvenudom, some sporting rough-out desert boots, with a few perfunctory pairs of Tony Lama \$500 a pair lizard skin cowboy boots, as an homage, a tip of the Stetson if you will, to rugged Western mountain manliness they were so desperately trying to affect.

I was now primed and ready for change. A new chapter, filled with dreams of manly Hemingwayesque adventures. Maybe a *mano a mano* encounter with a 'Griz'. Visions of seriously accessorizing my split-level McMountain man cave with the skin of my trophy, in harmlessly docile repose in front of a huge faux stone gas-jetted fireplace with a "no kindling required" to initiate a roaring fire.

So, to preempt being perceived as a 'pilgrim' as the great character actor, Will Geer convincingly cast as Bear Claw Chris Lapp, had dubbed Jeremiah Johnson, I carefully prepared and cultivated my new mountain man persona:

Checklist:

1. *Grow a beard worthy of real mountain man...no wimpy effete goatee for me...a full bushy au naturale Grizzly Adams.*

2. *Wardrobe—for that "just stepped out of the Sear's Catalog" look:*

a) *Pants - blue-jeans...red-tag, leather-waist-label Levis, custom tailored of course.*

b) *Shirts - my usual custom tailored shirts, tapered, only cut in flannel, with flap-chest pockets and snap buttons. All pre-washed multiple times, wrinkled, and faded...for that authentic mountain man look.*

c) *Footwear - Boots of course. Ah...but this could be problem, as new shiny boots would be a dead give-away that I was a green-horn. What to do? A stroke of genius—tie'em to the rear bumper of the Porsche and drag them around the block a few times...voila.*

d) *Hat(s) - a floppy wide-brim Stetson, aged (see "2(c)" supra). If clothes indeed make the mountain-man, I could be straight from central casting. Willie Nelson, eat your heart out.*

3. *Vehicle - Since, I'd have to park the Porsche in the garage during the winter months, I'd need something*

equivalent with my new manly station in life; a pick-up truck. Of course, it would have to be " 'Merican Made"...so a Ford, a 4 x 4 - 3/4 ton, the bigger the tires, the better. Too new looking? Take it to Manny's Mar Vista Detail Shop, for some random-looking fresh primer spots, and have Manny drive it to work for a few weeks.

I would cook my meat over the blazing orange electrodes of my Sharper Image Electric Rotisserie—basting, rotating and roasting, then pulling the meat apart with my bare hands, to the manly symphony of my grunting and smacking lips. My new mountain-man-mantra would be WWJD, "What Would uh...Jeremiah Do?" No 'girlie man', I'd send Polaroids documenting me roasting a huge leg-of-something, *a la Jeremiah*, to my dissolute L.A. friends who still dined out almost every night. To them, "roughing it" meant no linen tablecloth.

I arrived at Lake Tahoe in the Summer of 1974; it took me about a month to get settled in. Summers in Tahoe are spectacular, with the average daytime temperature seldom over 75 degrees. Because of the high altitude, about 6,200 feet at lake level, the air is much thinner, with little or no atmospheric pollution, causing the sky to look like it has been painted on with a deep cerulean blue, which in turn reflects the color back on to the lake. It is high-desert, so the air is dry with the delicious, pervasive scent of pine trees. The Lake itself, is so large, that it creates its own weather system, surrounded by high mountain jagged peaks like Mount Tallac, Freel Peak and Ralston Peak, all almost reaching 10,000 feet in elevation.

Each season, has its own unique beauty. The Winters, with the average annual snowfall level of 20 feet. At higher elevations 30 to 40 feet and higher, the surrounding mountains are spectacularly beautiful after a snowstorm. Everything is a pristine white, made even more dramatic against the brilliant blue sky.

In the Fall, I decided to restart my investigation business. Earlier research had indicated that none of the insurance carriers had staff adjusters living or working in the vicinity. I made some appointments with some of the major insurance carriers down in Sacramento, about 100 miles West, where most of the claims offices were located that handled Lake Tahoe and surrounding areas. I ended up returning to Lake Tahoe with piles of unresolved claim, multi-lines, including property and casualty. Many that were backlogged for months, some of which had already been referred to the California State Insurance Commissioner for poor, or non-existent claim service.

Just from the one visit, from the backlog, I would have enough work to keep me busy for 3 months. In the meantime I finished up some

of the negotiations for my other attorney clients in L.A. So cash-flow was not a problem. This time, I decided that I would limit my practice, to allow me more free time to pursue my painting. *Ha!*

In addition to the existing claims, I was getting new property and casualty claims every day, especially during the winter months when the roads were treacherous with snow and ice, often 'black ice' which is usually not readily discernible by eye, but could be deadly when driving on the snaking mountain roads lined with huge immovable old growth pine trees, that always win in a collision.

I had been living, and working in Tahoe for several years and had settled in to a life in the mountains rather easily. My investigation practice was busy...a little too busy, as it was cutting into my art work and studio time, and my social life. There was no shortage of beautiful women, most of them very healthy and athletic. I dated several, but deliberately kept the relationship on a casual basis—that is until that one 'dark and stormy night' in January of 1979 that I ran into, literally, one Annie Trudeau.

Most mountain people were pretty laid-back, nothing like the L.A. crowd I had just left behind. Very welcoming and generous, mostly my age, athletic, active and engaged. They spend a great deal of time enjoying the multitude of outdoor activities. Most worked evenings at the Casinos as card dealers or waiters. Worked hard and partied hard—all night, and played very hard, outdoors all day.

It was a great life. The more time I spent in the wilderness, the more I began to sense some very deep spiritual connection with those big mountains, that the Native peoples, who had summered at Lake Tahoe embraced. I even got a season pass at Paradise Valley Ski Area, and learned to ski that first winter, skiing over 60 days my first season.

Being so tall, I knew that I would never be great skier, but I learned well-enough to ski some moguls, and on occasion, a little powder. Most of the really great skiers were compactly built, no taller than 6 feet. Almost all of my new friends, in the winter days, skied their brains out, or what was left of them after drinking and medicating all night. And in the summer months, biked and hiked, and basically lived outdoors.

During the summer months, I did a lot of hiking and backpacking in Desolation Wilderness—a high desert with many little pristine lakes, and beautiful scenic alpine meadows, bubbling with a dense kaleidoscope of wildflowers. I also got into a little rock climbing with my new friends. Nothing particularly challenging, because again, I was relatively tall for the sport to take it seriously. Most of the good climbers were short and compact, with powerful upper bodies, like gymnasts, with not much weight below the waist, which was considered dead, useless weight. But I did enough of it to learn some basic technique—the-do's and more importantly, the-don'ts—how to climb

safely, along with rope management. I usually climbed with friends, so there was no need for me to have my own equipment.

In the winter, single vehicle versus tree accidents were frequent, usually serious, and often resulting in totaling the vehicle, with serious injury or fatality. Usually when two vehicles collided, both vehicles were a total loss.

One of the most dangerous winter routes was Highway 89 from South Lake Tahoe around Emerald Bay to the North Shore, Tahoe City. For almost 30 miles, it's a narrow, serpentine two lanes, with many steep grades and switchbacks, made it a 'white knuckler' during the winter.

Sometimes, if the driving conditions were poor, it might take emergency responders, sheriff and ambulance, as long as a half-hour to forty-five minutes just to get to the scene. A seriously injured victim, could bleed-out without some knowledgeable first aid intervention.

Because there are many stretches of 10-15 miles of mountain road, where there is no phone service to even call for help, I had installed a CB radio in my truck, which reserved Channel 9 for emergency calls, since it was monitored by local law enforcement and first responders. Because it was difficult to maintain snow removal by the County, Highway 89 was often closed during a heavy snow storm. There are numerous turnouts to allow vehicles to pass, also affording spectacular scenic vistas looking down on majestic Emerald Bay, sometimes almost 1,000 feet below. In some places, the narrow roadway, is barely wide enough for two normal size vehicles even during the dry months, but in the winter, far too narrow to allow the snowplows to push the snow off to the side of the roadway.

There is a scarcity of guard rails at the turnouts so the snowplows can push the accumulated snow over the side. It is definitely not a route for the uninitiated *tourista*, unaccustomed to driving in the ice and snow.

One morning, about 8:30 AM in January of 1979, after a heavy snowstorm, dumping over 3 feet of snow at lake level the previous 3 days, I got frantic call from one of my clients, Allstate Insurance, from the Sacramento claims office. It was a cloudless morning, with the reflection of the brilliant sunlight off the virgin snow, making it difficult to see without polarized sunglasses. But the break in the weather would be short-lived; the forecast was for another serious front to hit the area later that afternoon. This happens frequently in the mountains—the storms come in waves of sometimes two or three. Even with modern forecasting technology, the weather in the mountains is at best unpredictable, often capricious, and can very quickly, without notice become deadly.

The examiner on the file, John Schwartz literally begged me to investigate an accident ASAP. It had only been reported early that very

morning—a single vehicle on a turnout, on a deserted stretch of Highway 89, near Emerald Bay.

It seems that one of Allstate's insured, was driving a 1978 GMC 26 foot Glenbrook 260 Motorhome. The collision policy had just been written the week before, with an alleged ACV, Actual Cash Value of over \$50,000 bucks.

The owner had just reported the loss earlier that morning by phone. The 'accident' was alleged to have happened 3 days prior, before the big snowstorm, and he was just now getting around to reporting it. He told the sales agent that he had purchased it used about a month earlier from a private party for \$52,000 cash, fully loaded, but did not insure until then, because he had decided not to drive it...until now.

According to the claim report filed by the owner, a gentleman in his mid 50s, had taken his motor home on a trip, from his home in Sacramento up to Lake Tahoe, about 90 miles East. He was driving North on Highway 89, on his way to North Lake Tahoe. It was late at night, about 11 PM, when he pulled into a turnout, he says to check on a noise coming from the rear of his vehicle. He further states that he put the vehicle in "park" and got out to check on the vehicle. As he was checking out the rear of the vehicle, it inexplicably "just took off by itself" going straight ahead, in one of the turnouts without a railing or barricade, over the side of essentially a cliff. When asked why he had not reported it sooner, he said he was so "traumatized by the incident that it just slipped his mind", and further indicated that he had neglected to notify the El Dorado County Sheriff's Department of the accident, because he didn't think it necessary, as no other vehicles were involved. Hmm...very malodorous indeed.

So Allstate wanted me to get out there to investigate and photograph the scene, ASAP including photos of the motor home or what was left of it, after its free fall of maybe 1,000 feet. They were getting ready to mount a case for declination of coverage, under the exclusion of "intentional acts of the insured". Typically, when accidents like this happen on Highway 89, where the vehicle is not accessible, it is left until Spring or even Summer, to salvage it, as it is considered too dangerous to attempt a salvage operation during the winter. The owner was now demanding immediate settlement.

"Mick, this whole claim stinks. It's got fraud...intentional act written all over it. He insures it, a week before he takes it up to Tahoe...in the winter, just before a major snowstorm, which by the way was forecast down here in Sacto. The bill of sale for over fifty-kay...from a private party, looks bogus. Then he waits to report it 3 days later, until after the snowstorm, so the vehicle can't be recovered for at least what... 4 or 5 months? And no police report." John Schwartz says.

"Yeah...sounds pretty thin. Do you know the exact location where it went over...did he give you a milepost or anything?" I ask.

"Are you kiddin'? This guy is Mr Vague. He obviously doesn't want us to see it before settlement. He's playin' hide the 26 foot motor home with us. But, I did manage to draw out of him that it was just South of Emerald Bay," John says.

"Okay, John. Good news...bad news. The good news...I think I know the area. There's just one or two turnouts that have no guardrail, just South of Emerald Bay. Bad news...there's another storm, a big bad boy, by all the forecasts. S'posed to hit us by later this afternoon...probably dump another 2-3 feet. After which, should make it almost impossible to get to it. If you want me investigate it, I'd have to drop everything, and get out there before the storm closes Highway 89.

After today...it's pretty much inaccessible until the snow thaws. So if it's where I think it is, I'll have to rappel down the side of the mountain. It's steep, real steep...about a 45 degrees up to a 60 degree slope in some areas, then using an ascender, to winch back up. Probably take me 2 hours to get to the scene, photograph the launch point, and figure out the best way down...about a half-hour to rappel down, an hour to photograph everything...then maybe another hour to an hour and a half, to winch back up. It won't be easy...and it definitely won't be cheap.

John...I'll have to bill this at double my hourly rate including travel time...hazardous duty pay. Plus I'd have to buy four 80 meter lengths of 9.9 millimeter alpine climbing rope, rappel and belay gear, a harness and ascender at the Outdoorsman," I say.

"Mick...I don't care what it costs. If we can't get out to the accident scene...we're staring at fifty-kay...automatic. I want to nail this bastard! I'd owe you big time," John says.

"Okay...tell me a little about the insured...some background. What's he do, any other stuff insured with you. Prior losses' etcetera and anything else you can think of...like the Declaration Sheet of the policy," I say.

In investigating an accident, it's always helpful to have context, especially when doing a post-mortem at the scene of an accident. Small, seemingly insignificant details take on greater meaning, when one knows what you're looking at...and for. Sometimes it is the little details that form, and fill-in the missing pieces of the puzzle, as to what *really* happened.

"I'll FAX all that over to ya...in the next half-hour," John says.
About 15 minutes later the buzz and whir of the FAX:

Insured—Harold, age 55 and wife Elsie, age 61, Schumacher; he's a Real Estate Broker. Lives in Sacramento. He's got a 1979 Cadillac Coupe de Ville and a 78 Corvette Convertible, along with a house for about \$450K. Scheduled jewelry including gold totaling about 50K, all with Allstate. No other vehicles or property insured with us, at least. MVR driving record

: : *Michaelangelo's Renaissance* — *m.a.kominsky* : :

—*one speeding, the Corvette. No accidents, no other moving violations in last two years. Dec Sheet attached.*

Thanks, JS

By 9 AM, I am loading my gear including cameras and lenses and plenty of film into my truck *Moby Dick*, after the eponymous Great White Whale, a very large white Ford 4X4 3/4 ton F-250, with a 4 speed manual transmission. It has a camper shell on the back which enables me to stow my gear out of the weather. It sits especially high off the ground with lots of clearance, and tall, wide aggressive-tread snow tires to facilitate getting around during winter months, to make it up and down the road where my house is located high above Zephyr Cove, Nevada.

The house, which I had bought in '73 has a commanding view overlooking the Lake toward North Shore—*Casa Nevada, snow covered house*. The street, called Lookout Road, named after the US Forrest Service Fire Lookout station, just above my house, is so steep and narrow, that in the winter, they seldom if ever get the snow plow up there.

It takes me about half an hour to get across town on the main highway East to West, crossing the state border into South Lake Tahoe—the California side, essentially Highway 50, to get to the Outdoorsman. It's a legendary mountain-mecca sporting goods shop, selling all manner of ski and serious mountaineering equipment.

I buy the climbing rope, two belay devices, harness and ascender, and head West on Highway 50 to Highway 89 North. It's slow going up Highway 89. They've just opened the highway, and there's a procession of stranded locals and chained-up delivery trucks slowly meandering the climb North. The twisting road, even though it's been plowed is still treacherously slippery, even with my four wheel drive.

It takes me about an hour to get to the first turnout without a railing. I pull in, get out of the truck, and walk over to the edge of the precipice. I grab my high-powered Bauch & Lomb 10x50 binoculars, and looking down, I don't spy any wreckage. I continue on to the next turnout, about a mile further North. I park, and check to see if I can spot any wreckage below, again scanning left to right with the binoculars. Nothing. Then, scanning back right to left, I think I see a hump. I let my eyes adjust to the glare of the snow. Yes. There is something there. I take out one of my Nikon 35mm cameras, and mount the 200 mm telephoto lens, and a polarizing filter. Despite the glare on the snow, by rotating the collar on the polarizing filter, I can now make out the upside-down outline of the undercarriage with the four wheels facing straight up, like some dead roadside animal laying on its back with its paws reaching to the sky. New meaning to the term Road Kill.

I move my truck out of the way and take many photos, from every angle, setting numbered distance markers for scale, every 25 feet.

My guess, is that the turnout has about a 3 to 5% grade uphill, which would make it impossible to roll forward without some sort of power driving it. It is now becoming increasingly obvious; it is highly unlikely that the behemoth motor home could have accidentally gone over. It would have to be perfectly positioned—essentially aimed, to clear the narrow width of the opening to the precipice.

It's now about 12:30 PM. The sky is beginning to darken from the Northwest. I pull the truck back toward the edge of the precipice, put it in gear, set the emergency brake, and place chock blocks under the rear wheels, along with two day-glow orange traffic cones at the rear of the truck, to prevent a snowplow from striking the rear of the truck—joining the DOA motor home far below, with *moi* attached.

Because of the surrounding high mountain peaks, the roadway and the steep slope are already in deep shadow. With the sun rapidly disappearing, the temperature is starting to drop dramatically. The wind is starting to kick up, to maybe 12 mph. Whitecaps are beginning to form on the Lake far below. Here it comes. I figure I might have two hours, three at the most before the storm hits, so I'd better *andale*, rappel down, get my pictures and get the hell outta there before they close Highway 89. During a snowstorm even before dark, driving that road is a nasty, stress-sweaty business—so I definitely want to be off that highway before nightfall. This far North in the winter, sunset will be about 4:30 PM, then the temperature will drop precipitously, maybe 15 degrees, turning any melting snow on the roadway into black ice.

I get the 4 rolls of climbing rope out of the back of the truck. I tie the end of the first roll around the front differential axle with a double bowline knot...the most secure knot known in sailing and mountaineering. I throw the first roll over the precipice, down the slope, and carefully retrieve it, making sure that I have all the coils carefully placed on top of one another. I take the far end of the first rope, and tie a blood knot, an end to end splice knot to the start of the second roll, and then toss the second roll over the edge. Looking down, I can estimate that the two lengths will reach just about half way to the wreckage. I repeat the process with the remaining two rolls, then I tie a medium sized rock on the end of the last rope and heave it as hard as I can, while paying out the coiled ropes of the other rolls, making sure there are no tangles.

The slope is so steep, that the fresh snow has not accumulated deeply, the rock carries almost the full length of all four rolls of rope. But that steep slope, could also mean that there could be danger of avalanche, because of the instability of the snow. I will have to keep that in mind the whole time, once I'm over the edge, tethered to the rope. I am now committed. I slip on my one piece ski suit, then my lightweight Gore-Tex boots with an aggressive knobby sole. I then snap my 'gators' on, long thin nylon tubes with snaps along the length, over the tops of my boots and my pant leg, to keep the snow from coming into my boots.

I put on my rappel harness, checking that the operation of the carabiner is positive and secure, snap in the belay device, then pull on my knit ski cap and my polarized ski goggles on to my forehead. Finally, I place my camera gear in my day-backpack, along with the hand ascender and a spare belay device, in case I need it coming back up. In the inside pocket of my zippered snow suit I also pack a hand held portable cassette tape recorder to make audible notes, which is voice activated allowing hands-free operation. I plug-in the lavalier microphone into the external mic jack, affix the lav to the lapel of my ski suit and do an audio test playback to confirm it's good to go, and leave it turned on.

I decide to leave a note on the dashboard, in large block letters, viewable from outside through the windshield. In case it snows while I'm down there, they'll be able see it if they open the truck door:

MONDAY - JANUARY 13TH @ 1:15 PM

I AM RAPPELLING DOWN BELOW TO INVESTIGATE A SINGLE VEHICLE ACCIDENT INVOLVING A LARGE MOTOR HOME THAT IS ALLEGED TO HAVE HAPPENED ON OR ABOUT JANUARY 10TH. I EXPECT TO RETURN NO LATER THAN 3:30 PM.

IF FOR SOME REASON YOU ARE READING THIS NOTE, AND IT IS LATER THAN 3:30 PM, THEN SOMETHING MAY HAVE PREVENTED ME FROM RETURNING, IN WHICH CASE PLEASE CONTACT THE EL DORADO SHERIFF'S DEPT USING THE CB RADIO IN THE CAB OF THE TRUCK, ALREADY SET ON CHANNEL 9.

THANK YOU.

*MICK KOZLOV
KOZMICK INVESTIGATIONS
ZEPHYR COVE, NV 89448*

I pull on my Gore-Tex alpine climbing gloves with high cuffs, and thick leather palms as there will be considerable friction from the sliding rope during the descent. I shoulder the backpack, and affix the belay device to the rope, which will enable me to control the speed of my descent by feeding the line through it. I give the rope a few nervous tugs, take some deep breaths, and step over to the edge of the precipice. Then, very slowly I step backwards with my first step. The snow up top is about two feet deep...powdery dry and light which should afford good compaction and traction. Very slowly, I feed the rope out as I take one step then another backwards, controlling my speed by the amount of

friction on the belay device, all the while trying to maintain a perpendicular angle to the slope with my body. The top is at about a 45 degree slope, but it will increase to about 60 degrees as I approach the half-way point.

It's slow going. It takes me about 20 minutes to get to the half-way point, where it then gets very steep. I very carefully navigate the steep part, and in another half-hour I reach the Motor-home...or what's left of it, already a half-hour behind schedule. The frame and chassis are still pretty much intact, the top and sides of the body look like it had been dropped from the top of a 50 story building...which it had. It has come to rest on kind of a plateau against a large, now listing, pine tree, balanced precariously, so I make it a point not to spend any time unnecessarily below it, in case it decides to let ago. I will remain tethered. But at least there is a relatively level shelf which enables me to stand almost vertical.

I take off my gloves, and place them inside my ski suit next to my body to keep them warm. I pull out one of the Nikons from my backpack, already affixed with a 28 millimeter wide angle lens. I'm shooting a roll of 36, Kodak Tri-X 400 ASA black and white film, a relatively 'fast' film which is good for situations with low ambient light, so I can shoot with a small aperture F-Stop, like F12, without having to resort to a flash, with good depth field allowing everything within 15 feet in front or behind the focal plane to remain in focus. Using the internal light meter, I set the shutter speed to 1/60th of a second, and start taking images; full frame establishment shots from a distance to show the setting and establish the orientation.

The whole time I'm taking photos, I am verbally describing the location of the camera, by frame number, and the direction and approximate local time of the shot on to the cassette recorder. In forensic photography, especially in cases that may ultimately be litigated, it's a necessary process to record and preserve this meta-data, should it end up in court—along with the kind of camera, the lens and the settings of the camera while the images are being acquired.

The first thing that I notice, looking at the undercarriage is that this particular motor home is a front wheel drive. Hmm. No way this thing could have ever made it over the edge, up the 3% grade, by inadvertently engaging the power train. Once the front wheels were over the edge of the precipice, it would have just hung-up there, with the front drive wheels spinning uselessly...the front end suspended over the edge.

Unless...the vehicle was backed in, which would also allow the driver to get up some speed...to get a good run at the edge, then jump to safety just before it went over the side. This guy is starting to look like a real pro.

The smell of leaking gasoline from the huge gas tanks which could probably hold up to 50 gallons, is very strong. Two 25 gallon tanks. I note that both of the gas caps are missing...not likely that both

would have come loose from the ride down the slope, unless they were removed before, up top, with the intent that the uncontained gasoline upon impact would ignite.

I now attempt to find the front of the vehicle to see if I can locate the keys for the ignition, to check the status of the switch, if it is still turned on—if so, photograph it then turn it off—with all the ambient gas this thing is a sitting time-bomb. I'll want to check to see if there are any other keys present on the key ring, like a house key. No other keys, might mean that he removed all the other keys before staging the accident, because he didn't want to incur the expense of having keys made. It's little details like this, which alone may not seem significant, but combined with other minor incongruities start to accumulate to form a plausible narrative about what really happened. I circle around to the front of the vehicle.

Even with the body compressed down about 6 to 8 feet from the impact, upon careful inspection I can see that there is a great deal of old rust on much of the damage...old damage from a prior major collision, probably a roll over? Had the insured purchased a totaled RV for next to nothing salvage cost, then insured it as new? Not the first I'd seen this...with cars and sometimes boats.

The windshield is popped out. I kneel down to look inside.

"*Shit!*" I yell as I propel myself backwards.

Belted and harnessed in the front upside-down passenger seat is a person, with roof pushed down on its head, obviously no longer alive. I attempt to compose myself. I take several slow deep breaths, enabling me to control my stress-induced rapid shallow breathing from unexpectedly encountering a cadaver. I pull myself together, and remind myself why I'm here...to take pictures, to preserve the evidence. The stakes are obviously much higher now, with a fatality. All the more reason to slow down—to be thorough and precise.

I begin to study the cadaver through the viewfinder, quickly snapping off pictures, the sound of the shutter, and film advancing lever, the only ambient sounds, which grants me the illusion, temporarily at least, of detachment from the reality. It appears to be a woman, or what's left of one. The body has obviously experienced multiple trauma from the long tumultuous ride down the side of the mountain. She is staring straight ahead, her eyes open with a wide-eyed look of horror, her mouth, contorted open with the ghastly expression of abject terror as if captured mid-scream. A paisley-patterned red and white bandana, probably used as a gag, appears to have slipped down around her neck. She must have been conscious, when it happened. She looks to be middle aged, tanned wearing an expensive designer warm-up suit. Her hands are duct-taped across the front of her chest, from around the back of the front bucket seat, obviously immobilizing her. I zoom in on the front hand, her left hand, and notice a tan line on her ring finger—no ring. I snap off two quick bracketed exposures. My mind is buzzing.

Could this woman be the spouse of the insured Harold Schumacher, Elsie Schumacher?

If so, Harold Schumacher not only forgot to call in the claim, it would appear that it had also slipped his mind that his wifey was in the motor home when it went over the side. The distinct tan line on her ring finger, would seem to indicate that the wedding band had been recently removed...maybe to be recycled for the next lucky Mrs Schumacher? Yep...a real sweetheart.

I decide there is nothing that can be done for her...as I am reluctant to disturb the body, and potentially contaminate a crime scene. Pity...such a horrific ignominious end. I'm left wondering what were her last thoughts as it became clear that her own husband was about to launch her over the cliff? Did hubby remove the gag so he could hear her last words, pleading for her life? Did he reveal his dark motives to her before leaping free from the death trap? Did she die, not knowing *the why*?

Now my main imperative is to conclude my work down here, and get the hell outta there, before darkness descends. I've had more than enough darkness for one day. I locate the ignition switch, and photograph it. It is still turned to the 'on' position, but not surprisingly, there are no other keys on the key ring. Using a tissue from my breast pocket, so as not disturb any finger prints, I gingerly turn the ignition switch to the 'off' position to mitigate the threat of fire from the copious ambient leaking gas. I look at my watch. It's now getting close to 3 PM and the shadows are getting very long and dark, casting a funereal pall over the scene. I take one last pass around the wreck, to make sure I haven't missed anything. Done.

I stow all my camera gear in the backpack, and remove the ascender tool, affix it to my life line, put my gloves back on and start the long climb up. I'll have to give it a kick, to get up top before the storms starts to settle in. I'll also have to get on the CB and alert the El Dorado County Sheriffs of a possible homicide.

I really push myself going up. When I get to the truck, I'm totally gassed, in a full sweat and breathing heavily. I look at my watch—4:05 PM. It's already starting to get dark...very dark, so I put on my emergency flasher lights so I don't get plowed into, literally. I stow my backpack, remove the climbing harness, and immediately grab the microphone on the CB, which was intentionally left on—tuned to Channel 9, 27.065 MHz, the emergency frequency.

"This is an emergency call. I repeat this is an emergency call. Anyone monitoring this frequency, including law enforcement or any first responders, please acknowledge. Over," I say. I wait 10 seconds. Nothing.

I repeat the call out two more times. Finally, after the third time, "This is the El Dorado County Sheriff's dispatcher, in South Tahoe

substation. Please state your 10-20, uh...your location...for jurisdiction determination. Over," the crackling voice says.

"I'm on Highway 89 North, just South of Emerald Bay, parked in a turnout. Over," I say.

"Okay. What's your emergency. Over."

"There is a vehicle, a large motor home, that went over the side on or about 4 days ago. It is down several hundred feet below the roadway. I have just returned to the roadway above after rappelling down to investigate it. There is one known fatal, still inside that I was able to determine from the outside only. My name is Mick Kozlov, I am a private investigator out of Stateline Nevada. I was hired to check it out by the insurance company. The fatal appears to be a homicide. I repeat homicide. I'm in a Northbound turnout...a white Ford pick-up with my emergency flasher on. Over," I say

"Okay...any need for an ambulance or medical attention? Over."

"No...appears that the one confirmed vic has been deceased for over 3 days. I do not think there could be any survivors in the back of the RV which is inaccessible. I am not in need of any medical assistance. Over."

"Okay...please stay on site. I'm dispatching a unit to meet you there. Do you copy? Over," the crackling voice says.

Shit!...I was afraid of this. Now I'm definitely going to have to be driving down this treacherous bobsled run...at night in the middle of a blinding snowstorm. Well, it is what it is. I'll just put it on the bill for Allstate, a new line item under white knuckle pay.

"I copy. What's the ET to my 10-20? Over," I say.

"Hard to say...the storm's closing in fast. But it'll be at least an hour...or more, before we can get somebody up there. Over."

"10-4. Please keep me posted on the progress of the dispatched unit. It's gettin' pretty nasty up here...I sure as hell don't want to spend the night. Over."

"10-4. Copy that. Over and out."

"10-4. Over and out. This frequency is now clear and available until further notice," I say.

It's now 4:35 PM, and very dark. Since I initiated the call, there has been absolutely no traffic either direction on the highway. Not a good sign. Probably getting ready to close the highway, overnight at the very least. I go to the front of the truck, untie the climbing rope from the front axle housing, and begin retrieving it, separating and untying each length into separate coiled rolls. I stow the climbing gear in the back of the truck, and remove the camera bag with the two cameras. Once inside the cab, I unload the rolls of film from both of them, placing them securely into the aluminum screw tops canisters and put them back in the camera bag where they will be warm and secure.

I start up the engine, leave it on idle, and turn on the heater to warm the cab. I decide to take a little nap, before the Sheriff shows up.

I am awakened from a restive sleep by several sharp raps on the driver side, snow-covered window, followed by a back and forth, probing searchlight beam. I look at my watch—6:10 PM. About an hour and a half to get here. Not bad. I roll the window down, and about 6 inches of snow cascades on me. Outside, a bright yellow hooded slicker snowsuit with reflective glow-strips in the blowing whiteout, an eery apparition. On a nasty night like this, these guys earn every penny of their modest salary.

"You the one that made the emergency call about the accident?" he asks.

"Yeah...Why don't you get in the truck and I'll fill you in," I say.

Without a further word, he circles around the truck and climbs in.

"Phew...man, a nasty night to be out," he says dropping his yellow hood, removing the glove from his right hand and holding it out, "Jim Stratton, El Do County Sheriffs."

I take his hand, which is cold and wet—we shake. It's a firm, but friendly handshake. They seem to look younger, every year...this one looks barely old enough to shave, maybe in his early 20s with pleasant almost wry expression on his face, with an unflappable 'no-big-deal' demeanor.

"Yeah man, sorry to have to bring you out in this...but I thought the law ought to get a heads up, for a potential homicide, before I left the scene," I say.

"No problem. So whatta we got here?"

I fill him in on my case, and then update him on what I found.

"So, looks like a homicide, eh? I am going to have to get the detectives involved then. Since it is entirely possible that the husband is a suspect, and I'm going to have to ask you to tell your client not to have any contact with the potential perp...at least until we've had a chance to review the facts. We'll want to contact him first, and interview him, so that he's in no way tipped-off that he's a suspect in a murder investigation. And much appreciated if you could get copies of all the prints you make...as soon as you can get them to us. Eventually we'll probably want the negatives, which of course will be returned to you as soon as we can make a copy of the film strips," Jim says.

Despite his young age, I'm very impressed with his professionalism and knowledge of criminology. They train them well these days. This one will make detective in record time.

"Okay, Jim. But frankly I don't think you'll be able to get down there, for a week at least. This guy is already putting pressure on Allstate to settle. My impression, from what I've seen so far, is that this guy is a real piece of work. Smart and ruthless. So we'll have to have a plausible excuse to delay the settlement negotiations, without creating suspicion," I say.

"Agreed. I'll have the lead detective give you a call. He'll want to see those pix ASAP...when do think they'll be available?" he says.

"I can go into the darkroom tomorrow, print a contact sheet, look them over, then print the best of the bunch, in 8x10 inch black and white...two copies. I'll call your detective when they're ready, and he can pick them up, maybe tomorrow afternoon. I'm in Zephyr Cove...Stateline Nevada," I say.

"Great. Thanks for your cooperation Mick. I'll make a note of the location in my report. Not much else we can do here tonight. I'd suggest you start thinking about heading South...off this mountain. They've already closed 89 North and South, probably for a few days, at least. By now, shouldn't be any vehicles, North or South," he says.

We shake hands. He exits disappearing in the whiteout.

I get out of the truck, throw the traffic cones and chock blocks. in the back and survey my best strategy to get turned around, to drive South. About 8 inches of fresh snow has already fallen. I clean off the windshield, check my wiper blades removing the ice, then turn them on...at full speed they're barely able to keep up with the snowfall. The wind is gusting probably at about 30 mph, buffeting the big truck—it's whiteout conditions with visibility getting below 50 feet. In the distance I see a pair of headlights, slowly snaking toward me heading South, wildly weaving from side to side. From what I can make out as it goes past me, some sort of a 4-door sedan, an older Volvo, fishtailing.

An old Volvo rear axle drive with no tire chains...Good luck with that...

I check my watch—7:12 PM. Time to get the hell off this mountain to the safety and warmth of *Casa Nevada*, and a long hot bath in the Jacuzzi tub, with at least one hot brandy.

If I had waited much longer, I would probably have to chain-up myself...in this? Not fun. As it is, it takes me a good 15 minutes to get turned around. I almost get stuck broadside in the roadway a few times, before I can finally get the truck headed South. I put it in 4-wheel drive compound low, and keep it in second gear, to control my speed, and take off. The only way to drive in snow is slow...very, very slow. You must control your speed, especially on a downgrade because brakes are next to useless, so you drive like there's a raw egg between your foot, and the accelerator and the brakes, in a very low gear, and use the drag of the motor in low gear instead of the brakes.

I'm making maybe 10 mph top speed. My headlights shining on the whiteout are next to useless. High beams are even worse. I'm craning my neck to see the evanescent roadway, with the wind increasing, the visibility is rapidly deteriorating. I'm starting to get a migraine from the stress. My aching neck and screaming shoulder muscles are starting to cramp up...beads of perspiration are sprouting on my forehead. I am now coming up to a nasty stretch of road, a steep downgrade, with a series of

switch-back "S" turns, with a hairpin turn at the end. After that it flattens out, and should be a piece of cake...or so I thought. *Ha!*

As I slowly creep through the "S" turns, just about to enter the dreaded hairpin turn, I think I detect some movement in the road ahead. But it's probably my eyes playing tricks on me...from all the stress of driving in this mess. Suddenly, right in front of me, maybe 25 feet away, I see a something...ghost-like, standing in the middle of the roadway, slowly waving its arms. I dare not step on the brakes. I am forced to instantaneously to decide whether to pull to the left or the right. Because I know that there are some barricades and steep fall-off to the left, I opt for the right. The figure in the roadway appears oblivious to the danger, and does not take any evasive action. All I can do is get as far to the right as I can, very gently, so as not to spin-out and slide sideways into this snow zombie.

The last second, the apparition moves to the left two steps, and as I slither past it, my left side view mirror barely misses its head by inches. I can now see its face. It's a bloody mess, a wide-eyed stare, apparently in shock as I slide by. I repeatedly gently tap the brakes and manage to come to a stop about 50 feet down the road. I jump out of the cab, and run back. In the middle of the roadway, in a collapsed heap, is a body, dressed in ski clothes. I bend down on one knee, and take a look. It's a woman. Her face is bleeding profusely...possibly a broken nose. She's groaning in pain, and holding her left side, rolling from side to side.

"Are you okay?" I yell.

"Does it look like I'm okay, *mon ami* ?" she yells.

"No...frankly you look like you just got hit by a truck," I say

"Thanks...you could have lied to me ya know. Definitely not one of my smarter moves to trying to drive in this."

"Where'd you come from?" I say.

She points to an opening on the left side of the road, "Over there, I went off the road, and down the side...way down the slope. It took me about 15 minutes...just to crawl back up to the road. If you hadn't come along..." she says.

"A Volvo?"

"Yeah...what's left of it. Wrapped around a tree which kept me from going all the way down. *Mon Dieu*, my God!" she says.

"Can you walk?"

"I don't think so...my left leg doesn't seem to want to work anymore."

"Okay...I'm going to have to carry you to the truck. We've got to get you to the hospital...like *tout suite*," I yell over the wind noise.

"*Parlez-vous Français?*" she asks.

"*Un peu*...obviously, just enough to get into trouble," I say.

I pick her up. She's not very heavy. In my arms, I can tell that she is slender and relatively tall.

"Come here often?" she says as I carry her to the truck, cradled in my arms.

"Sure...great place to meet outdoorsy chicks...especially the incapacitated ones that I can take advantage of," I say.

"Well then this *is* your lucky day. You don't look like you'd have any problem getting girls," she says facetiously batting her eyes. A good sign—at least her sense of humor seems to be intact.

I get her to the truck, and stand her up, which draws a loud scream of pain. I open the passenger door. I pick her up, and as gently as I can, place her on the front seat. Again, she screams in pain. I can see tears streaming from her eyes in the dome light of the cab. It's the first time I get a good look at her face. Even with the blood and contusions, I can see that she's a beauty. Hmm. I go to fasten the seat belt shoulder harness, but as soon as I touch her left side, she screams again in pain. Okay...forget about restraint. First priority is to get her to Emergency. The nearest hospital is Saint Joseph's in South Lake Tahoe, under normal circumstances maybe a half-hour away. But these are definitely not normal circumstances.

When I slam the truck door shut, she screams again from pain. Not good. Possible fractures. Maybe some internal injuries.

I climb into the cab, easing my door shut.

"I'm Mick," I say.

"Annette...Trudeau. Friends call me Annie. God...Siegfried's going to kill me for this..." she moans.

"*Enchanté, mademoiselle,*" I say

She extends her left hand to me. I put my right hand into her cold, clammy hand. Definitely in shock. She squeezes it hard, "*Merci beaucoup!*" I gently pry my hand loose so I can drive.

"*Pas un problème...time to allons-y, ma amie!* Okay...Annie...try to relax. Just close your eyes and enjoy the e-ticket bobsled ride down the Matterhorn to the hospital," I say.

I belt up, and I look back over at her. She appears to have passed out, most probably going into secondary shock. There's no time to waste—she could be bleeding internally. If so, she could bleed-out unless I can get her some help...soon. Very soon.

I put it in gear, and give it some extra gas, spinning the wheels, crab-like until I can get some traction. When I finally get it straightened out, I shift into third gear, fishtailing, slipping and sliding all the way to the hospital, averaging 15-20 mph.

We arrive at Emergency in about 40 minutes. I jump out, run into the Emergency receiving, and yell for a doctor. The on-duty doctor and nurse briskly walk over to me.

"I've got a very seriously injured accident victim in my truck...just outside. Hurry, I think she's bleeding internally. I picked her up on the road about 45 minutes ago!" I yell.

After giving what little information I had on Annette Trudeau to the nurse along with some facts about her accident, I wait around for about an hour to find out if she's going to make it.

The nurse finally comes into the waiting area, "She's in surgery now Mr Kozlov. All I can tell you for now is that she's lost a lot of blood....internal bleeding, another half-hour at the most and she'd have bled to death. And...an unspecified knee injury. We won't know if she's going to make it until after the initial triage surgery is complete...it'll be touch and go for a while. There's nothing more I'll be able to tell you until tomorrow. Her condition is listed as critical, but she's young and healthy...I think she may pull-through. You should go now...and get some rest. Call the hospital tomorrow around noon, and we'll be able to give you more information about her condition...and the prognosis."

From the hospital, it takes me over an hour driving in the blinding snowstorm before I finally got home. It's almost 1 AM. I am so exhausted that I just flop into bed, barely having enough energy to get my boots off. My lack of energy was due in part to the fact that I had nothing major to eat all day, except for few energy bars that I keep in the truck for emergencies...like this? *Ha*. It has been a long day. A *very* long day.

The next day, I do not awake until almost 10 AM; when I look out the window from my bedroom at the normally commanding lake view it's a whiteout, Visibility is maybe 100 feet and still snowing heavily.

I take a long hot shower, until the hot water runs out. Then I build a big fire in the fireplace to take the chill off. Nothing seems to still the sense of vulnerability of the often seemingly capricious forces of nature—to assuage the primal fears of the vagaries of the sometimes petulant *Madame* Nature, like a roaring fire.

She plays no favorites...ruthlessly impartial, she knows no mercy...only rules. Violate her rules, wittingly or otherwise, at your own peril. Failure to play by her rules can lead to serious injury, and in the case of Annie Trudeau, possibly even death. And She always bats last.

By then, I realize that I am ravenous. I make a four-egg provolone cheese omelet with sautéed red potatoes, mushrooms, onions and green bell peppers, with sour-dough toast and a huge pot of coffee. It is a welcome diversion—cooking for me is generally an enjoyable and relaxing process, so I seldom dine out. As I slowly eat staring at the comforting hissing, crackling logs, the faint scent of campfire smoke somehow calming me, I ponder the previous day's events. I have a lot more to digest than breakfast.

It feels like the whole day had been just one bad dream...like some surreal Wagnerian fugue. The discovery of the body in the RV, which I was totally unprepared for emotionally, and then literally running into one Annie Trudeau. Hmm. There is some ineffable

connection *avec cette mademoiselle*, that is starting to haunt the hell out of me.

By about 11 AM, after my second cup of coffee, I finally start to return to some semblance of mental acuity and normalcy. I realize that I still have some work to do today. First I have to call John Schwartz at Allstate, and give him my preliminary report. He'll be pleased.

Next, I'll go into the darkroom, develop the two rolls of negatives, print contact sheets, then print the selected images—8x10 inch prints, including one set for the El Do County Sheriffs.

I pick up the phone and listen for dial tone....miraculously phone service is still up and working. I call Schwartz's direct line. He picks up on the second ring.

"John Schwarz."

"Hey John...Mick here."

"Mick...hey, I hear you guys are gettin' hammered up there with this latest front."

"Yea...before it's over, we're going to see a few more feet out of this bad boy. John, I made it up to Emerald Bay yesterday. I managed to get down to the wreckage before the storm hit," I say.

"Excellent! Whadya find out?" John says.

"Before I go into any detail, I have to alert you to the fact I found a body in RV. No positive ID yet. But I suspect that it may be Mrs Insured, Elsie Schumacher...same approximate age. Now, I'm no expert...but judging from the way I found her, it would *not* appear to be an accidental death. The accident site is being considered a crime scene by El Dorado County Sheriffs...a homicide."

"You're *shittin'* me...you think he ofted his old lady?"

"Unless she was a female Houdini, and duct-taped herself in the front passenger seat, yea...it sure looks that way. I think he counted on no one getting down there before Summer...before Allstate would be forced to settle...then pull a permanent *adios*. The El Dorado County Sheriffs were called by CB on site...an officer responded, but because of the lousy weather, my guess is that they won't be able to get down there for at least a week, if then. They definitely do not want you or anyone from Allstate to have any contact with this guy Schumacher, until the Detectives can see the pix I took of the scene and of the cadaver. Okay? If he knows that the vehicle has been inspected, they think he may rabbit," I say.

"Got it...so tell me what you found."

"Before I do that...is it okay with Allstate, if I'll give them all the contact info from my end...and do you have a problem with me releasing my photos of the scene to them?"

"Not a problem. Give them everything you've got. We will cooperate fully with the authorities and coordinate any and all contact with the insured with them," John says.

For the next half-hour over the phone, I outline the results of my investigation. I tell John Schwartz that in my professional opinion based on my investigation at the site, that it is "highly unlikely" that the damage to the insured vehicle was the result of an accidental event according to the legal definition and the insuring agreement.

"The photos will show the mature rust present all over the vehicle would tend to indicate that there was evidence of major pre-existing damage...maybe a salvaged roll-over." He's ecstatic. I tell him I'll get out a full report to him, with photos within a week.

As an investigator, to protect yourself from spurious civil lawsuits by the accused for defamation of character, even when you're 99.9% sure, it's never stated as a certainty...always as percentage of probability, much like the instruction given to a jury sitting on a civil tort trial—"the preponderance of evidence" standard—as opposed to the more stringent criminal standard of "beyond a reasonable doubt."

I go into the darkroom, and develop the two rolls of negs and print two contact sheets, which are just positive images of the native negative filmstrips with sprocket holes and frame numbers. Having studied photography at Art Center, I have my own darkroom. Since I shoot primarily black & white, which is the accepted standard for forensic photography, developing and printing of images is relatively easy, compared to color processing. And, it gives me the value-added service to bill to the client, with the added advantage of quick turn-around and control of the cropping and contrast levels of the prints.

I select the frames to print on the contact sheet, by viewing them with an eye-loop, then with a grease pencil I make preliminary crop marks. For future documentation, if it becomes necessary, each image that I print will be referenced by frame number and any meta-data about the image, on the audio notes recorded at the scene. I will keep each audio cassette on file for five years, in case they ever need to be transcribed for litigation purposes.

The ghastly images of the deceased are unsettling. I've taken a lot of images of accident victims...some of which were at the accident scene, of mangled bodies, including fatalities. But this one was different. This was anything but an accident, and I suspect that at some point the victim must have realized that she was going to die...probably hours before, by her own husband's hand, as opposed to a fatal accident victim where there is little or no warning. I suppose, in the end, it makes little difference to the victim. Dead is dead. Period.

I print two copies of each, of the 14 images of the launch site on the roadway, and 15 prints of the damaged vehicle, including the deceased. I hang the prints up to dry.

Having gotten authorization from Allstate, I call the El Do County Sheriff's Department, and get connected to the Detective, who has been assigned to the case.

"Detective Benson, here."

"Detective Benson, I'm Mick Kozlov, a PI, that is investigating a claim for Allstate Insurance on Highway 89...yesterday. I understand you've been assigned the follow-up...as a possible homicide?" I say.

"Yeap...lucky me," says a buoyant Randal Benson.

"Detective, I promised the responding officer Jim Stratton, that I would make available copies of the photos I took at the scene, including the images of the cadaver which appears to have expired not from accidental or natural causes."

"Call me Randy, Mick. Yeah, I was just looking this over, when you called. What can you tell me?" Benson says.

I outline my findings, and answer a few questions.

"Allstate has authorized the release of any and all info that I have on the case, including photos. I have addresses and phone numbers etcetera, of the insured, along with the photos. But honestly, the weather is so bad, I don't think I'd be able to get them to you until this storm is done," I say.

"Can you give me the basic contact info over phone to get me started?"

"Sure...then let's connect in a few days. In the meantime, I don't think much is going to change with the suspected perp...certainly not with the vic," I say.

"Roger that...nasty business...if he did kill his old lady like that. He's a cold-blooded MF," he says with a derisive cop laugh. Hmm...probably ex-military; they usually make pretty good homicide detectives, especially the ones that have been MPs, in combat, and executed their duty under the constant specter of death.

"Randy, judging from the obvious careful preparation and planning, this guy is very cute...don't underestimate him," I say.

I give him the contact info for the insured along with my contact info—we agree to stay in touch.

My next call is to Saint Joseph's Hospital ICU.

"ICU, Nurse Haley" the voice says.

"Hi. I want to check on the condition of an accident victim brought in late last night. Her name is Annette Trudeau. The duty nurse said to call back today around noon."

"What is your relationship to the patient?" Nurse Haley says.

"A friend I guess. My name is Mick Kozlov. I brought her in."

"Please hold," she says.

"Mr Kozlov you're not listed as a relative or a contact. Ordinarily I could not divulge any information to you...but it says on the chart that you pretty much saved her life. So, off the record, she is conscious...very conscious. Her condition has been downgraded from critical to serious but stable. I asked her if she wanted to allow you to have access to her info, and she said by all means...'unlimited access'

unquote. And she further said for you to 'get your you-know-what over here, uh...toot sweet...whatever that means, unquote. For someone that has been through what she's been through, she's a lively one," Nurse Haley says with a smile in her voice.

"Thanks. Tell her that me, and my you-know-what, will be over to visit, in a few days, after this storm clears," I say.

Two days later, I awaken to a brilliant blue cloudless sky. In the winter months, it happens like this in the mountains. Just after a snowstorm, the trees heavily laden with pure white glistening snow, the crystal clear sky and the clean crisp cold air, there is a palpable, almost exhilarating sense of renewal.

My first order of business is to dig out. I fire up the snow blower and remove about 3 feet of lovely fluffy light powdery snow. I finish up with the snow shovel, and I'm done by 9 AM. It will be a few days before the snow plow shows up, as they will concentrate on the major streets, before getting up to the top, where I live. That's, fine...I'm able to get around fairly easily with the high clearance of my 4 X 4 truck.

The local 'powder hounds' will already be on their way up in the chair lifts, eager to be the first ones down the virgin un-skied runs. Whooping and hollering all the way down—it's the same sensation as grabbing the perfect wave and surfing it all the way to the shore. After the first hour or so, the grooming crews will be busily grooming the mountain with their half-tracks, getting it ready for the *tourista* skiers who prefer skiing on groomed hard pack runs.

But I have some work to do today. Maybe tomorrow I can get up there, and ski Paradise Valley, taking Ridge Chair to the very top and spend the day up there, just cruising the intermediate runs, carving some nice Super G slalom turns, before they get full of bumps.

I call Randy Benson at El Do Sheriffs and we agree to meet half-way at the locals favorite, the legendary Red Hut Cafe for breakfast, right on Lake Tahoe Blvd—specializing in all manner of waffles.

When I arrive, I see an unmarked dark blue Ford Crown Victoria, in the parking lot, probably Detective Benson's. Four-door Crown Vics are the de facto standard ride for non-uniforms in most local police and sheriff departments.

I walk in and look around. I immediately see a guy, standing up waving at me. I walk over to his table. He's about six feet, well built, fit-looking with a military bearing and crew cut, maybe in his early forty's, old enough to have served in Vietnam.

"Jesus...Jimmy Stratton said you were a big one. Randy Benson," he says smiling, mostly with his deep set piercing blue eyes.

"Hey Randy...pleasure to meet ya, man," I say as we shake hands.

He pulls a chair out for me, and we sit. I hand him a manila envelope with the 8 X 10 photos and copies of the Allstate claim file.

The waitress comes over. I just order coffee. Benson opens the envelope and starts perusing the photos. Finally, he gets to the images of the cadaver, slowly studying each one of the images, the expression on his face is impassive and inscrutable. He's obviously been around a while.

"Definitely grounds to refer to the DA for investigation of possible homicide. I did a cursory background on our boy. He's a big-time Real Estate Broker and mostly developer, in Sacramento, with a rep as a real swinger. Apparently his wife is...or was...the money behind the man," he says matter-of-factly.

"Yea...I thought you might want have a little talk with Mr Harold Schumacher...maybe ask him if he's misplaced a wifey?"

"Thanks, Mick. I really appreciate this. Can I buy you breakfast?" he says.

"Nah...thanks Randy. Maybe next time. I gotta shove off...I've got a lot of catch-up to do because of the storm."

"I'll keep you posted. We'll have to get the Sacramento PD involved in this, since he's a resident of Sacramento," he says.

"Sounds good. Randy, as I said before this guy is a real sweetheart...smart...cold and calculating...and he's got money. So I wouldn't be surprised if he 'lawyers-up', as soon as you contact him. Allstate has agreed to have no meaningful contact with him until they hear back from you, so he won't know that we've inspected the RV. Not that I'm trying to tell you how to do your job, but you might just want to start out with talking about the vehicle, like it's a routine procedure to file a police report on a highway accident, not letting on that you know anything about it," I say, as I we stand up and shake hands.

"Yea...good point. I'll be in touch," Detective Randy Benson says.

I stop at a flower shop and pick up a bouquet of mixed wildflowers, on the way to Saint Joseph's Hospital to visit Annie Trudeau.

It's almost 10:30 AM when I walk up to the nurse's station, and ask which room she's in. I walk into the room, a semi private, with the other bed empty, and find Annie Trudeau laying in the elevated hospital bed by the window, wistfully staring out at the freshly fallen snow. Seated in a chair next to the bed, is a guy that looks to be maybe in his late twenties, talking animatedly to her—she seems to be someplace else.

"*Bonjour mademoiselle,*" I say with a big smile, as I walk into the room.

She looks up and smiles broadly, then seems to catch herself, looking hesitantly toward the guy sitting down, then back at me.

"*Bonjour Mick...comment ca va?*" she says.

"*Bien...Ca va?*"

"Siegy, this is Mick Kozlov...he's the guy that saved my life. Mick, this is Siegfried," she nervously says.

Siegfried gets up, chest puffed out, struts over to me, and extends his hand. Hmm...a cocky little shit. I seem to often evoke that Napoleonic insecurity from short guys when introduced.

"Siegy...Becker," he says.

As we shake hands he gives me the macho vise-grip, the whole time he is peering searchingly into my eyes, like he's trying to size me up. Competition for his lady? He's about 5'8", with a stocky, compact build. He's a good-looking guy, with a strong chin, lively intelligent blue eyes and a thick mane of long blonde hair. A real ladies man. His face is very tanned with 'raccoon' tan lines around his eyes, like he spends a lot of time on the mountain skiing.

"Hi. Siegfried Becker...that name sounds familiar," I say.

"Siegy's a competition mogul skier...probably saw his name in the Tahoe Tribune and maybe on TV...professional freestyle competition," Annie interjects.

"Yes...of course," I say, the whole time while shamelessly surveying Annie Trudeau's physical assets.

I barely notice her left leg with knee support, suspended in traction.

In the light, I guess her age to be around 25. Even without any makeup, Annie's face, despite the sutured cuts, and abrasions, and the nose packed with cotton, though very pale from loss of blood, is still beautiful. Her lupine colored eyes under naturally arched eyebrows are large and expressive, with long dark lashes...and an inviting mouth with full, cupid's bow lips. Her thick and lustrous long henna hair, is piled in a bun on top of her head emphasizing her high cheekbones and aristocratic forehead. Even though she's wearing a hospital gown, I can see that she is bra-less, with just an erotic suggestion of protruding nipple, on her ample breasts. *Mon Dieu!* Doctor Wilson, uh...Woody is now fantasizing his hospital bedside manner.

"So Mick, I uunde standt dat you rescued mina schatzi from da jaws of death, up zer undt Emerald Bay," he says with a thick Otto Preminger *Stalag 17* accent and a sneering smile, with more than a twinge of Teutonic arrogance.

"Rescued?...oh I don't know about that. Anyone would have done the same thing," I say playing the *tisk...tisk...* humble hero, as I walk over to the bedside and hand Annie the bouquet of wildflowers.

"Oh, they're lovely...*merci beaucoup*. I just wish I could smell them, but my nose is packed with cotton...it was broken when it hit the steering wheel," she says smiling with perfect white pearls, that were thankfully spared from the secondary impact.

"*Da rien*. So what's the damage, Annette?" I ask.

Annie starts to answer, but she is preempted by this Teutonic Twerp.

"Torn ACL left knee...and a ruptured spleen," he impatiently recites, without a trace of sympathy in his tone.

"I'm so sorry Annie. What's the doctor's..." I was about to ask, but I am again interrupted by this Siegfried.

"Mick, kin I haf un vord mit you...outside?" Siegfried more orders than asks, taking me aggressively by the elbow and escorting me outside in to the visitors lounge.

Once outside, I say, "What's up?" with a discernible tone of irritation, overtly releasing my elbow from his overly-familiar grasp.

He exaggeratedly looks both ways, like some weaselly Peter Lorre villain in some B-spy movie, and then says in low almost inaudible voice, "Can you find ze Volvo again...ver she vent ova?" he says.

"Probably...why?" I say in a normal voice.

"Shh...lower your voice. Let's just say, that it vould not be good for mina Annie if za cops found ze merchandiz en ze car," again with a contemptible smirk.

"Merchandize?" I ask again not buying into Siegfried's melodramatic moment.

"Merchandize. Meaning pharmacy....as in pills," he whispers.

"Oh? What kind of pills are we talkin' about here uh...Siegfried?" I say.

"*Shhh!*" Again with the overly theatrical side to side glance, he leans toward me in *sotto voce*, "Quaaludes, man...a full shipment of over 1,000 caps, in za trunk. She vas picking zem up for me from North Shore, because I am being vatched by za cops."

"So let me get this straight...you were having Annie pick up the drugs, because you were afraid the cops would bust you...you had her drive them down here, so you could sell them?" I ask.

"Ja wohl...zen zis stupid storm hits. Zust bad luck," he says without a trace of remorse about placing Annie in harms-way, either with the weather or the cops.

"And you want me...to show you, where the car is so you can get the drugs out of the car, before it's discovered by the cops? Right?" I ask.

"Ja...so let's go already," he says, again with the grabbing my arm.

I angrily pull my arm from his grasp.

"Yer outta your friggin' mind if you think I'm *even* going to get involved in something like this....now *fuck-off* you Kraut bastard, before I lose my temper and *weiner schnitzel* yer ass!" I yell.

"Okay Mick. But if za cops find za drugs in ze car, Annie vil go to jail...for a wery long time," he cockily declares thinking he has the upper hand.

"You wait here...while I have a word with Annie. Alone," I say.

I walk into the room, close the door, and sit down beside the bed.

"Annie, I've just had a little chat with your...friend Siegfried. He tells me that you picked something up for him in North Shore, and you were on your way back when you got caught in the storm?" I ask.

"That's right Mick. He said to meet some guy in Tahoe City, at a bar, and to pick up some special medication, that he has to buy on the black market because it's not approved by the FD...something, for his migraine headaches. He has these terrible, blinding cluster headaches...sometimes so bad he can't even function...for days. He said he felt one coming on and didn't think he could drive up there to get them...that he needed 'em because he has a competition next week. Why?" she innocently asks.

"Annie...Siegfried just told me that he had you pick up an illegal drug shipment...over 1,000 Quaaludes...classified as a Schedule One drug by the DEA. You're talking serious hard drugs here. So I gotta ask ya. Did you know that Siegfried is dealing drugs? Big time?" I ask.

Annette Trudeau, bursts into tears.

"NO! I had no idea! You mean that package in the trunk is full of illicit drugs?"

"Yeah...your friend's a real sweetheart. He was being watched by the cops, so he had you pick up the shipment so he wouldn't get busted. He wants me to take him to your car, so he can get the drugs out, before the cops find the car...and maybe discover the drugs," I say.

"That bastard! I feel so...stupid...so used. I wish the hell that I had never met him...one of the biggest mistakes of my life. Oh Mick...I'm so sorry that you are getting pulled into this. What are you going to do?" she says sobbing hysterically.

"Annie, I believe you when you tell me that you didn't know anything about this, okay? It's none of my business, but if you hang around this low-life arrogant Kraut bastard, it's just going to be a matter of time before he's busted...with that quantity...he's a major supplier. They're already watching his ass...not if, but when...and you or anyone around him could end up going down with him. We're talking major hard time."

"*Mon Dieu!*" she cries, placing her hand over her mouth.

"Okay...calm down now...everything's going to be alright. Here's how this will go down. I'll have him follow me up there in his car. I will just drive by and indicate at the location where your car went over and keep driving. After that, he'll be on his own. But I want you to promise that you'll have nothing more to do with this creep, okay?" I say.

"Okay Mick. I promise. And thank you, so very much...again. You seem to be my savior...my guardian angel. I don't know how I can ever repay you," she says.

"I'm sure we can work something...out," I say with a licentious grin.

"Or in. Oh, you men...only one thing on your mind!" she says good-naturedly punching me in the arm, smiling while wiping the tears from her eyes with the back of her hand.

"Actually, what's important to me, is not just the one thing...although it's an important...thing, but everything that precedes and follows it. More later on my clinical dissertation on foreplay and...post-play. Gotta run now. But I'll be back later to check on your...*you-know-what*," I say.

As I get up to leave, she reaches up, and grabs me around the neck and pulls me down to her soft moist warm lips, and gives me a long deep kiss, sending electrical shock waves down my spine. As I gently pull away she says, "I know it sounds crazy, but I wanted to do that the whole time...in your truck, that night out there on the mountain. *Plus tard et être poursuivie...attention mon homme de la montagne*," she says gently caressing my face with her hand.

Well now...*more later and to be continued...be careful my mountain man*. Hmm. Indeed, I'd better be careful *avec la femme fatale*...

I leave to find Siegfried pacing back and forth where I left him. Seeing me, he hurriedly walks over.

"Okay...here's the deal. It's non-negotiable. I'll show you where the car is on one condition...that after today...you never, ever contact Annette Trudeau again. I've just spoken with her...she now knows what you did...that you are nothing more than a low-life drug dealer...disguised as a hotshot lover-boy professional skier. She wants nothing more to do with you. Ever. Are we clear on this?" I calmly say.

Smiling he says, "Maan...you obviously do not undaschtandt...*da situation*" he says with air quotes. "Annie is..."

I move my hand in a zipper motion across my lips to cut him off.

"No talk...just listen. Very simple proposition, Siegfried. Yes or no. No maybes...buts...again this is not negotiable."

He pauses for a minute...pondering his options, then finally says, "Ja voldt... let's go."

"I'll take that as a yes...and if you ever even try to make contact with her again, there's a certain El Dorado County Sheriff's Detective by the name of Randal Benson, that I'm sure would be very interested in hearing about your pharmaceutical practice," I say.

"You know Benson!?" he says, unable to conceal his surprise and apprehension upon hearing the name.

"We're like this," I say flashing my fixed-together index and middle finger, then bending the index finger, giving him the *screw you* bird.

"Okay...okay. Itza deal...now let's just go, already!" he says.

"Oh...and one more thing. Here's how it will go down. You will follow me in your car. When I get near to the place where the car went over the side of the road, I'll start flashing my left blinker. When I'm even with the spot, I'll quickly flash my right blinker for no more than a few seconds. That will be where the car is. I will keep going...I will not slow down...I will not in any way give you any assistance in finding it. Okay...let's go," I say.

Heading North on the recently plowed Highway 89, in about a half-hour, I reach the approximate spot where I had found Annie. I don't detect any recent tracks where the Volvo went off the road, so I assume that no one even knows that there's a car down there. It sends a chill down my spine, realizing that had I not come along when I did—if I had been just a few minutes earlier, Annette Trudeau would probably not have survived the night, most likely dying a lonely death on the roadway, either from loss of blood or hypothermia. But the more sobering realization was that I would never have met Annette Trudeau. After only a very short exposure to one another, already a deep psychic connection was beginning to form, which I had not felt with any other woman since the loss of the love of my life, Sora Eagle Feather.

I look in my side view mirror, and confirm that Nazi-breath is following behind me in his late model 4x4 Toyota Land Cruiser, with a ski rack of course. I flip on my left blinker, then about five seconds later, my right blinker for only a few seconds. In my side view mirror, I watch him peel off to the right side of the road. I do not slow down, but continue North for a few miles, until I can find a convenient place to safely turn around. This should give him ample time to get his 'merchandize' out of the trunk of the vehicle, using the keys still in the ignition, and be long gone by the time I return.

About 15 minutes later, driving South, I pass by the accident scene—the Land Cruiser is gone. I continue on back to the hospital, to confirm that Siegfried Becker has not had second thoughts about our deal not to contact Annie. I pull into the parking lot. No Land Cruiser. I park and go see Annie.

It's about 6:30 PM when I walk into her room. It is now dark outside...there is only a dim night light next to her bed, casting a soft warm glow upon her angelic face. She is sleeping soundly. I do not want to disturb her from a much needed rejuvenating rest. I quietly sit down beside the bed and just gaze upon her. Her peaceful expression, seems to add to her vulnerability and innocence. I sense a deep aching in my heart. I am filled with a protective sense of...what? How could it be love? I barely even know this *femme*. I wonder if the manner of our meeting has triggered some mutual recognition of our mortality, of the fragility of life—if some higher source of synchronicity has brought us together.

So there it is. I decide that I will not attempt to deny or even resist it. I just sit there and bask in the warm glow of the intense emotion of the moment—the powerful sense of harmony and peace—silently observing her for almost an hour, until she finally stirs, slowly opening her eyes. The first thing that she sees is me, sitting there, smiling at her. She smiles. It's a beautiful warm loving smile. I reach over and put my hand on hers. Studying her face, I now see that there are tears welling up in her eyes, streaming down her cheeks.

"Are you in pain? Do you want me to call the nurse?" I quietly ask, gently squeezing her hand.

"No...silly. These are tears of happiness...and joy," she whispers, firmly squeezing my hand.

"How do you feel? Can I get you anything?" I ask.

"If there is any pain, I wouldn't feel it. I'm filled with such an overwhelming sense of gratitude...for being alive," she says, then hearing her sappy tone, she adds, "... and for you, entering into my life," again facetiously batting her eyes.

"Do you want to sleep some more?" I ask.

"I can sleep when I'm dead. But I would like some water."

I pour a glass of water from the pitcher on the table. She quickly drinks it down.

"So...I never asked you what you were doing up there on *that dark and stormy night?*" she says with air quotes.

I fill her in on my work, and outline the investigation that brought me up there.

"Where are you from? I detect a slight accent...and you speak fluent French," I say.

"I was born and raised in Northern Maine, a small town called Frenchville...go figure, huh? Right at the Canadian Border, across the St. John River from the Province of New Brunswick. French is the second language for most...and for many of us, the first language."

"So, then I take it then...that you're not related to the *other* Trudeau's...the Canuck Prime Minister? So no stretch-limos? No being whisked away to exclusive ski chalets in the French Alps, on First Class Champagne Concord flights, as a reward in recognition of my selfless, heroic act?"

"Nope...sorry about that Mick. My people are strictly coach class...in every respect. They're Acadian French...French hillbillies, basically potato farmers, so they speak a mish-mash of French and English...Français. I grew up in farmhouse where French was the primary language."

"Hmm...so *now* ya tell me. Is your family still there?" I ask.

"No. The family located to Southern California...Long Beach, when I was a sophomore in High School. Went to Long Beach State for three years. I'm the oldest of five; three sisters and one brother. I moved

to Lake Tahoe in 1972...to get out of the L.A. metro madness. How 'bout you?"

"Born in Philadelphia...raised in Southern Cal. Moved from Venice Beach to Tahoe awhile ago...for health reasons, my knees. But that's a story for another time," I say.

There's a long awkward silence as her darting eyes betray that her mind is grappling with something. Her expression registers indecision, finally she says, "So...Mick, I *just* have to ask you something. Before this goes any further...and I get my heart broken. Are you married, eh?"

"Not that I know of..." I say.

"Are you involved a serious relationship?"

"Hmm...you get right to it don't ya. Well...okay, I guess I'd have to say that maybe I am," I say.

"Oh..." a long pause as her lower lip begins to quiver.

"I guess I'm not surprised. If you don't mind my asking, how did you meet?"

"I just ran into her one night...and that was it. I guess we both knew...right away," I say.

"Oh..." again with the *Oh*, after almost a minute of silence which I have no intention of breaking because I'm having too much fun, finally she says. "How long have you been together?"

"What time is it?" I ask

Looking at the clock on the wall behind me, "It's about 8:30...why? Do you have someplace you have to be?" she says with a hint of suspicion in her tone.

I begin counting backwards on my fingers.

"78 hours and about 20 minutes...give or take a few minutes," I say.

She ponders my answer, looks at me quizzically, then she bolts upright with a huge smile and throws her arms out wide. I stand up, and lay my upper body against her soft, warm inviting breasts. Her arms wrap around me, as I burrow my hands in through the back of her open gown, finding my way down to the small of her warm, smooth back as we tightly embrace.

For a long time, no words are spoken; she is quietly sobbing. I slowly pull myself from her far enough to gaze into her tear-filled eyes. As our eyes lock, I gently lower my lips on to her waiting, quivering, open mouth...deeply, passionately.

So much for being careful *avec la femme fatale...eh mountain man?*

Annie's condition continues to improve, so that a week later she is able to be released from the hospital. In the meantime, I had spent considerable time with her at the hospital, getting to know her. She's about 5'8" tall, with a slender, toned lean body; bright as well as

beautiful, with a quick wit, and a quirky, self-deprecating sense of humor.

She works at Sahara Tahoe Casino, evenings as a sitting Captain for the Main Showroom, and skis days. It's a relatively prestigious, usually male dominated position, and very lucrative; frequently taking home \$750-1,000 a week, just in cash gratuities. In the summer months, when the headliners are in town, often taking home \$500 a night.

With the proposed ERA, Equal Rights Amendment, to the Constitution in 1972 and increasing pressure from NOW, the National Organization for Women, founded in 1966, the corporate management at Sahara began to see the handwriting on the wall; that the paternal 'good ol' boy' management mentality would have to undergo some change. Her timing was perfect—she broke the barrier with a balanced combination of her disarming charm, good looks and low key 'woman's rights' assertions while still remaining popular with her male co-workers 'as just another one of the boys.'

And for two weeks in August, before his death in '77, all of Lake Tahoe would be invaded by the legions of followers of the King, Elvis Presley. The whole town, basking in the profligate spending, with almost a religious fervor of his fanatical devotees, often staying in town for the whole two weeks. So everybody makes money, a lot of money...most especially the Nevada Casinos where gambling and drinking are ubiquitous 24 hours a day, along with the side dishes of prostitution and the sale of so-called recreational drugs, mostly cocaine and Quaaludes. 'Tooting' cocaine up one's nose, at \$100 for a mere gram as an 'upper', then Quaaludes, at between \$5-10 a pop, to bring you back down, so you could eventually get some sleep, then getting up around noon, downing a few Bloody Mary's, taking a few 'toots' to get you jump-started. Then like the label on the shampoo bottle says, *rinse and repeat* the cycle all over again...and again.

The huge showroom at Sahara normally with a rated maximum seating capacity of about 1,000, for fire safety—the place will be sardined with over 1,500, with the Fire Marshal in attendance each night to 'pick up his envelope'. Mostly heavily bejeweled and seriously over-accessorized rich middle-aged courtesan wannabes, 15 years past their prime, often pathetically decorated, in heavy theatrical makeup wearing a plunging cleavage-revealing exorbitant Oleg-something cocktail dress, who think nothing of throwing another coupla hundred bucks at a seating Captain, just to be a few tables closer to their King. She and the other 9 seating Captains, after dividing the take, often take home over \$1,000 cash, in one night.

But since the passage of legalized gambling in New Jersey, in 1978, all the West coast casinos were starting to take a heavy hit, from the new competition, mostly located in Atlantic City. Many of the top-billed entertainers, were getting offered much more by Atlantic City or Las Vegas in performance fees than Lake Tahoe, with it's relatively

small showrooms, could pay. So when the revenues started to dry up, the showrooms in Tahoe, begin to go dark, except for an occasional 'headliner' weekends, leading to many cutbacks and layoffs at Stateline Nevada Casinos.

She's well educated and relatively well-read. An English major in college, with an interest in creative writing, with a minor in French—she became disenchanted with the 'whole college scene', and yearned to return to a more non-urban setting, like her roots in Northern Maine. So she quit college with just two quarters remaining to graduate, and moved to the mountains, much to the disappointment of her very traditional, fundamentalist Christian parents, who still lived in Long Beach.

Because her car is still lying unnoticed off the side of the road up on Highway 89, I agree to take her home to her rented house way out in the county, that she shares with a roommate, about the same age, who she works with. Her name is Nancy...as in Antsy.

She is on crutches, making it very difficult for her to maneuver, so I carry her into her place, and lay her down on the sofa. Nancy comes out of the kitchen, and we exchange greetings.

Nancy is the complete antithesis of Annie. Although attractive in a handsome almost masculine way, she is short and rather stocky in build, with wide shoulders and muscular arms, like someone who weight-trains. Her personality is cool and aloof, with a constant expression on her face like she either smells something bad or her maybe she's been hiking all day in boots that one size too small, with the unmistakable whiff of misandry toward me. I suspect she may be a still-closeted Lesbian.

"Nancy, this is Mick...the guy that I told you about," she says almost apologetically.

"Hi," she says rather coolly, dismissively.

"Hi, Nancy. Nice to meet you," I lie.

"Well, Annie...how are you going get around with that bum leg? Where's your car?" she says.

"It's still up there...a total loss."

"Looks like you've got a big problem then. I hope that no one expects me to drop everything, and take care of you and chauffeur you around. Between my responsibilities at the Church, skiing and working, I'm not going to be around much if you need anything," she declares, behaving rather unsympathetically toward Annie, letting me know that she's a very busy and important lady in the local chapter of the Church.

"Oh? And what church would that be?" I ask.

"Mick, both Nancy and I are very active in Scientology...in fact it was Nancy that opened my eyes to the human potential movement, and L. Ron Hubbard. Do you know anything about Scientology?" Annie interjects.

"Scientology? No. To be honest, I'd have to plead ignorance. But, Annie if you're involved, I'm open to hearing about it," I say. Mr Thoughtful.

But in actuality I had encountered several so-called *Scientologists* down in L.A. Typically, very self-satisfied, insufferable to the point of arrogance about their level of enlightenment, compared to the rest of the unenlightened unwashed masses that believed in the existence of God or some other religion. They believed that everything...and anything not of Scientology was just a crutch to prevent the poor dupes from taking responsibility for their own lives—past present and future.

So I was curious to try to understand what the attraction was for Annie, in her own words. I knew one thing for certain from my encounters in L.A.—participation in this so-called Church, was not cheap. I had heard that the more enlightened you wanted to become, the more it would cost you—exponentially.

I had a hard time understanding the concept of commercialization of self-enlightenment. Just as I had a difficult time reconciling the commoditization of Christianity by many mainstream Christian fundamentalist, most especially the so-called Televangelists like Pat Robertson, a Southern Baptist minister, who was president and founder of CBN, Christian Broadcasting Network, and their constant on-air drumbeat of solicitation for donations to spread the Gospel of the Bible. Their mission, rather missionary statement was, to save unenlightened souls who had not yet received the message of the "Good News" Gospel—to become believers in Christ, to be 'born again', or face eternal damnation in the fires of Hell. Checkbook salvation with a not-so-pure *profit* motive.

Once true believers, as a measure of the depth and commitment of their faith, they would be expected to *tithe*, or contribute at least 10 percent of their income to the "church", including and most especially the Electronic Church, as there is a 'lot more overhead than traditional bricks and mortar churches'. Turns out, saving souls electronically, was not a cheap 'ministry' alias business proposition, to not just perpetuate, but like any other large corporate endeavor, with an inherent mandate to grow—or risk extinction. So despite the well-known fact that both utilized the same mind-numbing strategies toward achieving the same end—blind allegiance and faith, it was with no small irony, that each indicted the other to be a religious cult using indoctrination toward a commercial end.

Nancy announces, "Well, I was just on my way out...to go skiing. The snow is perfect, so I want a get a few good runs in the bumps before I have to go to work today. Annie is quite capable of explaining Scientology. Bye. Talk to you later Annie." And she's out the door.

Hmm...Scientology. Why am I not surprised? What does surprise me is that Annie, herself is an acolyte, a dedicated follower of

L. Ron Hubbard, the founder of Scientology. I had also heard that his considerably self-serving autobiographical stature was widely disputed.

I sit down beside Annie on the sofa.

"Okay, Annie. Scientology?" I say

She looks into my eyes, searchingly for a trace of skepticism, condescension, which I manage to suppress, barely. A reaction that had probably greeted her pronouncement on prior occasions, most probably from her Evangelical Christian family.

"Mick...are you seriously interested in hearing about it? If so, I must warn you that it is something that I do not take lightly...that it is not a just a belief system, but a very different and revolutionary way at looking at the world...and every one on it. It has changed my life," she says with tone of gravitas I had not yet seen in her.

"I'm listening," I say.

"Okay. But remember...you asked me," she says with thin smile, unsuccessfully veiling her apprehension.

I nod my head for her to continue.

"Scientology teaches that people are immortal beings who have forgotten their true nature, " she starts tentatively, studying the reaction in my face.

"Go on...tell me about the Church. The good...and the bad," I say.

"Scientology is one of the most controversial new religious movements to have arisen in the 20th century. The so-called bad news first. The church is often characterized as a cult and it has faced harsh scrutiny for many of its practices, which some critics contend, include brainwashing and routinely defrauding its members.

"Doesn't sound particularly original...like they borrowed it from the playbook of some of the Christian Televangelists..." I say.

A tolerant smile, then, "Another controversial belief held by Scientologists is that the practice of psychiatry is destructive and abusive and must be abolished," she says rather defensively.

"And that's not the good news?" I say smiling to trying to lighten the situation.

Undaunted, she continues, "Its method of spiritual rehabilitation...a type of counseling known as auditing, in which practitioners aim to consciously re-experience painful or traumatic events in their past in order to free themselves of their limiting effects," lapsing into what sounded to me almost like a rote recitation of dogma.

"How'd you get involved in Scientology?" I ask.

"A fair question. Through Nancy and her friends mostly. Generations of my family were raised as Catholic...there were few if any non-Catholics in the small town where I grew up in Northern Maine. As a kid, me and all of my siblings went to Catholic schools, I even considered becoming a nun...but I obviously decided against it."

"Thank God...an answer to prayer. Mine. When they say nun...they mean none," I say.

"Yea...well, no problem there. It would have been a disaster. Me in a convent? I would have lasted maybe two weeks."

"And...like they say, a mind is a terrible thing to waste...especially when it's wrapped in such a beautiful container. Sorry...go on," I say.

"Thanks. So anyway we moved to California so my father could find a job away from potato farming. Then, because of the cost, we all ended up in public schools. In Southern California, in college, I was exposed to a whole new world of ideas...including some mind expanding aids. Some of us were reading *The Teachings of Don Juan*, by Carlos Castaneda, so one Sunday some of us went out to the desert and dropped some peyote. For me...it literary blew the lid off of Catholicism. How 'bout you, any religion when you were growing up?" she asks.

"Yeah...much more mundane, but on my mother's side. She's pure Italian...a Roman Catholic, with an unshakeable faith, especially in Saint Anthony, to intercede...to deliver from harm. I too went to Catholic schools for several years, until the nuns with the metal edged rulers finally gave up on me. I've still got the scars on my knuckles...and elsewhere to prove it.

Mom was always pestering me to go to church...every Sunday, it would start about seven o'clock for nine o'clock mass. Every 15 minutes...*get up for church*. It started out as a good-natured battle of wits.

Until one Sunday, by then even at 12 years old, I was already much bigger than her, she came in and said, '*or else*'. I just rolled over to go back to sleep. Then she went into the closet and got a wooden coat hanger, and said, '*I'm warning you...*' Again, I just ignored her. Then she lost it, and started thrashing at me with the coat hanger. I just looked at her, and started laughing. But then she broke the hanger on me, with just a small piece of hanger left in her hand, flailing it in the air while I was howling with laughter. Finally, exasperated and out of breath, she just tossed what was left of the hanger, sat down on the bed, and together we just sat there, laughing hysterically.

So then I said, '*what would it take for you to give up on this church thing with me, mom?*' She then played the ultimate mommy card, she started to cry...big time, alligator tears, shoulders shuddering, the whole bit. Then she blubbers '*co-co-munion...*' It was then, that the dormant Catholic Guilt Gene must have percolated from the deep recesses of my DNA. It made me feel so guilty that I put my arm around her, and in a weak moment, heard the words escaping from my own mouth, '*...if I promised to get my First Holy Communion, would that make you happy mom...no more church?*'

She then looks up at me, immediately stops crying, the tears miraculously evaporating, and says, '*it's a deal*'...then gets up and walks

out before I could recant. I immediately realized that I had been artfully outflanked by feminine vulnerability...again. But, because I knew it would make her happy I followed through on my promise. And, after my Communion she kept her word. I've never been inside another Catholic Church since, except for Saint Peter's Basilica at the Vatican when I was in Rome visiting my mother," I said.

"What a great story! For me too, it was the guilt part that I had the most trouble with. The notion that Catholicism's guilt inducing doctrines were punitive, designed to control the minds and the hearts of its believers. The followers were serving the church, instead of the church, serving its followers. As a result, I stopped practicing being a Catholic, and begin searching for something...I didn't know what, but something more rational and less restrictive...less oppressive and less punitive," she says, with more than a slight twinge of anger in her tone.

"So Annie, it looks like it might be a difficult situation around here for you, at least until you're able to get around better," I say.

"Yea...and I need to deal with the car issue *tout suite*. Report it to the insurance company," she says.

"You'll definitely need some wheels...especially living out here in the boonies," I say.

"I'll manage. I always do," she says. *Madame Plucky*.

"Okay...here's the deal. I've got a spare bedroom at my place. If you want to consider staying there, at least until you can get the car thing resolved...get a replacement vehicle, I'm open to it. " I ask.

"Thanks...but I think both you and I know, that if I come over there..." she says smiling.

"Hey...no pressure. Only if it would help you out," Mr Magnanimous says.

"Well...I guess this is the part where I'm supposed to act coy...riddled with reluctance and indecision," she says.

"A furrowed brow would be a nice touch. Hey...we're both consenting, speaking for myself willing adults here," I say smiling licentiously.

"Okay...I guess just until I get the car thing resolved," she says smiling, again with the batting of the eyes.

"Done. It'll be purely Platonic..."

"Or not. Hopefully more Plutonic...as in thermal nuclear..." she says with that killer smile.

"Who are you insured with?" I ask

"State Farm."

"Good. Why don't you pack some things that you'll need for a week or so....and we'll head over to *Chez Mick*, contact your State Farm agent, and get that started," I say.

"Thanks Mick. Well, I guess we still have to think of some way to repay my growing debt to you...here's a down payment," then she reaches over and gives me a deep passionate kiss. Platonic...*eh?* Right.

"Uh...your credit is now officially good with me. You want to leave a note for Miz Nancy...with contact info?" I ask.

"Yea...frankly she'll be relieved that she doesn't have to deal with any of this. And so will I."

So when Annie moved in for 'just a few weeks'—she never left...until she did. She maintained the pretense of living with her female roommate, Nancy, for the sake of not revealing to her Fundamentalist Christian parents and family that she was, by their standards, *living in sin*. Whenever her parents or siblings came to visit, at least several times a year, she would stay with them at her place, until they left.

It turns out, that exposure to the El Lay, *zeitgeist* also had a transformative effect on her parents and siblings. L.A. does that—often even *saints* are no match for it. *En masse* they stopped going to mass, converting from Catholicism to the more entertaining Holy-wood commercial brand of Tele-Evangelical Christianity, shortly after Annie had left for Tahoe. They had been *born again, praise the lord and hallelujah*, while religiously watching CBN on cable TV, and were now actively involved in TBN, Trinity Broadcasting Network. A competing Electronic Church in Orange County, closer to home, founded in 1973 by the eventually disgraced and defrocked Jim Bakker and his wife Tammy Faye. A scandal of Biblical proportions of financial misappropriation and sexual "*improprieties*". Later...both reduced to tragic punch-lines on late night TV.

Being New Christians, now *on fire with the Word*; they volunteered to man the phones for incoming calls, for viewers receiving *the call to serve the Lord*, guiding them through the divine process of *receiving the Gospel*. Then with an emotional plea to the newly anointed, zealous Christians for a generous monetary contribution, they invoked the guaranteed deal-closer...*in the name of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.*

Between TBN and their perennially unprofitable 'Amway practice' which I later jokingly referred to as both 'non-prophet enterprises'...they were kept very busy with their dual evangelizing, which distracted them from Annie and I. Thank God.

It turns out, that within several months, after being away from the daily doses of Scientology from Nancy *et al*, she began 'to see the light'—becoming disenchanted with the legalism of it, not to mention the constant demand on her time and her bank account. She begins to fall away, or 'backslide' much to the chagrin of Miz Nancy and the 'associates' of the local chapter of the Church.

So Annie was again in full heat-seeking spiritual mode, when she become exposed to the teachings of The Buddha. After several minor detours between Scientology and finally landing on the board, on Buddhism, it became obvious that Annie's mercurial flights from one

religion to the next were indicative of a much more fundamental level of inner-unrest and longing...and sadly, gullibility.

But the real odyssey of the spiritual transformation of Annette Trudeau, ultimately, ending in our alienation and estrangement, just begins here.

- Chapter 20 -

In the summer of 1981, I was working my investigation practice, leaving enough time to do some painting, when I read in the local newspaper, that due to the passage of California State Proposition 13 in 1978, which essentially severely limited property tax revenues flowing to school districts all over the state, that the local school district in South Lake Tahoe, was threatening to be forced to cut all funding for athletics to the local schools. This included the South Tahoe High School's football and basketball programs. Reading further, I saw that the local cable company, owned by ACT, American Cable Telecommunication Inc., was soliciting help, to raise revenue to supplement the athletic programs so that the kids could have athletic teams.

Having been active in all sports when I was a kid, I had played everything—baseball, basketball...even football. I had an appreciation and respect for participation in sports—the positive health aspects, both physical and mental, along with the role of wholesome competition in molding character. Not to mention the fact that anything that drew kids away from the toxic effects of a sedentary life spent in front of TV, had to be a better alternative.

There was a contact name of Richard Rudawski and phone number listed. I wondered if it was the same Richard 'Rhino' Rudawski that was an All-American middle linebacker at UCB back in '64 when I was up there, who later played in the NFL for a number of seasons with the Denver Broncos. It sounded like it might be a worthy cause, so I gave him a call.

We agreed to meet for lunch later that day, at the local hotspot, Carlos Murphy's in the middle of town on Lake Tahoe Blvd.

I walked in right at noon, and went to the bar area, where I immediately spotted this huge mountain of man, sitting at the bar, with a cocktail in front of him, laughing with the bartender. I walked up behind him, and tapped him on the shoulder.

"Richard?" I asked

He turned to face me, and could immediately tell that this was not his first drink of the day...two maybe three ahead of me, judging by the redness of his eyes.

"Mick?" he says.

"Yea...hey man...howya doin'?" I say.

"Great...and gettin' better by the minute," he says, motioning to the bar stool next to him, then extending his hand. I give him my own very large hand, but it seemingly disappears into his massive meaty paw.

"What are ya drinkin', Mick?" he says.

"I'll have whatever you're havin'," I say.

"A double Chivas Regal, on the rocks...and another one for me, Scotty," he says to the bartender.

"So Richard, you the same Rudawski that played up a Cal, back in the '60s?" I ask.

"Yeap...call me Rhino...or Rude," he says with an engaging, toothy slack jaw smile.

When our drinks hit the bar, he finishes the one drink, picks up the next one and says, "Here's to ya, man."

"Cheers...you want to get a table where we can talk?" I say picking up my drink, and taking a sip.

"Sure...Scotty, send over another round to our table will ya? And put all this on our lunch tab. Thanks pal," he says laying down a ten for a tip on the bar.

"Thanks, Rhino," Scotty says. Rhino apparently is a mid-day regular here at the bar.

We get seated. The waitress hands us some menus and without looking at it, he says, "The barbequed baby back pork spareribs are killer here."

"Okay. Thanks...but I think I'll go a little lighter," I say.

The waitress comes back with another round of drinks.

"I'll have my usual," he says.

"A double order of the ribs and French fries?" she asks.

"You know it baby," he says playfully patting her on her butt with his huge mitt, which she does not seem to take offense to, probably because The Rhino is a notoriously big tipper.

"I'll have the chicken tostado," I say handing her my menu.

"So, Mick...you remember my name from my UCB days?" he says, sipping his drink.

"Yeah...I was up there in '64...on a B-ball scholarship. It didn't work out. I left after a year. Did you know Rusty Warren?" I ask.

"Yeah...I played with the 'golden boy'. What a prick. Nobody on the team could stand his ass. He was strictly about looking out for number one. When we heard he got his ass kicked over at La Val's, by some girl's boyfriend...not a very big guy either, but musta' been pretty tough, we all secretly cheered," he said.

"Brawley," I say.

"Sorry?"

"The guy that put Warren in the hospital...his name was Byron Brawley. He was my roommate and best friend up at Cal," I say

"Man, I would've paid to see that one. Well...*I think this is going to be the beginning of a beautiful friendship*," he says with a broad smile. Again holding up his glass in a toast, "Here's to your pal...Brawley. You still in touch?"

"Nah...he was KIA...Vietnam in '67. A Silver Star for Gallantry," I say raising my glass, and taking a long pull, downing all of it.

"*Shit*. Sorry, man...bad luck. That whole *fuckin'* war scene...some sick shit," he says his expression momentarily darkening.

"So tell me a little about this fund raising for the local athletic program?" I say picking up my next round waiting on the table, taking another pull.

"Well, first off I gotta tell ya a little about the people I work for. ACT, American Cable Telcom Inc; home office in Denver, Colorado. In fact, that's how I got this job, Regional Director of Marketing...after my playin' days were over with the Denver Broncos. They are one of the biggest MSOs, multi-system operator, in the U.S. But they've got some serious political problems with the local cities and counties, the franchisors. Too much growth...too fast, so the quality of the service is *shit*.

That's why I'm here. This franchise, with the City of South Lake Tahoe is in serious jeopardy. The quality of service is so bad...the customer complaints so many...and prices so high for what is offered, that the City has finally had enough of ACT. The franchise is up for renewal pretty soon, and the City is threatening not to renew it. It would be a huge loss. But worse, a precedent for other franchisors...maybe put some idea in their collective heads to give ACT the bums rush in other towns," he says.

"Okay...I think I got. If I understand you correctly, ACT's motives are not entirely altruistic here with this fundraiser. So you guys are trying to save the so-called franchise by trying to atone for *shitty* service...for high prices?" I say.

"Bingo Mick. So I came up with the idea to raise some money to save the athletic program...maybe get some good press...and feel good PR ya know, for the kids and all that. But frankly, I don't know quite how to go about it. So that's why I'm looking for some help from people in the local community who know the political landscape. We don't have much time on this deal but the company's willing to throw some very big bucks at this to save the franchise," he says.

"So ACT corporate really doesn't give a shit about the kids. This really is all about corporate profits...and loss," I say.

"Yeap...I guess that's how it shakes out, Mick. The CEO, J. Murdock Mahoney has given marching orders to everyone that's responsible for franchise relations...which includes me. Fix this...and fix it now, or your replacement will. Nobody disappoints Jason Mahoney, alias Ca-Je...more than once."

"Ca-je?" I say

"Uh...*Cable Jesus*," he says.

"Well now...I'll have to give this some thought. Under the circumstances, as you have outlined them, I'm not entirely sure I want to get involved with this," I say.

"I understand, Mick. But I just wanted to be square with you...ex-Cal Bear to ex-Cal Bear. That said, I personally have begun to develop a relationship with the local high school football and basketball teams, the players and coaches. The coaches are all good guys. They're in the profession for the right reasons. For them, it's all about the kids just having the opportunity to participate. They realize that these kids will probably never go on to play big time college ball. But they want them to experience what you and I experienced as kids...being a member of a team, learning the ethic of hard work and sacrifice...being an unselfish team player. If *we* don't make it happen. It won't," he says with disarming sincerity.

"Okay Rhino, I think you're personally in this, also for the right reasons. As long as the kids are the ultimate benefactors of this deal, I guess I don't really care about the motives behind it by the parent corporation...even if ACT, in the end benefits. For me, it's all about the kids. So...I'm going to role the dice with you Rhino, that you're being square with me. I've got a few ideas I can run by you...after you buy the next round," I say smiling, extending my hand which Rhino grabs vigorously shaking my whole body.

As he motions to the waitress, Rhino's face lights up with a broad smile, "Becky...another round over here, please," he yells.

The whole time I'm talking to the literally larger-than-life Rhino, while nodding his head in agreement, he's diving into the two plates of ribs with reckless abandon, his face ear to ear, smeared with grease and barbeque sauce. He's ruggedly handsome, with an affable face. My guess...he's about 6'4" maybe going 290 pounds with shoulders like he's still in shoulder pads. Apparently it takes a lot fuel stoking the boilers, to keep the Rhino Train running.

By now, I've got two rounds of double scotches under my belt. Despite the fact that the Rhino is still at least two rounds ahead of me, as we've been downing double Chivas for over two hours, with his huge volume, he still acts relatively unfazed. Neither one of us is feeling any pain.

"So, Rhino...based on what you're tellin' me about the short time line...here's what I'm thinking. You ever seen those sappy sentimental telethons on TV? Every year Jerry Lewis does the MDA, Muscular Dystrophy Association fundraiser...raises millions of bucks over a weekend," I say.

"Yeah, man, I remember...kinda cheesy. I can't stand that guy...Jerry Lewis."

"Agreed. Not many people can. Very cheesy indeed...but why do ya think they do it every year? 'Cause it works...big time. Raising millions of bucks that would normally take months if not years to raise,

in a matter of just two days. The power of TV personified. So based on the underlying rationale here, to make nice to the community, and the City Fathers, something like this, if done right, with video vignettes of local human interest stories...of the coaches...and athletes, and but more importantly, the local politicians, interspersed with the actual on air telethon, you could raise the money *and* create *tres* good will for ACT in the process. But most importantly...the priority of giving the kids the opportunity. It's *win-win baby*. Instead of the 'big bad-ass corporate cable company' a kinder, gentler face, in your case a very large...charitable face.

You'd be the MC...not a Jerry Lewis, but a coach. Coach Rhino, on your cap...with a clipboard and a whistle, givin' away tee-shirts and caps to the kids, with the logo of the telethon. Updating status reports on the contributions, blowing the whistle when hitting one of the many plateaus of \$\$\$\$. The metaphor of the coach, exhorting the community to do the right thing...to win one for the kids. *Rhino's kids*.

"I like it...tell me more, after the next round. Becky....another round over here please," Rhino yells.

"By the way, just so there are no surprises, what's up with the nickname Rhino? Got anything to do with that big horn on its snout...like always bein' horny?" I say.

"Nope...nuthin' that cool. It's 'cause when I'm runnin'...I kinda gallop like a Rhino with my head down, and when I hit you, you feel you done been stuck by a Rhinoceros horn," he says with no small amount of pride.

"Okay...I guess we can live with that. If anybody asks ya...since this is ain't supposed to be *R...*as in Rhino rated for violence, you can leave the part out about spearing the poor bastard. So...the first thing we gotta know is, how much do they need, so we can set a goal...adding at least 20 percent to that number, for pledges that aren't actually realized. You got a number?" I ask.

"No...but I gotta meeting set up with the mayor and the city manager, next week so we can run this by them. I can have them get the numbers for that meeting. Can you make it to the meeting, and pitch the deal for us?" he asks.

"Yeah...probably. But we'll need for you to get some approval from your people before we make the pitch...so we'll need a production budget etc. to submit to them. My rough estimate is that we're looking at about 20-30 K dollars out the door...minimum. That would include marketing dollars, like radio and print...promotional premiums like hats and tee-shirts...and bill stuffers with donation forms, sent out with the cable bills...etc.

If you want me to produce it...then we'll have to talk about some sort of compensation scheme for me, to act as executive producer and director. Since this is essentially for the kids, I'd be willing to turn-key the whole production for about 10 large, or about half what I would

normally get. That does not include all the production equipment...cameras, tape decks, editing, lights and sound etcetera, which would be the responsibility of ACT, which I'm assuming has access to all the necessary prod-equip in-house, along with professionals who know how to use it. So ballpark...20K plus 10K for *moi*," I say.

"Done deal...30K is chump change for what's at stake here," he says, taking another pull on his cocktail, while yelling, "Becky!"

"Okay...the other major issue, is timing. It's got to be televised on a weekend...like noon to midnight Saturday and Sunday...when people are at home. My guess is early winter is when most people will be staying at home, inside...but before the holidays, when there's some more disposable money in town. That leaves us with only about 3 months, to put this whole thing together. There's a helluva lot to do, man. It'll be tough but it can be done...*if* we can get started in a couple weeks," I say.

"I'm all in, man. I can handle the marketing...including print in the local newspaper...radio, and doing a dog and pony show with the local service organizations, like the Rotary Club and the Lions," he says.

"Finally, you'll need a catchy name to pitch it...something that says what it is...to sell it to the community and the local movers and shakers," I say.

"Got any ideas, Mick?" he says.

"Oh I don't know. How 'bout something like...Sporta-thon? A telethon for sports. It's 1981...so Sporta-thon '81, in case they need to do it again, every year, like Superbowl XV, etcetera," I say.

"I like it...a lot. Let me run this by my people," he says.

"Okay...one last, last thing. It's already 4 PM. Happy hour is about to start...which means I'm gonna *try* to stand up...and leave before I get *very stupid* and lapse into TSS?"

"TSS? I think my third...or mighta been R4 wife had that. Uh...Toxic Shock Syndrome. Are you about to have your period?" he asks with a faux puzzled look.

"Toxic *Scotch* Syndrome. Nope...no period. Just one big question mark on how da hell I'm going to drive home...if I don't leave, like right now," I say.

"Okay Mick. Hey, you want me to call ya a cab? Okay...you're a cab," he says. It's an old Borscht Belt joke, but when you're half-hammered, even tired jokes seem hilarious.

"I think I can manage. Yeap...the beginning of a beautiful friendship. You outta here too?" I say with a toasted grin.

"Nah...think I'll stick around here for just one more round...or two. Becky gets off at about seven, which means I'll be gettin' off about eight. I'll be in touch. And thanks Mick," he says pumping my hand with his big toothy man-child grin.

This indeed would be the beginning of a long and close friendship with Rhino Rudawski. But more significantly, the genesis of

my odyssey of revelation of the incredible power of a few major corporations controlling the media, both content producers and delivery technology, for better or for worse, to influence and shape the discourse of the *vox populi*, but more profoundly, control who even gets to have access to the 'megaphone'.

Sport-athon '81 is a huge unqualified success. With my connections at the casinos through Annie, we get interviews with some of the in-town celebrity headliners, like The Cos, Bill Cosby, himself an ex-B-ball player in college, and Willie Nelson, advocating the cause.

For a Saturday and Sunday in late October of 1981, for 12 hours a day, we cablecast a telethon out into the cable system of about 30K homes in California and Nevada, featuring lots of pre-produced interviews with local politicians, school administrators, coaches, and student athletes.

Rhino and I make personal house-calls to each of the five major casinos in Stateline Nevada which borders the City of South Lake Tahoe. Since much of their locals-based revenue comes from residents across Stateline, we pitch the concept of being a 'good community citizen' to individual casino Managers. The casinos are all highly competitive with each other.

So once we get the first one to go along for \$500, we go to the other casinos and let it tactfully slip how much their competitors are giving...whipsawing back and forth between the Managers, until we get everybody up to \$1,000. So we've got \$5K, a month before the telethon. It's cheap advertising for them and an excellent return on investment for perceived goodwill in the community, with the local smiling Casino Manager of each of the five major properties coming on air, presenting a check for \$1,000...*for the kids*. Uh-huh.

Rhino is brilliant as the on-air MC. He's an accomplished raconteur with many colorful stories about his days in the NFL. And he's great at interacting with the student athletes on-air, who are in awe of him, generously handing out autographed tee-shirts and caps emblazoned with the Sport-athon logo. And of course, there is the obligatory tugs-at-your-heart-strings little kids coming in with mayonnaise jars full of nickels and dimes that they've collected door-to-door.

Corporate ACT, flies some heavy hitters in, CEO Mahoney's Senior Vice President of Operations, Paul Berman and Corporate Franchise Relations Manager, Marla T. Dyson, to deliver a check for 5K dollars, on-air. This creates many photo ops to demonstrate to the other franchisors that ACT is a kinder-gentler-mega-media-corporation...with a heart. Right.

Sport-athon '81, creates about \$85,000 net over two days, which exceeds the goal, by about \$20,000. Everybody's happy...including the local politicians, City Councilmen, the Mayor—everyone gets a lot of

political mileage from it. It's win-win—an unqualified PR success for ACT. And especially the kids.

I get invited to go to the ACT corporate state-of-the-art production facility in Denver, to edit a 1 hour documentary about the telethon, called Sport-athon '81, How ACT Saved the Athletic Program of South Lake Tahoe. It is entered in the ACE Competition, Awards for Cable Excellence, held by the National Cable Television Association every year for programming produced by cable companies. It wins first place in its category delivering good national press for ACT.

While in Denver for a week, editing the documentary, I'm introduced to many of the corporate officers of ACT. One afternoon, I receive an invitation from Mahoney's Secretary, to have dinner with CEO, J. Murdock Mahoney the following evening. Rounding out the guests are VP Paul Berman and Corporate Franchise Relations Manager, Marla T. Dyson, both of whom I had met earlier, when they flew in for the telethon.

We are to meet at some ridiculously-priced five-star place, downtown Denver, about 7 PM, *Chez something-or-other*, for cocktails, and dinner. I arrive by cab right at seven, to find that they have already been seated. I'm dressed casual, with a blue blazer and tie, over jeans, with Sperry Topsider deck shoes, sans socks, which raises the eyebrows of the snooty *maitre d'* as he escorts me way to the back of the restaurant, to a private dining room, where I find everyone already seated at a large four-top table with linen tablecloth and napkins; with two empty cocktails glasses each, in front of them. Hmm...already behind two rounds. These ACT folks are a tough crowd to keep up with. The *maitre d'* pulls a chair out, for me, then drops the napkin on my lap with a condescending air like he smells something bad, which I suppose is not my cologne, but more because of my relatively uncouth casual attire.

"May I get you something to drink?" he reluctantly adds, "sir?" Pierre asks who I suspect, by day, answers to Pete.

"Sure...I'll have a Johnny Walker Black, over," I say.

"Very good sir. May I get anyone else another cocktail?" he says.

They all nod yes, and Pierre removes the empty cocktail glasses and oozes out of the room.

They all stand up. Paul, 'Pauly' Berman, whom I had spent considerable time with in Tahoe, and who I had liked immediately when I first met him, makes the introductions, and we all shake and sit. When Pauly was in his early twenties, he had lived in Tahoe North Shore, in Tahoe City, skied Squaw Valley the Mother of all Mountains, site of the 1960 Winter Olympics. For a time, he was on the professional freestyle

circuit, until he blew out a knee, which prompted him to go back and finish his undergrad at NYU where he grew up, and then finishing up with an MBA from Harvard Business.

The men are wearing bookend dark gray Brooks Brothers, white shirt and unremarkable neckties, the de facto corporate uniform. Marla Dyson's in a tasteful herringbone tailored pants suit with a relatively daring accessory, a muted mauve silk scarf. You go girl!

Pauly Berman, maybe, 35, is short and compact—looking trim and fit, with a relaxed and affable persona and an easy, contagious laugh. Despite having an MBA from Cambridge, he's still got a thick NYC accent, and the hip urban brash manner to go with it, which he makes no attempt to conceal. It serves him and his boss, Jason Mahoney well, especially when sitting in on those marathon sessions of negotiation...*doin' deals*, where he comes across as a tough, street-smart take-no-prisoners NY Jew, which belies his brilliant intellect and his personal generosity of spirit.

It's well-known that Mahoney relies on Pauly to do his heavy lifting—overseeing operations, hiring and firing, and it is no secret that he is being groomed by Mahoney to eventually run American Media Inc., one of ACT's many *subsids*, which is rapidly merging and acquiring creators and deliverers of programming, at a dizzying pace.

Creating multi-layers of corporate subsidiaries, to keep the Department of Justice Anti-trust Division overwhelmed, legally outgunned...and off their back. So this long term strategy of aggressive acquisition pursued under the guise of diversification, if left unchecked by the DOJ, ultimately would allow ACT to become hegemonically vertically, and horizontally integrated and politically well-positioned. Owning and controlling distribution, from creation of content to the consumer, including movie-goers and cable TV subscribers, would allow ACT through its many Byzantine subsidiaries to get a piece of the action at each step of the food chain.

Marla Dyson, is also in her early thirties, an undergrad from U of Illinois, with a JD, Juris Doctor from Stanford Law. In her heels, a mid-western raw boned gal, she's close to six-feet tall, with voluptuous curves. She's super-smart and an elegant looker—pure class.

Before showing up for dinner, to mitigate my considerable capacity to demonstrate my ignorance, I decided that I needed to know a little more about Doctor *J..* as in Jesus.

Indeed, Dr. Jason Murdock Mahoney, has an impressive resume of matriculation; MIT B.A.. Electrical Engineering and Economics, Princeton M.S. Electrical Engineering and Industrial Management, Harvard Business M.S., and Ph.D Operations Research.

From his bio, I am surprised to learn that he's only forty-two. In fact, with his youthful, fit and trim appearance he could pass for someone my age.

A large man, maybe 6'3", with broad square shoulders, a strong chin, and full head of dark thick hair, graying slightly at the temples, cut conservatively short but definitely styled—the poster-boy for presidential.

His wide-set unblinking eyes, are very dark, making his pupils indiscernible, deep under a prominent brow, casting the same menacing persona of a shark. Not much of a smiler, it's more of fleeting smirk, which is probably a good thing for him—his sneering thin upper lip revealing far too many reptilian teeth for the size of his mouth.

All the while speaking to you, he maintains an inscrutable, penetrating gaze, seemingly searching, sizing-up and measuring the object of his attention, like a curious circling shark. I begin to wonder if the initial *J*, stands for *Jaws*.

Because I have no illusions about how my meager intellect measures up to these Masters of the Universe, I decide to let them do all the talking, to limit my contribution to the conversation to an occasional sagely nod—to leave them guessing, rather than confirm my stupidity. So, I'll just be lil' ol' me...since everybody else is taken; WYSIWYG.

"Jace, Mick here is from Lake Tahoe. He and Richard Rudawski produced that telethon in Tahoe...it was a huge PR success for us," Pauly Berman says.

"And...I think as a result, now, we may have a good chance of getting that franchise renewed in South Lake Tahoe," Marla Dyson adds.

"Well, it was Rhino's idea to do something for the community...for the kids. I just facilitated his brilliant concept," I say. Mr Modesty.

"So...you're a facilitator, by trade, Mick? Tell me more," Jason Mahoney asks.

"Mr Mahoney..." I start.

"Please...Jason," he says with his laser gaze.

"Okay...Jason. Well, in my former day job, down in L.A. I was a negotiator and a claims administrator for some big-numbers plaintiff attorneys," I explain.

Pauly, Marla and Jason, exchange nodding glances. Suspicions now confirmed about my stupidity. So much for keeping my mouth shut.

In the meantime Pierre wanders in. Pauly wordlessly signals another round with a circular hand motion.

Pauly says, "Mick here is too modest. I hope you're not offended...but we've done some checking on your background, and some other things. According to our rather in depth research into Mick's past employment history...in interviewing some of his former clients, he was a can-do take no prisoners, and M-F uh...Mr Fixit. Smart...and if need be, the other M-F."

"So...I can see you did your homework. To what end may I ask?" I say.

"Mick...you're probably wondering why we invited you to have dinner with us? I'll save ya the guess work and cut straight to da chase, man. It's no secret in the industry...in all the trades, because of our recent major priority of merger and acquisition of cable systems, which provides most of the more than healthy cash flow which funds all the other acquisitions, that we've taken our eye off the ball. We've neglected to take care of...and protect the cash cow that we've got. Many of our systems in Northern California and Northern Nevada, are up for franchise renewal within the next 5 years," Paul says

I finally get an opportunity to demonstrate my sagely nod, and jump on it. Then, "If you don't mind my asking...and this has what if anything to do with me?" I ask.

"With the unqualified PR success of the telethon in Tahoe, we think you might be able to help us with some of our more problematic franchise renewals in uh...MF kinda role," says Marla with a wry smile.

"And not da Mr Fix it...da uda MF," Pauly says in exaggerated *Brooklynese*.

That one almost draws a smile from Dr. J. Almost.

I have no idea where this going, so I just continue with the nodding, alternating between pensive and wryly puzzled, which gives me enough time to muster a sagacious response.

"Oh?" I say.

"If you were to take the position we're offering you...you'd be working very closely under Marla, as her eyes and ears on the ground, at a newly created position. Regional Manager of Operations and Franchise Affairs for the Northern California and Nevada cable systems. To identify, trouble-shoot and fix problem areas with existing local management...and problematic relationships with the franchising authorities for the various systems," Pauly says.

The part about working very closely *under* Marla, definitely captures my attention and imagination.

"I'm very flattered by the offer. But to be perfectly frank, I don't know cable from corn pone. With my limited technical background and understanding of the technology, I wouldn't feel qualified to manage cable systems," I say.

"We're not looking for that in this position. This is all about the politics of getting to *yes...by any and all* means necessary which you seem to be uniquely qualified for. All of the system managers at the local systems have technical background, many of whom are just promoted technicians, holdovers from the old days in cable. Unprofessional for the most part...some without any college. They're totally clueless about how to manage the critical political relationship with the local government franchisor. In many cases, the relationship has devolved to an adversarial one. When we allow that to happen...we may win the battle but always lose the war. Automatic," Marla says smiling,

while catching me snatching a glance at her left hand, absent a wedding band.

What is it about these damn, not just beautiful, but brilliant, alpha females like Veruska Mirren, and now Marla Dyson that is like an aphrodisiac for me?

"If you don't mind...I'd like to give this some serious thought, before giving you my answer," I say

Jason Mahoney now seamlessly intervenes in his customary role as The Great Closer, "Okay...the one rather obvious part of this offer that we haven't discussed is the salary and perks. What kind of numbers would help persuade you to come on board?"

Hmm. Skilled negotiators never make the first offer. Get your counter party's demand first, depending on with how much conviction it is conveyed through body language and speech inflection, then make your counteroffer. Mastering the art of reading emotional and physical cues, body language, is crucial to the art of effective negotiating, as much if not more so, as being fluent with the facts and figures.

"Well...Jason, I'd have to think about that as well," I say, easing back into the familiar playful foreplay of negotiating. Mr Cooooool.

"Ballpark?" Pauly says.

"Oh...gee, aw shucks," I say smiling, "I don't know, I guess I'd expect maybe...at least \$50,000 a year, plus benefits," I say, shooting high just to get a reaction. Apparently not nearly high enough.

Jason Mahoney smiles and says, "\$65,000 plus full medical and dental and profit sharing...a plus a luxury company car of your choice. Does that help you make up your mind?" he says.

"It doesn't hurt...but there is one more major issue that would need to be addressed, as a condition precedent to even considering your offer...at any salary. Would I be expected to relocate from Lake Tahoe?" I ask.

"Mick, our *sources*..." with air quotes "have lead us to believe that you are involved in, shall we say, a serious relationship in Tahoe. Because Lake Tahoe is fairly centrally located among the various systems that would be under your supervision, we would have no problem with you setting up your office in Tahoe, including hiring your secretary locally. That said, you would be spending a considerable amount of time traveling from system to system, and here in Denver, attending corporate manager meetings...and making your unique talents available, like helping to create and craft policy for corporate franchise relations, generally," Marla says.

Unique talents available. Ms Dyson...you have no idea...

"Hmm, yes...I can see you've done your homework. If it's okay with you, I'd like to have a week to think about it," I say.

"\$75,000 and that's my best offer," Jason Mahoney says again with that unblinking laser stare.

Time for another sagacious nod. Seems the less I talk, the better I do.

"Mick...as you may have already noticed, Jace is not used to hearing the word *no*...or even maybe...from *anybody*...and he does *not* like to be disappointed. We'd like to have your answer...before you leave town," Pauly says with an undercurrent of the ominous in his tone.

"I intend to complete my editing of the production, and return to Tahoe in about three days. You'll have my answer before I leave," I say.

Pauly silently nods grudging affirmation, pauses a moment to reflect, exchanges eye contact with Jason, then motions Pierre, who has been standing at attention by the door, to come over to the table. Apparently part of Pauly's job description, is to ensure that Dr. J. does not experience *any* disappointment whatsoever.

"We're ready to eat now....please bring us menus, another round...and your best bottle each of red and white wine," Pauly says rather coolly.

We finish dinner, a long drawn-out seven course affair, indulging in small talk, with Pauly telling some hilarious off-color jokes, which do not seem to offend Marla, keeping everyone loose, except for Dr. J. whose measuring gaze I feel focused on me much of the evening, foreshadowing something dark and malevolent.

But I do manage to find out a little more about Dr. Jason Mahoney. He's got two kids, a daughter college age, and a son, high school age, attending a school just outside of Denver. On the surface, he's appears to be a dedicated family man, and speaks respectfully about his first and only wife. I also discover that he is passionate about sailing...racing sloops in off-shore ocean regattas. The Big Boys at least 12 meters, and big \$,,\$,\$,\$,\$\$. It gives me some insight into his reputation as being somewhat of loner, and his notorious, intensely competitive nature, preferring the solitude of racing sailboats, to more social sports, like golf or tennis.

While living in Southern California, I had crewed on some off-shore yacht races, like the Annual Newport-to-Ensenada International Yacht Race, and found the solitude of the expanse of limitless horizon of the open seas, the awe-inspiring sunsets, evocative of a spiritual sense of solace. But always just below the surface a respect, an ineffable, almost addictive awe...and fear, of the seductive, often unpredictable, sometimes petulant *Madame La Mer*. I get it. Dinner is followed by a Courvoisier brandy and an anisette liqueur.

After dinner, it's about 1 AM as I accompany Marla out of the restaurant. We walk out into the cold night air with me holding her under her arm. After so much alcohol, both of us sort of bracing each other up. Standing there, in the brisk night air she gets a shiver, then with a cooing sound, nestles up under my wing placing the front of her body against mine, pressing her soft breasts against me, her face burrowing into my chest. I place my arm around her shoulders...just to

be polite. Right. I catch a resonant whiff of her intoxicating perfume. Veruska's, *for my Misha* scent which I make as *Amirage* by Givency, at a coupla hundred bucks an ounce, my favorite fragrance on a woman. I begin to wonder exactly how much her *sources* actually *do know* about me, at the time, a seemingly innocuous foreshadow?

I walk her over to her car.

"Would you care for a ride tonight...to the hotel?" she adds looking up into my eyes, smiling not so innocently.

Now what do I do? But my better angels, usually woefully over-matched and outmaneuvered, especially in such a highly inebriated state, somehow prevail and convince me that Annie, who is back in Tahoe...waiting, deserves at least *some* measure of token resistance. To assuage my lustful guilt, I vow to myself to call her at home tomorrow morning and tell her about the offer...the job part.

"Thanks...but I think I need a walk in the night air, to clear my head a little," I hear myself valiantly say, but with a discernible lack of conviction, which she picks up on.

"Maybe next time," a confidently smiling Marla says, gently squeezing my hand. She slides into her new midnight blue Audi Quattro and drives off, leaving me standing there, for several minutes oozing with moral ambivalence as I watch her tail lights finally disappear into the night.

After some serious reflection, and discussing it with Annie over the phone, I decide to accept the offer of the position at \$75K...not a bad wage, for Tahoe. It would mean suspending my investigation business, but frankly, after all these years of dealing with the inherent negativity of personal injury litigation—the human misery of the injured victims, hyper-adversarial ego-maniacal attorneys, and insurance companies, I am definitely ready for a change. Worst case is, that I can always restart my practice, and be up and running to the income level where I left off within six months.

It would be my first encounter of many, with one J. Murdock Mahoney, CEO of ACT, affectionately referred to by other media conglomerate CEO's, Chief Enrichment Officers, as...Cap, short for Captain Ahab. A polite reference to his fascination with the sea and passion for sailing...and obsession for winning at any cost, financially and every other way. But more so, it is emblematic of his monomaniacal ruthlessness and hubris, often leading him to defy common sense and believe that, like a god, he can enact his will and remain immune to the laws of man and nature, commanding a morally oblivious, bankrupt Ship of Corporate Fools. And ultimately, he would prove to be a much more than worthy adversary.

I call Marla to inform her of my decision, She gives me the canned ACT welcome aboard speech, and offers to take me to lunch, then the airport for my return flight to Tahoe.

Over lunch, compared to our last encounter, she's in full-business mode. I assume, that the recognition that we'll be working closely together in her now un-inebriated state, Marla seems to have realized her role as my boss—she's professionally aloof and all business, which frankly fills me with a great sense of relief.

Lunch is a token affair with the unspoken compact of *sans* alcohol. We talk about when I will officially start—in two weeks. She gives me a brief synopsis of my duties, job description, perks and benefits. By then, it's time get to the airport, where I have her just drop me off in the loading zone in front of the American Airlines terminal.

"Hey, thanks for the lift, Marla. I'll give ya a call in the next few days. It'll take me a few weeks to get all my current business in order, including advising my clients that I'm no longer available," I say.

"Great...talk to you soon. Have a great flight," she says perfunctorily.

The two hour and twenty minute flight from Denver International to Reno is unremarkable. Thankfully both seats in my aisle are empty, which allows me to stretch out my long frame, and catch up on some much needed sleep.

When I enter the baggage claim area, I immediately see Annie racing toward me. *My gawd, I had forgotten how beautiful she is...but le monsieur most certainly has not...*

She leaps up, throwing her arms around my neck, enveloping my mouth with her soft, warm voluptuous lips. I throw my arms around her slender back and lift her off the ground, spinning around. Her lively lean body pressed tightly against mine, feels so familiar, so natural, that I am actually moved to tears of joy...and gratitude, mostly for not having betrayed her trust.

- Chapter 21 -

The drive from Reno to Lake Tahoe normally takes about an hour. The whole time the conversation is playful, easy and natural. We stop in Carson City, elevation about 4,800 feet, right at the base of Highway 50 before it ascends up Spooner Summit to 7,200 feet elevation, to have something light and unremarkable to eat at some little cafe. Making small talk, the waitress mentions that there's supposed to be a pretty big storm coming in this afternoon, with the snow level dropping to 3,000 feet. We quickly finish up, and pay the bill, wanting to get over Spooner summit, before the big boy hits.

As we head toward the summit, it begins snowing lightly at first — within a half an hour the wind is howling, the trees dancing nosily— it's approaching a complete whiteout when we arrive at *Chez MAK*, about 5 PM. In January, it's already dark as I pull into the driveway. When we open the truck doors, it's about 15 degrees colder at the Lake elevation of 6,200 feet. Just ahead of it.

Upon entering, I immediately notice that something is different about the place. There are now curtains, and many subtle feminine decorating touches...very homey and cozy. I build a big roaring fire in the fireplace, while Annie lights many fragrant candles and some incense.

I put some music on, down low...a little Lionel Richie, a duet with Diana Ross, *Endless Love*. I break open a nice bottle of chilled white wine, and we get comfortable on the several huge pillows on the floor in front of the warming fire, with our glasses of wine. The only sound above the soft music, the crackling fire and howling wind whistling under the eaves.

Endless Love

*My love,
There's only you in my life
The only thing that's bright*

*My first love,
You're every breath that I take
You're every step I make...*

I get up, open my carry-on case, and take out a something that I had purchased at the Duty-free store at Denver airport. I lay down beside

Annie, seemingly entranced by the primal power of the dancing flames of the crackling fire, reflecting off her serene eyes.

"Close your eyes," I say.

When she does, I remove the cap from the spray bottle pass it under nose, "Take a deep breath..."

She does so...then opens her eyes and looks at me, "*Mon dieu*, that is divine! What is it?"

"*Amirage...by Givenchy*. Like it?" I ask.

"*Bien sur...c'est enchanteur*," she coos.

"Good...if you like it, I'll buy you buckets of it *ma amore*," I say smiling.

"Oh, *ma cherie*...put some on me...now, all over," she whispers unbuttoning her top.

I slowly remove her top, revealing her bra-less luscious full breasts, her generous nipples obviously aroused. I spray the perfume on her neck first...then her shoulders, down to her inviting breasts, at each touch, lightly kissing. Her body begins to vibrate as I slowly pull her jeans off, casting them aside, placing more perfume on her delicious body, lower and lower, kissing her gently each step of the way.

She is now lying completely naked with only the warm glow of the flickering fire subtly revealing her beautiful feminine contours. She reaches over and pulls my shirt off over my head, reaches down, unbuckles my belt, and in one continuous movement, removes my pants, tossing them clear. We are now both completely naked, our bodies vibrating at the same frequency with expectant passion. We kiss passionately, and as we look into each others eyes, with hers barely open she pleads for me to mount her.

As if on cue, Rachmaninoff's 3rd Piano Concert begins playing, the epitome of the erotic. In Russia, his music initially was banned because it was considered far too sensual for public consumption. The Rach 3 is like making love...long, slow, melodic with crescendos and many tempo changes. We make passionate love...for several hours. Both of us dripping wet from multiple orgasms, her slick body glistening in the firelight, punctuated with groans of...*plus...plus ... jamais arrêter ma amour!*

I get up and throw some more logs on to the waning fire, get a down comforter off the sofa, lay down beside her, and throw the comforter over us. We tightly embrace, her back nestled against my chest with my hands caressing her soft warm breasts. I am suddenly overwhelmed with the sensation of timelessness—a joyful bliss and gratitude that at this moment...in this place, all is right with the world.

We fall asleep and do not awaken until morning, still in the same embrace, when I am stirred from a deep peaceful sleep, by the loud groaning sound of the roof trusses above, already straining under the weight of the massive ice and snow build-up.

It turns out that this is no ordinary snowstorm. Indeed, it snows all through the night, and for the next three days, seldom without let-up. Early on the third day, we lose power, telephone and cable TV, probably from the high-winds causing the snow-laden trees to fall, taking out the aerial utilities, which includes most of Tahoe. Because the house is all electric—no power means no heat, no cooking, no refrigeration, and no heat tape to keep the plumbing from freezing.

I take everything out of the refrigerator and bury it in a snow bank in front of the house. There are now 4-6 foot snow drifts already starting accumulate. I go outside to survey the situation, and estimate that there is about 6 feet of snow on the roof. Not good. If the snow load for the roof is exceeded which is right at about 7-8 feet, the roof could collapse.

It continues to snow, unrelentingly. With no phone, we have absolutely no contact with the outside world, so we don't know what the weather forecast is. The battery operated radio receives only static, which means the local radio station transmitters are probably damaged, and unable to broadcast. Another two to three days of this, could mean 8-9 feet of snow on the roof. The tremendous weight of the ice and snow is already causing compression of the framing structure of the house—the interior doors are no longer functional. Some of the door frames at the top are compressed down into the doorway by as much as one-half inch.

This definitely spells trouble. If the snow load on the roof isn't relieved, the whole house will collapse like a house of cards...with us in it. Pancake City.

In addition, because it is so cold, and with no heat—the interior house temperature nearing 40 degrees—the plumbing freezes under the house, so now there is no water for cooking etc., or toilets. I open all the facets in the bathrooms and the kitchen, put on my one piece snow suit, and clamber through the basement crawl hole, with a flash light and an acetylene torch.

For about an hour and half, I crawl around under the house, surveying the pipes for a tell-tale rupture in the relatively fragile cooper water supply lines. No obvious burst pipes visually...yet, but I won't know until I get the main line defrosted. If I don't get the pipes defrosted, and soon, once the pipes burst, it will be a nightmare to fix, forming an ice rink on the ground under the house and everything around it, making it almost impossible to work down there; *Sit spins* and *death spirals*...a la Olympic figure skater Dorothy Hamil.

I search for tell-tale condensation on the pipes, with heat tape on them, useless without power. I remove the heat tape and play the torch flame on the places that appear to be frozen. Finally, after about an hour warming the main pipe with the torch, I get lucky, and find several places where the pipe is frozen, which is announced by a loud cracking sound followed by the sound of the ice releasing from the blockage,

accompanied by the loud noise of the water rushing through all the lines, spitting out of the open facets, immediately revealing two small bursts of shooting streams of water on the feeder pipes.

I quickly turn off the main shut-off valve. Climb out of the basement, go into the garage, get some solder, flux, emery paper and several half-inch sleeves, a tube cutter and a couple more bottles of acetylene gas for the torch. It takes me another hour to repair the burst lines, before I can turn on the main valve again. Thankfully, the line does not refreeze and the repairs hold...as I hear the water rushing toward the facets. From now on, we will keep all of the facets, both the hot and cold water lines open with a low steady stream to keep the water moving, so as not to freeze. Most people do not realize that, counter intuitively, it is often the hot water pipe that is the first to freeze, because of the excitability of the hot water molecules. To test this, if you put hot water in an ice cube tray, it will freeze up faster than cold water.

By the fourth day the storm really bares its teeth. Annie and I, with the Lake effect feeding the moisture content of the clouds, assume that this bad-boy has got some serious legs, so we get into our one piece ski suits, go outside and begin to shovel the driveway. It takes us both shoveling for over two hours, enough for me to open the garage door to be able to make a path, to get the snow blower out. Even outside, we can hear the constantly groaning and shuddering of the roof trusses under the massive weight above.

Then, with snow shovels, we begin building a huge drift on one of the existing drifts next to the roof, already almost eight feet high, which will serve as a ramp about 30 feet long, of compacted snow. We place some old discarded sheets of plywood I had found under the house, down on top of the snow ramp, to enable traction for the snow blower, which will connect to the low point of the roof eaves.

I then fire up the Snapper snow blower. I climb the ramp up to the roof, with a heavy rope tied to snow blower. I get Annie to engage the clutch, and drive and cajole the blower up the ramp, while I pull with all my might, until we get the blower up on to the roof, with Annie working right alongside me the whole time...never complaining...always positive, smiling and playful. What a gal...they sure make 'em plucky in Northern Maine.

Once the snow blower is on the roof, over the next few hours, I make several runs until I can get the snow pretty much blown off the roof. By then, it's almost dark. Both of us are exhausted. We go inside the house and I throw some more logs on the fire in an attempt to get at least one room livable temperature-wise. We take inventory, and realize that we probably have enough food for another two days...if we carefully ration what we have. After we lost power, I had fashioned a standing grill from the sliding grill from the oven in the now useless stove, with legs fabricated from long metal cooking spoons and forks, lashed with

wire to the grill, to cook our meals over the fire. Canned pork and beans never tasted quite so good...especially after shoveling snow all day.

One other little interesting development to further challenge our urban camping experience—because the fireplace is mostly for cosmetics, I never keep more than a half of a cord of wood. At this rate of burning the fireplace, we might have 2-3 days of wood left. So we are now forced to be also judicious with the consumption of the firewood. I start making a mental note of which wooden furniture would be expendable. First candidate, the IKEA coffee table—one way to finally resolve the age-old question. Is there *any* real 'wood' in IKEA 'furniture'?

Each night as we sleep next to the fire, it is like a scene from David Lean's masterwork, *Doctor Zhivago*, when Yuri and Lara, with her daughter, in the dead of winter are forced retreat to the relative political safety of the isolated old family estate in the Russian steppe. Our days are spent reading by day and candle light by night. Annie decides to write some poetry. We make love often and a profound closeness, a level of intimacy I had never experienced with another human being, is formed. We have long talks, about the future which I've never done before with any woman. By the time I had decided to entertain any kind of long term commitment with Sora Eagle Feather, the relationship had imploded.

After far too many cursory, shallow relationships, sooner or later, I had found that one of the most important priorities for most women, was the notion of having a family, at least one child. That was deal breaker for me...no matter how much I could ever love a woman, because of my turbulent childhood with an abusive, philandering alcoholic father, I did not want to sit through that movie again. Most especially, I did not want to subject a child to even the remotest possibility of going through that. One night after some passionate lovemaking, Annie begins to cry. At first, she tried to restrain herself, but eventually it overwhelmed her. She snuggled deeply into my chest.

"Oh...Mickey, please, just hold me tight. There is so much I want to tell you...that you don't know about me, but I'm scared to death of losing you if you know," she sobs.

"It can't be that bad...we've come a long way, girl...in a very short time. But I have a closeness to you that I've never felt with another woman. Does this have something to do with you wanting to have a family...with having kids?" I ask, while gently stroking her lovely long hair.

"*Mon dieu...n'est pas*. I do not want *any* children. Ever. Period. That you don't have to even worry about," she says with such a vehemence that I am somewhat startled by it.

"Okay...then what *should* I worry about?" I say smiling, moving her head away from chest looking into her eyes.

"It's such a beautiful moment...now is not the time to talk about that. I don't want to ruin it. Maybe some other time...okay? Please...some

other time," she says looking into my eyes searchingly, holding my head with both of her hands and kissing me deeply, then burrowing her face into my chest.

By the sixth day, the snow stops falling, giving way to a brilliant cloudless cobalt sky. A welcome change from the white monotony of incessantly falling snow. Exhilarated by the marvelous bright light of the sunlit pristine snow, we go outside and play in the snow, making a snowman, dodging snow balls playfully thrown at each other. Both of us having sore backs and arms, as we have shoveled snow for at least two hours a day, just to keep up with the snow fall.

Early on the seventh day, the power comes back on. I tune the radio to the local AM station, to get an update on the weather, and the situation. It turns out that this was a once in a 50 year event snow storm, shattering all recent records for snow accumulation for one continuous storm. I'm not surprised. We also hear, that there are many storm-related injuries, and several fatalities. Some from highway crashes...and some from collapsed roofs, and structures, including a supermarket roof of a Safeway, that was literally flattened from weight of ice and snow.

With the phone now working, I immediately begin receiving frantic calls from my insurance company clients, to handle claims for structure damage from weight of ice and snow, and many automobile accidents, some with serious injuries or fatalities. I have Annie answer the phone and take claim reports, while I begin prioritizing the claims as to severity, casualty claims over property claims, and whether there are injuries of fatalities.

One particularly tragic group of claims, involves a mobile home park, down by Tahoe Keys, where several aged retired senior citizens, were crushed to death, when the weight of the snow flattened the flimsily constructed mobile homes, killing several old folks as they slept in their beds. A rather tragic, if not ironic end, for folks who had paid their dues in life, and had moved to Tahoe to retire, for their health, the dry climate and fresh air, to be closer to the magnificent natural beauty of Lake Tahoe. But again, *Madame Nature*, knows no mercy...only rules. She harbors no bias...only cold indifference, and ignorance of the rules is not a defense against the ravages of her fury.

One of the most notorious examples of this in history, happened just 50 miles North of Tahoe—The Donner Party. Delayed by a series of mishaps, a group of American pioneers spent the winter of 1846–47 snowbound in the Sierra Nevada. Running out of food, some of the emigrants resorted to cannibalism to survive, eating those who had succumbed to starvation and sickness. One of the survivors was reputed to have ruminated about the tragedy, *Don't take no shortcuts...and don't never dilly-dally.*

After the claim reports are evaluated and prioritized, I call the Claims Managers of my client insurance companies, and inform them that I will be collapsing my investigation and claims practice in two

weeks. That due to the exigent and serious nature of the storm related claims, I will complete them, but that I will not be able to accept any more claims henceforth, until further notice. Each one of the Claims Managers voices disappointment and without exception advises me that if I should choose to later resume my practice to be sure and contact them. I call John Schwartz on his direct line.

"John Schwartz here."

"Hey...John. Mick Kozlov here...howya doing, man? You gettin' hammered with claims by this last storm up here in Tahoe?"

"Yeah...brutal, man. Just sent ya a bunch. I don't know which genius in underwriting thought insuring so-called mobile homes...like livin' in a glorified refrigerator box...in Tahoe with predictable snow load issues, thought it would be a good risk. We lost three...in Tahoe Verde Trailer Park alone, complete totals. Two with the owners DOA...buried alive, in their beds," he says.

"Yeah...I've got those here. John, the reason I'm calling ya, is to inform you that I'm suspending my practice...I've been offered a position with ACT Inc. I start, tentatively in two weeks. Wanted to personally let you know, since you've been real square with me...that because of the emergency nature, severity and volume of the storm related claims that I have just received, I will complete them. But unfortunately I won't be able to take on any more claims...after today. Sorry man," I say.

"Mick...I'm really sorry to hear this. You've been a great asset for us here in Sacto...timely and professional. I guess we'll just have to send up a staff adjuster then...but none of them are multi-lines like you. So it'll probably take two or three to fill your shoes. But I wish you the best...if something changes, give me a call.

Hey Mick...you remember that RV claim up at Emerald Bay? Where the guy did his ol' lady?" he says.

"Sure...of course. What ever happened with that?" I ask

"You're going to love this. Remember the Detective from El Do County Sheriffs...Randy Benson?"

"Yeah...as I recall a pretty sharp copper," I say.

"Well, he came down to Sacto. We talked about a good strategy to trap the hubby...legally of course, into lying for the record. We agreed that we would invite the insured into the claims office here, and take a routine recorded statement...because it was over 50K, we'd need a signed...and recorded statement proof of loss, covering the circumstances of the loss, and a police report. I personally would take the statement...without him knowing how much we knew from your investigation. Anyway, he came into my office. All pushy and irate...that the claim was taking too long to process, threatening to call his big-time lawyer...suing Allstate for Bad Faith. He knew all the lingo...if we didn't settle with him, like yesterday.

So, I took his statement. You're right...this guy was a real piece of work. Short, middle-aged, bottle-suntan, bad comb-over, and lots a

gold...rings and chains...and of course a Rolex. A walking cliché, a caricature of himself. I asked him if his wife, also a named insured on the policy, was with him when the accident happened, so we could statementize her. He said no....that his old lady had run-off with her Personal Trainer from the Health Club about a week before. As far as he knew she could be someplace in Costa Rica with her thirty-something boy toy...and he hadn't seen or heard from her...and didn't know...or couldn't care less, where she was."

"So you got him on the record under oath, to commit to the facts, and lying about his wife?" I ask.

"Yeah...but here's the best part. So...I complete the statement. Then I tell him that there's somebody outside who wants to talk to him, from El Dorado County Sheriffs, to complete a routine police report on the accident required for us to make payment. *No problem he says.* A cocky little shit. So Detective Benson comes in, all smiles and polite, showing proper deference to Mister Big Time Developer.

Benson sits down, with a blank accident report form in front of him. This guy Randy Benson is good...very good. He introduces himself with a handshake...totally disarming. The insured reciprocates...*Harold Schumacher...call me Sonny, every one else does.* So he's filling out the report, taking his time...like it's no big deal, just routine. The guy is starting to get annoyed, he keeps glancing at his Rolex...acting like he's being put out.

Finally, Benson slides the completed police report across the table to have him sign it. Strictly routine. The guy signs it and gets up to leave. Then Benson pulls a masterful Columbo, *uh...excuse me...just one more question, Sonny.* Then he takes the photos you shot at the scene including the cadaver, and without a word spreads them on the table, and says. *So Sonny...help me out here...I'm a little confused. You say your wife ran-off...so...who is this woman in the photographs?* Suntan Sonny literally shits his pants...man it was unbelievable, the stink. Then Benson reads him his Miranda rights. The guy's in shock...but has the presence of mind to shut up, and immediately lawyer up," he says.

"Did he take him in?" I ask.

"Nope...probably 'cause of the stink as much as the fact that at this point it's pretty much all circumstantial. The cops can't produce a body, at least until summer; after the last big storm, the RV was buried a massive avalanche. But Benson had already contacted the Sacramento PD, showed them the photos and your report. They do some checking and find out that nobody, including her friends and family have seen or heard of the Missus since after the accident. Sonny apparently has told 'em that she was at some pricey weight reduction and cosmetic surgery retreat...to get a face lift, a full make-over on the QT in Palm Springs for two weeks...*at least.*

Anyway, so the guy with a full load in his pants waddles out...funnier 'n hell. He immediately races home. Based on probable

cause, Sacto PD does a stakeout. In about a half-hour, the guy comes out, with some thirty-ish arm-piece Bottle Blonde Bimbo, each carrying two large suitcases...like they're not going for just an overnighter. He throws them into the car and takes off. They follow him to Sacramento Airport, up to the ticket counter to American Airlines, where he buys four tickets...first class. Two tickets to Vancouver, YVR BC...and get this...two tickets from Vancouver to Havana, Cuba...where there is no extradition treaty with *Fidelito*. While he and his uh...secretary are sitting in the airport bar, slammin' down straight vodkas, the Sacto PD detectives wander over, and say, *Mr Schumacher? We'd like to have a few words with you, and your friend here, about the whereabouts of your wife.* That's when the Bimbo loses it, and starts screaming at Sonny, *I told you we'd never get away with it...you asshole. I didn't have nuthin to do with this...it was all his idea!"*

"Perfect...so she spilled her guts?"

"Oh *yeah*...they arrested them both...on the spot. She's already ratted him out for a plea deal...accessory after the fact, as she was his ride home from the murder scene. The DA of Sacto is filling a Murder One...pre-med with special circumstances which makes Sonny boy is eligible for The Needle," Schwartz says.

"So...there is some justice in the world after all," I say.

"Yeah...by the way, Detective Benson, says he owes you one. Without those photos, the guy probably would have pulled it off...once he got the settlement check on the RV from us, he probably would have rabbitted...most likely Cuba.

It turns out that his wife had all the money. After a few years of pumping it into his real estate developments, she realized that she was being had...was going to divorce him and file suit along with the other investors, for fraud and misrepresentation. It was a Ponzi scheme, using her wealth as seed money. He scammed about 15 million bucks from outside investors...what are friends and family for? Until it reached the critical mass, when interest rates skyrocketed to around 15%, the new money couldn't keep up with the charade...and all the properties went into foreclosure. Then it was *adios* time for Sonny boy...but first he had to deal with the inconvenient wifey who was now complicatin' his life...terminally...for her. "

"Real estate developers...the third oldest profession, behind prostitutes and lawyers. Okay John...I gotta run...get busy on these claims. Good job. Take care," I say.

"Sure...ever in Sacramento, look me up, and I'll buy ya dinner...and drinks," John Schwartz says.

"Dinner? Sure. Drinks? You might want to reconsider that offer," I say.

"Hey Mick...the money you saved us on this claim alone, Allstate can afford more than a few drinks. Keep in touch. And thanks

: : *Michaelangelo's Renaissance* — *m.a.kominsky* : :

again, man. Pleasure doing business with ya. And good luck with the new gig," he says.

- Chapter 22 -

By the time we dig out, and things return to some semblance of normal, it's Saturday. Paradise Valley has re-opened two days before— with over 10 feet of fresh powder. Our friends tell us the mountain is awesome...the snow's never been better, the whole mountain is open, and the main run at lodge level, nicknamed The Face is groomed and perfect, with little or no bumps. Usually by the weekend, the moguls on the face are pretty gnarly after being skied all week. The conditions are so good, since we'd been working pretty hard, Annie and I decide to go up and catch a few good runs. Both of us have season passes at Paradise, affectionately referred to by the Casino working ski bums as Pair-a-Dice. So we can go up anytime during the day, even if it's to get just a few good runs in.

We get up to the main lodge parking lot, about one in the afternoon, with The Face visible from the parking lot. It is as billed— magnificent. Steep but groomed to perfection. Despite the snow storm, Highway 50 over Echo Summit, is a maintenance priority by Caltrans because it is the main route for the trucking in of vital necessities like groceries etcetera. The parking lot is surprisingly full. Powder Hounds...somehow always undaunted and undenied...*luv slaves* to the aphrodisiac of the first runs down in the deep, untracked virgin snow.

We see that most of the skiers in the parking lot getting ready to go up to the chair lifts, are young—giddy with an expectation of a good day on the mountain. Party-hearty young aggressive Half-dayers, mostly—some already obviously well on their way to getting loaded either on beer or pot.

Annie and I are waiting in the lift line, to go up to the top of the face, and ski down, when some hotshot hooligans, about 6 of them, cut into the line in front of us. They're already half-in-the-bag, laughing and yelling, generally making asses out themselves.

"Hey...there's a line here..." I say

The one hotshot, who seems to be the Alpha of the pack, says, "So?" then turns around and ignores us.

"Go to the end of the line...now," I say.

Alpha of the pack says, "Or what!?" as he's being egged on by his pals.

"Real simple...I'll say it real slow...so even you morons can follow it. Either get to the end of the line, like everybody else...or I'll call the Marshal over and you can try to explain to him why he shouldn't pull you ski passes for the day. Am I making myself clear enough for even you to understand?" I say.

"Oooh...I'm sooo scared. *Fuck off*, man," Alpha says and turns around and starts laughin' and high-fivin' with his pals.

Annie says, "Let it go Mick...it's okay, the line's moving pretty fast."

"Nah...I think these kids need a little lesson in mountain etiquette...and deportment. They're trouble...keep our place, I be right back," I say to Annie.

I break out of line and pole-ski over toward the lodge, until I spot a Marshal in a red one piece ski suit. I ski up to him, and recognize him immediately. He's a friend that I had done some rock climbing with. From climbing, he's well-built and very strong. A good guy.

"Hey...Matt, howya doing man?" I say.

He turns around, recognizes me, smiles, and says, "Hey Mick, how's it hanging, man...a perfect day, huh?" Matt says.

"Yeah...the snow couldn't be better. Except Annie and I were standing in line for the chair lift to go up to ski The Face, and these young hotshots...about six of 'em...all loaded, cut in line in front of everyone. I think someone should have a little chat with 'em about proper mountain etiquette...before they cause more trouble on the mountain," I say.

"Lead the way, Mick," Matt says.

We get back over to the line, and find them still hootin' and hollerin'. I ski up to the line, duck under the rope, next to Annie. I nod to Matt, toward the hooligans—they're now gettin' close to loading on to the chair lift. He walks over to them, flashes his Marshal laminated ID tag on a cord, around his neck, and says, "I've had some complaints, about you fellas cutting in line. Please step out of the line," Matt says.

The Alpha says, "Hey...we didn't do nuthin' wrong. What's the beef?"

Then behind us a chorus of fellow skiers yell, "Those guys cut in line...this fella here confronted 'em, and they refused to go to the end of the line."

"I'm not going to tell you again...get out of the line...now!" Matt says.

They all get out of line, sullen and defiant, just about the time we are about to board the chairlift.

"Thanks, Matt," I yell over to Matt.

"No problem Mick. Have a good day," Matt yells back.

Then the Alpha whose maybe 5'10" stocky build with a constant sneer, flips me off with a middle finger salute.

We make a couple nice runs down the face. The conditions are indeed awesome. Annie's skiing ahead of me. There are now some medium sized moguls beginning to form, which Annie loves to ski. She's a beautiful skier...seemingly dancing through the mogul field, effortlessly making a series of quick turns and pole plants, her knees compressing to absorb the bumps, with her upper body from the waist

up, very still, most especially her head, which is absolutely motionless. I can see people up on the chair lift looking down pointing at her...screaming, and hooting as she effortlessly glides down the mountain, a ballerina on skis.

After a few runs, I tell Annie, "Hey babe, I'm going to go up to the top, Ridge Chair, they've got the gates up on the slalom course...good day to carve some slalom and giant slalom turns. She ya in about an hour, down at the lodge for a little *apres ski*, okay?" I say.

"Okay, baby...it's just so good here, I'm going to stay on the Face...see ya in about an hour," she says.

I bend down and kiss her on her warm salty lips, as both of us have worked up a nice little sweat, give her a little pat on the butt, and head for Ridge Chair, one of the older chairlifts, with just two seats per wooden slatted chair. I ski up to the end of the line, with maybe 15 skiers in front of me. I've got my sounds on, a Sony Walkman portable cassette player with headphones with a tape I made especially for making slalom turns...a little Carlos Santana, just the right beat to make quick rhythmic slalom turns to. I've got my eyes closed, my head bobbing to the music when my reverie is interrupted by some more hootin' and hollerin' coming from the front of the line. I open my eyes, to see the same hooligans cutting in line again, right before the boarding area for the chairlift. The lift operators are too busy, ensuring that every one gets seated properly in the chair to monitor the line, as the empty chair swings its final arc downward from the mountain, before completing the 180 degree turn before it heads back up the mountain with two skiers per each chair.

All six of them, board the chairlift and are on their way up the mountain, by the time it comes for me to board. Immediately in front of me is a younger woman, beside her a young girl, who looks to be about 12 years old. They're both seem very tentative as they approach the boarding area, where they are supposed to ski to the embedded marker in the snow, lining it up with their ski bindings. They barely make it in time, before the chair smacks them in the rear, causing the chair to radically swing back and forth, until it finally clears the boarding area. I'm next up, beside me is a middle-aged woman who looks like she's done this many times before and both of us easily are in place by the time the chair whips around for the upward ascent. I've got my tunes on, it is unspoken etiquette not to engage someone while on the chairlift who's got headphones on, listening to their music. Thankfully she gets it, and nods at me. I return the nod.

But by now the noise coming from the chairs in front of us is so loud, the yelling and hooting, that I take off my headphones. I observe, the one chair, with the Alpha Asshole that I had encountered earlier, trying to bounce the chair up and down, yelling and laughing. The other idiots follow his lead. Soon, with all three chairs, are bobbing up and down, mid-span between the towers, the cable starts to deflect about 6-8

feet up and down....they keep it up. I'm now holding on to the side of the chair, as the whole span is now undulating almost 10 feet up...then down. I hear a frightened scream coming from the young girl in the chair ahead of us. The chairs in the mid-span sink down about 12 feet, then catapults up about the same.

Suddenly...a loud *snap*, as the thick 4 inch strand cable becomes derailed from the pulley above, releasing the cable from the stanchion. The whole span, which we are on, plunges down about 20 feet, then catapults upward like a slingshot, violently propelling all the chairs skyward, ejecting at least six of the skiers out of their chairs into the air, some of them free-falling as much as 40 feet from the top of the arc, the equivalent of falling from a four story building. The operators immediately apply the lift brake—the chairs come to an abrupt halt swinging crazily forward and backward, up and down.

I'm holding on to the chair superstructure with both hands, but my fellow passenger loses her grip and is ejected up, out of the chair. She's now about a foot in the air, when I release my right hand and barely manage to grab her by the back collar of her ski suit, forcing her downward back into the chair. I hold on to her collar, until the chairs stop swaying to where I feel it's safe to loosen my grip on her with my right hand, my left hand still a death grip with the arm rest of the chair. It takes almost five minutes before the chairs stop swaying.

"I've got you...you'll be okay...just grab on to the armrest of the chair," I yell.

She doesn't respond, so I keep holding on to her.

Immediately we begin to hear blood curdling screams of pain...and crying from below. The chair in front is now empty...both the woman and the young girl having been ejected at the apogee of the cable. Our chair is now about 10 feet above the ground, as are most of the chairs mid-span. I see the six skiers, including Alpha, drop from their chairs, and ski off, without saying a word or stopping to render any assistance.

Looking down below, I can see that there are maybe 6 to 8 skiers who have been thrown out of their chairs. I look over to my right, and see that my fellow passenger is white with terror, clutching the side of chair, paralyzed with fear.

"You okay!?" I yell. She doesn't respond. Staring straight ahead...she seems to be moving her lips with her eyes closed, silently praying. I nudge her with my elbow, which seems to snap her out of it. She turns and looks at me.

"Are you okay!?" I yell again.

This time she slowly nods her head, "I...I think so. What happened?" she cries.

"Those guys caused the chair to derail, I'm going to drop down, see if I can help down there," I yell.

"Please don't leave me...I'm so scared I think I going to..." then she vomits.

"Gotta go...you'll be alright. Just sit tight...the ski patrol will be here soon...don't try to get down on your own, they'll lower you down with a rope," I yell.

By now the lift operator has called down to the main lodge and there are already several guys wearing orange ski patrol suits with big crosses emblazoned on their ski suits starting to ski into the area. They're all outfitted with two way VHF radios. I release my bindings and let my skis drop to the snow below. I then slowly position myself around in the chair so I can lower myself from the bottom of the chair...hanging from the bottom foot rest of the chair, my full length, with my arms outstretched, which puts my feet about 3 feet above the snow, I release my grip. I drop into the hard packed snow, sinking in about a foot, which lessens the impact. Taking an immediate inventory, thankfully, nothing seems broken or sprained.

In my ski boots, I manage to trudge over to the people who were in the chair in front of me. When I get there, blood is everywhere. The woman obviously already going into shock—she's sustained a compound fracture of her lower left leg. I can see the white bone material jutting out of her ski pants. I release the one ski still on her other leg.

By now the pain in her leg is really coming on fast...she's going into secondary shock. I bend down, and take her gloved hand in mine.

"Listen to me...you're going to be alright. Help is on the way...don't try to move, lay perfectly still, take some slow deep breaths. I'm going to check on the young girl. But first I'm going put a tourniquet on your leg, it's bleeding and we need to control that. Do not look down at your leg," I say.

I take off the blue paisley bandana that I tie around my head while skiing, a sweatband, wrap it around her leg and tie it tightly above the knee, which should stem some of the blood flow.

"Okay...God my leg hurts...so bad! My niece...Michela...please take care of her! I'll be okay," she says.

I kneel beside the young girl. She is barely conscious, and going into serious shock.

I grab her gloved hand and shake it to get her attention. She looks up at me...a glassy-eyed, dazed expression then starts to cry hysterically.

"Michela...is that your name?" I ask.

"Ye...ess. Mich-ela...Ale-ssandro that's my aunt. Is she okay?" she says through her convulsive sobbing.

"Your aunt's going to be okay. Now...Michela, my name is Mick...another Michael like you. Just lie still, don't try to move anything. I'm going to try remove the skis from your boots. You yell if it

begins to hurt and I'll stop. Okay?" I say trying to comfort her. I release both the bindings on her skis.

"Does that hurt at all?" I ask

"No," still sobbing, "I didn't feel a thing...my legs...I can't feel my legs!" she cries.

This is not a good sign...could mean a serious spinal injury. It's very important under these circumstances that the victim remain totally immobile so as not cause further damage to the spinal cord.

"It's okay...Michela, just close your eyes, and take some long deep breaths...help is on the way. You're going to be just fine. Very important! *Do not try to move your legs of your hips!* Okay? Your aunt is okay...just try to stay calm. Remember, slow deep breaths...that's a good girl," I say. She slowly nods.

About this time, I see Matt, the ski Marshal racing toward us.

"Mick...I thought I recognized your ski suit...you're covered with blood, man...you okay?" he yells.

"Yeah...the blood's from her leg" I say nodding toward the aunt, " a compound fracture of the tibia fibula. I put a makeshift tourniquet on it but she's going into shock big time. The little girl, her niece...may have a serious spinal injury...maybe a concussion. She has no feeling in her lower extremities...it doesn't look good. You're going to need a back board to get her down. A chopper would be your best bet. In case the vics lose consciousness, her name's Michela Alessandro. The aunt seems to be stable...but she's lost some blood."

"Thanks Mick. What the hell happened here?" he asks.

"Remember those hotdog skiers I called you in on earlier today? They cut in line again on Ridge Chair. By then, they were probably really drunk...had Bota bags around their necks. Anyway, they started bouncing the chairs up and down...all six of 'em. That's what caused the cable to derail. After the cable let go...all of them, dropped from their chairs and skied off offering no assistance. If you think your guys have got this covered, we should ski down, like *pronto*, before they split," I say.

"Got it...*goddammit*. My fault, man. I shoulda pulled their lift tickets on the spot. But they begged me not to...college kids. Promised to shape up...you know how it was when we were kids," he says apologetically.

"Hey Matt don't beat yourself up on this...you didn't make the cable derail...they did," I say.

"Okay. Let me tell my lead guy what's up with these two vics, then let's go get those bastards," Matt says, in a malevolent vengeful tone. Matt Stevens is no one you want to have mad at you. While I'm sliding my boots back into the bindings, and finding my ski poles, he brings one of the ski patrol guys over, updates him, then says, to me, "Let's go!"

Just about then, I see Annie skiing really fast toward me. She brakes sideways, spraying snow all over me, almost hitting me with her skis, and screams, "Mickey...*Mon dieu!* Are you alright!?" tears streaming down her face.

"I'm okay baby. Hey, thanks for the shower," I say smiling, wiping the snow from my eyes, "I was on the chair lift when it let go...but I'm not injured. Some of these other folks aren't as lucky," I say, holding her shuddering body against me.

"The blood on your suit...you sure you're okay?" she's crying now.

"Yea...I'm sure," I say patting her back reassuringly.

"We heard down at the bottom about the accident. I was sick with worry that you might have been injured...or killed. I'm so thankful that you're okay!" she says wrapping her arms around my waist with a death grip, burying her face against my chest.

"Annie...those hotshots that we had the run in with, they caused this. Matt and I have to ski down to the bottom, and try to catch them before they split. Okay? You stay here and see if you can help. You might go over to that little girl over there with her aunt and try to comfort them. The little girl's in pretty bad shape...see if you can keep her warm and from trying to move around and from going into further shock. She might also have a concussion...try to keep her talking, so she doesn't lose consciousness. I'll see ya back at the lodge later. Okay baby?" I say.

"Okay baby. Oh Mickey, please be careful!" she cries kissing me deeply.

"Don't worry about us...you should be worried more for the morons that caused this when Matt catches up with 'em. Gotta go, baby," I say.

I pick up my poles, and finish stepping into my ski bindings. I look over at Matt and say, " Let's do it!" We furiously shove off skating with our ski poles, polling to gain speed, until the gravity of the slope is sufficient to get us up to speed.

Matt's a very hot skier—he takes off like shot, with me behind him. It's a real effort for me to keep up. We both get into an aerodynamic downhill racer tuck position, letting our skis run, flat and fast with no edging. We ski down to the top of the Face run, without even slowing down, jump off of the small cornice catching about 5 feet of air, then ski almost straight down, flat-out staying in the fall line, making very few turns, skiing on just the tops of the bumps. We're down to the bottom in record time. Matt gets on his radio, calls the office, and tells them to send the South Lake Tahoe PD, to meet us in the main parking lot.

Using our ski poles to propel us, we half walk...half run on our skis toward the parking lot. From above, we both scan the parking lot.

For a few minutes nothing...finally emerging from behind a row of cars, I spy three guys, one of them limping between them.

"There...there's three of 'em. I recognize the ski clothes of the one hotshot trouble maker. He may be hurting...his two pals are helpin' him. Looks like they're about to get into their car. We'd better *andale*...before they get away," I say pointing in their direction.

Matt and I kick off our skis. As we're awkwardly making our way toward them as fast we can in our ski boots, at this rate they'll be long gone before we can get there, when we spot a patrol car from STPD pull into the lot. Matt, frantically motions to them, and they drive over.

"What's up, Matt?" the one officer says, who obviously knows him. Matt is well known and highly respected for his volunteer wilderness search and rescue efforts.

Matt points over toward the perps, and says, "Those guys over there...they caused a serious accident up on the mountain...derailed a chair. Mick here witnessed the whole thing. They're trying to split...I want you to detain them, officer," Matt says.

"Roger." and he jumps back into the patrol car, turns on all the flashing lights, and speeds over to the three. While were making our way over there, it's slow going in ski boots, we see the officers get out of the car, and confront them. It takes almost 3 minutes to reach them.

"These the guys you think caused the accident?" the officer says.

"Yeah...Larry, Moe and Curly, the moron in the middle. He was the instigator. Those other idiots just followed his lead. There's three more that were with 'em...they've probably already split, but I think you can get their identities out of them...one way or another. In that regard, I would be glad to offer my professional services...at no charge," I say, handing him my PI business card.

The Alpha hotshot says, "Hey man, this is such bullshit...we just happened to be on the chair. Look, I'm hurt myself," he says pointing at ace bandaged leg.

"Officer, there are at least six...maybe eight people seriously hurt up there. One little girl may be paralyzed...from the waist down. I was on the chairlift. I'm willing to press charges for assault against me. I want these guys arrested. I'm more than willing to testify against all of these...*people*. If you need it, I can come down to the police station later and give you my statement. But right now I've got to go find my lady, she's probably worried sick. Randy Benson's a friend of mine...he'll vouch for me," I say.

"If you know Randy...with El Do Sheriff's that's good enough for us," the one cop says.

So now, Alpha hotshot, ain't so feeling so hot...or cocky. I stare at him, just hoping he'll do something stupid like take a swing at me, so I can 'defend myself'. Instead, he his now totally diffident, refusing to make eye contact with me, just staring down at the ground, not making a sound, other than a barely discernible sobbing sound, with his shoulders

beginning to shake. By now, he is probably starting to sober up and realize he's in some serious shit.

The cops cuff them, read them their rights, put them into the back of the patrol car, and with a tip of hat, with all the red lights flashing, siren blaring, speed off like it's a 2-11...armed robbery in progress. Cops. They *love* those flashing red lights and sirens, the more the better. They don't need much of an excuse to turn them on like a 10-10 code, otherwise known as lunch.

Matt and I make our way back to the main lodge. At 4 PM, the shadows are already getting dark and long. With the sun having sunk behind the ridge, the temperature is dropping precipitously. The whole time we're walking back, he's on and off the VHS radio—it's crackling with urgent but calm voices, giving status reports and requesting resources.

"Mick, I'm going to have to get back up there. We've got 8 confirmed injuries...6 very serious, thankfully no fatalities...yet. Got a chopper to medi-vac at least 4 of the 6, including the little Alessandro girl and her aunt. All the vics are off the mountain...none too soon, it'll be totally dark up there in an hour. Thanks for all your help, man. It's now a crime scene. Gotta get back up there. Hopefully my guys got a list of eye-wits...get that to the cops, and yellow tape the scene. Later," Matt says, as we exchange a jocks upright hand clasp.

"Matt, if it'll help, I can give a statement about the proximate cause of the derailment. But I gotta tell ya, man even under those circumstances that cable *probably* should have never derailed. Have Paradise's attorney give me a call. Take care," I say.

"Thanks Mick. Yea...I know. Paradise is going to need all the help it can get on this one. I'll probably lose my job for not pulling those lift tickets, but my only concern now is for the those victims," he says earnestly, with a sincere sense of concern and integrity. The guy's a real Prince. One of the most generous and principled people I know, as evidenced by the number of lives he's saved, countless times risking his own life in the process. Braving almost impossible conditions, snow storms, threat of avalanche, to rescue someone, often from their own stupidity, usually complete strangers. I'll make certain my statement ameliorates his decision not to pull the passes from the hooligans.

"Got your back on that one, brother," I say. He flashes a half-smile, gives me a quick nod of appreciation, then hurriedly skis off into the impending darkness—to do his duty.

I walk over to the main lodge to the outside patio area right at the base of The Face ski run, normally populated with laughing and joking skiers, getting loose, drinking cocktails and ordering appetizers after a great day on the mountain. The *apres ski* boy-girl hook-up ritual. It's still busy but the mood is more somber and serious. I spot Annie, sitting with some of her friends, with a glass of white wine in front of her. Included with the group is the beautifully coiffed Siegy Becker,

local drug runner, who is laughing and talking to Nancy and Annie animatedly, until he spots me. His face turns white, loses the smile, then gets up and abruptly leaves without making eye contact. No loss. I come up behind Annie, pull down the collar on her ski suit, and plant a wet kiss on the back of her slender neck.

"Ummm..." she coos shuddering her shoulders, "I'd know those lips anywhere."

"I'd know the taste of that lovely nape," I say, the salty taste, the fine silken strands of hair mingled with the faint scent of *Amirage*, still there, immediately getting *le monsieur's* attention.

Her ex-roommate Nancy is there at the table, whom we haven't seen much of, since Annie's been staying at *Chez MAK*. She just rolls her eyes.

"Hi Nancy," I say coolly.

"Mick. Hey you two oughta get a room," she says tastelessly, something you might expect a guy to say...or Nancy. Apparently she still has not gotten over the fact that Annie has strayed from the fold and moved on from the Church of Sanctimonious.

"Already got that covered...try it sometime. With the right man...you might even start to like it. You ready to head home, babe?" I reply with a slight edge causing Nancy's face to turn crimson. Her mouth opens but only a flustered stammer comes out triggering an involuntary burst of derisive laughter from the others at the table. I had finally had enough of Ms Nancy's superior mocking attitude toward Annie—it was long overdue.

Annie, always kind and gracious, sometimes to a fault, is oblivious to the growing dark undercurrent between Nancy and I, or the fact that maybe Nancy has more than friendship in mind with her. With that, Nancy and her entourage of Hubbard acolytes, thankfully bid a frosty goodbye, leaving just Annie and I at the table.

"*Bien sur...ma cherie!* Did you find those guys that caused the accident?" Annie asks turning around to face me.

"Yea...the cops have 'em now. I may have to go down to the PD later this evening to swear out a complaint. But first, I could sure use a double Johnny Walker...then a nice long hot Jacuzzi soak with my baby. So much for a relaxing day on the mountain. What's the status on the little Alessandro girl?" I ask.

"I sat with her and her aunt for about 15 minutes...just held her, trying to keep her warm...making small talk to try to keep her mind off the obvious. Still no feeling below the waist. Then the medi-vac helicopter showed up and evacuated her and her aunt down to Sacramento. Turns out that it's the same Alessandro...the granddaughter of the former Mayor of San Francisco," she says, then finishing off her wine, and standing up to face me with her eyes tearing up.

"Yea...it's a tough one. But even with those drunken morons bouncing the chairs on the lift up and down, that cable *never* should

have derailed from the pulley. Ridge Chair's one of the oldest lifts on the mountain...probably should have been replaced or the very least retro-fitted years ago. This will *not* be cheap for Paradise Valley. With Mayor Alessandro's legal connections...they'll go all-in for Paradise's deep pockets. This one could drag on for years. Costing cubic bucks just for defense costs," I say, automatically lapsing into investigation mode while hugging her. When you've been doing investigation work as long as I have, sorta like a cop, sometimes it's hard to turn it off.

"Oh, Mickey...she's such a sweet, beautiful little girl. So brave. I promised to stay in touch with her. How could this happen?" she says, wrapping her arms around me, holding tightly.

"College kids. Six of 'em...they were drunk. Been drinkin' all day. Not just the lives of the injured, little Michela Alessandro and the others, but those college kids...their lives are changed...forever. God...I am *so* tired of seeing people's lives ruined...pointlessly injured, or killed by drunks. Not the least bit sorry to be leaving the business.

It's always the same. When you post-accident interview a drunk driver, always filled with profound remorse. *I've done it so many times before...I didn't think it could happen to me.* But all the remorse in the world, tragically can't turn back the clock, or bring back someone's innocent son or daughter...mother or father. No redo's allowed in history. Hey...let's get the hell outta here," I say, not at all liking the sound of my own dark rant, suddenly feeling overcome with a bone deep sense of sadness for little Michela Alessandro.

Yes...it's definitely time for a change.

By the second week, with a lot of extra effort, I manage to get all the preliminary field work done on the claims resulting from the Great Snowstorm of '82. The number of claims from collapse of weight of ice and snow and frozen plumbing water damage is considerable, many a total loss, especially to unoccupied vacation homes with no power or heat. I work long into the nights, preparing reports, including photos. I place an outbound message on my answering machine of the business line announcing that I have officially closed down the investigation business.

The first week in February I call Marla Dyson at ACT Inc.

"Hi Marla...Mick Kozlov here. How are ya?" I ask.

"I'm well...ready to go to work, *big boy?*" She replies. No small talk.

"Sure. I've cleared up everything on my end. Where do we go from here?" I ask.

"I probably won't be able to get up to Tahoe, until the beginning of next week...looking at my calendar, I could probably fly in next Sunday afternoon...into Reno, rent a car, so we can get an early start on Monday morning. In the meantime, why don't you research some office

space, and staffing for the Regional Office. We figure one secretary slash phone person, and one admin assistant. Okay?" she says.

"That'll work okay for me. You gotta budget for the rental and staffing?" I ask.

"Yea...I'll send it out to you today with our standard corporate lease agreement which you can present to the landlord if you find something that seems workable. We'd prefer to have the operation working out of the state of Nevada, for obvious tax and regulatory reasons. Can you set up a meeting with the Mayor and City Manager of South Lake Tahoe for next week?" she says. All business. Good.

"Okay. I'll get started on that. See ya in about a week. Travel safe. Bye Marla," I say hanging up.

By Friday, I've located a few candidates for office rental, tender a specimen copy of the corporate lease—they all promise to get back to me by next week.

- Chapter 23 -

On Sunday evening, Marla Dyson calls to inform me she has checked into the Sahara Tahoe Hotel Casino. We chat briefly, and I agree to meet her for breakfast 9 AM Monday morning at her hotel. I walk in to the pancake house at Sahara Tahoe, and find Marla already seated at a four-top table with an orange juice and cup of coffee, with some file folders spread out over the table. She's dressed in business suit with tasteful make-up, and simple pearl studded earrings, projecting the confident, consummate executive persona. I have to admit, she's even more beautiful even in the morning light, than I had remembered her from that night in Denver.

"Good morning Marla," I say as I pull out a chair and sit down.

"Good morning Mick...coffee?" she says distractedly looking down at an open folder, then she looks up briefly, inscrutably, and motions to the waitress to bring coffee and menus.

"The accommodations okay?" I say finally making eye contact with her, for few searching seconds. She looks unsettled, like she's trying to bluff herself out of an uncomfortable situation with overplayed indifference.

"Yeah fine. And just how are you?" she asks as an afterthought.

"I'm well...way past peachy," I say smiling brightly, which disarms her somewhat, finally bringing a reluctant smile to her super serious face. Two words immediately come to mind, to describe Marla Dyson...*in-tense*. So this is a preview of coming attractions—the atmosphere dripping with sexual tension.

"We set up for a meet with the Mayor and City Manager this week?" she asks still rapidly thumbing through pages, trying desperately to look the efficient driven professional in control of the situation.

"Yeah...Tuesday...for lunch at Carlos Murphy's. I've got a private room reserved, in case there's some raised voices. I've also included the City Attorney, who will be drafting the enabling ordinance legislation and a complete novation of the franchise agreement. They intend to put the franchise out to Request for Proposals, to other big players on the playground...like TCI and Times Warner...to put some heat on ACT. We can get into the personalities of the main players later, but don't be surprised if we don't receive the warmest of receptions. At the moment they are not particularly happy with ACT. " I say matter-of-factly, sipping my coffee, then leaning back in my chair. Mr Cool.

"I'm not surprised they want to RFP...after we basically fumbled the ball, then kicked it more than a few times, trying to pick it up...not just here but everywhere else. So I'm used to that. That's what you're for,

Mr Personality. Time to earn your money, big boy," she says regaining her stride, now that there is business on the table—a familiar and safe territory in which she is good...very good at what she does.

"Got it...it's game time," I say, feigning my most serious exaggerated game face. "This a good time to sketch out the political landscape...get some background on the local players?" I ask.

"Yea...good a time as any. Sketch away sport," Marla says, reluctantly smiling, while folding over to a clean piece of paper on her yellow legal pad, her pen poised.

"Okay. Starting at the top of the food chain, with the Mayor. Donnie Trent...that's, *it's not Donald...it's Donnie*. Been in Tahoe for over 20 years...was a Blackjack dealer at Harrah's for over ten years. He's early forty-ish, with three inch cheater heels, flashy...lots of gold...rope chains and rings...silk shirts and black slacks...by looks of 'em, at least custom tailored. The John Re-Volta genre. Can smell 'em comin' a block away...always reeks of *au courant* cologne. Drives a 1980 Red Ferrari GTSi...probably 30 Gs new.

Fancy's himself a real ladies man...seriously coiffed...never a *Brylcreamed* hair out of place. A Latin lover type with some Hispanic blood somewhere. A real charmer who likes to show-off his whiter-than-white capped teeth...smile-on-demand. Got an air of sleaze about him. He oozes, more than walks into a room.

He and *esposa numero tres* took in a foster child, a girl, into the home about 10 years ago. He recently airmailed the third wifey, got a divorce and took the obligatory middle-aged-crazy arm piece upgrade. Married the foster kid, a real looker...who was 18 at the time, about 20 years Donnie's junior. He's a mover and a shaker in local politics and apparently needed a trophy wife to complete the package. Nobody's quite sure exactly what Donnie does do...to support his lavish life style. His rezy says he serves as a political consultant on matters of real estate development, but lists no clients.

Marla, he's nobody's fool. Street smart with a lot of political savvy...and cunning. The word on the street is...don't underestimate him. Very articulate, and with his casino roots, because the town is loaded with casino workers, he's well-liked and trusted by the community. He always wins re-election by a wide margin...although his fellow city councilmen, in private refer to him rather derisively. Oh...and he's an elder in the local LDS church. A walkin' talkin' contradiction, uh...*oxy-mormon*...if you will. Sorry." I say.

"Has he expressed any sentiment about the Franchise renewal, or ACT...one way of the other? About working with us?" she asks.

I answer by wetting my index finger on my right hand and holding it up into the air...checking for wind direction.

"The guy's the consummate chameleon...or he wouldn't have survived this long."

"Can we get him to listen to what we can do for the City...and him personally?" she asks.

"Yea...but again, he's smart and cagey. My sense of him is it'll have to be a slow play, subtle and nuanced, build trust or you'll scare him off. There's five City Councilmen including the Mayor...four men...and one woman...so it's basic arithmetic, gettin' to three is the name of the game."

"Got it. Who's next?"

"City Manager Robert...*Bob* Martel. Probably in his early late 40s to early 50s. A good guy. It's an appointed position. He runs the City, and serves at the pleasure of the City Council. He's been doing it for about 8 years. A decent guy with a family...with two sons who play high school football, benefited directly from Sport-athon '81. Might be a good idea to get Rhino Rudawski involved. He and Martel seem to have established a friendship spawned from Sport-athon.

I think he appreciates what we did for the town. We have a good working relationship. So...he and the City Attorney will make recommendations to the council, including the franchise renewal, which they usually follow, so we've got to sell them on the notion that we give a shit about the community, about being more than just some big carpet-bag corporation. Me livin' here for a while now...probably couldn't *hoit*.

His admin assistant, Jane *Janie* Costanza, pretty much runs the day to day, with Janie doing the heavy lifting, like handling complaints from cable subscribers about issues of poor service, etcetera. She's pretty burned-out with us, because of the amount of time dealing with cable complaints, which takes up way too much of her time. She will be key, in getting somewhere with the City Manager. She's in her early thirties, a little on the plump side, but attractive, sweet and kind, with a few kids. A hard workin' honest gal, a supermom, who I perceive to be reasonable...and fair...but at the moment, would like to see ACT go away. I'll deal with her...and Bob Martel," I say.

"Okay...next," Marla says.

"City Attorney David *Dave* Chandler. Also in his early thirties. Been City Attorney for about 5 years. Bright...conscientious...and very serious about his job. I like him, because he's direct and pretty much guileless. He'll always be square with ya...and ya never have to guess what he's thinking, so he's not much of a poker player. He's married—no kids, a dedicated public servant.

He's in the process of drafting two ordinances. The Enabling Ordinance, and the actual Franchise Agreement. He's getting a lot of help from the League of California Cities, and the California Cable TV Association, in the form of sample legislation that's already been ratified by other municipalities with the same or similar size and demographics.

He'll then tweak them for a better fit for South Lake Tahoe. I'll deal with him as well, in pre-negotiating the preliminary drafts. So, I'll need a sample draft of a franchise agreement from ACT, which will lay

out the technical specs for the proposed system...channel capacity and offerings...and also the PEG channels, which they are very interested in," I say.

"Yea...I'll get that over to ya first thing when I return to Denver on Thursday. There are some unique challenges up here in the mountains with bandwidth capacity of the system, number of channels, broadcast channel availability through microwave only, etcetera. I'll have my engineer guy, get a hold of you and give ya a crash course on some of the things that ACT can...and cannot...or will not, be done up here. The number of, and channel positioning of Public Educational and Government access channels will be a sticking point for us," she says.

"Okay...here's a list of all the players, including the other four City Council members, with addresses and approximate age with their employer or DBA if self-employed, if you want to do background...or Dunn and Bradstreet 'em. Never can tell what little nuggets from people's past might turn up, including financial problems, past or present. Leverage issues. Anything else you want to cover this morning?" I ask sliding the folded list over to her.

"Good work, Mick. Nope...we're good for today. I've got some serious catch-up to do the rest of today. So...we've got about 16 months before the current franchise agreement matures. Do you have a tentative timetable when you think we can get this in front of the City Council for an up or down vote?" Marla asks.

"We should have all the details fleshed out, no later than a year from now. Figure another 4 months of negotiation to get us across the finish line, hopefully with the first vote. In the meantime...lots to do."

"Okay. How about I buy you dinner tonight?" she asks with an uncharacteristic tentative tone.

"Sure...mind if I bring a friend, to keep us from an all-work and no-play dinner conversation. Probably time you met Annette Trudeau," I say.

"Okay. Sure...bring your uh...*friend*. Any recommendations for dinner?" she asks with a fleeting mixed look of surprise and disappointment.

"How about the five-star Four Seasons, at the very top of Harrah's. A spectacular commanding view of the whole Tahoe valley, including the lake. I'll make the reservations. Shall we say 8 PM?"

"That works...especially looking forward to meeting *the little lady*," she says with no small twinge of sarcasm. Hmm...maybe this is *not* one of my better ideas.

After dinner, driving home, Annie's unusually quiet and seemingly preoccupied.

"What's up, Annie...you seem a little down?" I ask.

"Oh...*nothing*..."she says.

Now when a woman answers that question with, *Oh...nothing*...it means anything but *nothing*.

"Okay...let's have it, baby. What's going on?" I say.

"It's just that...okay. Surely you must know...that woman, Marla has got the hots for you big time. The whole evening...was like I never even existed. Honestly, I think if I had gotten up to leave...neither she...or you would have even noticed. How do you feel about her, Mick...be honest. Okay?" she says

"Annie...Marla's married to her career. She's used to getting what she wants. But I've already made it clear to her, that I'm not available. If I wanted to be with her...do you think I would have invited you to dinner? I wanted her to understand that you are my lady...that I love you...and that you are my *one*. Yes, she was...unforgivably impolite and dismissive toward you, but that's more of a comment on her character, than yours. You showed your class and character tonight, which I find *very* sexy indeed. I can't wait to get you home to show you my uh...appreciation," I say smiling placing my hand on hers, now looking over at her.

Annie then slides closer to me, and puts her head on my shoulder.

"That's what I wanted...and needed to hear, baby. Thank you," she coos.

- Chapter 24 -

I am awakened to the sound of the phone by the bed, rudely ringing insistently. Prying open one eye, I take a peek at the flashing red numerals on the night stand, next to the phone. 3:12 AM.

"Hello."

"Mick this Nancy...sorry to call you at this time of night...but there's a family emergency...for Annie. Can I talk to her...now!? It's really important!" she says, her rapid panting conveying a sense of urgency. By now Annie is stirring, but still half asleep.

"What is it Mick?" she asks still half-asleep.

"It's Nancy...for you. Something about a family emergency, here," I say handing her the phone.

"Nancy? What's wrong?" Annie says.

After a few seconds of voice from the other end, Annie says, *"Mon dieu! Siegy...dead? Hold on...I'm going to get on the other phone upstairs. Are you at home? No? Probably tapped? Mon Dieu! Okay...give me the number...got it. I'll call you right back,"* she says and hangs up.

"What's up Annie?" I ask.

"Mick baby...I can't talk about it right now. I have to call Nancy right back! I'll do it from upstairs uh...so you can go back to sleep," she says breathlessly, her face even in the subdued light of the dark bedroom seems highly stressed.

"I overheard you say...*Siegy's dead*. What's going on?" I ask.

"I'll have to tell you later. Please Mick. I have to call her right back. Now!" she says, then jumps out of bed, slips on a night coat, and races upstairs.

Less than a minute later, I hear Annie on the phone upstairs, talking hysterically.

I quietly insert a nail file from the night stand, in between the cradle and the receiver, leaving the button depressed. I put the receiver up to my ear, placing my hand over the mouth piece of the receiver and slowly release the button, so as not to make audible click.

"Nancy...*what happened?*" she cries.

"They don't know yet. Last night...they found Siegy's body curled up in the trunk of his Mercedes...dead, for at least 2 days...a parking lot...SFO, San Francisco Airport. He'd been shot in the back of head...several times," she cries.

"How do you know this!?" she yells.

"I just got off the phone with Donnie. He was tipped off by somebody at South Lake Tahoe PD," she says.

"Oh shit!. What does Donnie think happened?" she says.

"He said, 'knowing Siegy'...he thinks that Siegy tried to screw somebody over in the supply chain. Got greedy. He thinks that because he thought he was so smart that he could get way with it. Donnie thinks that he just a got a little too cute...once too often," she says.

"What does Donnie think we should do now?" she says.

"He thinks we should just sit tight...and he said do not to talk to anyone about this. That includes Mick. Period. I call ya later...after I know more. Annie...I'm really scared," Nancy says sobbing.

Click.

I hang up the phone and turn on the night light in the bedroom. About a minute later, Annie comes back down in the bedroom, obviously she's been crying. She sits on her side of the bed with her legs hanging over the side, not saying a word just sobbing.

Tapping her on the shoulder, "Annie...what's going on?"

"Oh Mick...I don't know what to say. Everything is falling apart. I just can't..." she says trailing off.

"What's this about Siegy? Annie...I overheard the conversation on the phone. I'm sorry...but I was concerned for your welfare. I heard the name Donnie mentioned. The only Donnie I know is Donnie Trent, the Mayor. Is it Trent? If that's so, what's he got to do with you...and what did Siegy have to do with you, and Nancy...and Donnie?" I ask calmly, quietly.

Annie throws her legs on to the bed, and looks over at me with a forlorn expression.

"Mick, I guess we need to have a talk..." she says with great resignation.

I sit up and put my hand on hers resting on her leg.

"Okay...shoot. But please begin at the beginning. Okay?" I say.

"Okay, Mick...okay. From the beginning. Mick that night we met...that you saved my life, up on Emerald Bay highway, I wasn't just some innocent dupe, running errands for Siegy. I knew what was in that package. I'm going to have to trust you with the rest of this story. That story I told you at the hospital was a well-rehearsed prefabricated cover story...in case I...I ever got busted. I'm so sorry. I can't live this lie any longer." *And the Oscar for Best Performance by an actress in a dramatic leading role goes to...Annette Trudeau...*

"Go ahead...what you tell me will be in strict confidence," I say.

"Mick... Siegy, Nancy and I, and Donnie Trent...were involved in the sale of drugs. It started out as a small time operation, but the demand became so great and the money so good, that it just kept growing and growing until Siegy and Donnie, begin selling to other local dealers. Donnie had some connections with the drug cartels in Mexico. He was having the cocaine brought up, then he and Siegy were cutting it down and selling to other dealers in the area," she says.

"But...what did you have to do with all this, Annie?" I ask.

"Both Nancy and I were mainly couriers. Because we were women Donnie and Siegy thought we'd draw less suspicion. So we made pick-ups and deliveries...drugs...and money. Huge amounts of cash. Like the one I made that night in Tahoe City. Not only was there drugs in the trunk of my car that night, but also over one hundred thousand dollars...in cash," she says.

"But why, Annie...why would you allow yourself to get mixed up in something like this? You make enough money at Sahara, don't you?" I ask.

"Mick...now comes the tough part. I'm not the kind caring person you may think I am. Mickey remember when I told you that in college, some of us went out in to the dessert and dropped some peyote? Well...that's not all that happened. I got high and had sex with one of the guys...a professor from Long Beach State. He called himself a Shaman...and that having sex with him would be a trans-formative experience. It was trans-formative alright...I got pregnant. I didn't know what to do. I wanted to have an abortion, but when I told my mother and father that I was pregnant...they wouldn't hear of it. Being devout Catholics they said I would burn in eternal hell-fire if I aborted the baby. They convinced me to bring the baby to term...that they would raise the child as their own. But...when I had the baby, she had some problems.

She had some kind of congenital brain defect. We don't know if it was related to the use of the hallucinogenic drugs...or not. Anyway...her name is Sarah. She's now going on seven. She was diagnosed with cerebral palsy...about 5 years ago. She requires constant care...which is very expensive. There was no medical insurance...she's not insurable, so my parents had to put her on Social Security Disability. But the costs per month...just for medication and other things, out of pocket is sometimes several thousand dollars a month," Annie says.

"I'm so sorry Annie...please go on," I say, gripping her hand.

"Well...Mom and Dad wanted me to have a life. I was so young...they insisted that I try to move on...that they would take care of her. This was before she was diagnosed with CP. So after dropping out of college...I came up here. Twice a year I go down to Long Beach to visit...and to see Sarah. She does not know I'm her mother. She's been told that I'm one of her sisters.

Anyway...so I needed some money...big money to be able to send down to Mom and Dad every month. Just about the time Sarah was diagnosed with CP, I had met Siegy through skiing. We became friends...then lovers. By the time you and I met we had evolved into just business associates. Anyway when we had first met, I had told him about my situation, he connected me with Nancy...and I moved in with her. He told me Nancy was working with he and Donnie for the past two years. So I begin working with them. The money was good...so that I could send two...sometimes three thousand a month down to Mom and

Dad. They just thought I had a great paying job at the Casino. I never corrected that impression.

The money Siegy, Donnie, Nancy and I were making was obscene. Siegy bragged to me he had several hundred thousand dollars buried in his back yard...with money in several safe deposit boxes under various alias names in banks. A lot of the money, was laundered through the Church of Scientology...disguised as contributions. In Donnie's case...the local Mormon Church. I keep at least forty thousand dollars cash hidden...here, in the garage, in coffee cans in my trunk along with some product...mostly coke," she says.

"Annie...I just don't know what to say...honestly. I am having a hard time wrapping my head around this," I say, shaking my head.

"Oh Mick...I'm so sorry. But I feel such a sense of relief that you know...it was killing me inside...not telling you. I'll understand if this could mean the end for us...I...I just..." she says crying, throwing her arms around me with her face buried in my chest.

The phone begins to ring again. Numb from the shock of these latest revelations about Annie's secret life, I almost decide not to answer it. It rings maybe 10 times before I pick it up. I look at the clock...it's now 5:25 AM.

"Hello," I say.

"Don't talk...just listen. If you think you know who this is, DO NOT mention the name," the unidentified caller says ominously with a voice disguise mechanism on the line.

"Okay...do you think this line is being tapped?" I say.

"Don't think so...probably couldn't get a warrant based on insufficient evidence...yet. Just the same...tell your friend not to take any chances.

By now, you probably know that Siegy Becker was found dead in the trunk of his car at SFO. Becker, and Donnie Trent have been under investigation by the joint task force on drugs...Operation Deep Snow...for over a year...by the Feds, El Dorado County Sheriffs and South Lake Tahoe PD. The death of Becker, has precipitated the Feds to round everyone up. Your girlfriend...Annette Trudeau has been implicated through her prior association with Becker and Nancy Howard. They've already got sworn arrest and search warrants out for, Trent and his wife, and Nancy Howard...and a search warrant for Siegried Becker's house...and your house since she is apparently living with you for the last several months. She...and you...have been under constant surveillance, since she moved in. They will be serving the search warrant on your house this morning by dawn, hoping to catch you unawares. This conversation never happened," the voice says.

Click.

I hang up the phone...incredulous. Man...what the hell have I got myself into here? I look at Annie, then back at the phone...back at Annie. One thing is very clear...I must make an immediate decision here.

Not having the luxury of time to logically think this through...all my options at this point look pretty lousy. Do I allow the woman that I thought I knew...that I thought I love...go to jail? Would the Feds even believe me if I try to plead ignorance, *gee I had no idea my girlfriend, who's been living here for over 6 months was involved in drugs, let alone dealin'*. So how would you explain the 40K stashed in your house? Yeah...right. The ultimate CLE for MAK uh...Career Limiting Event.

It's now about 5:30 AM...the law is probably already on their way to serve the search warrant by first light...which gives me maybe 20 minutes to deal with this. Annie looks at me. My face must be registering great fear and anxiety...and indecision. "Mick...what is it? Who was that!?" she screams.

"Get dressed...now! But leave your robe and pajamas on the bed. Don't do anything with your hair...just put your jeans and boots on. I'll explain as we're getting dressed," I say.

"But Mick...I don't..."

"Just do it! We don't have any time to talk about it!" I say.

As Annie and I are slipping on our jeans, parkas and boots I say, "Okay...Annie, the law is coming to execute a search warrant...here, based on your connection to Siegy. Someone...a friend in law enforcement...don't ask who, just tipped me off. From the phone conversation, I don't think they have an arrest warrant for you...or me...for that matter...yet! That probably means that they don't have sufficient grounds for a judge to grant an arrest warrant...so they'll be on a fishing expedition looking for something suspicious that will rise to the level of probable cause for an arrest. So listen very carefully. First thing to remember is to stay calm. Now...show me where you've stashed the cash and the drugs...everywhere and anywhere, around the house. We don't have much time...we've got to get everything that could possibly be considered incriminating out of the house...now!" I say trying desperately to remain calm myself.

Annie leads the way out to the garage, where she has a large steamer trunk. She unlocks and opens it. Inside there are two large Yuban coffee cans green of course, with black plastic covers. She opens one coffee can, and reaches inside to pull out several wads of cash. Four bundles of 10 *Large* each, with a thick blue rubber band, and with a piece of paper on each...10K. *Jezus...40K might be a hard-sell as tips and gratuities Ya think?*

"Is that *all* the cash...everywhere around the house? Anything over a hundred bucks in the rest of the house?" I ask.

"No...that's it," she says.

"Okay...what about the drugs. Where are they? All of them...including your personal stash...*any and all drugs*. Coke...pills?" I say.

She opens the second coffee can. Inside are 10 or 12 baggies of white powder...and several baggies of pills...judging by the

color...probably 'ludes. Enough to probably get a minimum of 15 years, a criminal enterprise for distribution of drugs. *Shit*...do I attempt to stash the drugs and maybe get busted, in itself a probable admission of guilt...or do I allow Annie to go down. Like I said, lousy options. I realize that either way I have to be fully committed to that course of action. I pause for a moment and gaze into Annie's eyes. She is looking back at me searchingly with tear-filled eyes, realizing that at this point that I am deeply conflicted. *Ya think?* I reflect on this for maybe ten seconds. Finally,"Okay...show time, baby. Anymore...*anywhere?*" I ask

With an immense sigh of relief, she shakes her head.

"Wait here...I'll be right back! Do not touch the contents of the can with drugs!" I say.

My mind is racing...the stress and pressure of the moment is not allowing my mind to function clearly. I run to the living room...and stop myself. I close my eyes and take some long slow deep breaths. Now what?

I'm replaying the phone conversation. Are Annie...and I...going to be caught up in the net of Operation Deep Snow? *Je-zus*...what a nightmare, trapped in a third-rate Stephen King pastiche.

Then...it comes to me. *Deep Snow*. Snow of course is the street name for cocaine. The perfect irony.

I run downstairs into the bedroom and get 4 pairs of long white ski socks. I then run back upstairs to the kitchen, where I keep a big jar full of quarters and loose change. I grab a handful of quarters, and drop them into the bottom of each double sock, so that each sock now weighs about a pound. Then I get four large plastic ziploc bags that can hold up to a quart. I run into the garage. It's now just starting to get light...we don't have much time.

Annie is sitting on the edge of the trunk...in a daze.

"Annie...snap out it!" I yell.

She comes to life...like I say, they make 'em pretty plucky in Northern Maine.

"Okay. Here's what we're going to do. I've got four socks. First I want you to pick up the drugs using the plastic bags to handle them...do not make direct contact with the coke. Drop them into the large plastic ziploc bags, then into the two socks. Then we'll do the same with the cash. Got it?" I ask

"Oh Mick...are you sure you want to do this?" she cries.

"Not the best time for a discussion on morals...or legalities. Very limited options here...we'll deal with the *you and me of this later*...if we don't get busted big time," I say.

She nods her head.

I tie the ends of all four of the long ski socks into a knot, and pull them very tight, with drugs in two them, and money in the other two. I find a black sharpie felt pen in a garage junk drawer, and mark the two socks with drugs with a big "D", the money socks with a big "M".

"While I'm dealing with the socks...take the coffee cans up to the kitchen, and wash them out with hot soapy water...and dry them off. Then pour the coffee out the cans in the pantry into the two coffee cans that were in the trunk, and shake them up...but good. Toss the empty pantry cans in to the trash. Then wash your hands thoroughly with hot soapy water...and put on some of that smelly moisturizer cream," I say.

Carrying all four socks, I run in through the front door into the living room, through to the patio door, on to the snow laden deck at the rear of the house. Because the house is built on a steep slope, it's about 30 feet down below to ground level. I sense Annie watching...mystified, but I do not have time to explain.

Nestled in a stand of Tamarack pine, I spot a large dead old growth cedar snaggle tree, which will make a distinct landmark, maybe thirty yards from the deck. It has long since died from a fire maybe 50 years ago.

I take the first sock and swing it around my head like a gaucho's bolo, and release it in the direction of the snaggle. The educational value of the fledgling PBS TV was never better demonstrated...or appreciated. *Nova—The Life of the Gaucho*. They'll get an unusually generous three-figure donation from *moi* on their next beg-athon fundraiser assuming I'm not doing two-figures...in Folsom.

It lands in the still unmelted, untracked deep snow about 10 feet from the base of the tree; the heavy weight of the quarters in the bottom of the sock causes it to totally disappear leaving only a small hole much the size of a large fallen pine cone.

I do that with each sock, until all four socks are now deeply embedded in the soft powdery snow...with no tale-tell foot prints in the snow leading to them. Frankly I'm a little pleased with myself, from maybe 100 feet, a nice little grouping of no more than 10 feet. Hmm...*I still got it baby. If Argentina doesn't have an extradition treaty with the US, maybe I'm not too old to be a gaucho. Or not.*

I then look at Annie, and say, "Now...go downstairs...put on your pajamas and get in bed. I'll be along as soon as I shovel off this deck so there are no recent foot prints," I say.

Shoveling furiously, it takes me about 5 minutes to get the deck cleared. I go inside and catch the kitchen clock on the wall. 5:56 AM. It is now starting to get light outside. I wash my hands...twice in hot soapy water and generously apply scented moisturizer—lilacs.

I run down stairs, take off my clothes, and grab both of our clothes and throw them in the dirty laundry...since they would be warm from us having worn them.

I root around my dresser and finally find my namesake pajamas...ubiquitously studded with little Mickey Mouse cartoons, along with a pair of Mouseketeer ears...opting for the more whimsical non-Drag Kingpin look.

"Two obvious?" I say to Annie, holding the Mouseketeer ears, twirling around like a runway model finishing with a fetching pose. Annie's brief smile gives a much needed light moment of relief from the heaviness of the situation.

"It works...if you don't over-accessorize. Lose the ears."

I hop into bed—pulling Annie close to me—I put my arms around her...and we wait.

"When they come...just act like we've been awakened out of a deep sleep. Drowsy...like you're not quite awake yet. And don't volunteer any answers. If they ask you any questions, just be direct, with a yes...or no. Okay? Remember, just act natural," I say carefully adjusting the Mouseketeer ears on my head. It does us both some good to hear her hearty laugh.

Amidst the cloying scent of lilacs...*in February*, she nestles her head against my chest and in complete silence...we wait.

We do not have to wait long...but it seems an eternity. In less than ten minutes, there's hard pounding on the door with loud commotion and yelling, "This is Federal Agents with the Drug Enforcement Agency! We are here to execute a search warrant. If you do not open the door immediately we will use force to gain access!" he yells.

"Annie...stay here...until I call you. Remember you were asleep," I say

She nods.

I run upstairs, sans ears, put on my best sleepy face, muss up my morning hair, and open the door.

"What's this all about officers?" I say sleepily, deadpanning in my Mickster pajamas—this being maybe the second time I've worn them in ten years. The other time a Halloween costume party.

"Are you Michaelangelo Kozlov!?" yells the big burly guy with a shaved head, the large white DEA letters emblazoned across the chest and back of his black bullet-proof vest.

"Yes...I am. Why? Is this like some kind of a prank? A Candid Camera...gotcha kinda deal?" I say.

"This is a search warrant...which gives us the authority to search the premises in its *en-tirety*...including any outbuildings, garage, vehicles, closets, personal effects...everywhere and anywhere. Do you understand?" he says gruffly, flapping the warrant in my face.

"So this isn't about those unpaid parking tickets, then?" I say.

"I repeat...are you willing to peacefully comply with this court order, smart ass?"

"I guess I don't have much choice. What's this is all about. Why are you here?" I ask with what I think is just the right amount of surprise and indignation appropriate for someone who has just been awakened out of a deep sleep...in Mickey Mouse pajamas.

"We are looking for evidence of narcotics...for use and or sale...and any associated contraband. Give me the keys to any vehicle you or Trudeau own. Now!" he yells, giving me a head to toe, checking out my pajamas—stifling a snicker.

"What? You were expecting Hugh Hefner in silk? There must be some mistake...let me see that warrant!" I say.

The officer hands me the warrant, then pushes past me with several other officers in tow. They immediately start tearing the house apart. The other four officers are yelling, like they talking over a 737 jet taking off. All these guys seem to have one volume level...like everyone they encounter is totally deaf. Probably an effective intimidation tactic.

"I'll check the vehicles...you check the kitchen and pantry. Keys?" one yells at me.

I walk over to the where keys to the vehicles are hanging in the kitchen, then toss both sets more at him with some heat. "Catch."

"Is there an Annette Trudeau on the premises here?" the lead no-neck, Officer Loud yells.

"Yea...she's downstairs still asleep...or was until all this ruckus," I say, which I think is a nice touch...but I remind myself to be careful not to be too cute...to overplay my hand.

"Have Annette Trudeau come upstairs. Now!" he yells.

I yell downstairs, "Annie...honey, come upstairs...*now puleeze!* There's some nice policemen here who want to have a look...inside your drawers."

About a minute later, Annie appears at the top of the stairs from the master bedroom below in her pajamas, house coat and pink fuzzy slippers.

"I don't understand. What's going on, Mick?" she says, yawning and scratching with her hair, a perfect disheveled mess. *Nice touch baby...well played...*with a grudging admiration for her consummate ability to deceive...*moi* in particular.

The next officer through the door has got a drug sniffing German Shepard on a leash. He unleashes him, and the dog starts sniffing everything, up and down our legs including mine and Annie's hands. He gets no hit...and continues on through the rest of the house. Next the handler takes the dog over to the trash...then the pantry and finally the refrigerator, opening and inspecting everything, including in the freezer. *Mental note...if I survive this...never...ever hide anything in the refrigerator, that you don't want to found.*

The Feds are here for over 4 hours. They literally tear the place apart, but find nothing. They go out on to the deck and look down below with binoculars. They never go down to the rear of the lot, because the snow is still 4-5 feet deep and untracked.

The Feds are not happy, but do not suspect that we were tipped off. They drive off pissed, but empty handed. It takes about an hour for

my pulse rate to return to normal and another two hours to put the house back in some kind of order.

The following day the town is all abuzz. The headline in the morning Tahoe Daily Tribune reads:

South Lake Tahoe Mayor Donnie Trent, 46 and his wife, Sarah Trent 22, arrested as Drug Kingpins
SOUTH LAKE TAHOE — Undercover federal agents using wiretaps, videotapes and paid informants gained entry into an elaborate, statewide drug distribution and money-laundering network that included South Lake Tahoe Mayor Donnie Trent and his wife, Sarah, according to court documents made available Tuesday.

Federal agents decided to close down the sting operation and make arrests after one of the prime suspects, local freestyle ski celebrity Siegfried Becker, 28 was found murdered in the trunk of his late model Mercedes at San Francisco International Airport just three days before.

The detailed court filings—affidavits used to support the multiple arrests—provide an insight into Trent and the workings of illicit drug trade centered in the resort communities around Lake Tahoe, with money and cocaine being shuttled among suppliers and dealers in Orange County, Palm Springs and San Diego.

The accusations about the Trent's have stunned residents of the bustling Lake Tahoe resort city where Trent presided as mayor. There had been whispering about his life style—about the source of his income, his Red Ferrari and fast motorcycles and his marriage to his 22-year-old former foster child. But few suspected that the 46-year-old part-time politician was caught up in the shadowy underworld of cocaine trafficking, as he is described in the court documents.

"He's a flamboyant personality. A loner," said Amy Burton, the mayor pro tem of South Lake Tahoe. "I don't know who his friends are. He's somewhat of an enigma."

An elaborate undercover operation—code-named "Deep Snow"—led to the arrest in the early morning hours, of the Trent's and 17 others, including a South Lake Tahoe casino employee, Nancy Howard.

Criminal complaints have also been filed against three other

suspects who remain at large after a 20-month investigation conducted by the FBI, the Internal Revenue Service, the Drug Enforcement Administration, U.S. Customs, South Lake Tahoe police and El Dorado County Sheriffs. One of the suspects is Enrique 'Ricky' Gomez, who allegedly acted as Donnie Trent's bodyguard and partner in laundering \$655,000 in "drug money" monitored and video taped by undercover agents. Trent is a prime suspect in the murder of Siegfried Becker. Ballistic tests are pending on Trent's handgun.

Trent bragged to undercover IRS and FBI agents that "he had a method to launder money out of the country that left no paper trail and no tax liability and that the system had been in place for 20 years," according to one affidavit.

At times packing a silver Smith & Wesson semiautomatic pistol in his briefcase, Trent picked up cash from bus stations in San Diego and again in Stateline, Nevada, in red canvas ski bags, according to the court papers. In one case, two other defendants were said in the documents to have personally transported \$250,000 in cash passed to them by Trent from Los Angeles to the island of Antigua.

For his trouble, Trent was paid \$48,500 in commissions. The court papers reveal a world of fast cars, private planes and weapons stashes. Always worried about detection, those accused of dealing drugs and moving their money into bank accounts are said to have gone to elaborate lengths to avoid being caught.

One of the defendants, Nancy Howard, allegedly a drug courier, was very active in the local Church of Scientology where money from the sale of drugs was purportedly laundered.

Earlier this month, Howard allegedly delivered a kilogram of cocaine, wrapped as a baby shower gift in paper with blue and pink lambs on it, to a government informant.

Wearing gray sweat shirts with "Sac Co. Prisoner" stenciled on the back, Donnie and Sarah Trent made a brief court appearance Tuesday. The two are charged with multiple counts of money laundering and distributing cocaine and pills.

The scheduled hearing was intended to determine what bail if any would be required to obtain their release. But attorneys for the Trent's asked for a delay until later in the week.

Trent's arrest surprised those who knew him in South Lake Tahoe, a resort community that still thinks of itself in many ways as a small town. Yet several of Trent's associates interviewed Tuesday conceded that they knew very little about the man who lived in a 'conspicuously large house for the neighborhood' near the Paradise Valley ski resort, not far from the state line casinos.

He is an elder in the local Church of Later Day Saints.

Annie and I appear to have escaped the long and wide net of the Feds...so far. It would also appear that I, Michaelangelo Kozlov also posses perhaps an innate, accomplished capacity for deception...the way I instinctively with great facility, without any conscience, eluded the efforts of the Feds to bust Annie...and don't forget...*moi*. Maybe there is such a thing as a natural born miscreant? Or maybe the larger question; is everyone to a different degree, if the stakes are high enough...capable of criminal behavior?

Hmm...maybe all off us...with varying levels of 'virtuosity', possess the potential...the guile, for consummate behavior of evading the law. If that's so, then ultimately, isn't my indignation aimed at Annie who found herself in a very difficult circumstance not of her own making, an act of sublime hypocrisy? I decide to sort all that out later.

It's a humbling...and yet exciting epiphany which helps to temporarily at least, assuage my disillusionment at being so easily deceived by Annie. I guess at some level, it's not the actual betrayal that is at the center of my outrage, but more the humiliation. The insult to my monstrous ego—the gullibility of having been so completely, so consummately duped.

But now there is the matter of Nancy Howard. Will she attempt to implicate...to rat-out Annette Trudeau to get a better plea deal? Perhaps implicate me, to vindictively repay me for my insults to her. Annie's forty-kay cash stash, just might come in handy for defense costs, insurance for Nancy Howard, to buy her silence...or not.

It is clear that at this point in time, the Feds probably have no direct evidence linking Annie to the drug operation or they would have showed up with an arrest warrant in hand along with the search warrant. But the Feds have vast and relatively unlimited legal resources...oh, and by the way...the law is happens to be on their side. So even if they can't directly prove she was involved, like the sting op with Nancy Howard, if they prosecute her...and or me, it will become a *very* long, arduous and *very* expensive nightmare just to defend ourselves from prosecution. Even if we 'win'...we still lose. Big time.

It's time to have 'the talk' with Annette Trudeau.

- Chapter 25 -

Buried deep in the back of the same issue of the *Tahoe Tribune* there is another AP article about the death of a prominent folksinger, a Native American activist:

Nora Feather, American Indian Folksinger dies in fiery automobile crash

The world of folk and social conscience music today is mourning the untimely, premature death of the beautiful Native American folksinger and songwriter, Nora Feather 33, who died in a fiery single vehicle accident on a deserted highway in New Mexico on the night of December 23, 1982.

It is believed that she had fallen asleep at the wheel while returning from a special benefit concert held to protest the encroachment on a sacred native American burial ground by a proposed petroleum pipeline by energy conglomerate National Petroleum Inc, NPI. The New Mexico Highway patrol related that there was evidence at the scene of alcohol being contributory to the cause of the accident...

Mick never gets to it, because of his fixation, like most folks in the community, with the front page local drug bust of the Drug Kingpin Mayor...and his own brush with the DEA.

- Chapter 26 -

After about week from the news of the local bombshell about the drug bust, things start to return to some semblance of normality in the community but sadly that cannot be said for *Chez MAK*.

One evening, as Annie and I are silently sitting by the fire, gazing at the burning logs for about an hour; she on one side, and me on the other of the sofa. Since that close brush with disaster with the DEA search warrant, conversation has been almost non-existent between us, and when there is any, it is strained and uncomfortable. We have our meals in silence, the food not tasting quite as good as cardboard. At night, we barely even brush against each other in bed.

"Annie...I think it's time we had a talk..." I say.

"Let me guess what it's about," Annie says with a sneer.

"Okay. Here's what's going on with me. I can't continue on with you as though nothing has happened. This situation...our estrangement, it's not healthy. So we need to start communicating, sooner than later," I say.

"Okay. You start..." she says defensively folding her arms in a somewhat haughty tone gazing at the fire avoiding eye contact with me.

"Alright then. Okay. I thought I knew you Annie. I thought that we had no secrets from one another...then this happened. To be honest, I'm pretty goddamned scared...and yes, angry that we're in this mess. We could have both been arrested...not just you...but me too. We're talking serious hard jail time here. So I want to hear it from you. Could you...do you think that you would ever be able to trust me again...if our situations were reversed?" I ask.

"Probably not, Mick. Is that what you want to hear?" she says.

"Annie...the first thing that needs to happen here if there's going to be any chance of us working through this is complete honesty. And that means no more defensive posturing. That goes for you...and me. Agreed?" I say staring at her, trying to get her eyes to look at me.

She finally turns and gazes at me with her tear filled eyes.

"Okay Mick...okay. So...where do we go from here. I'm so humiliated...so depressed...I honestly don't even know where to start saying how sorry I am...that I have caused you such misery," she says in a weary tone.

"Okay...that's not a bad place to start. Do you still love me Annie?" I ask.

"Of course I do Mick! I'm just so afraid that you've lost all respect for me...that you no longer love me. I'm just so sick with worry, that I've lost you. Can't eat...can't sleep...the best thing that's ever

happened to me...that I've blown it, and that I can never get it...or you back," she says now looking into my eyes searchingly, the firelight reflecting the glistening tears streaming down her cheeks.

I pat the seat beside me, "Come here...and let me hold you, baby," I say.

She immediately scoots over under my outstretched arm. I bring my arm down across her slender shoulders and draw her near me. As her now bony shoulders loosen, she sighs. She has lost considerable weight over the past week...probably from the stress and not eating.

"Annie...listen to me carefully. I still love you too. But these kinds of wounds don't heal themselves overnight. So...here's what I'm thinking we should do. If you stick around here...in Tahoe, Nancy has not implicated you...yet, or we would have heard something. But I think it might just be a matter of time before the Feds start thinking that there's some unfinished business with you...and me. So I think it might not be a bad idea if you were leave Tahoe...at least for a while, until things cool off. Could you go back down to L.A...to Long Beach, to your family, say, for several months?" I ask.

"Oh Mick...I couldn't bear not to be near you...but since we're being honest here, is this just a nice way of you telling me *you want* me to leave...to get out of your life?" she asks, sitting up staring, penetratingly into my eyes.

"Okay Annie...to be honest...yea, I guess so. I think we both need some time to process where we should go from here. That can't be done with us on top of each other. I want to stay in touch with you. I honestly think that after things with the Feds are more resolved, and we've had some time to reflect on the relationship, we'd have a much better chance at working things out," I say. Cold.

"Okay Mick...in fairness, I guess I can't say that I blame you. I think that it's probably best that I do leave...sooner rather than later. I'll call my Mom and Dad and tell them that I'll be coming down for an extended visit. I'll try to leave by the end of the week. Would that be soon enough for ya? And by the way...do you think it would be safe enough for me to go down and get the money and the drugs out of the snow?" she asks.

"There is no rush on your leaving...take as much time as you need to get out of town...but..."

"Hmm...straying from the script are we? Guess I blew it...you called my bluff. That was the part where you were *supposed* act crestfallen, fall on your knees, and beg me stay," she says facetiously batting her eyes. A good sign that she is starting to regain some of her plucky composure.

"Sorry baby...flunked high school drama class, 'cause I couldn't stick to the text.

But...it's a fact. The longer you are in the gun-sights of the Feds, I think the greater the risk is for prosecution...and not just for you. As far

as retrieving the money and the drugs are concerned, that should be the very last thing you would do...just before leaving town. Never know if they'll be back with another search warrant. By the way, I hope you will not be tempted to keep the drugs. There's enough there alone to send you to jail for a very long time. My advice...don't leave any finger prints on them. Put them in a plain paper bag and toss them in a dumpster someplace on the highway behind some 7-11 way out of town," I say. Mr Pragmatic.

"Okay then. Well I guess that it's settled. So much for lovey-dovey small talk, eh? Until I leave...probably best that I sleep on the sofa," she says icily standing up from the sofa now seemingly resolved to the abrupt *denouement*.

"Probably so Annie...probably so. I'm so very sorry Annie that this is happening to you...to us. But I do think it is best for you to get out of town for you...and honestly for me," I say.

"Yeah...right," she says.

I stand up and go to kiss her goodnight, but she averts her mouth, and I kiss her on the cheek. "Good night Annie. You'll find the bedding in the hall closet," I say coolly.

I watch her walk unsteadily toward the hall closet, obviously distraught and in shock from the sudden resolution. As I make my way downstairs to my empty bed, I'm filled with a profound sense of sadness.

Lying in the dark lonely solace of my bed, somehow forces me to reflect on what just happened with Annie. A profound, aching sense of loss and bewilderment, the likes of which I have not felt since Sora Eagle Feather walked out of my life. There seems to be a not-so-subtle pattern emerging here. Sora Eagle Feather...Annette Trudeau, just to name a few—a repeating Ophelia cycle. Mercurial commitment, all ending with precipitous operatic lamenting scenes followed by stage-right exits by the female protagonist. Yeap...as usual Shakespeare got there first.

Each time followed by my own predictable Danish Modern Prince soliloquy: *Am I doing the right thing? Did I abandon her in her greatest time of need?* Or is it just one more case of MAK...just being MAK. A selfish *bastardo*?

I'm filled with a deep sense of conflict about the parting. I will miss our good times, the laughs the good-natured kidding. The passionate lovemaking, the companionship. But frankly, beneath it all there is an overwhelming sense of relief that she is *bon voyage* mode.

Am I just a wildly careening emotional wrecking ball? Like it's hard-coded in my soul, beyond my control. Little consolation for the *victim*. I begin to wonder if I am destined to lead the solitary life of a monk. Mick the Monk—has a nice alliterative ring to it.

So, is there some series of traumatic emotional events in my childhood like the emotional abuse of my alcoholic philandering father that have precipitated a Dismissive-avoidant Detachment Disorder?

Ah...an encouraging breakthrough. Sorry your time is up...we'll have to take this up next week.

Or maybe as a penance I should just start a Monastery for sociopathic fellow-travelers to take them off the streets; The Order of S. O. B? Coed of course.

So henceforth uh...Horatio, I will vow to make a conscious effort to lead a life of abstinence from any female companionship and complications like a recovering alcoholic...one day at a time. But knowing my love of the feminine form, the addictive novelty and joy of being in a new relationship? The exciting process of mutual discovery, the blissful exploration of each others body, it's just a matter of time before my pathetic lack of resolve finds me in another *situation*. A fool for love? Or in the end, is it just lust? *Il bastardo!*

One night, while reflecting on my situation with Annie, still filled with ambivalence about her leaving, I finally fall asleep after staring at the ceiling for about three hours, when the phone beside the bed starts ringing...petulantly. The red LED digital clock shows 4:30 AM. *Jesus! Now what?*

Half-asleep, it takes about 5 rings. I jiggle it, finally, "Hello?" I say warily.

"Mickey...you sound half asleep," the familiar voice says.

"Mom? Do you have any idea what time it is?" I say with an edge.

"Off course, dear..." to her companion "what time is it love?"

Pia continues, "Why it's 12:30...Rome time...happy hour. A little early to be in bed...are you getting cranky in your old age?" she says giggling, sipping...something. A Manhattan? Her favorite.

"Mom...it's 4:30 as in the morning *here*. The roosters are still asleep." I say.

"Well I hope I didn't wake you. But since you're awake now...and by the way you're not a kid anymore. Apparently you grouchy ol' men need your sleep," she says again with a school girl giggle.

"No...no...just resting my eyes. With the time difference I'm always awake at 3 A-M waiting by the phone, just in case you call," I say.

"That's a good son. Now take out a pencil and paper and write this down," she says, "Flight 48 British Airways leaving on Thursday...at 11 AM."

"Mom...you're coming for a visit? That's uh...only in three days. Why such short notice?" I say.

"No dear, you must be still half asleep. Now pay attention. You really should try to get more sleep, dear. You're flying to London for a wedding," she says impatiently.

“Must be a pretty special wedding. Prince Charles? Very funny stuff, mom. Manhattans?” I say.

“No dear...London,” she says exasperated “you're going to give your mother away at her wedding, Saturday the 9th...to Patrick Wodehouse. And by the way, do you still have that nice dark suit with blue pinstripes. It'll look very smart with a pale blue shirt and a red tie...a black velvet vest would be a nice touch,” says Mother...just being a Mother.

“Wodehouse...Wodehouse, as in Jeeves-the-Butler-Wodehouse?” I say.

“No, no dear...I'm not marrying the Butler, I'm marrying P.G.'s nephew. Gotta run. See you soon, lovey. Ta Ta for now.” she says, now very British.

Click.

That's it. Done deal. I just smile to myself. Okay mom, if it'll make you happy, I'm on my way. I sit down with Annie and tell her that I'll be gone for several days for the wedding. There is still an awkward and painful estrangement between us.

Mother had been living in Rome Italy since 1968 where she had relocated to get away from the Ruskie Prince of Darkness, my father who had been stalking her after their divorce.

It was there she was 'discovered' when she went to MIPs in Canne France in 1974. At 59, she was still a looker. She was there to pitch her unique teaching method of oil painting—instant painting, for a TV series on instructional oil painting. For anybody else the longest of long shots, but Pia Kozlov is not just anybody.

She was introduced to a young Brit producer who immediately recognized her natural charismatic, and vivacious personality. Made for TV.

Paint Along with Pia had a good run. 52 half hour programs on British ITV and 26 on PBS in the US, nationally syndicated half-hour programs shot and taped, unscripted, with Pia just being Pia doing her thing in real time, the whole time with Pia crackin' wise and telling amusing anecdotes while painting. Somehow, miraculously always finishing a complete painting in the 26 minutes allotted. She was a natural, and the camera, and the audience loved her natural homespun humor and non-intimidating approach to teaching. She developed quite a cult following, just on the basis of her quirky and fun persona.

As her TV career was starting to wind down, she had returned to her 'lovely Rome...my home' to retire, teach a little and paint. She had met Patrick Wodehouse in one of the painting classes she taught. A classic Brit, with and pencil mustache, sporting an ascot with a charming mellifluous Anglo-accent and Brit savoir-faire. He had been living in Rome for over 10 years as a Brit expat, with his wife when he was widowed two years earlier. He was indeed the nephew

of the great British writer, P.G. Wodehouse, considered literary royalty in the U.K.

So after years of being Pia Kozlov's foil, I realized that resistance is futile. Get on the Pia Train...or get out of the way.

It would be a much appreciated distraction from the heaviness that had descended upon Chez MAK with Annie and myself. So I book a flight for London and arrive the day before the wedding with some serious jet lag. Pia and Patrick have driven across the Pond to Wimbledon London, and had arrived the day before. I get a chance to meet Patrick. He's a great guy, very attentive and kind to Pia, which makes me feel a little more comfortable with the sudden announcement of this ACT III union.

The small intimate ceremony is to be at a lovely little neighborhood Anglican church. At 68, Pia's still dresses to kill. She looks positive ravishing. Patrick, 5 years her junior, and about 5 centimeters shorter, is also sartorially splendid.

With me alongside my beaming Mother, who's wearing a very chic dark suit and corsage looking very matrimonial with a grinning Patrick, we're standing in front of a middle-aged rather plain matronly woman Pastor.

The church is full of Pia's and Patrick's multitude of friends.

“Good afternoon. What happened to Pastor Rollins?” Patrick says.

“I-I-I mmm...So-oh-oh-sorry...but he was taken ill the l-l-l-last minute...and he asked me to stand in for him. I'm very nervous, I don't normally do w-w-w-weddings...or give s-s-s-ermons,” she says with a stammer. *Really?*

Mother is now fighting laughter, not at the poor lady Pastor's expense, bless her heart, but just the hilariousness of the situation, of the whole comic scenario. Personally I was not surprised. Anything to do with Mother usually ends up like an episode of I Love Lucy.

Pia whose first impulse, next to laughter, is always kindness, says trying to reassure the diffident Pastor, “That's quite alright dearie, I'm sure you'll do just fine. Maybe you'd like to do the shorter version of the ceremony?”

I am now desperately trying to stifle my laughter—*damn* near busting a gut. Could only happen to Mom. Okay. *Cue the I Love Lucy intro music.*

“Oh...Thhhhh-ank you! P-i-a-a...dooo yooo...ttttake PPPPP....Oh the hell with it. I nnnnow pppronounce you man and wife...kiss the Brrrride!”

Definitely short...and very sweet. Mom and I burst out laughing, then Patrick takes Pia in his arms, with a big triumphant toothy grin on his face, bends her over at the waist and gives her a big wet kiss. The organ kicks in with the Wedding March, as Mom and I hug. Patrick then plants a big kiss on the mug of the Pastor, bringing a big grin to her crimson face.

Pia and Patrick walk down the isle toward the rear of the church with everyone having a great laugh, throwing rice and roses. That's it...it's over in less than two hours including the reception. I'm there less than 48 hours. Then it's an 11 hour plane ride from Heathrow back to SFO, then a three hour drive back to Tahoe.

Pia and Patrick would eventually settle in Wimbledon London where she would be eligible for UK National Health Care. They would enjoy a wonderful life together, frequently traveling to Italy and the rest of Europe. They were married for over 28 years. Some of her lady friends would say with no small amount of envy, a 28 year honeymoon, until Patrick's sudden unexpected death at the age of 90. Two months later, with her soul partner and faithful companion gone, she peacefully passes at the age of 95, wrapped in the warm embrace of Morpheus.

They had a great prime-time run together. Throwing many lavish dinner performances, with Mother entertaining everyone with her Auntie Mame *Yes! Life is a banquet and most poor suckers are starving to death*, anecdotes and antics delivered a la I Love Lucy. They lead a full, active and productive life to the very end. And neither of them left anything on the stage. As the Brits say, *Good show! Mom and Patrick, Damn good show!*

And God bless'em. Wherever they are—I'm sure they're planning their next *very* big soiree.

When I return home from London, I immediately notice that Annie's car is gone. I let myself inside the house—it is deafeningly quiet but the scent of her perfume eerily lingers. I find an envelope with *Mickey* in a delicate feminine cursive hand, leaning against a now empty wine glass on the kitchen counter along with the house key. I pour myself a double Johnny—straight-up, leaving the bottle out. I take a long pull, sit down on the sofa, open the envelope and begin to read the tear-stained heartbreaking letter.

Mon chere Mickey,

I am so profoundly sorry to have pulled you into my labyrinthine life. I thought this was my chance to finally find a lasting and true love...with you. But as usual I screwed it up...again.

*Seems like I can't quite close the deal
with a good man...ever, eh? You're a
decent and caring man. Et très sexy!
Quite a package...for any lucky girl.*

*But, you and I are now officially
yesterday's news. It would be too hard
for me to stay in contact with you. The
longing for your sweet delicious
body...every time I would hear the
sound of your voice.*

*I'm going to take this time with my
family to reflect on where I should go
from here with my life, because
obviously what I am doing isn't
working. I keep making the same damn
mistakes over and over. There is
something that I have been searching
for I think all of my life. I realize now
that it can't be a 'someone'...as
wonderful as you are...but something
much deeper. Until I find it, I know that
I could never be happy, with you, or
anyone.*

*If I EVER do find what I'm looking
for...I'll be in touch. And maybe we
could do an encore? Eh mon chere? In
the meantime, I won't leave any contact
information. All the better if the Feds
come sniffing around again.*

*I'll never forget that you saved my
life...twice. Once on that 'dark and
stormy night' on the mountain, and the
Feds house-call. From the bottom of my
heart...Merci beaucoup!*

Avec tout ma amour...toujours,

*Annie...the Goodbye Girl.
XOXOXO!*

Like I said...plucky.

: : *Michaelangelo's Renaissance* — *m.a.kominsky* : :

And as the curtain falls on yet another Act III of Goodbye Guy bids adieu to Goodbye Girl. I'm reminded that this love thing? Ain't for the faint of heart.

I put the now freshly stained, with my tears, letter back in the envelope. I decide to place it with my other *important papers*, along with the letter from Sora Eagle Feather.

*Bonne chance ma amour...jusqu'à ce que nous rendezvous...
encore.*

Good luck my love...until we *rendezvous*...again.

- Chapter 27 -

After the departure of Annie, as a distraction, I pour myself into the task at hand at ACT Inc. With the former Mayor Donnie Trent now ignominiously jailed in Sacramento, awaiting trial in Federal Court, the political landscape and calculus has changed dramatically for the cable franchise renewal with the City of South Lake Tahoe.

The new Mayor Amy Burton, is the complete antithesis of the flashy, politically savvy Donnie. She's middle-aged; a housewife with a couple teen-aged kids, rather matronly looking, but well-educated, intelligent, fair and reasonable. I have several lunches with her to discuss the renewal—she always insists on paying for her share. She's politically unambitious and refreshingly direct and pragmatic.

She understands that the reality of booting ACT Inc. out, as a practical matter would be a chaotic and costly legal proposition for the City, as I have tactfully made it very clear that ACT Inc. would not go quietly into the night. That the stick is never very far behind the carrot.

Because the city has suffered through the recent trauma of national notoriety of being perceived as governed by a *drug kingpin* mayor, and by inference a *drug mecca*, there is no appetite to stir up any more negative controversy...or publicity, as the life's blood of Tahoe is tourism. So taking on the 700 pound corporate gorilla, ACT Inc. in a legal battle is not anything they have the resources or the stomach for, which I recognize and exploit to its fullest potential—diplomatically...of course. Right.

But part of the art of negotiation includes exploiting the counterparty's weakness which both of you realize, but without giving a gratuitous open, high-handed voice to it, always trying to leave other party's dignity intact, as much as possible. It's a delicate dance that requires a great deal of patience, constantly walking the tightrope between the carrot...and the stick, all the while attempting to foster the gradual, incremental building of trust. Unless, of course, the other party is arbitrary or patently unrealistic in their demands. Then the gloves come off. And you *do not* want to go smash-mouth with ACT Inc. and one J. Murdock Mahoney.

Over a period of several months, new Mayor Amy Burton believes that I'm negotiating in 'good faith'; we establish a level of trust, that never would have been possible under Mayor *Donnie*—at least not without some personal *quid pro quo*. Marla Dyson, wisely senses that the less visibility that ACT corporate has in the negotiation and settlement process the better the prospects for a more attractive and expedient result for ACT. She makes very few visits to Lake Tahoe, and

has very little direct interaction with the local government in the negotiation process. So Marla and I, with the exception of my trips to Corporate in Denver, have very little physical contact uh...business wise anyway.

Working diligently with the City Attorney, within six months, we have hammered out and negotiated a tentative Franchise agreement with the City. In light of the fact that the initial prospects of getting any kind of favorable renewal of franchise were once considered remote, corporate ACT Inc. is duly impressed with the results, and my stewardship in particular, especially since the terms are far more beneficial to ACT than they were willing offer to keep the franchise.

But ACT is particularly pleased, because the franchise renewal predated the Cable Communications Act of 1984 by only several months, which would have statutorily granted the franchising authority more power to insist on the implementation of some of what was considered onerous provisions by ACT, like dedicated PEG, Public, Educational and Government channels; a very burdensome and costly proposition for the cable operator. Our insider cable industry lobbyists in Washington DC, had given us a heads-up on impending legislation on the cable industry, that was still in the draft phase. It had not yet hit the trades, or the National League of Cities political action committee's radar, the substance of which, I do not volunteer to the City. So that gives me an even greater sense of urgency to get the deal done. ASAP.

The franchise renewal passes the City Council unanimously, not by accident almost 8 months before the expiration date of the existing franchise agreement and almost six months prior to the passage of the Cable Communications Act of 1984 without the subsequent statutory PEG provision. *Done Deal, baby. Next?*

So, about two weeks later, with very little notice, I am summoned to corporate headquarters in Denver by VP Paul Berman, to have a meeting with Pauly, Marla...and Jason Mahoney. I fly into Denver on Thursday night, pick up a rental car and check into my hotel, for a meeting scheduled at 9 AM Friday morning. I am instructed to not book a return flight until after that weekend. *More details to follow upon your arrival.*

Friday, I get to corporate about 8:30 AM, and drop in to say hello to Pauly Berman and Marla Dyson, before the meeting with Dr. J, to get a preview of the reason for my attendance, which up to now, has been conspicuously...mysteriously lacking in explanation. Both of them greet me with warm and effusive praise for my job on the franchise, but are very vague and evasive about the purpose of the meeting with Jason Mahoney.

At 9 AM, Pauly, Marla and I walk over to J. Murdock Mahoney's office. His secretary ushers us into his huge sixth floor corner

office, with wide 10 foot high floor-to-ceiling windows, framing a commanding breathtaking view of the snow covered Colorado Rockies.

She shows us where the coffee and pastries are set up, seats us at prescribed locations at the head of the table, a 14 foot long solid African walnut conference table with 12 black leather upholstered wing chairs. Class. Nothing understated here—Conspicuous Corporate Wealth on display. The subtext...*it's good to be King*. Not much has changed since feudal times. While the world prays for *po folks*, the vassals, it listens to the demonstrably rich and affluent Lords.

Pauly and Marla are seated across from me, with the head chair obviously reserved for the *King*. At each seat location is a legal size folder with about 2 inches thick of material inside. Each folder is stamped with large block red letters:

PERSONAL AND CONFIDENTIAL
FOR CORPORATE MANAGEMENT EYES ONLY!

PROPERTY OF:

AMERICAN CABLE TELECOM INC.

DO NOT DUPLICATE !!

About 5 minutes later, CEO and President J. Murdock Mahoney purposefully strides through the door. He walks up to me and I am greeted with a what appears to be a genuinely warm handshake, which makes me very uneasy. Hmm...*what he's after?*

He clears his throat then takes two deep inhales from an oral asthma inhaler, prescription by the looks of it.

"Good morning everyone. And Mick...thank you for coming on such short notice," he says.

I had a choice?

"Sure, Jason...happy to be here," I say, leaving off the 99 year old George Burns rejoinder...*I'm just happy to be...anywhere*. I still have not fully recovered from the stress of surviving the looming encounter with the Feds, the difficult parting with Annie, and the Homeric effort required in getting the franchise renewed. I'm shanked—physically and emotionally.

"Okay, then...let's get started. In front of each of you is a packet with material that is obviously sensitive information. I must reiterate the necessity for the contents of this folder to remain absolutely for your eyes only. Do not even share it with other members of the corporate staff. It is absolutely imperative that the press does not get hold of *any* of these documents. Are we all categorically clear on that?" he asks.

We all nod affirmatively. *What? A plot to overthrow the government? Ha! Ha! Ha!*

"Now, let's open the folder, and have a look at what all this secrecy is about, shall we?" he says with his usual irritating self-satisfied smirk.

All of us open the folder and begin to review 'The Memo'.

"You'll notice the first enclosure is a memorandum dated August of 1971 from Lewis Powell, presently serving as a Supreme Court Associate Justice, entitled Attack on the American Free Enterprise System, sent to friend, Eugene Syndor at the US Chamber of Commerce. It was written before President Nixon nominated him to fill the vacancy left by Justice Hugo Black, a staunch supporter of liberal policies, civil liberties and labor. Black endorsed Roosevelt in both the 1932 and 1936 US Presidential elections and was an enthusiastic supporter of the New Deal, no further comment should be necessary, other than...*good riddance*.

After thoroughly reviewing it, you'll understand why the memorandum was marked *Confidential*. It was discovered by Washington Post leftist columnist Jack Anderson, who reported on its content a year later, after Powell had joined the Supreme Court, alleging Powell's efforts as an attempt to undermine the democratic process and integrity of the Supreme Court, summarily dismissed by the US Chamber as yet another *prima facie* example of anti-capitalist, Eastern liberal press bias.

The memo is essentially a clarion call for corporate America to become more aggressive in molding politics and law in the US. It is credited with sparking the formation of several influential right-wing think tanks and lobbying organizations, such as The Paul Revere Foundation and the American Legislative Action Congress, as well as inspiring and emboldening the US Chamber of Commerce to become far more politically active," pausing dramatically making eye contact for emphasis.

Mahoney continues, "In it, Powell argued, *The most disquieting voices joining the chorus of criticism came from perfectly respectable elements of society: from the college campus, the pulpit, the media, the intellectual and literary journals, the arts and sciences, and from politicians*. In the memorandum, Powell advocates *constant surveillance of textbook and television content*, as well as a purge of left-wing elements. He names consumer advocate Ralph Nader as the chief antagonist of American business.

The reason, despite its early date of creation, that it is the first enclosure is important. In that it forms the political armature...a manifesto of the basic political philosophical underpinning for every thing that follows it," Mahoney pedantically lectures his acolytes.

Pausing with almost comical theatrical gravitas, he continues, "To summarize...from 1964 through 1980, mostly under, charitably described as *leftists*, LBJ, and Carter, virtually the entire American business community experienced a series of political setbacks without

parallel in the postwar period. In particular, Washington undertook a vast expansion of its regulatory power, introducing tough and extensive restrictions and requirements on business in areas from the environment to occupational safety to consumer protection.

Today...the American economic system is under broad attack. This attack requires mobilization for political combat: *Business must learn the lesson...that political power is necessary; that such power must be assiduously cultivated; and that when necessary, it must be used aggressively and with determination—without embarrassment and without the reluctance which has been so characteristic of American business.*

The critical ingredient for success is organization: *Strength lies in organization, in careful long-range planning and implementation, in consistency of action over an indefinite period of years, in the scale of financing available only through joint effort, and in the political power available only through united action and national organizations.*

The reason I've called you here to today is to advise you that ACT Inc., along with many other large multi-national corporations, from sectors including of course Media, Telcos, Banking and Finance, Energy, Transportation etcetera...virtually every major sector of American corporate business is finally about to undertake serious efforts to organize corporate push-back against the unnecessary, onerous, overly burdensome, bordering on socialist regulation by the Federal government. The membership of the Entrepreneurial Corporate Caucus, or ECC, a conservative group of chief executive officers of major U.S. corporations, organized to promote pro-business public policy, will form the nucleus of this effort. So, the genesis...the formation of ECC was a direct result of the call to arms of the 1971 Powell Manifesto. It is, shall we say, a more uh...fervently *conservative*, but below-the-radar iteration, of the Business Roundtable. Any questions so far?" Mahoney asks.

"And my involvement, if any, in this effort?" I ask.

"ACT Inc. will be at the vanguard of this effort...leading the charge. Because Pauly and Marla's responsibilities for day-to-day operations are already more than demanding of their full-time commitment, they have both expressed great confidence in your abilities, based on your performance in Lake Tahoe in securing the franchise agreement, to represent ACT at the ECC. You would be the face of ACT in this effort, unless for some...*unfathomable* reason you should elect *not* to accept the position," Mahoney says smiling confidently.

I say, "Before I comment on that...I have a few fundamental questions. This memo has obviously been around for over ten years. So...*One*, why now? And *two*...why me? There are many other highly qualified lobbyists and political pols who have much more experience in this arena, than I."

"Okay...fair questions. To answer the second question first. Pauly and Marla think that you have demonstrated a keen, finely honed adroitness on how to get things done...to get to *yes*...and with a minimum of drama. And since both Pauly and Marla will be closely involved in overseeing this effort, they feel that, *A*, they can work with you...and *B*, we can trust you...that you will be loyal and dedicated to the interests of ACT, of course our paramount concern, which we may...or may not get from an outside *hired gun*.

The answer to the first part of your question is this. Since Ronald Reagan took office in 1981, the political landscape has never been more conducive to deregulation as evidenced by the strike-breaking position taken by Reagan against PATCO...the air traffic controllers union, in the summer of 1981 where he called the bluff of PATCO to strike, and fired over 11,000 air traffic controllers. The firing of PATCO employees not only demonstrated a clear resolve by the president to take control of the bureaucracy, but it also sent a clear message to the private sector that unions no longer needed to be feared. In the process sending the broader message that literally...a former B actor who has been selected by the GOP to play the biggest starring role of his life...was the new sheriff in town.

So along with the increasing appetite in congress for deregulation and privatization, and the growing sympathetic composition of the Supremes, there may never be a better chance to get this done. And most political polls seem to indicate that Reagan will cruise through a re-election campaign with no serious Democratic challenger...and easily be re-elected. We, myself included, think with your help...we can get a lot done in the next 4 years including, the wholesale national telecommunication and cable deregulation, and more importantly, relaxation if not outright abolishment of the FCC and DOJ rules against ownership of multiple media in the same major market," he says.

"Okay...thanks. But I think I'll need to give this some further thought...before I can offer the obvious kind of commitment ACT would expect...and deserve," I say, frankly feeling very ambivalent indeed about jumping right back into the middle of the ocean, of battling an unrelenting riptide of adversarial foam and froth, when I haven't even completely towed off yet from my last against-the-tide marathon swim.

"Alright Mick...fair enough. But let me just leave you with this footnote. Included with this position is an increase in your base salary to 100K a year, along with stock options...and of course all the other benefits from your prior status," he says, again with the *Jace is not used to hearing the word no...from anyone* confident smile.

"Thank you. I'm flattered by the offer...and your confidence in me. I'll get back to you before I leave town after this weekend," I say.

Mahoney continues, "Okay...I *guess* that will have to be soon enough. In the meantime, assuming that you will have made the smart...the *right* decision, this weekend, I'd like you to be my guest out at the ranch. We are expecting company for Saturday and Sunday. Several CEOs from Fortune 500 corporations by special *private* invitation, one from each sector, will be flying into my private airstrip at the ranch in their corporate Lear jets, where it will be safe and secure from the prying eyes of the media...and the possibility of leaks as to the number and identities of the attendees of the conference. We will be convening an exploratory plenary session, to take input from the other CEO's. I'd like all three of you, to sit-in on this meeting...and the one on Sunday as well.

To ensure complete privacy from the press, the conference was scheduled for a weekend. Each attendee and their entourage will be chauffeured from the ranch, to separate individual five-star hotels in the Denver area, so as not to attract any undue attention from the media. We will convene here at my office on Saturday and Sunday at the prescribed times. Sunday afternoon, they will be chauffeured back to the ranch...to fly out.

This meeting should give all of you some insight into what to expect...allow you to meet the major players. And Mick, I don't have to remind you that this is the NFL. That you would be suiting up for a smash-mouth, grinding ground game...again, assuming of course you've wisely decided to accept the position," Dr. J says.

Hmm...football, an apt metaphor for entrepreneurial trench warfare. As an ex-b-baller, I had always had a problem with football. The inelegant primal, brute force of it—zero-sum wining by grinding your opponent into the mud. And what's up with that pointed pig-skin? Ever try to dribble a football? Fogitaboutit...

"Mick, after we adjourn here, my secretary will give you directions to the ranch...we'll expect you for dinner tonight at 7 PM, with my family...and some friends. You'll be our guest for the entire weekend including tonight. The first plenary session is scheduled for noon on Saturday, ending with the second session convening at 10 AM Sunday, concluding by 2 PM. In the meantime you all will review the material in the folders. Come prepared. Any questions?" Jace says.

"Okay...I'll see you all tomorrow...obviously, I've got some homework to do," says Pauly as he gets up to leave, placing the folder under his arm.

"See ya all tomorrow," Marla says, as she stands up to leave flashing me a fleeting look of disappointment that we won't be having dinner...etcetera tonight, having recently been advised by me during an earlier tryst in Tahoe, that Annette Trudeau is no longer on the program. So much for Mick's recent mercurial monastic mandate. *Pfst!*

"Marla...got time to have lunch with me today, to help me get a better insight and perspective with the material?" I say reaching out to my boss for some much needed uh...mentoring.

"Sure...always glad to be of service. Come by about noon," she says trying desperately to restrain her obvious pleasure at my overture in front of Jason Mahoney.

I check in with Mahoney's secretary for the directions to his ranch, then decide to go back to my hotel to do some serious reading before noon check-out. I pack, then begin reading the *verboden* contents of the folder before leaving for my luncheon date with Marla. After which, I'm off to the Fiefdom of *Ca-je Rex* for dinner with the family, and to spend the weekend at Mahoney Manor, presumably with other assorted courtiers and courtesans.

As I begin reading, it quickly becomes obvious that the impressive list of attendees of the ECC, the *who's-who* of the hyper-capitalists, like the Illuminati, are the Neo-Feudal Lords, at least in their own not-so-little megalomaniacal minds.

Host and Roundtable Moderator:

J. Murdock Mahoney - President & CEO
Cable TV and Satellite Programing;
American Cable Telcom, Inc. (ACT) and American
Inter-Media Inc. (AIM)

Keynote Speaker:

Max Mesmer – President Political Strategist and
Legislative Lobbyist - Mesmer Strategies Inc. (MSI)

Attendees:

Drew and Chase Kramer - CEO & VP
Operations, respectively Energy - Coal and Natural
Gas; Kramer Energy Industries Inc. (KEI)

Reginald Meade - CEO & Chairman
Newspapers, Print & Radio/TV Media;
World Media Inc. (WMI)

Michael Goodwin - President & CEO
Entertainment Motion Picture & TV Content;
Zenith Studios Inc. (ZSI)

: : Michaelangelo's Renaissance — m.a.kominsky : :

Lane Rector - CEO & Chairman

*Oil and Liquid Natural Gas –
National Petroleum, Inc. (NPI)*

Jamie Draper - CEO & Chairman

*Banking and Finance
Bank of Long Island, Inc.*

Payton Chandler - President & CEO

*Telecommunications and Telcos
Universal Telephone & Telecommunications, Inc.
(UT&T)*

Rand Rourke - Talk Radio & TV Host.

*Developer of the Proposed Libertarian -
Acropolis Libertatem*

Gordon Nelson

Libertarian founder of Americans for Tax Fairness.

Frankly, after reading the radical, right-of-John-Birch mission statement, I realize it's probably no accident that I'd never even heard of it. The embryonic Libertarian organization and the individual members would of course assiduously attempt to insulate themselves from the prying eyes of the press—the same kind of cultish mystery and cloaked secrecy surrounding the Freemasons, of which there is more than probably much common membership.

Mission Statement:

The only proper functions of a
government are the:

- Police, for protection from criminals,
- Army, for protection from foreign invaders,
- Courts, for protection of your property and contracts from breach or fraud by others, to settle disputes by rational rules, according to objective law.

Self-evident Truths:

- All property and all forms of wealth are produced by man's mind and labor;
and
- It is the sole power of each individual

*to achieve or to destroy one's own
happiness; and
- Public welfare is the welfare of those
who do not earn it; those who do, are
entitled to no welfare.*

Hmm...looks like repurposed Galt Gestalt. Chapter and verse from Ayn Rand's fictional *magnum opus* tome, Atlas Shrugged—Rand's most ambitious manifesto of Objectivism. Individual rights embodied in *laissez-faire* capitalism nicely distilled in American oil industry business magnate John D. Rockefellers':

Do you know the only thing that gives me pleasure? It's to see my dividends coming in.

As I review the attendees, conspicuously absent is a representative from the US Chamber of Commerce. Is it possible that the highly tendentious pro-business CC is considered too moderate for inclusion in this Libertarian Wild Bunch?

From the agenda, it would appear that the first day, Saturday, will be dedicated to introductions and socializing, formulating and refining the intent, structure and parameters of actions of the organization, including defining respective roles and leadership. Then listing the range of topics for the roundtable discussion, which is to follow on Sunday.

Reading through the various bios of the attendees, I can't abate the nagging disquiet that these are the so-called Royalty of Capitalism—the elite of the Chosen Ones, the self-anointed Masters of the Universe.

It's somewhat daunting, and I must say, flattering, and yes, even seductive to think that I may be a player, albeit a peripheral bit player, involved in this effort by the preeminent lions of capitalism to fundamentally redefine, reshape and *maybe* even completely restructure the rules of engagement of capitalism in America. And by extension, indeed the entire planet. Maybe power is the ultimate aphrodisiac? Make that a *definite maybe*...on both counts.

It is not lost on me that this historical clandestine meeting of the Captains of Capitalism could conceivably become part of the genesis for the redefining of political power based on a radical oligarchical distribution of wealth in the world. And more importantly who controls it, how to keep it, and to what lengths it will be wielded.

So...it turns out my little joke about the *overthrow of the government* may have had more than a kernel of truth to it—the old Reverse Robin Hood allegory. This merry band of plutocrats are essentially advocating a highly coordinated long-term strategy calculated to force an economic corporate *coup de etat*. A redistribution of vastly increased wealth—in slo-mo. Starting in motion, an inexorable tide of seemingly minor, inconsequential political victories. A slow and gradual

accretion, so as to be almost imperceptible—the cumulative effect not being realized until what? *It's too late?*

The moral dilemma I have to confront before I leave Denver is my potential role in the time honored parable about the frog in the simmering pot. Do I want to be the hapless frog? Or can I morally rationalize being a guy who turns up the heat?

The first stage of willingly participating in an immoral, if not illegal act, which this may well be, is to desperately seek some historical precedent. Some prior morality play that could conceivably rationalize and overrule my initial ambivalence about being involved.

Of course the Faustian Bargain immediately comes to mind...not a bad outcome for *Monsieur* Mephistopheles—not so good for *Herr* Faust. Or for Tricky Dick—the Watergate fiasco.

But, what if there would be some greater social good to be achieved by bending the rules. Would this be any different from FDR's attempts to stack the composition of Supreme Court, to be more sympathetic to a more liberal legislative agenda?

I decide to put the Frog-pot-stove motif on the back burner, for the moment at least until I've had a chance to get more input from the actual players at the conference.

At 11:30, I drive over to ACT Inc. to meet VP Marla Dyson for lunch. Her secretary buzzes her, then tells me to go on in. I knock on the closed door, and open it to find her voraciously reading the contents of the folder.

"Living dangerously are we?" I ask.

She looks up at me and smiles broadly, "Sorry?"

"No drawn blinds?" I say.

"Hi, Mickey. Well, frankly, I am desperately in need of some major excitement in my life...which by the way, you *will* be providing this afternoon," she says standing up, stretching her arms backward, causing her lovely full breasts to protrude, "Ready to go? Any special requests for lunch?" she says smiling mischievously.

"Well, so much for *no* pressure. But rest assured my associate *Mista* Wilson, uh...that would be *Woodrow* H. Wilson, will hopefully rise to the occasion and do everything bodily possible to meet the challenge, assuming a coupla double Johnny Walkers can overcome the inherent performance anxiety of satisfying a high-powered Alpha *shikse*. As for lunch? Something low fat...to preserve my girlish figure. Some white meat. Breast of uh...something sounds good," I say.

"Well, you're in luck, big boy...it's the special on the menu today," she says, locking up the folder in filing cabinet, then walking over to me and grabbing my hand with a nice squeeze, "Let's bust outta this cell block...*now!*"

As we're leaving she announces to her secretary, "I'll be gone for the rest of the afternoon. Anything short of nuclear holocaust...or a massive drop in my stock...*do not* page me."

At *Mista* Wilson's very persuasive urging we decide to skip lunch and go straight to her condominium, a gated monument to conspicuous opulence. I follow her Audi in my rental, which at a normal legal speed, is maybe a 10 minute drive. In less than 5 minutes the horny corporate Barbarians are at the security gate.

Fast forward a few hours later to her minimalist but lavishly all-white appointed 8th story condo. Both of us are sitting up in a bed large enough to have its own zip code, with a glass of wine, under ridiculously high-thread-count satin sheets covering our still glistening bodies. The cold, clinical atmospheric of Marla's antiseptic operating-theater of a master bedroom is somehow unsettling.

As the sun is slowly slipping behind the same commanding view of the Rockies, "Top ten...maybe top five of most satisfying business lunches...ever," she says, clinking her glass to mine in a toast.

"Don't know if I coulda survived bein' number four," I say.

"The key is a strict training regimen, gradually working up to optimum performance levels. I'm hereby appointing myself your *very* personal trainer."

"See...that's the difference between men and women. Women are more into that uh...whole journey thing. Long distance marathon runners who savor the wine-sippin' experience, even the pain. Men are pure pleasure-seeking missiles of *luuuuv*...sprinters...guzzlers, more interested in the destination, an exploding climax...through the tape at the finish line," I say.

"For a sprinter...you did just fine. And Mickey? No complaints," she says nuzzling up close.

"*Merci* baby...and *Merci sil vous plait*. Hey, Marly as much as I hate to say it, I'm going to have to think about getting dressed pretty soon. I'm expected for dinner by the King at Hacienda del Rey at seven. How long do think it'll take me to get out there?" I say.

As she gets up, "Hold that thought...I desperately have to pee. Don't go anywhere. I'm not through with you...yet. Don't make me use restraints," she says smiling.

"Perchance an elaborate system of ropes and pulleys? As I find a woman with mechanical aptitude...kinda handy to have around the house. Ya know...good with their hands, particularly if they can work on uh...plumbing. *Very* useful," I say.

As I watch her walk toward the bathroom, I am awe-struck by her lithe, graceful body. For a tall woman, she's perfectly proportioned; full yet firm uplifted breasts, wide shoulders, a wasp waist, the narrow hips, and the lean, well-defined legs of an athlete. My gawd! *Monsieur*

Wilson likewise immediately registers his shameless appreciation for the exquisiteness of her feminine form.

In search of some Kleenex to blow my nose I open the drawer of the night stand. Hmm...interesting what you may find in a woman's...drawers. A bright pink vibrating dildo, tough to compete with the on-demand reliability and staying power of good ol' Pink Floyd. Condoms, assorted love-lubs and...handcuffs. No Kleenex, but an oral inhaler, obviously prescription with the name of J. M. Mahoney with a recent date of a week ago. I quickly close the drawer just before she returns.

Apparently Dr. J has recently operated here as well. Part of the '*no disappointment clause*' of the employment contract of an executive VP, to never utter the 'N' word...No, to the good Doctor?

When she returns to bed, "Probably about half-an-hour. By the way...just to prepare you a little for what to expect. The ranch, "with air quotes of her free hand" is about 400 acres, with over a thousand head of Black Angus beef cattle, and last count, at least 30 pure bred Arabian horses. A hobby of the lil' lady, Missus Mahoney," she says.

"Jezus...Sounds like something from Bonanza. Ben Cartwright's Ponderosa, which would make me, what...the big dumb one, Hoss Cartwright?"

"Something like that. Only time will tell. Mick, before you leave, it might be time to let you know what you might be getting yourself into, uh...of course I mean with this position that Jace has offered you. By now, you've probably familiarized yourself with the material well enough to realize that these are career corporate soldiers. Lifers...playin' with live ammo. Once you join *our inner sanctum* of Jason Mahoney et al, it's very difficult...if not impossible to get out. Just ask Pauly...or *me*," she says, putting her glass of wine down on the night stand and staring into my eyes, completely devoid of the levity a minute ago.

"Kinda like...being a *made wiseguy* in the Mafia? Only one way out...ten toes up?" I say with a grin, which goes unreturned.

"Mickey...I *really like* you. I always have from the first day...and when you were attached with Annie, if it's possible, I wanted you even more. And now it's about *waaaay* more than just the sex. Do you understand what I'm trying to say here? And it doesn't matter if you feel the same way about me...or not. That's how much I *care* what happens to you," she says gazing searchingly into my eyes.

"So...I'm not just another pretty face?" I say batting my eyes. Which draws a good-natured punch to my arm, but with a bit of an edge.

I start to say, "Well, as Hoss Cartwright might say, *moronically* earlier this morning I was giving this exact topic some serious cogent thought...and I was reminded of the ol' frog in the simmering pot trope, ya know where the..."

"Mick...let me break it down for ya...okay? *Choose*. You're either *not* in the pot...or you *are*. You know the Eagles song...Hotel California?" she asks.

"Yeah...sure."

"Remember the lyrics? This is the part I want you to *ree-ly* think about...*before* you agree to join *us*," she says.

*Last thing I remember, I was
Running for the door
I had to find the passage back
To the place I was before
"Relax, " said the night man,
"We are programmed to receive.
You can check-out any time you like,
But you can never leave!*

"So if I join up, do I get to wear a sword? What...a secret decoder ring? Will I be expected to return some kind of stupid secret *honky* handshake with a bunch of middle-aged fatso white guys in matching leisure suits? Sorry...but that's where I draw line in the sandbox...and definitely, no tasseled *fez* or raccoon hats. Period.

Marly...I really appreciate that. But as you may have already noticed I'm a *very* big boy. I've been around more than a little. I can take care of myself. Now...I've *really* got to get going...jump in the shower and get dressed. Don't want to disappoint his Lordship, now do we?" I say gently stroking her cheek with the back of my hand.

"Okay...one last thing before you go," she says, cradling my face in her hands and kissing me deeply, "now...you can get dressed."

As I climb out of bed, she gives me a playful but sharp slap on the butt. In the shower, I begin to replay the lyrics to Hotel California in my head...

*You can check-out any time you like,
But you can never leave!*

And then the part that she didn't say...

*And I was thinking to myself..
This could be Heaven or this could be Hell*

*Then she lit up a candle and she showed me the way
There were voices down the corridor,
I thought I heard them say...*

- Chapter 28 -

The drive out to the Ponderosa takes a little over a half-hour, which gives me a little time to ponder my relationship with Marla. I am deeply conflicted with the notion that VP Marla Dyson seems to have sold her soul, to the *company store*. It occurs to me that Marla has been trying to tell me that she herself, is *bought and paid for*, which I find more than a little tragic and rather depressing. Is it just a simple matter of career ambition? Or are she and Pauly, trapped in the *inner-sanctum* under the beguiling Rasputin spell of J. Murdock Mahoney—his extreme wealth and therefore power, which somehow morally seems a little less reprehensible.

I decide to put all that aside for a while, and from here on out, concentrate on my own decision of whether to accept the position. A tacit Faustian Bargain? Which I have decided I will suspend until later this weekend after I am able to gain more insight into what I might be getting myself involved in—both the near and long term.

I turn off the main road on to graveled path, unobtrusively marked by a stone obelisk, maybe 6 feet high. Like the Washington monument, a not-so-subtle phallic symbol of economic potency and American male hegemony. So much for nuance.

In the distance high on a hill, against the backdrop of the snow-capped Rockies, I see what looks more like a *kitschy* El Lay suburban Spanish motif mall, than a house. I continue driving for maybe a quarter-mile, which brings me to a completely fenced estate—spiked wrought-iron pickets which I guess to be about 10 feet high, between four foot square river rock turrets every 20 feet.

I stop at the manned kiosk in front of a gate. I check my watch—6:35 PM.

"Good evening sir, the nature of your business?" says the stocky uniformed security buzz-cut-guard with a practiced smile and an irritating, contrived politeness. He's packing a holstered sidearm—a semi-automatic, maybe a 9mm.

"What? No alligators? A moat...maybe a drawbridge would have been a nice touch?" I ask.

Nothing. Apparently he's not amused by my wit. Like an anchovy pizza, not for everyone.

"Yeah...you're probably right. The gators? A bit much. Okay...I have an appointment. Mick Kozlov to see Mr Mahoney," I say. Tough crowd.

He meticulously makes an entry on his clipboard, probably including that I'm a *wise-ass*, then gets on the phone. After less than a

minute, nods to me as the huge wrought-iron gate slowly, noisily creaks open. I continue up the hill on the now concrete paved tarmac for about 100 yards until it turns into a circular drive under a Spanish Mediterranean portico, with its massive size, woefully out of scale to the two story *Orange County-isimo El McMansion* behind it. I'm guessing maybe 20K square feet minimum all stacked under a red terra cotta tile roof, like something designed by a Francisco Lloyd Wrongo. Parked under the portico is a squadron of 8 new black Chevy Suburbans, presumably for transportation back to the corporate offices of ACT for the weekend summit. A valet parking attendant materializes out of nowhere.

"Good evening sir, do you have any luggage you'd like me to carry in for you, *sir*?" again with the polite, almost obsequious demeanor, disconcertingly so. Judging by his bearing, trim appearance and buzz-cut, also probably ex-military.

"No thanks...I can handle it," I say slipping him a fiver, which he politely refuses with a sweeping hand gesture, fleetingly revealing the butt of a gun in a shoulder holster tucked under his blue blazer.

"Very good sir...please leave the keys in the car. I'll park it for you. If you want to leave, just let me know and I'll bring the car up for you, *sir*," he says.

"Thanks. How will I find you?" I say.

"Sir, there is *always* someone on uh...duty, twenty-four-seven."

Hmm...*And welcome to the Hotel California, sir...enjoy your stay.* Now, with increasingly alarming loudness, ricocheting around inside my *cabeza* is that damn song...

*You can check-out any time you like,
But you can never leave!*

As I grab my carry-on out of the trunk, no sooner do I slam the lid, the car drives off disappearing around the side of the house. I walk up to the double eight-foot high solid oak front doors, which are open by the time I reach them. An impeccably attired and groomed manservant of Hispanic descent, is standing there with an amiable smile framed by a carefully trimmed obligatory Latin mustache. Arrayed above the massive arched doorway contour are hand wrought-iron letters, *La ciudad brillante en la colina.*

Now, I'm not what I consider terribly fluent in Spanish, but my translation of the inscription is, *The bright...or shining...city on the hill.* Probably just a coincidence that president Ronald Reagan, in speeches famously references the exceptionalism, the promised land of America the *be-utiful*? Yea...right.

"Mick Kozlov, to see Mr Mahoney," I say.

"Si Señor Kozlov, yo soy Raphael...welcome to the *hacienda*. Por favor, allow me to show you to the *veranda*, where *Senor* and *Senora* Mahoney and guests are taking refreshments and cocktails. And may I take *su maleta* to your room?"

"Buenos días...y muchas gracias Raphael," I say

"Esta bien, señor...por favor, sígueme usted," Raphael says taking my bag with a smile, pleased with my Spanish response.

Cocktails?...the magic word. Lead the way Raphael, could sure use a doble-Juanito right about now...vamos!

I follow Raphael through a meandering maze of rooms, the walls full of large original oil paintings, mostly figurative portraits of what I assume are Jason Mahoney's family, his children, including presumably a full-size of his wife with an Arabian horse. And several huge landscapes, some maybe 8 feet by 6 feet, a few that I recognize as originals by Thomas "Yellowstone" Moran. Some depicting the vast panorama of Yellowstone Valley, others of the turbulent sea, from the time he spent living in East Hampton, Long Island. Serious Big Collector Bucks.

On the way through the house, I stop and gaze through an open door into a dark wood paneled library revealing several very large hanging photographs of a large racing sloop on the open sea under full sail, beating to weather, heeling mightily in a heavy frothing sea, with an upward slanting *Más Rápido!* on the transom...every serious racing captain's constant exhortation to his crew...*faster! Si, mi capitán! Andale!..Arriba!*

A few images of Jason Mahoney sporting a sailing foul weather suit, and an uncharacteristically uninhibited broad smile, holding up a trophy surrounded by smiling members of an adoring crew. There are also many trophies and plaques on the wall. Definitely a serious, yet blissfully happy sailor.

I myself, even as a child had always been enthralled by the sea. My own art reflects my fascination with the changing moods of *Madame La Mer*. But my paintings though often as large as Moran's, are less literal, more gestural, attempting to capture the essence of the raw power, capriciously unleashed by the sometimes petulant *Madame*. It is what attracted me to off-shore sailboat racing in Southern California, now relegated to an occasional weekend regatta with friends out of San Francisco Bay—to experience and photograph the many changing moods of the open sea to eventually translate on to canvas.

Whenever I feel emotionally unsettled, overwhelmed by the complexities of life, I seek the solace of the sea to 'ground' me. The constant low level primal B-flat roar of the wind and waves, the omnipresent scent of the salt laden air reminds me of my primordial origins. The pure and simple elegance of nature, rejuvenates my spirit.

As I catch up with Raphael, we finally reach the rear of the *casa grandisima*, and walk out on to a huge *veranda*, facing an Olympic sized

pool, with a backdrop of meticulously tiered landscaping, more of an arboretum much like the magnificently manicured grounds at the Huntington Art Museum in Southern California, with all manner of exotic flowers and trees. The air is lush with a delicious *melange* of fragrances from flowers that I had never experienced before.

As I approach a large table under a huge umbrella, with four people, Jason Mahoney spots me, smiles, stands up and walks over to me. On the street I would not have recognized him in *ranch-chic* jeans, boots and western shirt.

"Mick...welcome. Nice to have you, " he says shaking my hand warmly.

"Well thanks, Jason...nice to be had," I say smiling.

"Before I make the introductions what can Raphael get you to drink?" he asks.

"Thought you'd never ask, Jason. Yea, a Johnny Walker, over...would be very much appreciated," I say.

"Okay...Johnny Walker, Red, Black...or Blue?" he asks.

"I usually drink *Juanito Negro*...over. Blue? Don't believe I've ever had it. The difference?" I naively ask, again blithely revealing my colossal ignorance on such epicurean matters...it's a gift.

"*Azul es el mejor*...aged for over 60 years...as opposed to the Black which is about 12 years. Starts at about \$200 a fifth. Raphael, please bring Mr Kozlov a Johnny Walker Blue, straight up...a double. *Gracias*, Raphael. Mick...you don't want to drink Blue over. The ice melts and dilutes the full appreciation of the nuanced blend. It's to be sipped...and savored, like a fine woman," he says. *Like your private stock, Marla Dyson?*

His sentence is punctuated by the loud slamming down of a cocktail glass on the glass patio table top by the sole woman at the table followed by a hasty, petulant folding of the arms. Got *my* attention, but Jason seems oblivious. Hmm...obviously, she's not particularly receptive to the simile either.

"*Muy bien, senor Mahoney,*" Raphael says, then walks behind a complete wet bar on the *veranda*.

Jason Mahoney walks me over to the table and makes the introductions.

"Mick...my wife Peggy...Max Mesmer...and Ernie Porter, chief of security on loan from Lane Rector, NPI for the conference this weekend. He's arranging all the logistics and transportation for us."

"Pleasure," I say nodding toward Peggy Mahoney which goes unacknowledged.

Both Mesmer and Porter stand to shake hands.

"Mick...call me Ernie," Ernest Porter says with a thick Southern drawl. His gratuitously firm handshake is almost confrontational. On his extended right forearm arm I can't help but notice the large spiraling tattoo of a snake, with the serpent forked tongue morphing into the

inscription, *El Negrito* on the back of his hand. Wearing black jeans and a black golf shirt, maybe 6'2" tall, lean and wiry with the hard ropey vascular muscles like someone who works out...a lot. On his substantial left bicep, a skull tattoo, with *FORCE RECON USMC*. Hmm...an ex-black ops guy, a perfect specimen of a made-in-America trained killing machine. His coal black, unblinking lifeless eyes, and hard sneering mouth, give me a momentary chill.

"Hi Mick...heard some good things about you from Jason," Max Mesmer says without making direct eye contact like he's talking to someone behind me, his fleshy effete handshake, clammy like three day old fish. He's fifty-ish, short with shoulders like a goat, and a thick mid-section, a polyester Hawaiian shirt tucked into his belt-less trousers, almost up to his armpits with daring red suspenders. His idea of casual Friday, tops-off the package of a Max Bialystock double, complete with the bad comb-over.

"Thanks."

I notice that Peggy Mahoney doesn't appear to be very sociable, rather distant and aloof, judging by her unfocused sullen bloodshot-eyes, she's obviously already several rounds ahead of everyone else, most probably usually the case. Despite her washed-out appearance, one can tell that at one time she was probably a beauty, and could still scrub up pretty good. Her copper hair is cut in a low-maintenance short bob. I make her age to be early forties, but with excessively high-mileage and considerable premature streaks of gray at the roots from her last dye job, a coupla months past shelf life. Wearing brown riding boots with tan jodhpurs, the tightly-fitting brown knit pull-over is unflattering to her flat, chicken chest. She's short and compact—a slim body with slender but fleshly crepey arms, with the thick torso and a face that exhibits the unmistakable puffiness of a career alcoholic.

Jason motions me toward an empty patio chair next to Peggy who reeks with the saccharine pickled scent of alcohol. We all take a seat, just in time for my drink to arrive.

"*Gracias*, Raphael," I say.

"*De nada*, *senor*."

I take a sip. It's like nothing I have ever tasted before, from the heavy cut-crystal tumbler the thick smooth viscosity oozes over my lips on to my tongue exploding in a subtle synergistic blend over a predominately musty hint of oak...nectar from the gods, ambrosia.

"Not bad...Jason, could get used this," I say.

"Good. If you make *the smart* decision...maybe you'll get that chance. Mick...Max is going to be giving the keynote talk tomorrow morning...to kick off the conference. I'd like you two to get together sometime before the conference...for a preliminary exchange of some ideas and strategies for our long-term game plan, maybe after dinner tonight," Mahoney says.

"Sure...not a problem, Jason," I say.

Dinner with Jason, Max, Peggy and I is an unremarkable affair, with Ernest Porter deferring. We are joined at dinner by Jason's 16 year old son, Trey. He's tall for his age, maybe 6'4" with a hulking frame, with not much on it. I'm reminded of myself when I was the same age.

"Trey...Mick here played some B-ball in college...at UCB. Trey's *only* a second string center on his high school basketball team," Jason says with an unmistakable disdainful tone.

The poor kid seems to have inherited his mother's sullen disposition, I'm sure due in no small part to failing to measure up to his father's expectation of perfection.

"Yea? So were you any good?" he says rather snidely.

"Good...maybe a half a step from great. I wasn't a particularly gifted athlete. I was good enough to start in high school...we had a good team...they carried me. Got a full ride to UCB, but left the program early, due to uh...political incongruities, shall we say?" I say smiling.

"Mick...maybe tomorrow morning...after breakfast, you could show Trey a few things about post play in our gym," Jason says.

"Well that's up to Trey...but yea, if you're interested I'd be happy to, Trey," I say.

Before Trey can even answer, Jason says, "Great. He'll be there...9 AM *sharp*."

Trey's face darkens, then he pretty much clams up for the rest of the evening. Poor kid. Been there...done that.

The *entre* is classic Ponderosa bill of fare. Mounds of barbequed baby back pork ribs, of course raised and slaughtered on the ranch. The way Max Mesmer attacks the pork ribs would tend to indicate that he's not a practicing orthodox Jew. Peggy Mahoney doesn't make it through the entree, before she dozes off at the table. The fact that her face ends up in the mashed potatoes, would also tend to indicate that my conversation is less than riveting. Raphael is summoned by Jason, to assist the missus upstairs, followed by Trey. Then, like some cliché scene from *Bonanza*, Ben Cartwright, Max and I retire to Jason's study for brandy and manly cigars. Cubans of course.

As we're sitting around the crackling fire in the massive river rock fireplace, puffing and sipping, like real men, scanning the room, I notice what appears to be a small armory in a floor-to-ceiling *armoire* behind locked double glass doors.

"Quite a collection of guns...you a hunter?" I ask

"Yes...I hunt a little. Mostly non-humans," Ben Cartwright says with a *ha ha* smirk, "and an occasional gray wolf or mountain lion that is menacing my cattle. But I'm mostly a collector of firearms...with an extensive collection of handguns, including vintage civil war, and handguns of the old West, like the Colt .45. Care to have a look?" he says.

"Not particularly into guns but...sure. Max, you interested in seeing this?" I say trying to be inclusive.

"Honestly...no, guns terrify me," he says, taking a sip out of the brandy snifter, just staring at the fire surrounded by a cloud of smokey fragrance of his Cuban cigar, relishing every puff.

He walks me over, opens an unlocked drawer in a credenza next to the *moire*, and removes a key ring. He unlocks the one door, then releases the other door from behind, and fully opens them both. The gun case is obviously a custom built affair, with shotguns, rifles and hand guns arrayed in elaborate stations against a red velvet background material. In the center a large bronze National Rifle Association *cloisonne*, with a red background, and an American Eagle clutching a rifle with the founding date of 1871. I notice an M16 assault rifle, the kind used in Vietnam, from the pictures that Byron Brawley had sent me from his tour of duty in 'Nam. Also, what appears to be some kind of hunting rifle with a scope, but with a multiple-shot magazine, perhaps for hunting *peasants*... who might be pilfering his cattle? Hmm.

There is also a large collection of various handguns, from vintage revolvers up to more contemporary models, semi-automatics with large magazines.

"That an M16?" I ask.

"Yes...it is, fully functional in the semi...or automatic mode. And next to it is the infamous AK47, the rifle of choice by the Viet Cong...also capable of firing multiple bursts, in semi, or fully automatic mode. Be careful...it's loaded, as are all the guns here...for protection," he says handing it to me. As I take it from him, inexplicably my heart begins to race and I break out in a cold sweat. Some psychic connection with my best friend from UCB, Byron Brawley, KIA in Vietnam. This would probably be the kind of gun that killed my pal...*from small arms fire*, as the citation read for the Silver Star for Gallantry.

I immediately hand it back to him, "Thanks...but uh...anyway. Thanks for showing me. Impressive collection," I say.

Jason looks at me quizzically, pauses, and shrugs. I abruptly turn and return to my chair by the fire as Jason replaces the AK47 in the gun case, locks the doors and places the key in the credenza drawer.

When Jason rejoins us by the fireplace, he says, "Mick...I notice you're wearing Sperry Topsiders. Do you sail?"

"A little bit. I've crewed...the Cinco de Mayo regatta to Ensenada, but certainly not anything serious like the 12 meter you're into," I say motioning toward the wall-size photos of the *Mas Rapido* with my cigar hand.

"Like off-shore racing?" he asks.

"I do...but my experience is mostly with sloops ten meters and under...with an occasional twelve. Because of my size, I'm considered prime moveable ballast. I enjoy the physicality of cranking the jib winches on quick multiple tactical tacks...sometimes in a pinch a little

foredeck work with a 'chute, and on rare occasion a helmsman. But I have to say that I particularly enjoy the mental challenge of the tactical part of racing, and on a clear night with billions of stars it's magical, almost spiritual...for me at least," I say.

"No *almost* about it. The romance of being on the open sea under sail where theoretically, from any point of origin, with a good boat and crew, and some wind, one could literally sail anywhere in the entire world, limited only by one's imagination and seamanship," Jason says almost wistfully with a fleeting flicker of openness, then catching himself, but it's too late, I know what I saw. And more ominously J. Murdock Mahoney, knows what I saw...something akin to vulnerability. Then the switch is instantly flipped back to CEO Mahoney mode.

"...and an irrepressible sense of adventure," I add.

"Indeed," he says gazing at me searchingly. Then it's gone.

Then turning to Max Mesmer, "Okay Max...we should probably get started. Why don't you outline your talking points to Mick, while I go check on Peggy," as he gets up and leaves.

With Jason gone, Max Mesmer, now in his element, begins listing the bullet-points of his talk. It becomes obvious that he has carefully thought out a long term legislative strategy, including the eventual re-composition of the Supreme Court, more conservative, and much more sympathetic to business. It's a highly ambitious long-term vision, which he articulates with great enthusiasm and intensity.

I ask several questions, but it becomes very clear early on that he is enthralled with the sound of his own voice, and that he's not particularly interested in what recommendations I may have, so I let the *Mesmer-izing* one do all the talking, making a few mental notes that I will take up later with Marla and Pauly.

About an hour later, Jason Mahoney returns; it's almost 11 PM.

"Okay gentlemen, I assume that you are now good to go for tomorrow's meeting. I'm going to suggest that we all retire for tonight. Raphael will show you to your respective rooms, where your things have already been unpacked and laid out. Breakfast will be served starting at 7 AM. Good night Max...Raphael?"

"Good night Jason and Mick," Max Mesmer says as he follows Raphael out of the library.

As I'm about to leave, Jason takes me by the arm, and with his head, wordlessly motions for me to stay.

"Mick...there's something that I need to cover with you. No one...and I mean no one is to know what I am about tell you, not even Pauly or Marla...and certainly not Max. I am informing you that I have had four sub-Rosa cameras and various microphones strategically installed throughout the conference room area...the cameras will be undetectable. Since we will not be taking formal written minutes for legal...and security reasons, it will provide a record of what was said...and by whom. Because you are fluent in video production, and

because secrecy and security is of the highest priority, after the conference, I'm going to ask you, and you alone, to take the raw footage to our post production facility, lock the doors, and edit the footage of the four cameras into a complete record of both days of the conference. Of course, the priority is to ensure that the audio and video quality for any given speaker is the best possible. Again, it will be for *my eyes only*. Are we absolutely clear on this? And, do you understand why I'm doing this?" Jason says intensely staring into my eyes.

"Not sure, but my guess would be that because it will be believed that there is no record, formal or otherwise, that everyone will be more likely to be candid...more outspoken," I say.

"Correct. Okay. Tomorrow morning after you've had your breakfast, Raphael will escort you over the gymnasium...where Trey will be waiting at nine. Raphael?" he says.

Raphael, seemingly always hovering in the shadows within earshot of the beck and call of *el patron*, appears in the doorway.

"*Por favor*...follow me upstairs to your room, *Senor*," Raphael says.

Replaying the events of the evening, the proposed clandestine recording of the conference, the apparent deep unhappiness of Jason's wife and son and Mahoney's apparent obsession with guns and related paranoia about *protection*, causes my sleep to be somewhat restless and sporadic, so the next morning I'm up by 5 AM.

My room has a decent sized full bathroom with a large shower. I take a long hot shower, finishing off with a Siberian Rinse of my *other peeps*, of pure cold for a full minute to remove the cobwebs, shave, get dressed and put on my gym shoes, which I always carry with me in case I want to go for a hike or a jog.

By 6 AM, I'm downstairs, where I let myself out the front door to go for a brisk morning jog, usually for an hour, before breakfast. The morning air is cool and fragrant with the luscious sweet scent of freshly mowed alfalfa. I begin walking toward a distant barn with a corral, populated by maybe twenty horses. I don't know much about horses, but I do know beauty...and an Arabian when I see it. Despite their relatively short stature, they're still classified as a horse. They are an elegant breed with an arched strong neck and long flowing mane and tail. Among the group, is an all-white stallion, along with an all-black mare—they appear to be an item. As I walk up to the corral, the big stallion starts to nicker and whinny, with his ears pricked forward, he walks over to the corral fence. I walk up to him, and pat him on his massive head.

"Hey boy..." I say scratching between his eyes, as he emits a low rumble of appreciation through his nostrils, bobbing his head up and down playfully.

"He likes you...never seen him take to a stranger like that before. Horses are a good judge of character," I hear Peggy Mahoney say behind me, exiting the barn carrying a blanket and saddle.

"Good morning...yeah...maybe the size thing...probably thinks were related," I say.

"Do you ride?" she asks

"Nah...never got into it. Lucky for the poor horse...having to lug my big uh...mass around," I say.

"I'm Peggy Mahoney," she says apparently not remembering me from last night. I must say, considering how bad she looked last night, she looks transformed, alert and relatively happy, without the alcohol induced sullen mask...or the mashed potatoes on her mug.

"Mick Kozlov...I'm hear for the conference," I say, not wanting to embarrass her for not remembering me.

"Yes...of course, we met last night. I just wanted to introduce myself a little more properly than last night. I was a little under the weather and not a very gracious hostess, I'm afraid," she says, laying down the saddle and blanket on the middle rail of the corral, extending her hand.

I take her hand, "I hadn't noticed...but thanks," I lied, "going for a ride this lovely morning?" I ask.

"Yes...every morning. Beats the hell out of psychotherapy, know what I mean?" she says for the first time exhibiting a lovely smile with an endearing gap between her front teeth. Yeap...she gets off the sauce, could scrub up real good.

"Yeah...for me it's a long morning hike or a run. Keeps my head straight for the rest of the day. Need any help with the saddle?" I ask.

"Nope...thanks, been doing this since I was a kid," she says slipping between the horizontal rails. Then walking over to the big white stallion, firmly patting his strong arched neck, "That's my *Blanco*...good boy," taking a small apple out of her riding jacket pocket, and placing it in his mouth, his huge white teeth loudly crunching it, followed with a low whinny of appreciation.

"Well, I'll let you two get going...have a good ride," I say, as I turn to leave her hand quickly reaches through the fence, lightly, tentatively, touching my arm.

"Mick...last night after dinner, Trey told me that his father imposed upon you to spend some time with him this morning...at the gym. I just wanted to say thanks...and to let you know that Trey has some uh...*issues*...to kind of prepare you. He's been diagnosed with bipolar disorder...and schizophrenia. It runs in my side of the family...along, with as you probably have already observed by now, alcoholism. So Jason, while never having said it openly, blames me for the way he is...*defective* genes. But he's also a brilliant kid...kind of a savant, really...prone to excesses and obsessions, sweet but *very*

sensitive, with a dark calculating side like his father. He's fine as long as he stays on his meds...but...

Anyway, I just wanted you to know...and perhaps you could be a little *more* patient with him? He's a good kid...and not a bad athlete, but he lets his emotions sometimes sabotage his abilities...low self-esteem. Jason can be so uh...impatient with him at times. His expectations for Trey are very high...unrealistically so, which only compounds his fragile self-image issues," she says with an apologetic, but protective maternal tone.

"Thanks for that Peggy...I'll keep it in mind," I say.

"Thank you, Mick," Peggy Mahoney says with a sincere, warm smile of motherly appreciation.

"Not a problem...have a good ride. See ya later," I say, smiling, then turning around to start my morning jog up the hill toward a beautiful meadow blanketed with a riot of wildflowers, populated by hundreds of free grazing Black Angus cattle against the backdrop of the snow capped Rockies and huge white fluffy clouds.

I get a moderate rhythm going, maybe a 10 minute mile pace, take a quick glance at my watch...7:35, after about twenty minutes I start to break a nice little sweat. At a base elevation of over 5,000 feet—Denver, the Mile-high city—the cool, clean succulent mountain air is like a tonic as my runners-high endorphins start to kick in. The whole time I am thinking about Trey's relationship with his overbearing father. The parallels with the difficult relationship with my own alcoholic abusive father, the same issues of self-sabotage and low self-esteem, resonate deeply with me.

Yeap...sure beats the hell out of psychotherapy.

By 8:10 I'm back to the *hacienda grandisimo*. I make my way to the kitchen where I find a seated Raphael, nursing a mug of steaming coffee, with an attractive middle-aged matronly *Latina* woman bustling about the *cocina*.

"*Senor Kozlov...este es mia esposa...Consuela*. She will cook anything you want for breakfast," he says.

"*Por favor*, Raphael, please call me Miguel, and *el gusto es mio, Consuela...gracias. Dos huevos, por favor uh...scrambled*," I say.

"*Si...senor no hay problema...pero le gusta huevos rancheros senor uh...Miguelito?*" she says with a warm smile.

"*Si. Muy mucho y gracias, senora*," I say.

"*De nada. Huevos rancheros...coming up*," she says with an ever-present warm smile.

"*Senor*, after breakfast, I will walk you over to the gym...where you are to meet *Senor Trey* at nine. *Esta bien?*" Raphael says.

"*Si...esta bien, Raphael*."

The *huevos rancheros* are wonderful, cooked to perfection with all fresh ingredients including freshly laid eggs, sprigs of cilantro, over

frijoles, melted cheese and freshly prepared salsa over a bed of homemade toasted flour tortillas.

"*Muchas gracias, Consuela. Su-premo! El mejor!*" I compliment Consuela.

She smiles back, shyly averting my eyes.

By 9 AM, Raphael has escorted me to the gym. *Gym?*

Ha...it looks more like Division Two college sport-plex with a full size full-court complete with glass backboards—why am I not surprised? I show up with no expectations. Judging from the kid's lousy arrogant attitude at dinner, I'm seriously hoping he's a no-show. I'd rather be spending my free time with Miss Marly.

There's a steel rack on rollers of leather basketballs under the basket. They all appear to be new. I pick one out...take a deep inhale. Ah, the familiar comforting scent of the leather. I dribble it to check the air pressure...perfect, of course.

Never could resist the opportunity to shoot hoops, so after I do a some stretching out of my hamstrings, calf muscles and Achilles tendons for about 10 minutes, I then run a few medium speed full court sprints, just to warm up the ol' *cuervo*.

First, I begin with some close bank shots under the basket with both my left and right hands. Then I move out about free-throw depth and methodically work my way around the basket from 15 feet, with easy jump shots. The only sound, the loud echo of a bouncing ball in the empty gym, accompanied by the familiar nostalgic squeak of sneakers on the gym floor. Then... *swish, swish, swish...yeah baby...I still got it!* Gawd it feels good to be out here. Reminiscent of those many solitary but happy hours I'd spent in the gym as a skinny kid honing my skills.

"Do you *ever* miss?" I hear a voice behind me say.

I turn, and see it's Trey, in a \$300 gym suit, gym shoes that probably run about \$200 a pair, with head-to-toe assorted basketball fashion paraphernalia. He looks like he's on a commercial shoot for Nike or Gator-aide. With no small effort, I manage to stifle my impulse to guffaw.

I glance at my watch...9:35. Not a good start.

"Hey Trey...nice fashion ensemble. Didya like rip-off a Big Five sporting goods? And yea...I've missed...once, back in nineteen and seventy-two, the L.A. Earthquake. After I released the shot...the basket moved," I say deadpanning it.

Although he tries desperately not to smile, he finally breaks up. *Yeap...I still got it.* Not a bad looking kid...when he smiles.

"So...okay Trey. The first rule of an effective practice routine is regimen. Doing it the same way, every time. Repetition creates muscle memory...which allows you to trust your body to perform to its maximum potential...without the crippling self-doubt. Ninety percent of being good in any sport is practice...and focused relaxed intensity, also

known as self-confidence, so the *other* 90 percent is confidence. No practice...no confidence. A daily, hard uncompromising practice routine. So, the second commandment after regimen, among the many you will learn...*as ye shall practice...so shall ye play.*

The first thing we're going to do, is warm-up and stretch. Then run a few sprints...then always, and I mean always start with the fundamentals...including defensive stance and footwork drills. Then and only then, do we actually pick up a ball. Then it's passing...crisp chest passes, then bounce passes against a wall. The last thing we do is shoot buckets. And...finally, *the* most important thing to remember is....punctuality. Nine o'clock does *not* mean 9:35. We clear on that?" I say.

"Okay...*whatever*," he says, dismissively.

"Okay *what*?" I say with an edge.

"Okay...*Mister Kozlov*," he says with sullen sarcasm.

"Trey...drop the mister...and the attitude, okay? If you want me to spend some time with you, then a major attitude correction is in order. You're not doing *me* any favors being out here. We're doing this for *you*, man...not *me*...and lastly *not* for your *father*. Okay pal? By the way...I go by Koz. Ready to go to work?" I say.

"Okay uh...Koz. What do you want me to do first?" he says with youthful earnestness. A good sign that he's starting to get the rules of engagement.

"First thing, air-mail all the ridiculous regalia you're wearing. Strip down just to your shorts and t-shirt, lose the head and wrist bands etcetera and etcetera," I say

I walk him in through the warm-up and skills drill routines. He's huffing and puffing, but with a surprising eagerness and commitment, he breaks a good sweat. Encouraging. For a tall gangly kid, he moves pretty good, although it's obvious that he's not in basketball condition, and that he's never been coached properly in fundamentals and footwork. That will be the first order of business.

Six-feet-four at 16, judging by the size of his feet and hands I'm guessing that eventually he'll be at least six-six. All the more reason for him to learn fundamentals, especially good footwork which will include daily rope skipping, until he can grow into his length. We'll also get him doing some daily push-ups and pull-ups to improve his upper body strength, and put some muscle on his bony frame so he can bang the boards with the big boys.

Listen to me will ya?...with the *we*. Coach Koz, like he's *my* kid...*or something*, which brings a smile to my face.

But is it possible that through Trey, that I am vicariously, desperately attempting to reconcile, indeed revise, my own history of my battle with my own autocratic oppressive father? A revisionist's futile attempt...a fool's errand, to try change the dark Gothic ending to a more *and everyone lived happily ever after?*" *Is it possible that I may in fact*

need Trey, more than he needs me...to finally finish some dark festering, unfinished business? Jesus...I'm almost 40 years old. Where the hell is that coming from?

I look at my watch...10:20.

"Okay Trey. That's enough for today. I've got a meeting to get ready for. Good job today. So tomorrow morning, we'll work on ball skills, including shooting. We'll start at 8 AM *sharp*. We clear on that?" I say.

"Okay...I guess so..."

"Okay...*what*, Trey? What time?" I say

"Okay Koz...8 AM, *uh...sharp*," he says grinning. Another good sign. Now we're starting to get somewhere.

"Good lad. So see ya *manana...en la manana*," I say, playfully slapping him on his butt.

"*Si, senior*," he says smiling, leaving me alone in the gym with my thoughts about what the rest of the day, the weekend and indeed what my future, if any with ACT, may have in store for me. If I decline the position as offered with ECC, then I'll probably end up leaving my current position at ACT, voluntarily or otherwise.

But I am distracted from having to grapple with the difficult decision whether to participate long-term in the ECC as envoy for ACT, by the youthful expectation, like a 16 year old boy in *uh...lust*, that I will soon be seeing one delicious Marly Dyson. Gawd, I love being in *uh...like*.

Time to hit the showers and hose off, *para mia seniorita muy bonita...horita!*

By the time I get back to the *hacienda grandisimo*, in the distance, near the stilted seven story traffic control tower with the huge wind sock standing straight out, I can make out several silhouetted tall vertical stabilizers, with the unmistakable high horizontal stabilizer of a Learjet 35A starting at about 3.5 million bucks a copy, entry level. The same jet that I had flown in, to depositions and trials with many of my former clients—high profile plaintive attorneys' in L.A., including one Vera Mirren, Esquire.

So...*Los Maestros de los Universos* have landed.

I run into Raphael on the way to my room to shower and suit up for the big game.

"Raphael...have all the guests arrived?" I ask.

"I am not sure, *senor*...but they're in the library with *Senor Mesmer* and *Senor Mahoney*. *El patron* is asking for you. He says the limos will be departing for his office downtown at 11:30...in about a half-hour. What shall I tell him, *senor*?" he asks with an urgency.

"Tell him...*no hay problema*. I'll be good to go in 20 minutes, *mas o menos*," I say as I two-at-a-time run up the stairs to my room to shower and get dressed.

Within 15 minutes, I'm downstairs about to enter the library, in jeans, a clean sport shirt, and a sport coat sans necktie, and my trademark Sperry Topsiders, sans socks. Jason Mahoney, spots me in the doorway, waves me off, excuses himself from a conversation and walks up to me, wearing a dark Armani and of course, a bold beige tie.

"Glad you could make it, Mick. You didn't have to get all dressed up on my account," Mahoney says, good-naturedly but not without sarcastic edge.

"I always try to look nice *for you*, Jason," I say batting my eyes, while coyly patting my hair in place.

He tries, but can't suppress an evanescent smile. *Hey...I can still kill...even el patron.*

"All the scheduled attendees arrive okay?" I ask.

"Yeah...we were just about to leave...without you. You'll be riding over in our corporate limo with me and Max. The rest of the attendees, in the hired limos. Game time. Ready to go?" he asks.

"Sure...game on, *el jefe!*" I say smiling, realizing that compared to some of the trials of the high stakes eight-figure cases I had negotiated, this was like...just a warm up act.

On the way over to the corporate offices of ACT, in the back of the limo with Jason Mahoney and Max Mesmer, Jason says, "Did Trey show up this morning at the gym...as ordered?"

"Yes...he did," I say

"On time?"

"Yeah...he did well. He worked hard. I think the kid's got some potential, I'll work with him again tomorrow," I say, not giving him a specific time so that Jason won't be tempted to come to the gym to observe and most likely inhibit the poor kid.

"Okay...good, uh...thanks, Mick," he says thoughtfully with a faint hint of surprise.

"So, Jason...and Max, what is it that I should be looking for here, in today's meeting?" I ask.

"Mick, I'd say the most important thing for you to observe and learn today is...*power*. Who's got the power in the room...and the smarts. There will be some pretty monstrous egos in there. It will take a few hours to shake out who will emerge as the alphas of the pack...the *raison d'etre* of today's meeting. From our extensive background research, we pretty much already know who the smartest guys...and gal, in the room will be. But ultimately, it will be about strength of personality. Who is going to lead...and who's willing to follow...or not," Max says.

"I want you to pay particular attention to Lane Rector, CEO of National Petroleum, and his right-hand man...VP Howard Roland. He's a notoriously ambitious brown-noser...and Ernest Porter, *El Negrito*, the guy you met the other night at the ranch. We understand him to be, literally, a hit-man for Roland. He's an oily, pun intended, slippery sub-

Rosa son-of-bitch, who specializes in getting things done...by whatever means necessary, including so-called black-ops. And with an infamous reputation for never letting the law, or law enforcement interfere with getting a *done deal*.

He maintains his own security company...so he's an independent contractor which gives NPI, plausible deniability for his often marginally legal activities. We suspect that Rector, *et al* will attempt to emerge in a role of leadership, next to me of course, since I am the nominal head of this effort. I suspect that we will have to constantly monitor their activities...that's where you come in. To be vigilant that this character Roland, who *thinks* he's a lot smarter and clever than he really is, doesn't go rogue on us...pull some stupid cowboy stunt that could taint and jeopardize our long term strategy," Jason Mahoney says.

"So if I'm hearing you right, you see a potential for internal conflict with regard to interests specific to each economic sector...like the short-term self-interest...'eye-ee'...quick profits, of a big powerful energy corporation like NPI. And, how they might conflict with the long-term macro-strategy for power...and the ultimate control of the economy? And you want me...to be the cop on the beat, to anticipate and preempt any squabbles," I say.

Jason looks at Max, then nods at me and smiles.

"Bingo," Max says.

Some seriously mean streets...pretty tough beat, Jace," I say.

"That's *exactly* why we offered *you*...the job, Mick," Jason says.

"Anyone else?" I ask.

"Lastly but most definitely not the least, Reginald Meade. An insufferably arrogant Brit...CEO & Chairman of World Media Inc. He's our biggest direct threat. Mostly newspapers and print, but increasingly aggressive in the acquisition of content creation and delivery companies, including broadcast radio, and satellite and network TV...and reputedly, with his eye on some of our bigger cash-cow cable subsids.

Meade, getting along in years now, at 79 is starting to release more and more of the daily operational responsibility to his son Arthur, not the sharpest knife in the drawer.

But the real threat to us is the old man's young and beautiful, arm piece Asian wife, Alexandra Kwan, born in 47, known affectionately by her adversaries as *AK47*...or The Dragon Lady. Disarmingly charming...but lethal as she is beautiful. She's a brilliant tactician and strategist...matched only by her unrelenting ruthlessness. M-B-A Harvard *magna cum laude*, and a P-H-D in econ at London School of Economics, and oh by the way, a J-D from Yale law. The few times she's been tested by some light-weight corporate eunuchs attempting a hostile takeover bid...left them a quivering mass. They now view her not just with respect but fear and loathing," Jason says smiling.

"If not penis envy. From what you say, she probably poses the greatest potential threat for an internecine media war...with ACT.

Sounds like the Divine Miz Dragon Lady is just your kinda gal, Jace," I say kiddingly which draws an evanescent knowing smile from *el jefe*.

"So far, our most successful strategy with her has been containment...with an occasional feigned take-over interest in some of their properties...just to keep her on defense," Jace says.

"Yeah, well if she's half as good as you say, she ain't fallen' for the ol' head fake too many more times," I say which draws nod and a smirk from Maxie Mesmer.

Hmm. This whole scenario is starting to more than casually resonate with the Italian leitmotif of the Godfather Trilogy...and Machiavelli, my *peeps*. A variation on the now famous Godfather dictum—Michael Corleone in Godfather II, "Keep your friends close...and your enemies closer..."

And, would I be expected to play the role of the *adopted*, but trusted outsider adviser, Tom Hagen...the *consigliere*, with no actual blood on my clean manicured hands, or would I end up like Sonny Corleone...the *family* enforcer in the trenches with the political slime who in the end, for all his good intentions and loyalty, gets caught in a deadly crossfire. Machine-gunned at the toll booth of uh...life. *A 'leave the gun, take the canollis'*, kinda ending for *mio*.

Just about then, we pull-up to the manned security gate to the ACT Inc. campus, followed in tandem by the Corporate Wagon Train of eight black Chevy Suburbans. I look at my watch...12:10 Saturday afternoon. So there will be few if any regular staffing employees working today or tomorrow.

As the security guard comes out of his kiosk, Wagon master, Ben Cartwright, lowers his smoke-tinted window. The guard immediately recognizes him and all but genuflects.

"Yes, sir, Mister Mahoney, *sir!*" snapping to a smart attention.

"Those eight black vehicles behind us are all part of my party. Close the gate after the last one. Today and tomorrow, make no record or notation of any kind, about my visit or the other vehicles or occupants in my party. After our entry, for the next two days, no one, not even employees are going to be permitted to enter other than the eight limos, the truck from the catering company Executive Food, my private secretary Rebecca Reese, and VPs Paul Berman and Marla Dyson. Is that *perfectly* clear?" he commands rather cryptically with a melodramatically stern expression on his face.

"Yes, *sir!* Your secretary, the caterer and Mister Berman and Miss Dyson have already arrived, *sir!*" the guard says, as the gate slides open.

"Very good," Jason Mahoney says over the whirring sound of the window, as it slowly glides up—the covert melodrama of the moment, almost causing me to break out in a laugh. *What...no fake beards with shades?*

As the car is driven to the main entrance of the corporate office, I notice that the parking lot is almost empty except for the Executive Foods catering van, and a few cars, most notably Marla's Audi. *Yes!*

As we get out of our limo, the caravan of other limos back into some rapid deployment and escape formation. What? *No circling the wagons for the tonight's corporate campfire sing along?*

As each little entourage exits their respective limo, they began to assemble in the main lobby, where Pauly Berman and Marly Dyson are expectantly waiting, to greet and direct the corporate royalty up to the office of J. Murdock Mahoney.

I walk over to Pauly, "Hey Pauly...catchin' up on some paperwork on a Saturday...I see," thrusting my palm into his outstretched hand. He laughs with that easy infectious chortle, slapping me on the back, looking me up and down.

"Hey, Mickey...good to see ya, man. The Sears and Roebuck Grain and Feed Catalog store, is the *next* turnoff."

While he's doing his little *schtick*, I feel a hard pinch on my left butt cheek, causing me to spin around. Marly, giggling like a school girl, looking positively delicious is obviously already a round or two ahead. Hey it's Happy Hour...in London. For the Merry Band of ACT Alcoholic Acolytes, it's always Happy Hour...somewhere.

"Miz Dyson, need I remind you that it says right in the employee handbook, that *inappropriate* touching of a fellow employee in the uh...workplace, especially an...*underling*, could constitute sexual harassment?" I say.

While Pauly and Jason are occupied with the business of greeting and directing we move off to the side, "You mean like *this*?" Then she does it again, only much harder this time on the right cheek.

"Actually, I'm afraid that this has now escalated to the point of becoming a pattern of abuse...that I shall now be forced to refer the matter, to my counselor in such matters...*Mista* Woodrow H. Wilson, Esquire...whom I believe you have had the uh...pleasure of making his acquaintance? I say.

"A uh...bald fellow? With only one eye...*very* short?"

"Yes, one in the same. Tragically, blinded at birth by a Barbaric religious rite. *But*...I would describe him as being much, *much*...*taller*," I say looking down at *le monsieur*.

"Here's yer workplace...right *heya*," obviously from hanging around Pauly to long, giving *Monsieur* Wilson a firm squeeze.

"Please *madame*...you make look, but unless you intend to buy, do not uh...fondle the merchandise. You break...you buy," I say.

While effeminately lifting my right leg backwards at the knee, we then do the alternating cheek Italian air-kiss routine, "*Mmwa...mmwa. Ciao bella! Ciao bella!*" We then wander back over to Pauly and Jason.

By now all the attendees with their entourages have assembled in the lobby.

"There are two elevators, please press the button marked *corporate office*, which will take you up to the conference area, where you will be greeted by my secretary Miss Reeves. There is a buffet luncheon set up, along with an open bar. We will convene the conference at approximately 1 PM. You'll find prescribed seating at the large conference table, along with the agenda and some background material. Enjoy," Jason Mahoney says.

Hearing the words *buffet* and *open bar*, Maxie sidles over to one of the empty elevators. After both the elevators quickly fill up, they are gone, leaving Pauly, Marly, Jason and I, waiting for the next elevator.

"You guys ready for a little corporate *kabuki* theater? The Dragon Lady, I guarantee you've never seen *anything* quite like what you're about to witness," Jason Mahoney says almost reverentially.

Fast forward to 1:15. Lunch and Happy Hour are over. All the principals are now seated at their respective prescribed pews at the huge cathedral of a conference table, with their entourages sitting behind them on chairs. Some of the principals, are sipping cocktails chatting and laughing with each other, while several staffers are leafing through the folders of material.

Pauly, Marly and I, with me in the middle are seated off to one side behind Jason, which gives us a commanding view of all the attendees, now looking toward Jason Mahoney, now standing at the head of the conference table.

In the seats closest to the head of the table, Reginald Meade, of World Media is to Jason's right, then to Jason's left Lane Rector, National Petroleum. Howard Roland is seated directly behind Rector and Alexandra Kwan behind Reggie. Pauly says *sotto voce*, leaning in to my left ear, "Keep your friends close...and your enemies closer..." The serpentine Ernest 'El Negrito' Porter is seated directly to the right of Howard Roland.

I get my first look at the Dragon Lady, sitting closely behind Reggie Mead, all business, quickly turning pages, furiously making notations, leaning over his right shoulder whispering, as he's nodding his head up and down. With porcelain skin, large wide-set dark eyes, a pouty mouth with full lips, and stylishly coiffed shiny jet black hair. As advertised, she's a looker.

"Check out AK47...a walking Vera Wang, of course. All-Asian head to toe, probably to the tune of about four or five grand," Marla hisses. *R-rrrrrr*.

Jason calls the meeting to order, "Let's get started. Good afternoon ladies and gentlemen. Thank you all for attending this very important and timely two-day conference which I believe will go down

as a definitive pivot point, when American business drew a line in the sand, and said to the government, both state and federal...enough. *E-nough* of your arbitrary anti-entrepreneurial legislation and *e-nough* of your exorbitant taxation and onerous regulation. And as now Justice Louis Powell declared in his famous keynote call-to-arms memo way back in August of 1971...it's long past the time to push back. To take back the American dream!" John Galt says to a smattering of subdued golf applause, various affirmative head nods and smiles from the Ayn Rand acolytes seated around the table, most especially from the back bench sycophants.

"As we have an ambitious agenda for the next two days, so that we might get right down to business, I'll dispense with the introductions as we all know each other. By now, you've had ample opportunity to peruse the proposed agenda in front of you. I would ask at this time, if any of you would like to propose amendments to the agenda or have any questions or general comments?" Jason Mahoney says scanning the gathering.

Miz Dragon Lady stands up, which allows me to check out her slender petite Asian anatomy, but with one very attractive anomaly, relatively large breasts...probably a gift from, and for Reggie. The gift that just keeps on giving, "Jason, will there be a written transcript of these meetings in the form of minutes. Formal or informal?"

"Alexandra, the answer to your question is no, there will be no written record of this meeting of any kind, for obvious legal and security reasons," Jason says.

Impressive. Where most players plan maybe four or five moves ahead, she obviously sees the whole board...much earlier, always looking eight to ten moves ahead.

"Very good, Jace. Thank you," Dragon Lady says sitting down, smiling. *Jace?*

"Anyone else?" Jason asks. Nothing.

"Okay. With no further questions or comments, let's proceed with the first item on the agenda. Max Mesmer, of Mesmer Strategies will now deliver the keynote address. Max?" Jason says sitting down. Another smattering of applause.

Using an overhead projector for bar graphs, pie slices and copious bulleted lists, it takes Maxie Mesmer about an hour to get through his not-so-mini rote rehearsed dog and pony show with tired laugh lines. Not exactly Mesmer-izing stuff. Basically a manifesto for creating and implementing a long-term gradual economic strategy that embraces a global free-market international economy, with little or no trade barriers. A complete repudiation of the role of governmental control or intervention. Ostensibly, adios John Maynard Keynes—hello Milton Friedman. Max sits down to a round of enthusiastic applause.

"Thanks Max, for that excellent presentation outlining the long-term strategic interests of the Entrepreneurial Corporate Caucus...comments?" Jason says.

Lane Rector from NPI, dressed cowpoke-chic, with an affected LBJ drawl, clears his throat, "Okay...since this here conference is being conducted under high levels of security...with no written record, may I speak candidly to ya'll?" he says. Here comes the first volley.

"Of course, Lane...and I would also encourage all of you to speak openly and frankly...that's the point of this conference," Jason says.

"While I applaud in concept the intent of this here conference, I believe that at this stage before we get too far along in to substantive issas, that we begin to discuss procedural issas, like the potential for conflicts such as the boundaries of control of the E-C-C over its members, versus the sovereignty issas of the respective corporations. So I think we need to discuss some sort of dispute resolution process should the interests, economic or otherwise, conflict with one, or more of the other member corporations. Some form of arbitration mechanism, perhaps similar the UN Security Council, that would require unanimous consent and approval, with veto power vested in any one of the primary members."

"Okay...what's the nature of your concern, Lane. Can you give us an example?" Jason says.

Lane Rector then stands expansively waving his hand like LBJ giving The State of the Union address, "Sure, Jason, thought you'd neva ask," with a pasty smirk, "The primary concern that we of the fossil fuel industry have, and I would also include in that, coal, and natural gas...so it's also relevant for you as well, Drew and Chase of Kramer Energy...is the increasingly the-sky-is-falling ravings and drumbeat of the radical left environmentalists...on the alleged existential impact on the ecology through the consumption of our primary product, oil.

We spend a great deal of time and a helluva lot of money every year, millions of dollars, to ensure that our revenues from petroleum are not diminished by bleeding heart-liberal environmentalist, who care more about some ridiculous butterfly or beetle, than the economy. Oil is literally the fuel that drives the international economic engine. Full stop. And...we pay a lot of money to moles in the both governmental, and non-governmental environmentalist groups to keep us informed about what's going on in their huddles.

What I am about to tell ya'all must not under any circumstances leave this room. The latest and greatest threat to our revenues, still in its infancy is something quaintly coined the *greenhouse effect* by the environmental scientists. It is a relatively new scientific revelation. Some of our own independent long-term computer modeling, correlates with the preliminary computer modeling done by NASA which we have uh...gained access to. NASA hypothesizes that unless the atmosphere

can remain at or below 350 parts per million of carbon dioxide or CO₂ which is the uh...inescapable” he says with the same smirk, “by-product of the combustion of all carbon fossil fuels, perhaps within our lifetime, most probably by the end of the 21st century, the world may be a very different place, perhaps even uninhabitable in some regions.

Frankly, to put it quite bluntly...insofar as our business model is concerned...not our problem. As there is no mention anywhere is the corporate by-laws, about anything like saving Monarch butterflies or Dung beetles from extinction. Besides, none of us will probably even be around...to have to deal with it,” Lane Rector says with a cynical smile.

“Our own petro-scientists and geologist can pretty well predict how much energy in the form of oil and natural gas is still untapped sub-Terra Ferma. We know that unless something dramatically changes...some vast unknown oil reserve is discovered like the North Sea, we've already quantified the finite amount of oil still in the ground. We call it peak oil...where ongoing supply eventually will not be able to keep up with the demand, especially now with the increasing consumption of emerging economies like India...and eventually China.

By our calculations, again barring any unforeseen discovery of a bonanza of new oil reserves, or profoundly more efficient extraction technologies, we could see oil production peak as early as sometime in the first 25 years of the 21st century.

Let me be *cleah* ladies and gentlemen. Because our highest, and indeed by corporate charter, our *only* responsibility is to our shareholders, we do not intend to be prohibited or even impeded by anyone...including governments, by whatever means necessary from maximizing the profits of the sale of petroleum...until damn near every *goddamed* last drop is extracted and sold.”

Howard Roland adds, "And if I may add, Lane...when he says *any* means necessary...that's exactly what he means. So to summarize Lane's comments. No one, including the government or this entity, the E-C-C, ultimately is going to tell N-P-I what it can...or cannot do."

"Drew and I would both second the concerns and recommendations just registered by Lane," Chase Kramer says of the bookend Brothers Kramer of Kramer Energy Industry, Inc.

Then Dragon Lady speaks, "Lane, you indeed, make some interesting and compelling points about the issue of process before we delve too deeply into the substance. Allow me to make few preliminary observations. Firstly, because the nascent structure of this fledgling political action committee, or P-A-C, at this time is rather amorphous, I believe it is to our benefit, jointly and severally...practically, and more importantly, legally...under the *existing* rule of law, to keep it thus. Essentially a 5-0-1-c-6 non-profit corporation without any power of control over the business decisions of individual member corporations.

And, if at some point down the road, some conflicts should arise...such as unwanted, unsolicited acquisition by one member

corporation of another, I-E, in the unlikely scenario that ACT should attempt a hostile takeover of a World Media asset, we at World Media believe that it's crucial that the members of the ECC should remain impartial, indeed agnostic. It's just Major League Baseball...hardball. Even, if in the highly unlikely event somehow the reverse of the illustrative takeover were to happen. Would you not agree, Jace?" she says with a wicked smile. Nice move.

"Of course, Alex," Jace says.

"Secondly, the other issue, frankly, from the standpoint of legalities, for World Media, and conceivably me and each of you personally, is a far more troublesome one. The fact that these meetings are being conducted in a highly secretive manner...and that great lengths have been taken, to prevent the prying eyes of outsiders, most especially the press, would tend to indicate that we have something to hide by meeting so surreptitiously. A veritable buffet for the conspiracy theorists...and leftist journalists. Potentially spawning some accusations, groundless or not, of anti-trust activities...along with possible personal exposure for prosecution for criminal conspiracy by the D-O-J. It is for that reason that at the very beginning of the meeting, I specifically asked if minutes were being taken on this meeting, for which I was unequivocally assured by Jason, that there will be *no* legally discoverable *written* record of the substance, discussed at these meetings. Right Jace?" AK47 says again with the cold calculating smile of a ninja assassin.

The video will show that Jason Mahoney nodded in agreement.

Jason then stand stands up, clears his throat, and begins pacing around the conference table, also gesturing expansively as he expounds, *hmm, some kind of CEO style thing?* "My personal vision for the E-C-C, would be to maintain the facade of more of social club, like a very exclusive corporate country club, but with very...*very* high asset standards for admission.

To optimize the considerable years of accrued experience, skill, economic and political power of membership of the E-C-C in the form of strictly a strategic advisory body...like the elders of a tribe...leaving the ground game tactics and spade work, to the existing infrastructure of political action, like the US Chamber of Commerce. For gentlemen...and ladies, if Lane Rector's forecasts, and I might add, reinforced by other very credible independent prognostic scientific studies, are indeed correct about peak oil, and this so-called *greenhouse effect*...then civilization as we now know it, inexorably, will be reduced to a chaotic tribal society of primal inter-tribal warfare...over the basic needs for survival.

So I believe the real challenge before us, though a contemporaneous worthy priority, is not so much to try to shape and control the evolution of the existing so-called democratic form of

government, but to envision the coming of the new global world order as our highest priority.

Best distilled as...how to position ourselves so as to maximize our leverage, so when the *music stops*...and the inevitable social chaos does ensue...when, not if, they will be coming after us with torches, pitchforks...lynch mobs in the middle of the night. And it will happen, gentlemen...and ladies, perhaps in our lifetime. So again, we must begin to position ourselves *now*, if we are to ensure that we, the *ruling class*, our families, children and grandchildren, are not left without a chair, at the head of the table. To quote one of our most esteemed captains of capitalism, and ideological brethren, John D., as in Doyen, Rockefeller, *I always tried to turn every disaster into an opportunity.*

In short ladies and gentlemen...*oderent dum metuant*...latin, *let them hate us...as long as they fear us...*

So it will become the prime imperative of all so-called corporate mainstream media to control the message. To control the content...obviously one must control media infrastructure. And therefore own the media...both horizontally and vertically. To that regard, ACT and WMI are on the same side of the ball. So creating and more importantly maintaining hegemony over the message and the delivery mechanism should be our priority number one. And I'm sure you all realize, that would also mean controlling the regulatory climate...by any means necessary, most especially Supreme Court appointments.

Well, thank you all for the excellent input and discussion for this, our first session. It's getting late. I'd suggest that we adjourn for today, and resume with the agenda set out for tomorrow's meeting, here at 10 AM. You're individual limos, will take you to your respective hotels. This meeting is hereby adjourned. Have a good evening," Jason declares.

As the conference quietly adjourns, under a palpable pall of solemnity with little conversation among the attendees, Jason Mahoney walks over to his desk, and unobtrusively flips a switch.

Well there it is. The vision of the coming New World Order, controlled by the Masters of the Universe. Indeed, the opening question posed by Ayn Rand in *Atlas Shrugged*, *Who is John Galt?* is answered. John Galt is not a *who*...but an *it*...a *what* skillfully resurrected by J. Murdock Mahoney et al. Indeed, the Russian immigrant Jewess, Ayn Rand would have been very pleased indeed, with Jason's little speech.

So the long-term strategy is to create and concentrate as much wealth and tangible asset for the *ruling class* as possible. The more wealth...the more power, so when the *pate* hits the fan, they will control *how* and *where* it sprays out.

Essentially, a return to a Middle Ages society. Where land ownership and other tangible asset will form the basis for the ruling hierarchy of *the who* and *the how* the world is governed. Welcome to the

New World Order—Neo-fuedalism. Like the King said about the serfs, *we just want to make their situation very difficult...but not impossible.*

In other words, *some bodies still gotta pick dat cotton.* So the question one has to start asking himself now...before it's too late? Is this New World Order inevitable, implacable? And if so, do I want to be a Lord...or a vassal?

After the room has emptied out, the only remaining attendees are Marla, Paul, Max Mesmer, myself and Jason Mahoney. Jason walks over to the conference table, and joins us where we all now seated, each with a cocktail in front of us. All of us are frankly somewhat in shock from Jason Mahoney's Ahab vision for the future. I take a long pull on my cocktail.

"Okay...time for a little inside-baseball post game. Comments...impressions of the meeting? Marla?" Jason says.

"Interesting...how Dragon Lady did all the talking for Reggie. But after hearing her speak...I can understand why. What's up with that jackhammer Roland character, not-so-subtly explaining Rector's meaning. And what's the deal with his creepy reptilian pal?" she says.

"Roland is Rector's factotum...does all the heavy lifting including spearheading dark ops. And in Roland's delusional little mind *only*, the heir apparent. Reptile? An apt analogy. *El Negrito* Porter is indeed one to watch out for. No accident that the snake tattoo on his forearm is a Black Mamba, one of the most lethal venomous snakes known to man, a silent killer that lives in the shadows...with no known anti-venom. Pauly?" Jason says.

"Yeah...AK47's the full package. Brings it with lotsa heat...and excellent deception in her delivery...good off-speed stuff. No doubt about it. A Cy Young chucker, even on a not-so-good day, probably un-hitable. Makes me wonder if she'd consider pitchin' for our team," Pauly says smiling.

"Believe me Pauly, I'm *personally* working on that one...*very diligently*. Max?" Jason says, with a smirk.

"Impressive performance by the Dragon Lady, no doubt. But I found it quite fascinating that Rector admitted that oil's days are numbered," Max says.

"Yes...but in serious scientific and academic circles, it is really not considered a new epiphany...just the industry's very late open recognition of it. The *greenhouse effect*...and resultant dramatic deleterious climate change is *very* real. And that *is* a relatively recent revelation. And frankly the fossil fuel industry, not surprisingly, has been living in a fossilized reality of denial about it.

But I can tell you this. The American people will *never* give up their *bourgeois* comforts, including and most especially their cars for some vague *hypothetical existential* crisis...not until it's too late and they are forced to. And when it finally does pass the tipping point? The thin

fragile veneer of civilization will disappear, almost overnight. Mick? Your impression of Alexandra Kwan?" Jason says.

"Your closing comments...a nice lighthearted upbeat coda to end the day on, Jason. Anybody bring a Swiss Army knife...so I can just open a vein and get it over with?

On the matter of AK47, honestly, Jason...I've been around some pretty high-powered alpha types. Worked closely with plaintiff attorney's mostly, with off-the-charts brilliant minds, usually with an ego to match...forget the gender distinction. I can tell you if her performance is indicative, that *she got game. She's good...very scary good.* That whole little takeover riff...brilliant. Sort of a Valentine caveat...*don't even think about messin' with World Media...or me.*

My advice, Jason? Play dead...maybe Dragon Lady will lose interest and look for some other fresh meat...and leave ACT alone. Or not," I say only half jokingly.

"Mick and Max, I'm having dinner tonight with Alex...uh Alexandra Kwan...a strategy meeting. The limo will take you back to the ranch. I won't be back until quite late so I'll call the limo driver to pick me up later," Jason says with a wink and a smirk.

Max says, "Okay, Jason. I've got some work to catch up on. I'll pack tonight so I can leave from the meeting for the airport, tomorrow afternoon."

"Jason, I'm going to have some dinner with Pauly and Marla...to discuss a few of today's *very* interesting developments," I say looking at Marla, "I can catch a cab back...or something."

"Okay...I'll see you all tomorrow...gotta run. Got dinner reservations," Jason says, then leaves for the elevator.

After Jason's out of earshot, Marla says staring at Pauly, "Right...over dinner...with Pauly, unless he can't make it and is expected home because of some family commitments...or something?"

"Yeah...dinner. Sorry to disappoint you two but, can't make it tonight...some family in town. My in-laws...or something," Pauly says smiling at Marla then me, as he leaves the room for the elevator, giving Jason enough of a head start.

"What a pity...maybe next time, Pauly," I say to Pauly's back, as he raises his right arm, waving his hand.

"Well, I guess it's just you and me for uh...dinner, Mickey," Marla says.

"Yeah...too bad about Pauly. I guess it'll be just up to me...to entertain you for the night. I'll try not to bore you with too much shop talk," I say.

"Yeap...just you and me...alone," Marla says.

"Well actually, I was kinda hoping that you wouldn't mind some additional company...as an old mutual friend is also in town for the night. *Mista* Wilson is free tonight, and feeling a trifle lonely," I say.

"Would not dream of disappointing my uh...*hardy* ol' pal, *Monsieur* Wilson. What do you two feel like for dinner?" Marla says grinning.

"Hmm...since Jason's going to be doing uh...Chinese tonight. In honor of our fearless leader, how about we go back to *Chez* Marla, and order Chinese take-out."

"Yeah...uh *Jace*. You picked up on that too?" Marla says smiling.

"Gee uh...*Alex*. Not an exactly a hard tell to pick up on. But *Jace* and *Dragon Lady* must have a reason for exhibiting the almost brazen familiarity," I say.

"Yea...*Jace* doesn't make tactical errors. Everything he says is carefully calculated. I think he may be sending *Reginald Meade* a little in-your-face valentine, that his days are numbered...professionally, and personally with *Alex*...almost taunting him. They've been going at each other for years," Marla says.

When I wake up the next morning, Marla is nestled under my arm, sleeping soundly with a peaceful, contented look. I raise my head and spot the clock...7:35. *Shit*...I'm supposed to meet *Trey* at the gym by 8 AM *sharp*.

"Marla...baby, time for me to get up," I say in her ear. Nothing. Finally, I gently nudge her shoulder, "time to get up," She cocks open one eye, looks up at me and smiles, "Okay...I guess I can sleep when I dead. Tell *Woody* that even though he's a sex fiend...that he's finally met his match," she says groping me. *Woody* is instantly awakened out of a deep slumber.

"Baby, as much as *we* would *luuv* to stay I promised *Trey* that I'd spend some time with him in the gym working with him...showing him some uh...offensive moves. I was s'posed to be there at 8 AM," I say hopelessly without conviction.

"Umm...apparently *le monsieur* has other plans for the morning...some offensive moves of his own," she says.

The next time I catch a look at the clock it's 8:10. Not complainin'...just splainin'.

I quickly shower, as Marla makes coffee and toast. By 8:30 we're on the road.

By 9:05 she drops me off in the driveway, and drives off. I race upstairs, put on my gym shoes, and jog over to the gym.

I enter the gym to find *Trey*, just sitting against the wall, cradling, more hugging a basketball, looking sullen and despondent.

"Hey, *Trey*...sorry to be late man but something came up...something very big that couldn't be ignored," I say. An inside joke, guess you had to be there.

He refuses to acknowledge me just continuing to stare down at the floor, his eyes full of tears and red. I walk over to him, sit down

beside him, and put my hand on his shoulder, which he disdainfully pushes away.

"Hey, man...I'm really sorry, okay? But..." I start to say.

"What happened to the *And...finally...the most important thing to remember is...punctuality*," he snarls, staring into my eyes obviously angry and hurt.

"Okay, man I had that comin'...you busted my chops good. Now...where do you want it to go from here. How about if we try to start over here. Okay? Hey man...howya doin? Come here often?" I say.

Despite himself, he cracks a smile, "Yeah...I was supposed to meet some jerk...but he was a no-show."

"Okay...that's more like it, pal. Hey, I've got to leave to get ready for a meeting in about 15 minutes...with your father. How about we pick this up tonight, when I get back...say about seven. Then we'll have the whole evening to spend together and work out. Sound like a plan, *amigo*?"

Okay...I *guess* so, Koz. But if you're like even *five* minutes late, I'm going to have my old man dock your pay...big time," he says smiling. Like I said not a bad looking kid...when he smiles.

"Deal," I say standing up, then grabbing his hand, I pull him up, when unexpectedly, he throws his arms around my waist, and tightly hugs me. *Jesus*...I get a major tennis ball in my throat. I hug him back. The poor kid. Yeah...Peggy was right, he is a very sensitive kid...probably doesn't have many if any pals. Reminds of I someone I knew intimately at his age. Someone very tall and skinny...and very sensitive.

"Okay, Trey...seeya tonight man. Be prepared to work your ass off. Tonight we'll cover some offensive moves, and shooting. Gotta run, later Trey," I say as I leave the gym and run back to my room to change into a clean shirt and jeans.

Somehow by 9:30, I'm downstairs at the front door, where Max Mesmer and Jason Mahoney are waiting, just as the company limo pulls up.

With the exception of the presentations by Libertarians Rand Rourke and Gordon Nelson, the second day of the conference is relatively unremarkable, patronizing The Chosen with a self-serving equal opportunity for each of them to pontificate their particular ethos for their brand of Capitalism and show how smart they think they are.

Rand Rourke, Evangelical Christian talk radio and TV host, unveils his vision for his proposed Libertarian walled and gated citadel; a utopia in Northwest Washington state. *Acropolis Libertatem*...loosely translated from a Greek and Latin contraction as, City of Liberty. *A City High on a Shining Hill embracing the true ideals of the U.S. Constitution, of Liberty...one nation under God*, Rand Rourke waxes.

Born Harold Limburger, he is a dedicated acolyte of the writings and teachings of Ayn Rand. His first name, appropriated from his

fearless leader's last name, while his last name borrowed from the rugged individualist anti-hero Howard Rourke, in the Fountainhead, better reflected Rand's lofty *laissez-faire* anarchist's philosophy, far better than the eponymous stinky cheese, Limburger. And his adopted name, in keeping with a man of his media stature, has a nice punchy prime-time alliterative ring to it.

Hatched in Cascadia County, to chicken farmers in the far Northwest corner of Washington state, he reinvented himself as the self-anointed spokesmen for the common plutocratic God-fearin' Libertarian man, whose fundamental freedoms are being trampled upon by *Marxists, Socialists, Liberals and Establishment Republicans...who will likely find that life in our community is incompatible with their existing ideology and perverted lifestyles*, extolls Rourke.

And if Liberty has been missing from the life of you and your family, consider the Acropolis Libertatem for your new home.

A two billion dollar, totally self-sufficient and self-contained, off-the-grid Libertarian city-theme park that would mark *the rebirth of our nation through its founding principles*. Its vision, a fortress-like city, that will feature *no recycling police and no local ordinance enforcers from City Hall*, but will require all residents to *maintain one AR-15 variant in 5.56mm NATO, at least 5 magazines and 1,000 rounds of ammunition. Just in case...*

The location of this proposed plutocratic paradise, built on 300 acres, was carefully researched and selected based on far-looking computer models of climate change, for the availability of plentiful rainfall and relatively temperate climate being near the micro-climate of Puget Sound, free from the calamitous tornadoes or hurricanes of other vulnerable regions of the U.S. like the Midwest or East Coast. And for added credibility, R. Rourke has *an intimate knowledge of this region, from being raised there*.

His high-gloss PowerPoint with glitzy video presentation rivals that of a multi-million dollar theme park...a Jeffersonian Disney World for the true believers and shameless apologists of Christ and the Libertarian lifestyle. *For a mere \$200,000 non-refundable deposit, you can reserve your custom one-quarter acre home site. Total population will be limited to the first 7,000 followers. First come first served. Reservations are filling up fast. So don't be left outside the gates—alone, to deal with the roving hordes of Barbarians of the coming apocalypse from Climate Change!*" he warns, ending with, "And I'm pleased to announce that J. Murdock Mahoney, has graciously accepted my invitation to serve on the prestigious Board of Directors, he himself having purchased five of the custom home sites."

Then Gordon Nelson, Evangelical Christian neo-conservative founder and president from the NGO and PAC, Americans for Fair Taxes, does his Libertarian dog and pony show, railing about the unfair tax burden placed on the wealthy, who are rewarded for their ingenuity,

innovation, good ol' entrepreneurial spirit, and job creation by the profligate US government with onerous tax rates, including excessive inheritance tax. *For all the good we do for all the uh...workers, this is the thanks we get? Higher and higher exorbitant taxes and more and more stifling regulation.*

By 2 PM the meeting adjourns, the Lords with their attending courtiers, returning to their corporate jets for the return flight to their respective Fiefdoms to have afternoon Sunday dinner with their families after divvying up the world. I inform Marla, that I have to return to the ranch to meet up with Trey Mahoney for a promised workout in the gym. She's disappointed, but I explain to her that I'll be at corporate tomorrow, deliberately keeping it vague, to do some editing at the state-of-the-art post-production suite. We agree to meet for lunch.

At 5 PM, I make my way down to the kitchen where I find the ever-present Consuela.

"Como estas?" I ask.

"Muy bien...y tu? Yo puedo preparar una comida para tu, señor Miguelito?" Consuelo asks smiling brightly.

"Gracias...eso seria maravilloso...something light. I'm not very hungry," I say.

"Si, esta bien...I have some tamales already made up," she says.

"Perfecto, senora," I say.

By 6 PM, I'm at the gym where I find Trey inside shooting baskets. By the looks of his full sweat he's probably been there for at least a half-hour.

"Hi Trey...howya doin man?" I ask.

"Not bad...nice to see your watch works," he says. More attitude.

"Okay...let' not wear that out already. Ready to go to work?" I ask.

"Lead the way fearless leader," he says.

We warm up, stretch and do the defensive drill regimen, four full-court medium sprints, then get down to business with drills for offense.

"Okay...Trey, I want to watch you take some jump shots from the free-throw line. Just easy and relaxed, with no dribble. Just square you feet and shoulders to the basket...again, when you receive the ball from me, do not dribble...do not make any moves. Okay?" I say.

After ten shots, he only makes three from the 15 feet. With no defense he should make that shot at least six to seven times, while being defended at least five times. It's obvious to me, that his shooting mechanics are poor. He is releasing the ball late, after he reaches the high point of his jump, causing a relative flat trajectory, resulting in most of his shoots missing because they're short. The other flaw I see, is that he is not finishing with a wrist snap follow-through, the "hook" of the hand, with the index finger pointed directly at the basket, which

produces a nice high arching shot with just a little backspin. It's simple physics, vectors and all that stuff. The higher the arc of the ball at entry point of the basket the more likely it will not bounce off the rim, if it's slightly long or short. The really pure shooters almost without exception shoot rain-makers, with the final follow-through of a snap of the wrist, forming 'the hook'.

"Okay, Tre. That's good for now. Now, I want you to just shoot an ordinary free-throw...no jumping. Okay? Aim for the back of the rim, 90 percent of the shots that are too short...don't go in," which I think is pretty hysterical. Nothing from Trey...rough room.

After another ten shots, he sinks only five. The same problem as the 'J'...his legs are not getting into the shot, and as a result his trajectory is too flat.

"Okay, Trey. Shooting free-throws, when you're not winded, in a controlled situation, you should sink at least 8 or 9 out of ten. You made five. Same thing with the jump shots. Undefended from 15 feet you should make six or seven...you made three. I see what the problem is. So were going to have to completely tear down your shot mechanics and start over," I say.

After about an hour, I get him to tuck his elbows in, forming a 90 degree angle between his upper arm and forearm cradling the ball just above his forehead with a slight bend forward at the waist. Then I get him to start releasing the ball much earlier on his jump shot, while on the way up just before he reaches the high point, essentially using his legs to propel the ball. *Voila*...he gets it...much more arch, and softer, and no longer short. Finally, we introduce the wrist snap follow-through. The kid's an eager and fast learner. By the time we quit, his percentages are much better, and his form is also looking pretty good. And he's smiling...nothing succeeds, like success.

"Okay Trey, good job...much improved. Let's take a break and sit down for a few minutes," I say.

We sit down on the floor with our backs to the wall.

"So tell me about your team. What position do you play?" I ask

"Well...even though I made the varsity team...Mile High School, when I do play, which is infrequent, I usually play center...or forward," he says.

"Okay. I think, you're going to be a big dude when you finally quit growing...probably six-six or taller, but still not quite tall enough for a college center. So I think you want to work on your offensive skills facing the basket. We can get into posting up later. So I want you to practice, using the method we worked on today, shooting at least 100 free-throws. Strive to make 80 at least. And 100 "J"s a day...every day. Moving around the key, take 25 from four different angles. Stay within 15 feet with the "J"s until you can hit fifty to sixty out of hundred, again, without a dribble. Catch and release...later we'll incorporate the moves including dribbling, but I just want you to work on your form and

footwork, and very important, always staying square to the basket. Then move back another three feet, and repeat it. Got it?"

"Yeah...Okay. Thanks. Hey Mick...can I ask you a kinda personal question?" he says.

"Sure...Trey, anything, shoot," I say.

"Mick, have you ever loved someone...such much that it hurts...but they didn't know it. And you were afraid to tell them for fear that they might reject you...that sometimes you just can't think of anything else...that you can't even sleep or eat?" he earnestly asks.

Whoa...this is little more than I signed on for. When I said anything, I didn't mean that *anything*. But looking at the kid, I can sense that he is deeply conflicted and really has no one else to talk to. Okay...sure, like every adolescent kid, I know what he's going through. Been there...done that, so I decide to plunge ahead.

"Yeah...sure. When I was about your age...every guy and gal going through puberty experiences it...ragin' hormones and all that. It's all part of the maturation process, I guess. I was tall and skinny...and had a crush on this gal who, I thought at the time was *abso-fucking-lutely* beautiful. But she didn't even know that I was alive...and didn't care. I still remember her name...and I can still see her uh...face, Amanda Collins. She was my best friend's older sister, by two years. I used to have wet dreams about her. So what's going on with you?" I say.

"Well...kinda the same deal with me...Sam," he says.

"Samantha...classy, I always liked that name for a girl...older or younger...what?" I ask.

"Older...he's a senior on the basketball team. Sam Reynolds. Sometimes when we shower after practice, I can't take my eyes off him," he says.

Okay. *Now what?* No turning back now.

"So...I take it you have no interest in girls *at all* then...not that there is anything wrong with that?" I quickly add.

"Nope. Never have...never will. But I'm still a virgin. I feel confused...guilty...and so ashamed. So much in love, that it's killing me...that he doesn't know how I feel about him. But, I think just from subtle stuff, he likes boys too. I see him in the shower checking the other guys out too, but he always plays the macho man...always with a new girlfriend...one girl after another. But, even if he did feel the same way, I wouldn't even know where to begin...or how to make love. What would *you* do if you were me Mick?" he asks.

"Well the first thing...don't worry about the making love part. As with women...if you truly love her...or uh...him...it'll just flow naturally. Just don't put too much pressure on yourself to perform to some artificial porno standard...and the rest will take care of itself. Okay? Just curious, Trey...have you told either your mother or your father, about how you feel toward other men?" I ask.

"I think mom knows, but we've never openly discussed it. My father might suspect it, but if he ever found out for sure that I was a homosexual, he's so macho, he'd probably kill me, rather than suffer the humiliation of his son being a uh...*fag*," he says tearing up.

"Yeah...that's a tough one. Trey, I think it might be time to sit down with mom. I know she loves you very much...and in talking with her, I think she would be very understanding and accepting. But if you don't *come out*, as they say, I think it'll start eating at you...and in the long run, make you very unhappy. So I think I'd maybe start with your mom," I say.

"Mick, now that you know this about me...do you think less of me? Can I *still* be your friend?" he asks staring searchingly into my eyes.

Can I still be your friend? Jesus. Another tennis ball in the throat. It's tough enough going through puberty, tall and gangly, but to have to deal with the deeply ingrained cultural guilt, shame and prejudice of being gay...just a kid. My *gawd*, my heart is breaking for him.

"Trey...the first thing I want you to know, is that I am honored that you would trust me with something that is so deeply personal and private. I respect and yes, even admire your candor and indeed, courage. And it will be our secret until you tell me otherwise.

And yes, no matter whatever should happen, you are and always will be my friend. I want to tell you a story. Many times, in the search for wisdom...for answers to life's persistent questions," I say smiling facetiously with air quotes, "they are best answered by a parable...or symbolic narrative.

Back in the 1964, when I was at UC Berkeley, I and many, many others were involved in some student protests on campus for civil rights, and free speech. One day, a friend, Byron Brawley and I were faced with the difficult to choice...whether to intervene, when the cops were mercilessly beating a fellow student with batons. We ultimately decided to rescue him before they beat him to death.

The guy, that Brawley and I rescued that day became my best friend...for life. Ad Hoc Shapiro...Hawk. We could not have been more different. He was short and stocky...brilliant...very Jewish...and *very* gay. In all the years that we have been friends it's never been an issue. Eventually, we sort of went our separate ways. He ended up in Seattle Washington, working for a software company called Microsoft. It so happens that even though he sustained serious head injuries from the beating, he had a brilliant talent for computer science and software design...and coding...what we would now call a savant. When we get together, it's like we pick right up from where we left off. We love each other like brothers...and there is nothing that I wouldn't do for Hawk Shapiro...and he for me.

So right about that time, there was four of us, Charles Washington, Mario Savio, Byron Brawley, myself...and later, of course Hawk.

Almost a year later, my pal Charles Washington, a young black activist who also happened to be one helluva basketball player at UCB, went to Selma Alabama for a massive march for black voter's rights...to Montgomery, the state capitol. But it seems that the state troopers never got the memo, more likely ignored that it was to be peaceful and non-violent.

Charles and John Lewis, the young president of SNCC were leading the march with about 600 demonstrators, along with some other members of Student Non-violent Coordinating Committee. He gave his life on that day...brutally beaten to death by the cops. Dying for what he deeply believed in...civil rights for all. Civil rights does not and cannot stop at the door with just the confrontation of racial inequality. The so-called patriotic pledge of allegiance that the religious racist hypocrites so eagerly invoke and rotely recite...*one nation, under God...with, liberty and justice for all...* does not say for *some...* but *all*.

A few years later, Byron Brawley also one of my very dearest friends, had been drafted and was serving in Vietnam. He, as we all did, opposed the war but was forced to choose the army...instead of jail. He and his lady, whom he loved deeply, figured he'd do his two years and pick up where they left off.

Tragically, a natural-born leader...and a warrior, as a squad leader, he was killed trying to save his comrades in battle...an ambush by the V-C. And...it broke my heart. To this day...I can still see his wry, laughing joking face...all the good times. He sacrificed his life not out of some bull-shit sense of American patriotic duty...but for his pals...guys that lived...and died *for each other*. That Silver Star for Gallantry that was awarded posthumously would have meant nothing to him...certainly not more than the love and respect of his fellow comrades. Now, I'm not one to quote from the Bible much, but this one has stuck with me through the years...John 15:13. *Greater love has no one than this, that one lay down his life for his friends.*

So...in many ways the cause for equality for women...and for homosexuals and lesbians, ain't *no* different from the battle for racial equality. Hopefully it won't take another 200 years to have the law of the land catch up with the universal rights of all men...and women.

On the 28th of August 1963 Martin Luther King, Jr. had organized a now historic march to Washington to show the importance of solving the United States racial problems. About 250,000 people gathered and listened to his immortal words: *I have a dream that my four children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin, but by the content of their character.*

And the same kind of bigotry and prejudice exists today against gay men and women. So maybe...*children will one day live in a nation*

where they will not be judged by their gender...or sexual preference, but by the content of their character.

And maybe...just maybe...one day, because you're smart and courageous you can blaze the trail for others...by choosing *to do the right thing*. To confront bigotry and prejudice...you will inspire others to do the same.

My only hope is that in your lifetime you'll find friends like mine...my pals Byron Brawley, the Hawster and Charles Washington. Doesn't matter if it's a he...or she...is straight...or not. And if your sexual preference should ever become an issue between you and your so-called friends, then I'd advise you to move on. Because frankly, the content of their character is sadly flawed and not worthy of *your* friendship," I say, finally standing up, giving Trey a hand up.

"Now...give me hug...and get busy on that "J"...cuz I'm going to be checkin' up on you from time to time. Okay my friend?"

As I throw open my arms, he gives me a big hug. I lift him up off the ground and shake him in a big bear hug. Finally, after about a minute he pulls away and says, with tears streaming down his cheeks, "Okay, *my friend*. Thanks Mick."

"Thank you for being so open an honest with a pal, Trey. And by the way, since you've apparently got some juice with the old man...*wouldn't hoit* if you could hit him up for a nice little raise for yours truly?" I say smiling, which draws a good-natured punch to my gut, and a Killer Smile.

Monday morning, I decide to get in a good run early, where I again encounter Peggy Mahoney out by the barn, saddling up, *Blanco Grande*...for her *beats the hell out of therapy* morning ritual ride.

"Good morning Peggy," I say brightly.

"Hi Mick...yes, it is a good morning indeed. Hey Mick, last night I had a little talk with Trey. He said you two had a good long talk about uh...some things yesterday...and he wanted to share some of it with me. Have you got a minute?" Peggy says.

"Sure, Peggy...what's on your mind?" I ask.

"Well, a lot was said...the kind of things that I never expected to hear from Trey. Very candid...and very emotional and I have to confess that I almost don't know where to begin," she says.

"Well, the beginning is usually not a bad place to start...like I told Trey, yesterday. Shoot," I say.

"Okay Mick, okay. Trey finally came out last night that he is *gay*. Something that I had suspected since he was a child. He told me that you urged him to confide in me...his mother, that I would understand and accept...and yes, love him no matter what," she says, her eyes welling up with tears.

"Peggy I can't...won't confirm what Trey told me in confidence," I say.

Peggy Mahoney then reaches up to me and pulls my head down, like one of her prize horses, and gives me a long passionate kiss on my mouth.

"Thank you, Mick...you have no idea how much I appreciate your kindness to my son. And if there is anyway...anyway at all I can repay you...just say the word," she says looking into my eyes deeply.

Oops. Unintended consequences. Looks like Trey isn't the only Mahoney with some unmet sexual desires and needs. Uh...*pent up demand?*

"Well, you're very welcome Peggy. But you don't owe me anything. What I did for and with Trey, is out of friendship...we are now officially pals...best buds," I say as breezily as I can muster.

"Mick, I would hope that you could be my friend too...only maybe a little different kind of *special* friend?" she says smiling but with a tentative tone.

"Peggy...thanks for the very flattering overture. But...not a good idea, for everyone concerned, including and most especially Trey. He's extremely vulnerable right now, and would probably perceive it as a betrayal of his trust in me. So, if you would like to talk more about Trey...I'm open to that. Otherwise, I'll let you get back to your ride...and me, with my morning jog," I say.

"Okay...Mick, you're probably right...for now. But seriously, if there is anything you think I can help you with..."

Trey asked me if I thought that either he or I should tell his father that he is gay. I told him, probably not a good idea right now...if ever. As you probably have deduced, Trey is Jason M. Mahoney the third...from a long line of hard-driving obstinate Irish macho males, of which in temperament at least, he is the exception. So the notion that Jason would find out that his son is definitely...irrevocably gay and will probably never sire any male children to perpetuate the Mahoney name would be very difficult for Jason to accept. Not every man is as secure in his manhood as you apparently are...especially his father.

Mick I don't know if you realize, but I have two children. We have a daughter as well, who is now a sophomore at Yale. The day she graduated from high school, she moved out, essentially to get away from her overbearing father. We hardly ever see her, unless I go up to New Haven, we don't get to spend any time together. My life here is very lonely. For the past almost five years, Jason and I have had *no* intimacy in our marriage...we sleep in separate rooms. I know that he sees other women, including Marla Dyson...that they have an ongoing sexual relationship. I don't blame Marla...I think she may be in a difficult situation with Jason...with not many options for getting out of it. As you probably already know, Jason can be very uh... persuasive...intimidating, even," Peggy says.

Oh?...I hadn't noticed...

"In case you may be wondering why I drink to excess? One of the reasons is...and I've *never* confided in anybody before about this. As I can never be really certain what happened between our daughter, Clementine...and Jason. She refuses to talk about it, or have any contact with him...emotional or otherwise. I can only suspect...and I'm not entirely certain that I could handle actually knowing...for sure.

Mick...It wasn't always this way with Jason and me. But about seven years ago, something happened to him when he started making all this money...and power that goes along with it. He changed...and not for the better," Peggy says.

"Peggy...I'm so sorry to hear how unhappy you are...but honestly, I don't think this is something that I either need...or *want* to know. Yes, Peggy we *can* be friends...but purely Platonic. If that works for you then, okay. I will continue to be friends with your son Trey for his own...and my sake...not yours or anybody else's...including Jason Mahoney unless Trey tells me otherwise. He took a large leap of faith with me coming out like that...trusting me and I have promised him that I will never betray that trust," I say

"Thanks...Mick...for everything. I'll let you get back to your morning run," she says smiling warmly.

"Okay, Peggy...here's my phone number back in Tahoe if you ever need to talk. Gotta run now. I've got to get to the corporate office this morning to finish up some video editing, before returning home to Tahoe. I'll be in town for the next two or three days, if you need to get a hold of me. You can leave a message with Marla Dyson's secretary since I nominally work for Marla," I say handing her one of old business cards.

I then take a peek at my watch...almost 9 AM, "Bye Peggy...take care," as I take off on my own *beats the hell out of therapy* jog.

By the time, I shower, shave and pack, have a little breakfast, and am finally able to resurrect my rental car and drive in to corporate, it's almost 11 AM. I stop by Marla's office, stick my head in, and say, "Hey...beautiful...lunch about one, okay?"

She looks up from her computer—she seems unsettled. Then distractedly says, "Okay...fine," then continues on working. Hmm.

Then I head up Jason Mahoney's office. His secretary Becky Reeves, ushers me into his office.

"Good morning, Jason," I say brightly.

"Afternoon, Mick...are you ready to review the footage of the conference?" he asks brusquely.

"Yeah...sure. That's why I'm here so bright and early," I say smiling letting his customary sarcasm slide.

Then, from his locked drawer, Jason hands me the 4 VHS tapes from the Closed Circuit TV cameras, one tape for each camera.

"Okay...we've covered what I want. One more thing. I want three different versions of the final cut. The first with *all* the comments,

including mine. The second with all the comments *except* my final wrap up comment on Saturday, just before I adjourn the meeting...and a third...the same as the second, except without Alexandria's opening comment on Saturday about the written minutes...and her response to Lane Rector's comments. Got it? Label the spine of the cassettes with an innocuous number one, two and three respectively. How long do you think it will take you?" he asks.

"Okay be advised that CCTV footage usually has date and time super-ed over the video...not optional. There would be a lapse showing in the date and time which would indicate that there has been an omission...missing video and audio, the difference between the ending time and the beginning of when it resumes, indicative of just how much time is actually missing," I say.

"Hmm....not good. Any suggestions?" he asks.

"Well...about the only suggestion would be to mask the date and time super with some kind of graphic superimposition obscuring the raw time-date string...like a black rectangle with some graphic, like the just the date that would completely cover it," I say. Me in my MF mode. The other MF, Mr Fixit...it's a gift.

"Okay...do so on versions two and three only. How long will *that* take you?" he says

"Well, first I'll have to log all the tapes individually...if each tape has about 6 hours on it...extended play, total for both days, then it'll probably take me, even shuttling fast forward through them probably 6 to 8 hours just to make rough edit decision lists for each version. Then to edit the final cuts, maybe another day or two, including some rudimentary titling. Do you also want the names of the respective speakers with executive titles, also super-ed over the video as they speak? I ask.

"Probably a not a bad idea," he says.

"Okay...the edited masters will be on a VHS. How many copies do you want of it?" I ask.

"Just one...*and one only*. Then I want you to return *all* the raw footage to me. Under no circumstances is anyone else, including Pauly and Marla to learn of the existence of the raw video...or the edited versions. Are we *absolutely clear* on that, Mick?" he says, again with those trademark penetrating dark shark eyes.

"Perfectly clear, Jason. Can you call down to the post-prod suite and tell them that I'll be editing the next few days...and that I am not to be disturbed," I say.

"Already taken care of. The suite has been *exclusively* available for you *since 8 AM* this morning...and will be, until you release it, for however long it takes you," Jason says.

"Okay...then I'd better get to work," I say starting to leave when he almost forcefully grabs me at my right elbow.

"Mick...one last thing. We still have not heard back from you on your decision on whether you will join us at the E-C-C. I need your categorical answer before you leave town. Are we clear on that?" Jason says with an unmistakably ominous, bordering on malevolent tone, raising the hair on the back of my neck.

"Then you shall have it...at the very latest before returning to Tahoe," I say coolly, then quickly pivoting with the four tapes, make good my escape to the solitude and relative security of the editing room.

Logging raw footage, and making notations on a log sheet, relative to time code, is not an exactly riveting proposition, maybe one notch above watching miniature golf. Generally, there is nothing romantic or particularly magical about editing video. It requires a great deal of patience and technical attention to detail...constantly monitoring video quality and consistent audio levels, flow and pace.

It's often rather boring especially when doing real-time talking heads as is also the case with recorded video depositions, of which I have done hundreds of times as a Certified Legal Video Specialist. This professional designation, makes the testimony when time and date stamped, theoretically unimpeachable, on technical grounds at least. Boring as hell...but lucrative, especially when there's potentially millions of dollars involved in the outcome.

By 12:45, I'm already bored to tears, so I wander over to Marla's office to pick her up for lunch. I tap on the door and let myself in. Marla is just sitting at her desk, staring off into space.

"Hey...ready for a little lunch, I'll buy," I say breezily.

She looks up at me hesitantly, then finally says almost resignedly, "Okay...let's go."

Not exactly the warm reception that I had expected. Something's changed. Obviously something's happened since I left her on Sunday. As she silently drives, she looks straight ahead, her hands nervously milking the steering wheel, not making eye contact with me.

"Whattya feel like for lunch...French cuisine, a little *Le Monsieur*, perhaps?" I ask trying to loosen here up..

"Honestly, Mick...I'm not very hungry. Do you mind if we just find a quiet place. I think we need to have a talk," she says not buying my attempts a levity. Not a good sign.

"Sure...your place?" I ask.

"No...right now. Probably not a good idea," she says ominously. Okay.

"You decide then," I say figuring that I'll let her deal with *it* in her own way, at her own pace. Finally, after about 10 minutes of silence, she pulls into a deserted parking lot of the trail head to a hiking trail, with a view of the pristine Rockies, turns off the engine, and for the first time, turns in her seat and faces me and makes eye contact. There are tears welling up in her eyes.

"What is it, Marly? Why are you so upset?" I ask laying my hand on hers on her thigh. She removes her hand from under mine. It is shaking.

"Mick...I don't know how to begin this...so I'll just be direct and plunge right in. I can't see you anymore...I'm so sorry..." she says now fighting back the tears, her lower lip trembling.

"Was it something that I said...did...or *didn't* do?" I ask with one of my best bright contrived smiles, trying to lighten up the moment. For the first time today, there's an evanescent smile, then in an instant it's gone.

"No...*gawd* no...I wish it were that simple. Oh...Mickey, I'm so unhappy. I...I'm...so conflicted, I just can't do this anymore," she says.

"Marla...I know about Jason Mahoney...and you. Is that what's causing the conflict?" I ask.

"*How did you find out!?*" she says staring intensely into my eyes.

"Hey...I'm a trained investigator, remember? And the first rule of a good investigation practices is to be open, to allow the clues, including exploring a person's uh...drawers, to lead you wherever they may. Frankly I had had some suspicions...which were presumptively confirmed while innocently looking for some Kleenex to blow my nose while you were in the bathroom. I came across a prescription asthma inhaler in the drawer of your night stand, along with your friend and my competitor, ol' reliable Pink Floyd, with Mahoney's name and a recent date on it, uh...on the prescription bottle that is. *Elementary* my dear *Dyson*," I say.

"So you've known all this time, and never said anything to me about it?" she says with an edge of indignation.

"Marly...it's been less than a week for *gawd's* sake. And by the way this morning when I ran into the Missus uh...Mahoney, she confided in me that she knows about her husband's multiple, forget serial, concurrent dalliances...including the one with you. A truly gifted libertine, I must say...makes my old man look like a rank amateur," I say with grudging admiration, leaving off the part about the Missus coming on to me.

"Oh my God! She knows? Mick this has been the longest week of my life...an eternity! I have been trying to figure how to tell you for the past several months. Sunday night, Jason came over. I finally decided that I *had* to tell him about you...and us, that I...I uh...felt very strongly about you...that I didn't want him to come over anymore," she says.

"So as of Sunday night Jason definitely knew about us. Hmm. Interesting, this morning he certainly never let on. He's good...*very good*. And yeah...Peggy knows, but to her credit she does not blame you. In fact, she also indicated some empathy for your situation...that Jason

would never allow you to leave the uh...relationship, voluntarily at least. So, how'd Captain Ahab take that *one*...the rejection?" I ask.

"Not good...he said that *he* and *only he*...would be the one who would decide *if* and *when*, he was done with me...like that...*done with me*," Marla says, now completely losing it, sobbing hysterically.

"Did he get violent with you...or threaten you in any way?" I ask.

"No...Jason doesn't do angry. He just gets his way...or gets even, which ever is more expedient. And he never, *ever* loses. He treats everyone that's involved with him, including his family...and me and Pauly as nothing more than some highly expendable business assets.

He also said something that was very degrading to me personally, which for the first time made me realize *who* and *what* I was going to be dealing with my whole humiliating...ignominious existence, as long as I stay at ACT.

He said that he didn't care who I whored around with...as long as I was *available when he wanted me*. Sex on demand with Marla...part of my job description. And that essentially he was willing to share me with you, as long as you were willing to do his bidding for him at the E-C-C...just best business practices...a *quid pro quo* for him. Basically that I'm just another fringe benefit for working for J. Murdoch Mahoney. Mickey...is that how *you* feel about me? As just some...perk?" she says staring searchingly into my eyes grabbing my hand in both of hers and squeezing it very hard.

"Marly...I would have hoped that by now, after the time we've spent together, you would have known to not have to ask that question. I *love* ya baby...you're my *one*, no matter what happens with Captain Ahab. Never forget that," I say reaching over and hugging her tightly, then giving her a deep passionate kiss.

"Oh Mickey...*gawd* I love you so much...it hurts. I...I thought I had lost you. I was literally sick, with worry and grief," she says hugging me tightly.

"Do you think you'd be in any physical danger if you were to rebuke him?" I ask.

"No...Jason's too smart...and cunning for that. He has *so many other* ways and *mind-fucking* devices at his disposal...none of which would leave a mark...physically at least. I've made a deal with the devil, Mickey...and now the devil's calling in the note. Oh Mickey...what are we going to do?" she cries.

"Not to worry baby...let me think about it. You'll just have to trust me. There's always a way. And by the way...I never, *ever* lose either. Well except, for that thing at UCB...and there was the time when Rad Vlad ran me out of town on a troika...and of course there..."

"Okay...alright already! I got it. Mickey...I trust you *with my life, baby*," she says staring intently into my eyes. That look of complete

and utter trust—and the echo of those words would come to haunt me for the rest of my life.

"Thanks for that. Well it won't be boring. Either me...or *Capitaine* Ahab is probably going go down for the count. A draw might be the best we can hope for. Dealing into a inside straight kinda odds. Our only advantage might be to exploit his colossal arrogance and complacency.

The N-F-L baby. Only one way to deal with their superior size, speed and strength...we may not be very big but we're uh...slow. So, we gotta try to keep it close for four quarters, then with superior deception and the element of surprise, the last minute of the game break open the wide receiver ...uh, that would be *vous* in this little parable...behind the defense, as the QB, uh...*moi*, throws for a game winning Hail Mary, just as the final gun sounds."

And the part that I didn't share with Marla, let's just hope that the sound of the *final* gun, literally ain't from one of the many of NRA-boy's prized collection of fully automatic assault rifles.

"I'll say one thing for ya, Mick...you sure know how to add a little spice to a girl's hum-drum corporate quotidian existence," Marla says.

"Yeah, I know...but as they say, all work..." I say.

"Sounds a little less than lottery odds," she says gamely.

"Yeap. Thin...*very thin*, which makes the precision of the time frame...the execution of our plan mission critical, baby. The lousy timing of this whole exercise with Jason kinda complicates things...more than just a little bit.

He wants...indeed is demanding an answer about whether I will accept the position he's offered. Under the circumstances even though I was leaning away from accepting it, not wanting to get involved with those crackpot Libertarians, I think now, to buy some time, for the time being anyway...Jason has to think that I'm on board. That I'm buying in to all that entitlement and privilege of the *ruling class*...the whole all-you-can-eat bull-shit buffet, until I can work out some kind of bullet-proof exit strategy for you and me. Okay?

But...even though you know Pauly much better than I...I don't think you should trust or confide in him...or anybody, including anyone in your family.

One last thing, baby. Just so you know what Ahab is capable of...he videotaped both days of the conference. Four sub-Rosa cameras with microphones stationed all around the room to listen in, on even stray conversation among the attendees. I suspect that's why he offered to host the conference at ACT. None of them know it...with the exception perhaps of the Dragon Lady. That whole little friggin' jaded, pun intended, *Jace and Alex* performance with her...the faint scent of conspiracy, like the smell of not-so-young, egg-foo-yung starting to go bad...someplace in the fridge.

I wouldn't put it past him that he's either got your phone tapped and, or sub-Rosa surveillance installed at your condo. Is the condo in your name or his?" I say.

"It's in the corporation's name...of course. A tax write-off...like me," she says bitterly.

"I have been instructed in no uncertain terms *not* to reveal the existence of the those tapes...to anyone, including you and Pauly. For the next few days I will be creating three different variations of an edited master...*one copy only*. More later on that. After I'm done with the edit, I'm supposed to return all the raw footage. Then before I leave for Tahoe, give him my decision about accepting the position. I can't be sure, but I had the distinct sense that if he doesn't get the answer he wants, because of what I now know about the E-C-C, that my services, and me personally might become very expendable...and *very* soon.

And, again don't let Pauly in on anything...for now at least. And it goes without saying, don't let on to Jason that we had this little talk and that you know about the tapes...it could put you in grave danger. I know it's going to be tough, but until I leave it's going to have to be *business as usual*, baby," I say.

"Oh, Mickey...what if he wants to come over?" she asks.

"Well...how 'bout the old tried and true feminine escape hatch, in this case never more true, *not tonight, honey, I got a headache*," I say.

"More like a cluster migraine...a cluster-fuck headache," she says.

"Okay...one last thing. Start laying the foundation for you to have to come to Lake Tahoe, to work with me to complete some unfinished business with the franchise agreements of some of the other systems. And just in case this whole thing does go South...when you pack, do it inconspicuously of course, but pack as though you may not be coming back here. And take anything personal that you absolutely can't live without that's portable, like pictures etcetera. Tell him that you may have to be in Tahoe for a while to wrap things up. Keep that vague. Okay?" I say.

"Okay...Mickey. I guess we'd better get back. Are you coming over tonight?" she asks.

"Sure...don't want to arouse any undue suspicion, now do we? So purely for uh...appearances. Like I said *business as usual*," I say grinning, which draws a playful slap.

"Well, me being the consummate M-B-A and J-D *business* professional, I would likewise remind you to include your better half, the brains of the outfit...*Monsieur Wilson*," she says.

Atta girl!

- Chapter 29 -

At 6 PM, I call it a wrap for the day. After so many hours of looking at talking heads, and logging the footage, making edit decision lists for three separate final cuts, I'm blotto...and definitely in need of a double-Johnny or three. Marla's already there, when I hit the call button on the intercom; the large metal security gate slowly creaks open.

I walk through the slightly ajar door to her condo, to find Marla outside, leaning against the balcony railing, gazing out at the golden sunset...*the gloaming* as the micks call it, behind the breathtaking Western Alps, the Rockies.

There's an Antonio Carlos Jobin number with a tantalizing samba back beat playing faintly in the background. She's lookin' good...*very good*...the way the warm Alpenglow invitingly plays upon the highlights in her chestnut hair. She looks so young and innocent...and *so* vulnerable. My heart rate kicks up about 50 BPM.

On a glass patio table is silver Sharper Image Penguin Martini shaker, copiously covered with beads of condensation alongside two iced Martini glasses, with skewered green stuffed olives. A bottle each of Bombay Sapphire Gin and my guy, Johnny. I pride myself on my adaptability...to be flexible in any given Happy Hour situation, in any time zone always remembering to observe and honor local custom first. An equal opportunity imbiber.

I walk up behind her and throw my arms around the front of her, sensing her warm soft, perfect breasts, are *sans brassiere*, her nipples already aroused, and place my wet lips on the nape of her bare slender neck. She sighs.

"It would appear that *the girls* are just as happy about *Monsieur Wilson's* visit...as he is. Would you like *Le Monsieur* to pour you and the girls a Martini?" I ask.

"Now that...I would pay to see!" she says laughing, then turning in my arms, now facing me, throwing her arms around me placing her head against my chest.

"Mickey...your heart is beating so fast and loud, pumping all that blood...*where does it all go?*" she says mischievously.

"Talk about excessive blood flow, *Monsieur Wilson*, may be temporarily unable to pour...as something's come up...which is hopelessly incapacitating his bar-tending skills," I say.

"By the way, may I say that I'm *extremely* happy that you remembered to bring your uh...*un*-faithful companion," she says.

"Well...actually, in these kinds of situations, I never leave home without him. Over the years I've realized that it is best to relinquish the

control stick in the cockpit over to co-pilot *Le Monsieur*...that resistance is futile," I say.

"Impressively uh...pragmatic." she says.

"Marla...I hate to even bring this up at such an uh...*suspicious* occasion, but if you could just hold that thought for about an hour...we have some work to do before we can begin taxiing for take off," I say.

"Oh? Like what could *possibly* be more important?" she says.

I whisper in her ear, just in case, "We can't talk out-loud about anything that's important until I can sweep the place for bugs and cameras. Okay?"

"Oh...yeah. Almost forgot about that. Well hurry up will ya, the unbridled girls getting a little restless...don't know how much longer I can contain 'em," she whispers back.

"I'm all over them uh...it," I say.

It takes me about an hour to go through the condo. I hold my index finger up to my lips to signal Marla not to talk as I do my security scan *schtick*.

Not surprisingly I find four different audio wireless transmitter bugs, one in a wall light fixture right near the bed in the master bedroom...one each in the master bath, living room and kitchen. Hmm...very high end, not some gypo Radio Shack bugs. Obviously strategically and professionally placed by someone who knows what they're doing. Real pros. Of course. I would expect nothing less from the Captain.

Also in the master bedroom, in a ceiling fixture directly above the bed is a very small barely detectible video camera, also wireless...also very high end. I leave each one undisturbed, so whoever is doing the monitoring is not aware of their detection by me until I can decide *when* and *how* I want to deal with them. I motion to Marla to go back out on the balcony.

After we're outside on the balcony deck, I close the patio door. I had already cleared the balcony of bugs. I pour out the ice in the Martini shaker, fill it again with ice from the bucket on the table. I then pour 10 ounces of Bombay Sapphire Gin over the ice, put Mr Penguin's head back on, and begin gently shaking it. I then take the olives out of each Martini glass, place a few cubes of ice in each one and swirl the ice until the glasses are starting to sweat. I then pour about a half ounce of Johnny Walker Red in the bottom of each glass, then gently swirl each glass until there's a lovely amber film of single malt scotch coating up to the rim.

Now it's time for the *coup de grace*...I unscrew the stopper in Mr Penguin's beak, and let the ice cold Sapphire gin slowly *o-o-ooze* into the glasses, then lastly, gently position the olives in the glasses...just so.

Voila! Marla-tunies now being served on the terrace...with the Johnny giving the gin a lovely smokey after taste. I hand Marla the Martini.

"Burnt Bombay's...*Sante Madames*," I say holding my glass up to hers.

"*Sante...Monsieurs*," she says.

She takes a sip. "Um-mm. Divine...smooth, that barely discernible burnt flavor is so subtle...but gives it so much character. My compliments to the mixologist," she says.

"Marla...as you could see the place was bugged big time. My guess is that all of them have been recently placed, as there is no dust whatsoever on them compared to the environment they were placed in...probably since I arrived in town...or less than a week.

Which prompts an even larger question. *Why now?* Not to alarm you, but...just thinkin' out-loud here. Other than the possible obvious motive of jealousy...which you seemed to have dismissed. Maybe some growing paranoia about loyalty to his Lordship...and *the cause*, and the perception by Jason that I may be a potentially corrupting influence on you, making you a dangerous commodity for him to have around? So he may be hedging his bets...just in case, in the unlikely event in his mind at least, I were to decline his offer. Or, worse, maybe start blowin' whistles especially after having been given privy to being in the huddle with the Big Boys of the ECC. Me...and my services could suddenly become *very* disposable. In which case I'd have to wonder what would happen to me...and you...and anybody that's loyal to me if I said *no thanks*. Maybe a visit from our cold-blooded reptilian friend *El Negrito*?" I say.

You can check out...but you can never leave...

"That bastard! So where do we go from here?" she asks.

"Well...if I decommission them, or toss them, they'll know we're on to them. So we'll just have let them think they're still working. There has to be some ambient sound or they'll know something's wrong. So we'll take the bug out of the master bedroom, and put it in the living room. I'll position the video camera in the bedroom so it's facing up toward the ceiling. There's no trailing audio on it so they'll probably think that it just shifted. Try to remember not to reference any room in the house when talking, as they will have them labeled as to location being monitored.

I doubt they will be on to it before you leave town for Tahoe. And don't use your personal land line for any conversations with me...it's probably tapped. I'll call you only *to* your office line...call me only *from* your office. You also have my pager number...leave an alt number. So...anything we want to discuss that's important needs to be done either on the secure balcony...or the bedroom," I say.

"Why don't you grab Mr Penguin, of course observing proper animal rights protocol...as I hereby make a motion for the bedroom...right now," she says shimmying her beautiful bouncing breasts.

"I second that *e*-motion...the motion is carried unanimously," I say bustin' a little funky chicken rejoinder move.

"And as a purely symbolic gesture, to ensure that no animals were harmed during this very Happy Hour, I shall *not* carry Mr Penguin by the beak," I say as I wrestle with where to grab the slippery damn thing, finally sayin', *screw-it*...picking up Mr Penguin by the beak as we adjourn to the bedroom, where I have removed all the bugs and placed them in the living room. Then standing on a chair, aiming the camera harmlessly at the ceiling. And for the record no animals were harmed...with the exception of *el serpiente con un ojo* getting roughed up a little. Not complainin'...just splainin' Lucy.

Over the next several days, I complete the final edited versions on VHS of the three variations of the conference.

Wednesday afternoon, I walk up to Jason Mahoney's office, and present to Captain Ahab the three edited master cassettes along with the four original cassettes of raw footage. He immediately walks them over to the VHS player TV combo, and with the remote control, previews each, for about 3 minutes real-time then fast forwards to the parts that were supposed to be edited out. He then surprises me by randomly fast-forward shuttling through each of the four raw footage cassettes, then rewinds them. *Trust but verify...that there's been no switch. A personal caveat and preview for the coming games: He does not miss much.*

He smiles, when he sees that everything appears to be as agreed.

"Good job, Mick. Thanks. Now why don't we sit down...have a drink and discuss your decision about my offer," he says, all business now, as he goes over to his liquor cabinet pouring a scotch, up for each of us. I am seated in front of his desk, as he comes back to his desk, then leaning against it facing me...very close, handing me my drink. Hmm...*in battle always try to maintain the tactical advantage of holding the high ground. This guys is always in the game...Mr Intimidation.*

"Cheers, Mick...mud in yer eye...as my people say," raising his glass, not by accident, literally towering over me, looking down keeping his eyes intently trained on me while taking a sip.

"Cheers," I reply returning the toast taking a short pull.

"Okay...I've given you plenty of time to make your decision. Have you got an answer for me? After having privy to the conference and all the major players I would have to hope...for the good of *all concerned* that you have decided to accept my offer?" He says with an unmistakably ominous tone.

"I have. I've decided to come on board...to accept your offer, but with one pre-condition," I say.

"*Oh?* And just *what* kind of pre-condition?" he asks, obviously somewhat irritated that I have not fallen unequivocally into the fold.

"I'll perform all the tasks that you have outlined to me relative to the position offered. But, not as an employee per se, but as a contract

entity. My annual compensation of 100 K would be the same, tendered on a monthly retainer basis. The advantages for me are that I can continue to have my own business...my prior profession of investigation etcetera...along with a PR client base independent of ACT, to pursue the same or similar business interests for others. It would be a similar contractual relationship that you have with Max Mesmer.

In the unlikely event that I would perceive even the appearance of a potential conflict of interest of my representation of another client with the interests of ACT, I would forthwith, advise you accordingly, leaving you with the option to sever and terminate the business relationship with me at your earliest convenience, by tendering written notice without having to state cause. The obvious advantage for ACT is that you will have none of the standard liabilities of an employer to an employee...including possible legal liabilities for acts of agency on behalf of the master, which maybe construed as legally redressable...including civil and criminal. No benefits...including stock options, medical insurance or company car, etcetera, etcetera.

If you wish to proceed under these conditions, I will have a contract, and representation agreement drawn up for your consideration. The effective date of the agreement would be after I have concluded the ACT company business in Tahoe, still as an employee of ACT. I'm figuring within 30 days which will give us some time to draft and ratify the rep agreement," I say.

"Well now...and just hypothetically of course, what if I decide to decline your proposition?" he asks, again with the smirk, sensing that I may be bluffing.

I stand up and stare into his searching eyes, "Hey, Jason...no hard feelings. I've enjoyed working with ACT, you, Pauly and Marla. And it should go without saying, rest assured that any knowledge, proprietary or otherwise that I may have gained about the corporation, you and any of the employees of ACT...and or the E-C-C, would remain expressly confidential with me, of course...subject to the force of law," I say.

"I see. You've obviously given this some careful thought. Mick, I really like you. I think you could have *gone very* far with ACT. But it seems clear to me, for the moment at least, that you have made up your mind, so I won't insult your integrity by offering you more money...or perks...which I might entertain," he says of course trying to change my mind by sweetening the deal.

"Thanks Jason...but no thanks. This isn't about the money. Do we have a deal?" I ask putting my open hand out to shake hands.

He studies me searchingly for about 10 seconds. *The first to blink, loses.*

"Well, I guess under the circumstances I'm left with little choice. Okay then. Done deal," he says slowly extending his hand, which I briefly shake.

"But just *hypothetically* of course...*what if I* had summarily declined your offer?" I ask smiling.

"Well Mick in that case...I guess, hypothetically, I'd just have to kill ya. Just a little Black Irish humor there, lad," he says with a bit of Irish lilt along with a chilling intense penetrating gaze into my eyes, followed with a hollow smile. But the message is unmistakably clear. Do not *even* think about *messin' with me*.

"Ha...ha...Jason. Okay, since my work is done here for now, I should get back home to Tahoe. I've still got some unfinished loose ends to tie up on a few of the franchise renewals. Probably take me at least a month to conclude my involvement in the negotiations, to get Marla up to speed for my replacement before I can free myself, to commit full-time to our new business relationship," I say.

"That should be soon enough. Just stay available in case an emergency arises, okay?" he says.

"Sure. Okay...unless there's something else...I should get going. I've got a flight out tomorrow morning early. Thanks," I say extending my hand again which he grudgingly fills with his.

"Okay...Mick. I'll be in touch...through Pauly," he says.

"Thanks." I say as I turn to leave.

"Oh...by the way. Marla won't be working with you on the franchise renewals...so there won't be *any* reason for her to go to Tahoe. I've found something else *very* uh...pressing, which needs her urgent attention...like yesterday. So, Pauly will be taking that over, at least temporarily," he says with a smirk. *Check...with the polite chess warning that my queen is in danger. Grave danger.*

"Oh...Okay. Whatever. See ya," I say dismissively, desperately trying to mask my disappointment and grave concern. As I exit his office, I can feel his intense stare boring holes into my back as I walk toward the private elevator.

By the time I get back to Marla's condo, she is already there, standing in the kitchen, with a glass of wine, busily chopping something.

"Honey...I'm home," as I bounce through the door left ajar, breezily doing my best Rob Petrie from the Dick van Dyke Show, while placing my briefcase on the kitchen counter. I then put my index finger to my lips, while pointing up to the living room ceiling, grabbing my ear lobe. Marla nods.

"Oh...Roob...did you have a good day at the office, dear while I've dutifully been baking brownies and otherwise keeping a perfect home for my big brave man," Marla says doing a perfect Mary Tyler Moore of the dutiful housewife Laura Petrie.

"Yeap...and I had an interesting talk with the boss today. But before I get into that, after a hard day at the office...gee whiz honey-bunch, I could sure use a highball," I say.

"Of course dear...just as soon as I get your robe and slippers you smart and powerful man. And for dinner, your favorite...my special meatloaf. You must be famished, foraging out there in the big bad uh...big business world," she says pouring me a double shot of Johnny.

"All in a day's work...which I do happily without reservation for our happy home, our two-point-five kids and one dog and point five cat, and for my beautiful and *very* capable *housewife*," I say, drumming my fingers on the counter, then taking a long pull on the Johnny.

"Oh...Roob! So tell me about your day, sweetheart. It's always *so* exciting to hear how smart and clever you are at work," she says.

"Well, yes...of course it would be. And speaking of me being smart...*and* clever...I did meet with the *big* boss today, Jason Mahoney about the new position that is being offered me with much more pay," I say, which causes Marla to stop with the slicin' and dicin', and look up at me, the smile now gone.

"Really. How did *that* go?" she asks the tone of levity also vanished.

"Just fine. But I'd rather tell you the *wonderful* news after our *wonderful* family dinner," I say

I motion to Marla toward the balcony with my head, then open the patio door and wait for her, closing the patio door behind us. Before saying anything, I make a quick sweep for any bugs that may have been placed since the last scan. All clear.

"Okay. Here's the deal. Good news...bad news. Good news first. I rejected his offer as an employee...but I countered. Told him that I'd perform the activities and duties as defined, but as an independent contractor only...for the same rate of compensation. He was *not* happy, but being the consummate poker player didn't openly display his displeasure. But I could tell that he was *seriously* pissed-off. Anyway, he reluctantly accepted my proposal. So in about a month, I'll be off ACT payroll, after I've completed the unfinished business on the franchise negotiations," I say.

"Okay...and the bad news?" Marla says.

"There's no way he's going to let you come to Tahoe. He told me that he had something pressing for you to do...that you would no longer be involved in the franchise renewals from Tahoe, that Pauly would take all that over," I say.

"Yeah...pressing alright. Like *pressing* his body against mine. That *bastard*! So do you have a plan Mickey?" she asks.

"Marla...I don't have to tell *you* how slippery he is. He's *good...very good*, at all this corporate intrigue bullshit. But I think he now realizes that he may have made a major mistake in judgment in prematurely assuming my willingness to fall into the fold, with the rest of the sheep...no offense intended," I say.

"That's in really *baaahhhh-d* taste," she bleats.

"I think he's uh...*concerned*, justifiably, that when he let me into the huddle of the E-C-C, without extracting a commitment from me beforehand, that he screwed up big time. He was so sure...so cocky that I'd take the deal as not many *if any* ever turn him down...for anything. So okay...if you can hold out here for about a month...until I get things going again, back in Tahoe, then you can split.

When the timing is right, about a month from now, you will inform C-E-O J. Murdoch Mahoney, in the form of a letter for his eyes only, that you no longer can tolerate his predatory sexual exploitation as the employer over a female employee...that it's *over*, and that you will not file suit for sexual abuse in the workplace as long as he lets you leave unchallenged and unmolested with a good letter of recommendation which we will draft, seeking no severance, just a voluntary tendering of your resignation, effective immediately, for *unspecified* personal reasons. Tacitly leaving open the possibility of filing a claim for sexual abuse in the future, should he foolishly make the mistake of not honoring his side of the bargain. Okay?" I say.

"Okay...then what? I come to Tahoe...as *what*. To do *what*?" she asks with a bit of an edge.

"Thought you'd never ask. Okay...so you'd pick up and move to Tahoe where you have uh...not just one but two, very *special* friends there. We'd form a partnership...both professional and *very* personal. I could restart my investigation biz for some cash flow until we can get our own PR etcetera firm up to speed. With your legal credentials and impressive resume working for other corporations doing what we would be doing for ACT as employees, but without the exclusivity or strings attached...and ultimately more money. So whattya say, partner?" I say grabbing her and pulling her into me.

"Oh Mickey...it *sounds* so wonderful. But...do you honestly think we can pull it off? Do you *really* think he'll leave us alone?" she asks hugging me tightly looking up at me, her face filled with apprehension.

"Marla...I honestly don't know what the hell he's capable of. But I can tell you this, if there is such a thing as an evil-born man he's redefines it. So what's the alternative, baby? Do you want to live the rest of your life, working, *literally under* someone that evil and autocratic? This is your chance to make a break...a getaway. But I can't make that decision for you. All I can tell you is...that I love you and I want you with me...no matter what happens, we'll deal with it," I say.

"Oh Mickey...I love you. Just hold me...and tell me everything is going to work out, okay?" she says hugging me tightly.

"Everything is going to be fine, baby...*just fine*," I say, leaving off the *I hope*.

Both of us realizing that this will be our last evening together for at least a month, we decide to have a quiet, light dinner then retreat to

the secure bedroom. But before retiring for the evening, because I have a very early flight out in the morning, I decide to pack. I've been traveling light with just one suitcase, a carry-on and my briefcase. I pack the suitcase, leaving out clothes for the morning. The last thing I pack in the suitcase are the seven VHS cassettes from my briefcase. Just to be safe, I wrap them in two layers of aluminum foil to ensure that they will not be damaged by routine random x-ray at airport security.

We spend a quiet, reflective evening, just holding each other while listening to music, some rather melancholy Chopin and Ravel including one of my favorites, the lyrical Pavanne for a Dead Princess—tragically prophetic...

- Chapter 30 -

I must admit, it feels wonderful to be home again, in my beautiful Lake Tahoe, in the comfort of my own surroundings especially my large California King-sized bed, a full seven feet long by six feet wide.

In 1983 the first cell phone technology was released to the general public, a relatively primitive bulky handset at a ridiculous cost of close to \$ 4,000 each plus \$ 50 per month and .40 per minute. I buy one, establish an account, and send it to Marla, so we can talk on the phone without fear of being monitored. She keeps it a secret from everybody that she has the capability, so whomever may be monitoring her conversations is not aware that we talk frequently.

We talk at least three or four times a week. Because she is suspicious that her car may also be bugged, she only uses it while sitting outside, or in a quiet open public place.

She's been staying busy, trying to stay out of the sights of Jason. But apparently, the gossip at the coffee pot, around the ACT corporate office is that Jason Mahoney's considerable sexual appetites are now being satiated by the Dragon Lady, one Alexandra Kwan Meade wife of CEO and Chairman of World Media Inc., the aging mogul Reginald Meade. She's also hearing some rumors, from very reliable sources that something big...*very* big, in the corporate world of mergers and acquisitions is about to be announced about ACT, and a player to be named later...*a very large player.*

In the meantime, the landscape of television is being drastically and dramatically changed with the advent of the delivery of satellite programming, like CNN, Cable News Network, launched in 1980, by Ted Turner, maverick media mogul and President of Turner Broadcast. Cable systems including all of the ACT Inc. systems begin carrying it almost immediately, as it cannot be received 'off-air' broadcast like the big three, ABC, NBC and CBS networks and their local affiliates.

This invariably helps to drive more subscribers to cable TV. It will revolutionize how news and information will be delivered near real time—worldwide news, now 24 -7. Many public places like bars, hotel lobbies and airports will leave the TV tuned to CNN, all day long for breaking news, a constant Dow Jones update, and human interest and celebrity gossip stories that are beginning to draw a large audience. It's the incipient stage of what will eventually be called *reality TV*. Giving all news, including international, national and regional an element of entertainment, coining a new term, *info-tainment*, and a local sense of connection and intimacy with happenings in distant places in different

time zones. I also leave CNN on during the day while working at the house. It is not unusual for a flashing graphic to occasionally appear over the programming, with *Late Breaking News Story...stay tuned for live coverage from the site.*

One afternoon, about 3:30 PM, I was working at the house with the TV on CNN, muted, when out of the corner of my eye, I'm distracted by a flashing graphic, *Hostage situation in the Denver area...stay tuned for latest developments.*

I un-mute the TV and turn the volume up. Some reporter is standing in front of what appears to be a school in the background with the name, Mile High School. I immediately recognize it as Trey Mahoney's High School:

Details are sketchy and unconfirmed at this point, but here's what we've been able to confirm so far. It is believed that a male student is holding several other students' hostage at gun point. He is demanding he be given the opportunity to speak to the news media. The identity of the students remains unconfirmed. It is not clear why he is holding, so far as we know at this time, four other students at gun point. He has threatened to execute them unless his demands are met. Stay tuned for further developments

...the reporter breathlessly reports.

The phone rings. I pick it up, "Mick Kozlov."

The voice on the other end is crying hysterically, it's a woman, "Mick...it's Peggy...Mahoney."

"Hi Peggy, how ya doin? You sound really upset. I just saw on CNN that there's a hostage situation in the Denver area....looks like Trey's school. Is he alright?" I ask.

"Mick...it's Trey. He's taken some students hostage...with some guns he took from home...a handgun and some kind of rifle...an A-something or other," she says sobbing.

"Okay...please try to calm down, Peggy. Have you or Jason been able to talk to him directly...to ask him what the hell is going on?" I ask.

"Yes...but he won't tell us anything...and he refuses to listen to anything, I or Jason has to say. He says he needs to talk to you...and you only. Can you please call him....oh God please talk to him Mick before he does something really...please call him right away!" she pleads.

"Of course Peggy...give me the number. I'll try to reach him as soon as I hang up," I say.

"Oh thank you Mick...there's a private line...in the basketball coaches office at the gym. It's a direct number that bypasses the switchboard," she says giving me the number for the school.

"Have you talked to anybody at the school admin or teachers....or the police about the possible cause or the status of the police response. Do you know if they've called out SWAT yet?" I ask.

"Here's the name of the Detective in charge...a Rodney Gabriel. Here's the number for the PD. They have patched him in from the high school to talk to us. Okay? Please...Mick, call Trey right away! This character Gabriel sounds like he's real eager to rush in there...like some kind of cowboy. And Mick...one thing Trey did tell me. He went off his meds about two weeks ago," she says.

"Okay...Peggy. In the meantime, you can give him my number...but tell him I'm probably going to be on the phone with Trey when he calls. Okay?" I say.

"Okay, Mick. Please call us back at the house...right after you get off with Trey! Promise?" she says giving me her phone number.

"I promise Peggy...gotta run. I'll be in touch with you as soon as I can. Bye," I say.

Jezus Trey...what the hell have you got yourself into, man?

I punch the number in on the keypad, and wait for it to ring. I immediately get a recording...*this number is no longer in service or you have dialed the number incorrectly...please hang up and dial again....etc.*

I immediately realize that in her angst, Peggy has neglected to give the area code for Denver...but I am so upset myself, that I don't catch it like I should have...like something one might do if it was his own kid in such jeopardy. I redial with the area code for Denver. It rings about 8 times, finally, *"Hello?"*

"Trey?...is this Trey Mahoney speaking?" I ask.

"Mick? Is that you? Mick...hey, good to hear your voice...got a minute so we can chat? I'm kinda in a situation here," he says laughing incongruously...sounding agitated...*kinda in a situation.* Ya think?

"Sure Trey...shoot, uh...*dammit*, poor choice of words. What's up...talk to me pally," I say, again with the laugh on the other end *"...you've still got your sense of humor I see,"* he says. He's talking very fast, being bi-polar if he went off his meds, he could be in the middle of a manic episode.

"Yeah I'm a regular riot...what the hell's going on, Trey? Are you...or anybody else hurt? Does anybody need medical attention...a doctor...or a lawyer?" I ask.

"Indian Chief, Mick...you forgot Indian Chief," he says laughing uproariously at his own joke, then serious. *"Nah...everybody's okay...so far. And when this is over I won't be needing any doctor...or lawyer,"* he says giggling.

"Okay, Trey...take a few deep breaths...and slow down, you're talking really fast...hard for me to keep up, man. Okay? So slow *everything* down...remember let the game come to you. Trey, why did you go off your meds?

"Those damn things zombie me out...just make me feel dead inside. So I decided I try going without them. That's when I got up the balls, no pun intended " again with the inappropriate amount of laughter *" to go for it...with Sam."*

"Okay, Trey...got it. Yeah, we're a real pair...coupla funny coconuts aren't we, pally. So tell me what's going on man, from the beginning...deep breaths...and slow down. Okay?" I say.

"Okay...Mick, okay. Remember when I told you about Sam Reynolds, the guy I had a crush on? Well, one day about a two weeks ago, I finally decided to tell him how I felt about him. We were alone...just the two of us in the shower after practice. I asked him if he felt the same way about men that I do. Anyway...it turns out that he's as gay as I am. We made passionate love in the shower. You were right Mick...it felt so natural...so spontaneous and beautiful. No problems like you said. Okay?" he says.

"So then what's up with the hostage thing, then?" I ask.

"So after we're done...he tells me that if I tell anybody else that he's queer...I'll be sorry...that this will have to be our little secret which is fine with me. So anyway, a few days later, I guess he has a change of heart 'cause when I come in the locker room, to get dressed for practice...on my locker...with a magic marker in big black block letters...F-A-G...fag, Mick. Then, all the guys in the locker start laughing and mocking me, with Sam leading the taunting...egging everybody on. They leave the locker room...to go to the gym for practice.

I just didn't know what to do. Then I remembered our talk about maybe making a statement...about sticking up for myself and coming out. So I put on my jock strap, get dressed and go out into the gym to practice, like nothing's happened. All of sudden, my balls feel like they're on fire. I'm sweating like crazy...rubbing my balls, then everyone starts laughing...like fall down laughing. Sam says, hey hot balls...you get that from one of your boyfriends? Like that...trying to get some cover, so the guys won't suspect he's gay.

I sprint into the locker room, rip off my jock strap and run into the shower to try to get that stuff off. Finally, it starts to subside. When I go back to my locker, to get dressed...so I can get the hell outta there before they come back in, I see the tube of Tiger Balm layin' on the floor. That ointment stuff...you use for sprains and shit...it supplies heat to keep the swelling down. I know it must have been Sam that did it."

"Okay...Trey...that was a shitty thing for him to do...I get that. Granted...that punk Sam is a real prick. But what in the hell are expecting to accomplish by taking these guys hostage, man?"

"Okay...here's the rest of the story...maybe it'll help you to understand why I have to do this," he says, still talking so manically that sometimes it's hard for me to follow him.

"Trey...you don't *have to do* anything, man. Listen to me...you're not making any sense here. You're not thinking rationally...probably

'cause you went off your meds. This can only end badly. Please Trey, I'm beggin' ya man...give it up. Now! I'll talk to the cops...I'll have them promise that they won't use any force...they won't hurt you...when they take you in. You mother is just sick with worry," I plead.

"Let me finish, Mick okay? Please...just listen. So anyway, within a week, it's all around the school that I'm gay. During the day, in class or whatever, all the jocks, especially the football players are making my life miserable...hey fag...hey gay boy...the whole bit. Then one day after class after I quit going to basketball practice, some of the football players along with Sam and three other guys on the basketball team, cornered me. Those fucking football players gave me a real beating...broke my nose, knocked a few teeth out...for what? What did I ever do to them?" he says, starting to sob.

"Jesus, Trey...I'm so sorry man. I know it's easy to say, but don't pay any attention to those sexually insecure punks. I know they hurt you...bad. But trust me...*this is not the answer*. If you want to get revenge...violence against these guys will only hurt *your cause*. Okay?" I say.

"Mick...that's not the worst part. So I come home. I'm a bloody mess. My mom and my father are there. Mom, says, Trey...my gawd what happen to you? So I tell them...including my father that they had been bullying me for a few weeks and then they beat me up for no reason...just because I'm gay. Mom grabs he and hugs me...starts crying. The old man just stares at me, finally he says, '...if you're gay, then you had it comin'. Don't expect any sympathy from me...the Mahoney clan DOES NOT have queers. Period,' " he says crying.

"Oh man...godammit. I'm so sorry Trey. But you can't listen to him. He's just an emotional cripple. He's a big nothin'...not even worthy of you. Listen to me kid...let me help you get out of this okay? I promise...you can come and stay with me. Okay? We can do this together. We'll tell the world...I'll..." I start to say.

"Hold on a second Mick...somebody's at the door..." he says, then puts the phone down. I hear some voices, then Trey comes back on, *"Hey Mick...that was the cops. They say they're going to meet my demands...they're going to set up the cameras so I can tell my story...about the bullying and the beating. This is my chance to do the right thing. I remember what you said...do the right thing. Okay? Well it's time. Gotta go...tune your TV to CNN. Bye Mickey. I love you. Take care...my best pally,"* he says.

Click

"Trey! Trey! Don't hang up," the line goes dead.

I immediately hit the redial...the line's busy. I try three more times. Busy...probably off the hook.

I immediately call the number for the Detective, Rodney Gabriel. I get the local precinct.

"Denver police," they answer.

"This is an emergency I have to talk to Detective Rod Gabriel...it's matter of life and death. Can you patch me into his phone...out at the hostage scene at Mile High?" I yell.

"Who are you?" the voice says.

"My name is Mick Kozlov...I'm a close friend of the family of Trey Mahoney...the young man that's holding the students hostage. I think I can help...talk him into surrendering," I say keeping one eye on the TV.

Then I hear the guy yell, *"hey this guy wants to talk to Hot Rod...Gabriel about the hostage sit. Patch him in. Okay? Hang on."*

It may have been only a minute...or two at the most, but it seems like an eternity.

"Gabriel here," the voice says.

"Detective Gabriel, this is Mick Kozlov...a friend of the kid holding the hostages. I think I can help...I can talk him down if..." but I'm interrupted.

"That won't be necessary. The situation is resolved. The hostages have been freed...they are unharmed," he says.

"Great. What about Trey Mahoney. Is he okay?" I cry.

"He won't be taking any more hostages. Before he came out to do the interview, I instructed my SWAT guys to take him down if they could get a clean shot...without endangering the lives of the hostages. He's DOA," Detective Gabriel says matter-of-factly, like he's handing out a parking ticket.

"Are you saying you shot him to death in front of the cameras...like a dog for Chrissakes!?" I cry.

"No...not me personally...but yes he is confirmed dead. There were no cameras. Never was going to be any cameras," he says coldly total devoid of emotion or any semblance of sympathy.

"Goddammit man...I could've stopped this. He was just a confused kid...he was off his meds. What was the big fucking hurry?" I scream.

"Too late...it's a done deal," he says.

"You cops...you lied to him...lured him out in open then assassinated him...like some dog. And he died for what? For being gay? You fucking cowards! Goddammit man!" I yell.

"Well, that uh...kid was packin' a loaded and lethal AK47.

When a kid picks up a man's weapon with intent to do bodily harm, in the eyes of the law...he's no longer a kid. I gotta go. I'm gonna have a shitload of paperwork to do," the compassionate Detective "Hot Rod" Gabriel says.

Click

Then on the TV screen flashes the graphic,

HOSTAGE SITUATION RESOLVED...ALL
HOSTAGES FREED AND UNHARMED!
STAY TUNED FOR MORE DETAILS!

Then the reporter comes back on clutching a microphone barely able to contain his excitement. Gesturing wildly, sweeping his arm toward the scene behind him, signaling the camera to zoom in for the money-shot close-up of the hostages being escorted out of the building. "Thankfully, all the hostages after their grueling ordeal...are unharmed!" he says, then as an *oh by the way*...an afterthought, "The perpetrator was killed in the *shootout* with the police...thankfully no law enforcement personnel were injured in the incident." *Shootout?* Sounds so much more dramatic than the reality. A surgical kill-shot from a safe and sanitary hundred yards, of a distraught and confused sixteen year-old kid who just wanted to be able tell his story to the world about the pain and angst of being bullied and beat up, for no other reason, than his sexual preference.

The middle-market local broadcast affiliate hack is now thrust on to the national stage—it's *his lucky day*. His big chance to make a name for himself. Maybe some major market TV station will pick him up. He's starting to wind it up now, "This is Robert Shaw, of KDNR...live from the scene of the dramatic rescue of four hostages from Mile High. Just to recap, all the hostages are safe and unharmed. Robert Shaw...signing off," enunciating his name very slowly and clearly, just in case a news director from the Big Leagues, thinks he might be ready for prime time...for *the show*.

I hit the mute button, and then start to cry uncontrollably. Like I've just lost my own son. Involuntarily replaying in my head, is the same haunting refrain used over and over again. *Everybody's a safe and unharmed* except a 16 year old kid, who just happened to be looking for love in the *wrong place*...at the *wrong time*...

Dammit! Goddammit!

The AP and UPI pick up the story, in no small part because the perpetrator is the son of corporate mogul, CEO of ACT Inc, J. Murdoch Mahoney.

Jason Murdoch Mahoney the third...Trey, dead at the age of 16.

In the story, there is no mention of the fact that Trey had been the victim of systematic merciless bullying and a severe beating by the so-called innocent hostages. J. Murdoch Mahoney, when asked for a statement about the incident:

My son was a very troubled young man. Sadly he made the unwise decision to quit his medication without telling anyone...including his mother or I. It was solely his decision and as such, he must bear the

full responsibility for his actions...for the tragedy that resulted. Thankfully no one else was harmed.

What happened was unfortunate, but I hold no else responsible, including the police, for the death of my son. I will have nothing further to say on the matter. I would ask that you all refrain from attempting to contact me or anyone in our family, that you respect our privacy, as we grieve for the loss of our son.

Well said...and well managed damage control for the reputation of CEO Jason Mahoney. Most conspicuously, no mention of the fact that his son was homosexual.

'...if you're gay, then you had it comin'...don't expect any sympathy from me. The Mahoney clan DOES NOT have queers. Period.'

A week later, I fly in for a very private memorial service for Jason Murdoch Mahoney, III. Marla picks me up at the airport, from there we head over to the cemetery for the funeral. We hug and embrace for a long time. Peggy Mahoney has asked me to say a few words at the service.

Finally, Marla says, "Mickey, are you okay?" looking searchingly into my eyes.

"Yeah...I'll be okay. This is a...a tough one. I loved that kid. Have you heard how Peggy is taking this?" I ask my eyes welling up with tears.

"Pauly says she is, of course devastated...perhaps even suicidal. She's been drunk from the day it happened. Her daughter Clementine is here from college...probably the only reason she hasn't killed herself, yet...according to Pauly," Marla says.

"Okay...let's get over to the cemetery and get this over with," I say.

We arrive at the funeral site, just as the limo pulls up with the family. It is a beautiful bright sunlit day, belying the incredibly palpable darkness and sorrow of the moment. There are some prurient sensationalist paparazzi, at a distance with very long telephoto lenses, hanging around like scavengers, just waiting for their chance to pounce on road kill.

There are about 20 folding chairs set out in front of the elaborate brass coffin, by the looks of it probably the most expensive money can buy.

We walk up to a seated Pauly and his wife, whom I had never met. He stands up and as we hug, he winces. I can feel his body has lost some of his once lean muscle. Probably from stress. "Mickey...glad you could make it man...Peggy will appreciate it. This is my wife, Joan."

Joan stands up, and we also hug. She a short, compact woman, very trim and erect, and even though she's obviously been crying, I can still tell, is a beautiful woman. Marla and Joan, very close dear friends, embrace for a long time.

As the family makes its way from the limo, Peggy Mahoney, in all black with a veil, is being supported by Jason, and on the other side, presumably her daughter, Clementine. She seems very unsure on her feet. She's probably been drinking, even more, in order to get through this. She is quite a bit smaller than I remember her from our last encounter...probably from not eating, trying to drown her sorrows as the now seemingly cliché saying goes. Never works. Sadly the only sure way I know to drown one's sorrows would be to like take a leap off the Golden Gate Bridge.

As they approach, with them is a Catholic priest. We wait for the family to be seated, then we all take our seats in the front row. As I look around, I see no one else in any of the remaining seats. No friends...no other relatives, how tragic. I again, experience the sensation of a tennis ball being stuck in my throat.

The only sound is the rustling of the leaves from a cold, bone chilling North wind. The priest nods toward me, and I stand up and walk over to the podium by the casket. I'm trying desperately to keep it together. I look down at Peggy and smile wanly. She nods her head.

I begin, "Young Trey Mahoney was more than a good friend of mine. In the short time we knew each other, I grew to understand what a special and yes, truly courageous young man he was. I loved that kid...like my own son. Sometimes in the face of such overwhelming grief...it is a good time to call upon other such tragic senseless moments in history for inspiration, to help us deal with our own pain...of others left behind...as others have dealt with it. Trey had the soul of poet. A gentle and kind soul that only wanted to love...and be loved...for who he was, not what others wanted...or expected him to be. So I would like to leave you with a few of these words taken from the song by Don McLean, *Vincent*, about another anguished soul, Vincent Van Gough who also took his own life...just as sure as Trey did because, this world was never meant for one as beautiful as you..."

I begin...fighting back the tears...

*For they could not love you
But still your love was true
And when no hope was left in sight
On that starry, starry night*

*You took your life, as lovers often do
But I could've told you Vincent
This world was never meant for
One as beautiful as you*

*They would not listen, they're not listening still
Perhaps, they never will...*

"Trey sacrificed his unfinished life...attempting to *make* them listen. To do the right thing. His only crime was following his broken heart as to whom he chose to love.

Perhaps, now in some small way, they will begin to listen..." I say, then taking a seat.

I don't remember much of anything else during the actual service, as the priest droned on with the expected religious platitudes.

After the service is over I walk up to Peggy. She seems totally oblivious to her surroundings...almost catatonic.

"Peggy, it's me, Mick," I say.

She looks up at me, there is a fleeting recognition of me, a wan smile, then she just stares out into space.

"Peggy, I'm so sorry for your loss...you know I loved Trey, like he was my own son," I say.

Then looking up at me, "I know Mick...I know...and he *loved you too*. Thank you so much for your beautiful words about my beautiful boy," she says so faintly that I can barely hear her, offering her bony emaciated hand to me. I take it. It feels like the hand of a woman in her eighties, with little weight or mass, covered by milky paper-thin skin. She then withdraws her hand and she is again gone to some other place, perhaps to join her son.

I shake Jason Mahoney's hand, and perform the perfunctory, almost brusque, "I'm very sorry for your loss, Jason," I say barely able to conceal my contempt for his despicable behavior toward his own son.

"Thank you, Mick...and thanks you for coming," like some automaton.

I then turn to the veiled Clementine, "I'm Mick Kozlov, your brother Trey, was a very dear friend of mine. I'm so sorry for your loss," I say.

She just nods, saying nothing like she herself is suffering from PTSD. Perhaps as Peggy had once confided in me...something very dark, to do with her father?

- Chapter 31 -

On the drive back to Marla's, I hold her right hand all the way...stroking it, feeling so grateful, to have her in my life. I then become lost in deep reflection about my time spent with Trey.

"How long can you stay for Mickey?" she asks.

"I'm sorry...you said something? I was someplace else," I say.

"Yes, I know...it's okay, baby. How long are you in town for?" she says again.

"Oh...uh...I should get back. I'm not sure I can be here. I just might be tempted to take Jason Mahoney out to the woodshed...maybe so he doesn't leave," I say.

"Baby, before you return to Tahoe, I know it's not a good time...but we need to talk about when to execute our plan to get me out of this corporate insane asylum. I think it's time...but..." she says with some tension and indecision in her tone.

"But what?" I ask.

"Well, I'm ready...whenever you say...that you are ready to have me in your life...*full-time*. But...Mick I want you to be absolutely sure, that you're comfortable with that proposition. It's a big move...for both of us. I love you Mickey, of that I'm very sure...more sure than I've ever been in my life. But I have to know that *you* have the same level of commitment...that you're also ready, and frankly, that you're *over Annie Trudeau*," she says.

Hmm...well, there is that. Annie Trudeau. So that's been lurking in her consciousness all this time? I have to admit to myself, the mere mention of the name gives me more than a slight increase in heart rate. *Jesus...what's up with that?*

Women just seem to have another layer of wisdom...of knowing that we men seldom possess. Some call it intuition. I call it the feminine cellular cognizance of Yin. Is it during the love making that they sense some distant connection...a yearning for the embrace another woman. The *other woman*...from the past, alive or even dead, the present or even the future?

"Thank you for your honesty, baby. Marly...please pull over." She pulls off the road, comes to a complete stop then turns to face me, her eyes filled with a mixture of expectation and dread, "Yes...I've given you and me some very careful thought...including the ca...ca...commitment part," I say, only half-jokingly,

"Well...easy for you to say," Marla says with that beautiful smile, a real gamer.

"Marla...I believe that for perhaps the first time in my life...well one of the first anyway...*probably the third actually*, that I am truly ready for a mature loving, committed relationship...more importantly with you and just you," I say taking her face in my hands, then giving her a deep passionate kiss.

"Oh, baby...I'm so happy. I could scream with joy!" she cries.

Then both of us starting hooting, hollering...and laughing until tears are streaming down both of our faces. In my case, as much of a release of the monumental grief over the senseless death of the kid.

When we arrive at Marla's condo, I do a quick sweep again for bugs, the master bedroom and bath, along with the balcony. No new surveillance activity, The camera in the bedroom appears unmoved, still tilted harmlessly upward.

I go into the kitchen, uncork a bottle of chilled white wine, and bring it with a fifth of Johnny Walker Red, and some glasses out on the balcony. I then close the patio door behind us. I pour a glass of wine for Marla, then a very generous shot of Johnny for me. I'm going to need it. We've got some pretty heavy *stuff* to work through. We both take a seat on patio chairs next to the glass top patio table, looking out at the Rockies, as the sun slowly creeps out of sight. I take a long pull, then launch into my plan of attack including long term strategy—for survival, financial and physical.

"Okay...timing's pretty critical on when you give notice to Jason. With the death of Trey, probably a little insensitive, even for him, for us to drop my draft on him for the rep agreement...and your notice. Let's give it a week, before we do the deal. Though highly unlikely, I'd like a signed agreement from Jason, before you drop the hammer on him about the sexual abuse issue etcetera. I've got a draft agreement which I'd like you, uh...my legal counsel, to look over for issues of legality, recourse and such. Make your notations, we'll discuss, and I'll prepare the final draft for submission to ACT.

In the meantime, we have three documents to prepare for your separation from ACT. The first is your letter of resignation, for his eyes only, with the caveat that unless he unequivocally releases you, promising not to impede your departure in any way...and that he will prepare a letter of recommendation which you will draft...and that he will not besmirch your reputation in any way whatsoever, or you will be forced to pursue a complaint for sexual abuse in the workplace, etcetera.

You will also indicate in the letter, that should he violate any of the terms of separation, or in any way impugn your reputation, professionally, or personally...or fail to provide a fair and honest reference...or should you meet with any harm, a copy of the letter, along with a comprehensive narrative and factual chronology listing the acts of abuse, will be filed with several parties, including your personal lawyer in a sealed and dated unopened registered letter which has been

witnessed and notarized. But as a lawyer, and a woman, I'm sure you don't need any help from me in finding the right buzz words that would typically make a workplace abuser piss his pants.

The second letter will be very short...and direct, a one paragraph formal letter of resignation, for the record, indicating that you are leaving for personal reasons, effective immediately. Period.

The third document will be the draft of the letter of recommendation, listing your position, title, responsibilities, your uh...professional job description, dates of tenure, modestly acknowledging your competency and listing your professional accomplishments etcetera, which he will have transcribed on to corporate ACT letterhead, and sign as C-E-O," I say

"But Mick, what if he won't cooperate. I've worked with Jason long enough to know that he does not intimidate easily. He's one *nasty bastard*, to have as an enemy. What's our back up position?" Marla asks.

"There is no backup. It's basically one big bluff. You just resign...leaving hanging in the air, the implicit threat of the revelation of sexual abuse. Assuming he feels sufficiently at serious jeopardy at the mere possibility of you blowin' the whistle on the abuse claim, whether he openly acknowledges it or not, we don't really need him...or ACT. He'll find out soon enough that you're with me in Tahoe. And I suspect that he will probably then terminate the rep agreement, forthwith...unless he thinks he has more to gain. Maybe with his insufferable arrogance the possibility of buying our confidence, which I would not attempt to disabuse him of...until *we're* ready. But either way, in the meantime, maybe it will give me an opportunity to dig a little deeper.

I sense something very dark...and very sinister about this whole E-C-C thing. That maybe we have only been privy to the agenda just above the surface. I think Jason and Dragon Lady have been clandestinely coordinating some major agenda for quite some time that may entail more than just some seemingly benign political action committee. A much more proactive, aggressive coup d'etat agenda, and not to sound like some conspiracy theory nut job, perhaps eventually usurp the power of the democratically elected American government. Yeah, I know...but right now, not for anyone else's eyes...yet. Which makes us perceived as even a greater threat vector. *No bueno*, baby.

That whole charade that they performed. The E-C-C, just a rah-rah vehicle for co-opting the other greedy corporate oligarchs, probably just an elaborate smokescreen. The other members probably don't even realize that they're just *beards*...useful pawns, to give the E-C-C stature and credibility...and cover for a much larger and sinister agenda.

By then the oligarchs will have capitalized on the irrational paranoia of the so-called radical right fringe elements, *'the useful idiots'* as Lenin called them. The single-issue anti-abortion and Second Amendment nuts, of which Mahoney has street-cred already through his high profile public stance on gun owner's rights with the NRA.

They will have also co-opted the same flag wavin', God-fearin', Bible-thumpin' nice folks who are quietly arming themselves to the teeth for the coming uprising against Big Brother Government...a ready-made private army of a Super-patriots militia for the Second 'Merican Revolution, ultimately to unwittingly protect the sacred assets of the plutocrats...indivisibly co-mingled with the Second Coming of uh...*you know who*," I say.

"I for one would not for an NY minute doubt that he is capable of such an elaborate cabal. After working for Jason...having witnessed up close and personal, and yes, even a bag lady go-between for his corporate machinations. He makes the eponymous Machiavelli, look like a rank amateur," Marla says.

"Ya know it's more than ironic...that it's 1984. The title of Orwell's chilling dystopic vision for world domination, published in 1949 with the incipient ascension of the military-industrial complex as later warned in President Eisenhower's farewell address of 1961. But, it will not be 1984 that will be the paradigm for establishing the New World Order...not a first...that will come later.

It will be through the gradual yet implacable seduction, then apathy, of the fat and happy, mentally vapid populace through the constant assault of their sensory structures by ubiquitous vulgar, banal media...and sexy technology. Infusing fast-food fame and celebrity as a substitute for true sustenance...and substance. Amazing to me that Aldous Huxley *got it so right*, as long ago as 1932, with his brilliant *magnum opus* Brave New World.

Not if, but when, the people wake up to the fact that they have been duped into believing all this crap about the evils of government *per se*...it will be too late. The US governments will have been replaced by a New World Order...essentially a Plutocracy. After the collapse of the world's leading democracies...one by one, little by little, internationally the political power of other governments will be gradually emasculated and begin to crumble...replaced by a global autocratic oligarchy of the rich and powerful until the plutocrats of the world can take total control of the world economy. Neo-feudalism. Like Mark Twain, said, *History doesn't repeat itself...but it does rhyme*.

Yeah...I know a conspiracy theorist's all-you-can-eat-buffet. A paranoid's psychotic playground...making the grassy knoll...U-F-O cover-up shit look puerile in comparison," I rant.

"Mick...sometimes it just seems so hopeless. Like what the hell is the point of even trying to fight it?" Marla says.

"Yea...that's exactly what the so-called ruling class is counting on...fortified by the gradual privatization...replacement of the responsibility of government institutions and social programs by plutocratic philanthropy...neo-fuedal *noblese oblige*, doling out just enough scraps to keep the vassals alive, paying them less and less for

even more work. Just enough to survive, so that they can continue to work...to maintain their obscene wealth for them," I say.

"Jesus, Sweetie pie...thanks for that Panglossian picture. I was starting to get *really* depressed," she says playfully punching my arm.

"Yer *velcome*, *schatzi* and here's another ray of sunshine to further brighten your day. It gets better. This ain't your ordinary airport paperback novel monolithic conspiracy...with easily identified co-conspirators wearing black hats...or white sheets.

There will be no smoking gun...no paper trails. This is a more fundamental *conspiracy of consciousness* which distills down to basic human instinct of self-interest, also known as avarice driven by the motivation of hubris and insatiable greed. It's dubious at best that any kind of charges of criminal conspiracy could ever stick if indeed they were ever even levied, especially with the stacked Supremes being the final arbiter.

All great civilizations and empires eventually collapse not from external forces, but implode from within...from over-reaching and hubris in the excess, the Mayans, Romans, the Greeks. So this one is even more insidious and will be much more difficult to deal with...if at all."

"Well that's a relief. Just when I was getting ready to open vein...thanks *sweetie pie*," she says.

"Sure...just call me Sunny as in sunshine. But if I can just hang in there for the next several months...maybe I can dive below the surface and get enough documentation, in addition to the conference video, to be able to make a cogent and convincing argument...to expose it before it's too late," I say sensing the need for another pull on my whiskey.

"But Mick...why now? Why this concentrated effort *now* to consolidate media and lay the ground work for this so-called New World Order?" she asks.

"A good and reasonable question. One that will be definitely proffered by any rational thinking skeptic about the legitimacy of the premise of this massive cabal. The biggest motivating causation for the increased sense of urgency is three-fold. The first, the recognition of peak oil, the supply of petroleum fossil fuel as being an exhaustible, finite resource.

The second and more powerful motivation...the realization that climate change, the so-called green house effect...is real and more profoundly, inexorable. That the best mankind can hope for is to slow it down, and perhaps if we're lucky to mitigate the calamitous effects of it.

The Masters of the Universe...the Chess masters, that caused this whole environmental existential crisis with their mentality of plunderous greed also are the one's who are always looking at the *whole* board...*the big pict-ya*. They didn't rise to economic hegemony through luck or accident. These are not just the smartest guys in *the* room...but *any* room...*anywhere*. While everyone is looking maybe 5 moves ahead...they're 10 moves out.

And even as smart and as rich as they are...they can see *no way* out of this deadly chess match with *Madame Nature*? It's Check-mate, baby...for life on the planet, as we know it. So they have already begun the adaptive phase of preparing for the eventual collapse of society. Sadly the descent into chaos and positioning themselves to not only survive but to flourish. Every crisis always presents opportunity for the astute, bold and willing and in the good old American entrepreneurial tradition...like Jason said in his little Galt pastiche, *never, ever...let a serious crisis to go to waste. This crisis will provide the opportunity for us, the ruling class to do things that we could not before.*

The third, is the same three primary prerequisites for evaluating whether any crime was or is in the process of being committed, including the subject one. What you lawyers call *mens rea*...literally *guilty mind* or criminal intent. Holding a Royal flush, the Royalty likes their odds. With all the resultant chaos and civil unrest, they're betting that even being prosecuted would be a very low priority of what's left of law and order.

The political landscape may never be more conducive than it is right now, with the three branches of government in lock-step with a radical ideological sense of the priority and primacy of capitalism. They can and will justify their criminal intent, with the notion that democracy *must* serve this deistic entity of Capitalism...in direct opposition to the democratic ideals the country was *theoretically* founded on. These same hypocrites when challenged to defend their patently self-serving actions? Ha! In their greedy little minds, they're acting magnanimously...for the *Greater Good, by doing the thinking for the poor ignorant unwashed masses that don't know what the hell is good for them.*

So...the motive is already clear. The opportunity and more prominently, the means, is here and now, as it has never been before. And unless they seize the opportunity, *now*...they may never get another chance. More M-B-A platitudinous *carpe diem* bullshit," I rant.

"Mick...if they do let you penetrate the inner-circle...do you think they would ever let you leave, or live if you tried?" Marla says.

"Probably not...so we have to be *not just smart...but smarter*. If Jason's always 10 moves ahead on the board we have to be 20 moves...just to stay ahead. And we need to find a way to make it *very* costly for them, professionally...and personally, because ultimately that's the only way to get their attention. Not if, but *when*, they try to take us down," I say.

"*Lordy*...you *sho'* know how to sweet talk a gal," Marla says downing her glass of wine, pouring herself another.

"Mickey, I wish the hell I had never even met Jason Mahoney. I wish that you and I could just run away to some distant island and live out our lives in peace...but I know *you* could never do that...that you can't run away from this. Not sure why...maybe someday you can tell

me. But...I'm with you Mickey. As long as *we're together*, I think I can endure just about anything," she says hugging me tightly.

"Thanks baby...but this conversation prompts a very important issue for the *we* part of this. This is my fight. I can not reasonably expect you to be willing to join the cause...just because you love me. There also has to be a deep and independent personal conviction on your part for your reasons to participate. Otherwise, you and I, *the we*...won't survive this. I'm not going to lie to you. We're going to get dirty. It will get ugly...very ugly, and mean and nasty before it gets better...if ever. So I want you to think about it very carefully before you agree to enlist in *l'appel à la guerre*...the call to war," I say.

"Mickey...I guess I've always felt some deep sense of personal betrayal...to myself for essentially selling out to *the man*...ACT Inc. and literally, Jason Mahoney. Because I was blindly ambitious, partly because of my *august* family origins, I had something to prove to my over-achiever-father, my hyper-ambitious Stanford college chums...and myself. I sold out. Yeah, that's right...*sold out big-time* and you can't convince me otherwise," she says.

"Okay, Marla...if you say so," I say, taking another pull off my Johnny.

"Jeez...but I didn't say you couldn't *at least try* to convince me otherwise," she says slapping me good-naturedly.

"Oops...sorry. Missed my cue on that one. How's this? *Aww gee honeybunch...don't be so hard on yourself, sweetie pie*. But seriously Marla...we all sellout at one time...in one form or another most especially me or would I be here working for ACT as well? So, who the hell am I to judge anybody? The central issue for me at least, is *the now*...that you and I...that the *we* get it, and *our* willingness to do something about it," I say taking her hand in mine.

"Gee...*honeybunch*, thanks...I think? But yeah...hearing you talk so passionately about how you feel stirs me to think this may also be my chance for some form of personal atonement...*to do the right thing*. Like that poor kid, Trey Mahoney. I went through a *living hell* not being forthcoming with you about Jason. I damn near had a nervous breakdown, thinking that if you ever found out...I'd lose you.

Just as you have told me that you are ready for the uh...*C* word...with me, I'm ready to commit to the cause...and the Koz. *I'm all in, Mick*," she says tearing up squeezing my hand.

"Good. That's what I needed to hear. Marly, you remarked earlier about where does my sense of outrage come from? Some day...maybe I will tell you about some dear friends of mine who were sacrificed on the altar of greed. That as sure as *shit* flows downhill, massive inhumanity and human misery *always* flows from the pure pursuit of acquisitiveness and avarice that precedes it. Byron Brawley, Charles Washington...and of course, now Trey Mahoney, shall not have

died for nuthin'...*for trying to do the right thing*. I think it's time you met Hawk Shapiro," I say.

"So okay...I want to hear about that...*all of it*. But for now...what's the plan, *mon capitaine*?" she says.

"Okay. Both of us have enough asset to keep us going comfortably, until I can restart my business, and we can start up your PR firm. My guess is that we can have them up and running in less than 6 months, after which I would terminate, if one even exists, the agreement with E-C-C, as I do not want to have anything further to do with C-E-O S-O-B, J. Murdoch Mahoney, professionally or personally. *Ever*," I say downing the glass of whiskey, then pouring myself another.

- Chapter 32 -

It takes me about month after returning to Lake Tahoe, to conclude my business as an employee for ACT. Pauly spends quite a bit of time in Tahoe finishing up, getting ready to collapse the office and staffing in Tahoe. I begin to notice an uncharacteristic seriousness and lack of spontaneity...seldom cracking wise...or laughing at my likewise mordant sense of humor. The normally easy flowing conversation and kidding is now strained and all business. Marla also senses his estrangement with her. Something's up. I have no idea what Jason Mahoney may have told VP Paul Berman, but I'm starting to get the vibe that Pauly is conflicted. Time will tell.

I forward the draft of the agreement for representation over to Jason Mahoney, through Pauly. He reviews cursorily, then looks up at me, "Mick...are you sure you and Marla know what you're doing?"

"Sure Pauly...hey man, what's up with you? You seem distant and really uptight since that weekend of the conference. Is there something goin' on that I should know about?" I ask

"Yeah...I know, Mick, I know. I uh...never mind," he says. It's obvious that something's eating at him.

"Hey, ain't none of my business, but is everything okay at home...with Joanie and kids? It's been pretty intense the last several weeks...with all the changes at ACT, and the E-C-C. You seem really stressed out, man. Pauly after work, let's go have a few cocktails... I'll buy," I say.

"Mick...I really can't. I'm leavin' tomorrow morning for Denver, and I..." he says.

"Come on, Pauly...it won't kill ya to have a cocktail with a pal," I say smiling and punching his shoulder good-naturedly, which causes him to grimace and almost drop to one knee. Hmm.

"Okay, Mick...okay...after work," he says coolly.

"Carlos Murphy's...at six," I say.

"Okay...right," Pauly says distractedly.

I show up at Carlos Murphy's at six, to find big Rhino Rudalski holding up the bar.

I slide on to a bar stool next to Rhino slapping him on his enormously broad back...like smacking an old oak tree. He spins on his bar stool, turns and engulfs my outstretched hand, pumping it causing my whole body to rock back and forth on my stool. *The man-child has no idea how strong he is.*

"Hey, Mickey...good to see ya, man...been a while. Whattya drinkin' pally?" he asks.

"Johnny Walker Red...over...a double," I say which the bartender overhears, and places in front of me. I take a long pull, then look at Rhino.

"So...howya been big boy? Now that ACT's going to collapse this corporate operation in Tahoe, where ya headed?" I ask.

"Not bad. Not good...honestly Mickey, been better. For the past several months I've had these killer headaches, like migraines. Can't sleep...been real forgetful lately...and *very* agitated and angry. Becky broke up with me...said I was beginning to scare her big time with my moods *etcetera*," Rhino says seemingly in a rare melancholy mood.

"Did you see a doctor about it?" I ask.

"Nah. I've had the headaches, on and off since I left the NFL...but this time is different, man. They're much more frequent, hurt like hell man. I'm poppin' pain killers like candy. Chatting with some of my ol' teammates, several got similar issues...some of them diagnosed with dementia. *Fuck me*, man...they're only in their 40s. Anyway, there's a rumor...fairly reliable sources inside and outside of ACT of a big reorganization comin'...at the *very* top corporate level. No particulars yet. Not even sure if I'll have a job. All the execs and mid-management cubicle jockeys are pissin' their pants." Rhino says somberly.

About 6:30 Pauly wanders in, and wordlessly takes a seat at the stool next to me. Rhino and Pauly exchange hellos, handshakes and small talk. Then Pauly says, "Hey Rhino...will you excuse Mick and I...we've got a few things to talk about before I have to leave town for Denver tomorrow."

"Sure...no problem. Good seeing both of ya," a preoccupied, uncharacteristically serious Rhino distractedly says.

Pauly and I adjourn to a table, where he calls the waitress over, and orders a Jack Daniels over.

"Okay...Pauly, let's cut to the chase, man. Frankly, you've been acting a little strange of late...not just toward me but Marla has noticed it. Why don't you tell me what the hell's going on," I say taking a sip of my cocktail. Pauly's Jack Daniels arrives. He takes a long pull, then turns to face me. His eyes filled with intensity...and uncertainty.

"Pauly...what did you mean by *am I and Marla sure of what we're doing?*" I ask.

"Mick...I'm really in a tough situation here, man. I almost didn't come this evening. I actually drove by the place...like twice. Then the last minute turned around. I figured I owed you that," he says.

"Pauly...I consider you a good friend. There's nothing that you could say that would change that...so just tell it like it is, okay?" I say.

"Okay Mick. Okay," he says downing his drink, then raising it to the waitress for another. "What I'm about to tell you, if it's leaked that I told you, would get me fired in a New York minute...or worse. And it's the *worse* that scares...no terrifies me the most. Not just for me...but for you and Marly," he says.

"You had me with *terrifies*. Go ahead...just can't wait to..." I say smiling.

"*Listen to me Mick!*" he says slamming his hand down on the table, causing the silverware to bounce, ringing out like some kind of ominous warning call causing some anxious side-glances from other tables, "pay attention, *goddammit!* And take what I am about to say to you very, *very* seriously. Okay? Or do so, not just at your own peril...but think of Marla," staring at me with an intensity in his eyes that I have never seen before from the usually sardonic, good-natured Pauly.

"Okay, Pauly...shoot," I say, soberly.

"There is going to be an announcement maybe as early as next month, that ACT and World Media have merged. Ol' Reggie Meade will be gone...the Board of Directors lead by Alexandra will have given him his professional...and personal walking papers. A corporate...*hasta la vista*, baby. The new company will be ACT World Media...with the Dragon Lady C-E-O and Jason Mahoney, president. It's the next logical move on the big chess board...in what will be many, toward the eventual and complete domination of market share of the media landscape in major markets...both content and delivery," Pauly says.

"Ah...so a *check* move. Vertical integration, controlling the delivery and distribution mechanisms...the messenger. Then gradually by acquiring control of most mainstream content providers," I say.

"Yea, something like that. Hey Mick, I'm sorry man, but I can't allow myself to be distracted by *peripheral* issues...like world domination," he says sardonically "...not my call...not my job description and ultimately not my worry. This is strictly business for me...*it has to be*.

So anyway...there will be like a dramatic restructuring of the company's labor force with lots of consolidation of management. Initial estimates are about a 20-30 % reduction in total workforce or between 15 to 20 thousand layoffs. Not by attrition...but effective essentially immediately.

It will be ugly. It's important that no one in either company knows this. It could cause a panic...a stampede for the door and maybe have an adverse effect on the stock price. After the smoke clears, the then juggernaut ACT World Media, will launch a hostile take-over bid of several of the more vulnerable major motion picture and TV production studios, like Disney, NBC etcetera...even print like the Wall Street Journal, maybe the Washington Post or even the New York Times. Giving them complete vertical and horizontal integration...domination in the marketplace, assuming the D-O-J doesn't intervene. But we have it from *very reliable, inside sources* that they won't. And I would strongly advise you to not to look into it...or even *ask how or why*.

We're talkin' billions with a capital *B* riding on this deal...and Jason has already made it very clear. *Nothing*...and *no one* is going to be

allowed to jeopardize his *magnum opus mega-deal*. By *whatever means necessary*," he says with an ominous tone.

"Okay. Got it...so no Christmas card from Captain Ahab this year? But seriously folks, how might this effect me...and Marla?" I ask.

"Jason now takes seriously that you and Marla have become a serious item. It took a while for his monstrous ego to get his head around the reality that he lost control of one of his trusted soldiers. He considers you a *corrupting and corrosive influence* on Marla...that she's left the rez...and that her priorities have become rearranged. *Skewed* is the term Jason used. She can no longer be trusted to do what's best for company...and of course, for Jason," he says.

"One and the same. *Corrupting*, and my fav, *corrosive influence*? Hilarious...especially coming from the good Captain, the highest compliment possible. And the offer for the job repping the E-C-C?" I ask.

"*Adios* baby. Gone. Jason's really pissed that you didn't take it...unhesitatingly *as offered*...when it was offered. He thinks you tried to manipulate him, hold him off until you thought you could take advantage of your insider knowledge...and use it against him, even blackmail. He now sees you as an existential threat vector, the potential to do him grave harm. He no longer trusts you...or by association, Marla. He's very uh...*unhappy* about how much you and Marla know about too many things including the E-C-C...and the possible damage you and or Marla could inflict...potentially disrupting the merger.

If Jason's vision, as articulated at the conference, got leaked to the press, public outcry from some liberal watchdog N-G-Os, just might force the D-O-J's hand to intervene and take a long hard look at potential anti-trust merger oligopoly ramifications. Could blow the whole deal *if* the numbers on high market-shares of the respective media in major markets of the proposed merger entity, saw the light of day.

He never had any intention of allowing you to work as a contract outsource. Because, he would have lost exclusive control of you. You'd no longer be his...M-F and *not Mr Fixit*. Loyalty and control issues...as you know, something Jace does not suffer well. But he never let on. He wanted to stall you to get the business wrapped up here, before you left. And then he intended to waltz you along until the merger was a done deal...then blow you off," Pauly says.

"Not surprised. Frankly at the conference, I sensed a foreshadow of the merger...personal...and corporate *with the Alex and Jace show*. What about Marla? How does she fit into this new landscape?" I ask.

"That one is a little more complicated. What I'm about to tell you must be in *strict confidence* okay? The consequences of it being leaked...*far more dangerous* than losing one's job...etcetera. Get my drift, pal?

Marla knows some things that *only* she, Jason and I know. How ACT got some of our cable system franchise deals got done...by

greasing some of the players in the local government. She and I actually have first-hand...like bag-man knowledge. Probably some criminal prosecution exposure there...corporate and personal," Pauly says, now starting to sprout beads of sweat on his forehead.

"Dangerous *how*?" I ask.

"Mick, Marla has confided in me how much you mean to her...and from what I can see, it appears to be reciprocal. If I were you, I'd start thinking about how to get Marla outta ACT...sooner rather than later. I can't say anymore pal. I know better than *anybody* what Jason Mahoney is capable of...and trust me you do not want to know first hand. My advice as a friend to both of you...*get the fuck outta Dodge*...make that Denver ASAP. Got it? Okay I've already said *way more* than I should've. I really *have to* go now," he says.

"One last thing. Pauly how do you fit into all of this?" I ask.

"Mickey...I gotta wife and three little kids. Because you and Marla have no such obligations I can't expect you to understand why I feel I have to see this through with ACT. I started with nothing. Jason took me in and he's been very generous to me and my family. I'm not proud of some of the things I've done...some serious *shit*, but I've always been able to rationalize it because I wanted my kids to have the opportunity I never had growin' up...to go to the best schools and colleges...to have a shot at a good life, without having to *sacrifice their soul*, like their old man," he says

"Thanks for the timely heads up. If I hadn't asked you to meet me tonight, when were you going to tell me all this...just as Captain Ahab was about to make Marly and I walk the plank? What I don't understand is this. Pauly you're one of the smartest guys I know. You've got everything working for ya...you could go anywhere. Any Fortune 500 would get into a bidding war to steal you away from ACT. Why, man...with all your career options, stock and big salary. Why did you allow yourself to be a such a sell-out? My *gawd*, man with your talents you could even do your own start-up," I say.

"Mick...believe me when I tell ya, that I've laid away nights...just staring at the ceiling trying to figure out how and when it all went wrong...and how to get the *hell out* while I still have a scintilla of dignity...and self-respect.

But...once you've a made that Faustian bargain, once you've turned *that* corner, ain't no turning back, man. Just like Marla...I know *too damn* much. If some of the things I've done for Jason Mahoney ever came to light, I could be staring at some pretty long, hard time. Things that even Marla doesn't know about...and you couldn't even *begin* to imagine.

My only hope of getting away from Jason, is to ensure this deal gets done. Then with all the reorganization, my position as factotum for C-E-O J. Murdoch Mahoney, will no longer be necessary.

Jason will start phasing out his operational responsibilities...handing them off to the newly anointed C-E-O, Alexandra Kwan. And they don't call her *AK47* for nuthin'. Then, like many others, for the *financial viability of the company*, recognizing our primary responsibility to the shareholders, regrettably, after over 10 years of doing the heavy lifting...and dirty work for Jason Mahoney, I too will have to be officially downsized...*irrelevant*. Like everyone else in his twisted life, " Pauly says bitterly.

"Pauly, I'm sorry man...but you're better than that. You're twice the man that Jason Mahoney could ever even hope to be...professionally...and as a human being. I know you give a *shit* about other priorities...like your family. You're a good and decent man, Pauly. I saw how you looked at those kids at the telethon in Tahoe to raise money just so they could *have the opportunity* to play a sport that they loved...to test themselves. I got that.

Jason couldn't care less about anyone but himself...*he lives only for deals*. To him everything and everyone...including his family are assets...chattels. He's a *sociopathic asshole*, who couldn't even get past the notion that his own kid was gay. When Trey reached out to him...he basically disowned him...*downsized* him. It devastated the kid.

Why do you think the kid basically committed *suicide by cop* that day? He had no intention of hurting *anybody*...but his old man...and himself. He knew he wasn't going to come out of it alive. But, it was going to be payback...to tell the whole world that the brilliant entrepreneur, the Fortune 500 multimillionaire, wasn't as perfect as he would have you believe, and that he had a homosexual for a son. In the end, sadly the kid never got his chance to publicly *come-out*...*to do the right thing*, to talk about the bullying, the beating and discrimination.

Like most things, Jason managed to preempt and micro-manage that disclosure. It's not too late Pauly...you me and Marly...we could do something together, something important, maybe something meaningful...and good," I say

"Mickey...it may not be too late for you and Marla...but it is for me," he says almost wistfully.

"Really? And how's that Pauly? It's never too late man, to at least *try* to do the right thing...even a 16 year old Trey saw that," I say, immediately not liking the far too sanctimonious tone of my own words.

"Yeah...right. And just how'd that work out for the kid?" he says with biting sarcasm, obviously stung by my indictment of his character.

"Pauly...that's not worthy of you, man. There's something else going on with you, man...level with me," I say.

There's a long pause as Pauly unflinchingly stares through me, his tearing eyes penetrating my very soul.

"I'm a dead man...*walkin'*," Pauly whispers.

"*What?* What *the hell* are you talkin' about, man?"

"Mick...the tests are conclusive. *CLL*...Chronic Lymphocytic Leukemia. *Fuck me*, man...42 years old...in the best shape of my life. How long I might have depends on how aggressive it is, but they're sayin' stage four...maybe 6 months, a year if I'm lucky. *Ha! If I'm lucky*, the Doc says. One big *fuck-over*...a karmic gotcha, probably for all nasty shit I've done for ACT...and Jason Mahoney. So...frankly, I just don't have the *fuck-ing* time to be *fuck-ing* sick right now! I need to get as much asset in the bank, stock etcetera as possible. I need the big payday of this merger deal Mick, the increase in my stock value alone. For Joanie and the kids...so when the final curtain drops on my Act III, pun intended, my exit from ACT, etcetera, I'll go knowing my family will never have to worry or want...for anything," Pauly says.

"*Jezus*...I'm so sorry Pauly. *Goddammit!* Do you mind if I ask...how did Joanie take this? And how long have you known?" I ask.

"I was diagnosed about 6 months ago. It started with me getting really fatigued. Weight loss. Cold sweats...and then some swelling and tenderness of my glands...then big time near my gut. So I go see the Doc, ya know, a routine kinda deal. Fix me up Doc, make with some pills *pronto*...then get me back in coach for the final quarter of the Superbowl of mergers. *Ha!*" Pauly says.

"*Jezus* Pauly...isn't there *anything* that can be done?" I say

"Nope...stage four means like two percent survival rate. Joanie doesn't even know yet. Man...if she did, she'd have pressured me big time...to quit ACT like *right now*...to spend whatever time I have left with her and the kids. That's also in confidence, okay? So ya see, man...I don't *really* have much *choice*, or much *time* here. If I can just get through this merger. Okay? Gotta go," he says as he stands up to leave. I also stand up open my arms, and give Pauly a big hug and slap on his back.

"*God-dammit!* Man, I'm just heartsick hearing this, Pauly. Okay, man. Just remember...anything you need, anything at all...I've got your back. And if...when this health thing goes South, Marly and I will be there to make *damn* sure that Joanie and the kids get through it okay. That's a promise. Love ya, man," I say hugging him tightly, also tearing up.

"Thank you, Mickey...that *really* means a lot to me. I love you too, man. And take care of Marla...she's one in a million. See ya, pal," he says staring intensely with a warm smile of appreciation.

He stands, pivots like soldier about to go into battle, to do his duty, and with his head held high, marches out the door, smiling and waiving jovially to Rhino on the way out. A real gamer.

Hotel California. You can check out any time you like...but you can never leave...not ever.

- Chapter 33 -

"Marla, there's a recent development here that may impact our exit strategy from ACT," I say on the phone after my meeting with VP Paul Berman in Lake Tahoe.

"Okay...what's goin' on?" she says.

"What I'm about to tell ya...must remain in strict confidence. If it gets out that Pauly confided in me, it could rain down serious retribution on him...and not just getting fired. I found out a few things from Pauly that might have a profound effect on how we proceed with Jason Mahoney. And I found out why Pauly's been acting so strangely. Marla, he's dying...of cancer...maybe 6 months to a year to live," I say.

"Oh...Mickey, how terribly sad. Pauly dying...the guy's the picture of health. He's only forty-something. I'm in shock...poor Joanie...and the kids. My gawd, Pauly and I have been through so much together with ACT. He was the only one I ever really felt like I could trust...he's like a brother to me," Marla says starting to sob.

"Yeah...I'm still in shock myself. I promised him that you and I would be there for Joanie and kids...when the time came," I say.

"Oh of course Mick. Joanie and I are really close...like sisters. I'm like an aunt to their children. When I get off, I should call Joanie right away...let her know that I'm here for her," she says.

"No Marla! *Do not* call Joanie. Pauly hasn't told her yet...and Jason doesn't know either, so don't let on that you know. Okay?" I say.

"My gawd...poor Joanie!" she says.

"There's nothing we can do about any of that. And in light of Pauly's recent revelations...some, very unsettling, what we *really* need to talk about right now, is how to get you outta ACT...*ASAP!*" I say.

I outline the merger of ACT with World Media for Marla along with the timetable for the resultant staff reductions. I inform her that both she and Pauly will be downsized, and that Pauly is going to ride it out all the way out to the end, so he can accumulate as much asset as he can with increased stock value and anticipated severance pay for his family. Also, to keep his company health and life insurance intact.

"I think Pauly's planning on buying as much ACT stock on the open market as he can, in small increments over the next month, so as not to attract attention before the merger. Under the circumstances, I don't think he's concerned about prosecution for insider trading. Figures he'll probably be ten-toes-up, by the time the S-E-C puts it together. With the current cast of characters, if ever," I say, leaving out the dark parts about the potential for nasty reprisals against us from Jason Mahoney.

"Normally a risky proposition...but yeah, I get it. Pretty hard to put a dead man in jail," she says.

"Agreed. So here's the question I have for you. If you don't resign, and get downsized, ACT will probably give you a generous severance package. My guess is that you'd have to stick around there for at least another two months...maybe longer. It is strictly your decision...but I think you should consider it. Take some time to think it over...you don't have to decide right now. If Pauly's right, there should be a big bump in the ACT stock value, as soon as the merger is announced. He also thinks that the downsizing for corporate management will happen very soon after the merger is a done deal. But this may or may not change our strategy about how to approach Jason depending on what you decide," I say.

"Oh Mick...I'm just not sure if I can pull this off...staying here...knowing about Pauly and the merger, acting like business as usual," she says.

"Well...again it's your call, baby. You've got a lot invested with ACT," I say.

"Oh screw the severance package. And if I retain the stock in ACT after resigning. If I don't liquidate it until after the merger I can take advantage of the lift from the merger. I'm just so weary after all these years of trying desperately to suppress my self-loathing for my behavior...for the things I've done for...and with Jason Mahoney.

It's time for a change, Mickey. I just want out. I want to be with you...I want us to have a life. So I don't have to think about it anymore. After what you told me about Pauly...dying so young, really focuses the mind on how fragile life is. With news like this, how your priorities can change overnight when you realize how vulnerable you are to the vagaries of life...that you're not invincible.

Whatever time you and I may have left, I want to spend with you Mickey...and live each day with you as if each day may be our last. I love you Mickey. So...I guess I'm saying that I think we should proceed as planned...that I should resign, sooner rather than later. But, what do you think?" she says.

"And I love you too, baby. Yea...each day as if it may be our last. Frankly, I'm glad to hear that you're ready to move on. But I had to make sure you knew all moves available on the board...options. And that you were absolutely positive about how you wanted to proceed. Marly, any idea about how much vacation and comp time you have accumulated?" I ask.

"My guess is about five weeks...maybe six total with everything. Why? What are you thinking?" she says.

"Have you got the drafts of the three documents for your separation done yet?"

"Yea...If we proceed as planned, I think they're right there. I'll fax them out to you tomorrow...first thing," she says.

"Okay...assuming it's a go, here's the tentative timetable. To keep from drawing suspicion, I will formally submit my contract outsource proposal...for the repping position right away. Pauly says, there ain't a chance in hell he'll accept the terms. I'll make them non-negotiable...so it'll be easy for him to say no. He'll waltz me as long as he can before the merger. Working backwards from say the six weeks of vacation etcetera, you would tender your resignation, and the veiled threat of exposing, no pun intended, the sexual harassment in the work place claim, right after he receives my proposal. I'm confident he won't personally acknowledge anything other than your short succinct formal resignation letter. He'll have the personnel department draw up the separation papers including stock ownership and final paycheck along with the COBRA health and life insurance documents. Just like you were a janitor giving notice," I say

Yea...a janitor. An apt comparison...cleaning up everyone else's shit. I think I'd rather say...very, very personal reasons, you bastard! So what would be the effective date of separation from ACT?" she says.

"Wouldn't be surprised if he'll want to have an exit interview with you, just so he can eyeball you and get a read on how serious you are about the sexual abuse threat. Maybe try one last shot at some of his mind-fucking games. I think you should do it...again, to not draw any undue suspicion. Keep it short and not-so-sweet...and get the hell outta there ASAP. If he presses you, your verbal only reasons for leaving so abruptly might me something like *you are no longer able to resist uh...my...irrepressible charms,*" I say

"So give my overloaded gourd a date," she says.

"Assuming six weeks...your effective termination date could be as early as next week. Pretty much as soon as you can pack and be ready to hit the road," I say.

"Oh gawd...Mickey that sounds so wonderful! But what about all my clothes and stuff here at the condo?" she says.

"Whattya got?" I ask.

"The condo and all the furniture...and even my Audi, is all property of ACT. So all I really have is my clothes, lots of clothes...and some personal stuff...photographs. There are some family antiques, heirlooms and lamps...but that's it. It would all fit in a small like U-haul van," she says.

"Okay...not a problem. I'll fly in...rent a small U-haul and drive us back to Tahoe, stopping by Seattle to see an old friend. The Hawkster...maybe spend a few days in the Seattle area, and some time with my ol' pal, who I think it's about time you met.

It'll break up the drive nicely. We'll rent a car, see the Seattle area, then take a drive up to world-class Vancouver B-C, for nice little pre-honeymoon in a classic old hotel, to hold over us until we maybe can find a preacher in Tahoe?" I ask.

: : Michaelangelo's Renaissance — m.a.kominsky : :

"Oh...Mickey? Are you proposing...like marriage? Like a Nick and Nora Charles Thin Man kinda deal?" she cries.

"Yeah...but mit out the too cutsey yap-yap dog Asta," I say.

"Oh Mickey...yes! And an oh yea, baby to Le Monsieur! I'm assuming that he's also up for the uh...union.?"

"A reasonably safe assumption...my best man," I say.

"But...isn't the best man, usually the ring bearer for the groom?" Mara asks.

"Of course...that's why it's probably better if it's a very private ceremony," I say.

"Oh Mickey! You...both of you, have made me, and the girls, very happy ladies!" Marla cries.

"Yeap...it's our Tahoe Wedding Special...two-fer-one," I say.

- Chapter 34 -

As planned, a few days later, I formally submit my outsource contract proposal through Paul Berman, not expecting any kind of an immediate response or even acknowledgment from Jason Mahoney. I am not disappointed.

Soon thereafter, Marla tenders her two letters of separation in a sealed envelope marked *personal and confidential* through Rebecca Reeves, Mahoney's personal secretary, and the brief and succinct, formal letter of resignation with an immediate effective date, through the proper channels of the Human Resources Department.

Not surprisingly Jason, by phone, does request an exit interview with Marla, *just for old times...and I hope we can remain friends* dinner, which she declines but agrees to meet him in his office.

I call her on her mobile phone, to check on her, after her meeting with Jason Mahoney.

"Hi babe...so how'd the meeting go with Captain Ahab?" I ask.

"He wanted to meet for drinks...and dinner...maybe one last roll in the hay. I told him that I didn't have time, because I was busy packing. Don't ask me how...but I just feel that somehow he knows about my move to Tahoe with you and a whole lot more. The shit-eatin' smug grin of his. What a piece of work. But, he didn't let on...just very, very creepy," she says.

"Yea...it wouldn't surprise me if that *son-of-bitch* found some way to monitor our phone conversations. It would have to be a line tap on my end. Probably interested in who I'm talking to other than you, as well. Shoulda thought of that one...*dammit*. Nothin' we can do about that now. But just to be on the safe side...from now on, I'll call you from another number...from a random pay phone, each time different. So let's hang up and I'll call ya back in about a half an hour. I want to hear more about the meeting...and work out the details for your move. Okay?" I say.

"Okay, baby...talk soon," she says.

The Black Mamba, just smiles when he hears Mick say, *"it would have to be a line tap on my end."*

"Yea...right...go find a pay phone pal," El Negrito muses, adjusting the earpiece from the earphone jack from the scanner, while sitting in his black Chevy totally-equipped Suburban so he can literally camp there, if need be, innocuously parked in the visitor parking by the front gate of the condo complex. Since the calls are made typically about the same time in the evening, it's no big deal to position himself to

monitor the calls each evening until Marla vacates the condo...which will be very soon.

But the deadly Black Mamba snake is very patient. Silently laying in wait for hours...in the shadows, sometimes in total darkness just waiting for its unsuspecting prey to get complacent or careless...just for an instant. That's all the Mamba needs...to strike...to kill.

Even though mobile cell phone technology is relatively new, only since about 1983 in the U.S. markets, the *sub-Rosa* pros, as always are way ahead of the curve on being able to monitor and eavesdrop on communications.

Because it was initially an unencrypted analog RF, radio frequency signal, with a portable battery operated scanner from Radio Shack, if you know what frequency range to monitor, it's even easier to eavesdrop, than physically planting a bug on a land line...with virtually no risk of detection.

The same scanner technology has been used for years, by unscrupulous *cappers* for ambulance-chaser-attorneys, to monitor police calls to get to the accident scene to sign up prospective plaintiffs who may be injured.

I hang-up my land line office phone...a desk top DTMF push button model. I unscrew both the mouth-piece and the ear-piece of the receiver handle, and carefully inspect them to insure there is no bug. I check all the phones including the one in my bedroom and the kitchen. I then do a sweep of the house for bugs. All clean.

I then drive down to the bottom of the hill, find a pay phone at Roundhill Village Shopping center, and call Marla back.

"Hey babe. Okay, did a sweep for bugs. Nothing. Couldn't find anything obvious on my phones...doesn't mean it's not being monitored. So from now on I'll be callin' from a different pay phone each time. So tell me about the meeting with Jason," I say.

"Well he was predictably charming, in his own inimitable slimy way. Full of platitudes and gushing with faux appreciation for my achievements. You will be missed...blah...blah...blah. Won't you reconsider? More...blah...blah...blah. Rest assured that you will receive great references from ACT, and from none other than Lord J. Murdoch Mahoney personally, etcetera," she says.

"Anything about the merger...or your letter about the sexual harassment caveat" I ask.

"Quite a performance...probably for the rolling cameras. He knew that I wouldn't agree to meet him for dinner. More of his cutsey mind-fucking games to catch me off-guard. Not one word about the merger. And not one word about the sexual harassment letter. Then when I rise to leave, he walks over to me to give a farewell hug, which I return.

When he draws back, his shark eyes are no longer smiling when he says with a chilling calm, holding me firmly by my shoulders at arms length with both hands, "And just in case it may have slipped your mind, my dear Marla...perhaps distracted by the joyful planning for the impending uh...union with your dear Mick, I hope that I need not remind you that as a condition of your employment that you had signed a very strict...very legal...and very enforceable non-disclosure agreement with ACT, with severe liquidated damages stipulated of a minimum of \$200,000 dollars, per occurrence. Are we clear on that, Marla?" he says giving me a single violent shake of my shoulders, like an ominous exclamation point.

Then he says coldly, 'I think you know the way out'. He turns, and walks back to his window and just stares out at the view without saying another word. Mick I think somehow he knows we're getting married. I haven't told anybody! Period. And if he knows that...probably a lot more!" she cries.

"Yea...okay. Marly I want you out of there...ASAP! Are you packed and ready to go?" I ask.

"Yes, Mick...everything is boxed. I could leave tomorrow...tonight if I could. Oh Mick...I'm so scared. You didn't see his eyes. My gawd...how could I have...even. All these years. What the hell was I thinking?" she says starting to quietly sob.

"Okay Marly...just hang in there...and stay calm. I'm sure you'll be okay there until I can get there. But just to be on the safe side, make sure all your windows and the door is locked. Because Jason has a key to the condo, brace a chair and some boxes against the front door. Sleep in the bug-free master bedroom with a chair braced against the door, and make sure the cell phone is totally charged, for tomorrow. Okay? I'll catch the first plane out for Denver tomorrow morning. By the time I pick up the U-haul truck and get out to your place, it will probably be around 2 PM local time. I'll call you from the U-haul when I'm leaving.

Stay there. Don't go anywhere. And keep the door locked until I arrive. Let nobody...I repeat *nobody* in, but me. I don't care if it's an emergency...a fire, or whatever. The password will be the *full* name of *Monsieur* Wilson...don't say it out loud right now. Okay baby?" I say.

"Okay, Mickey...got it. I love you. See you soon. Bye," she says.

"Bye baby. See you soon...and don't forget that I love you. Everything's going to be just fine...try to get some sleep. And Marla? My best to the twins...Lily and Rose," I say.

"Sorry? Who?" she asks quizzically.

"The girls, after the flowers...just my little mnemonic for the identical twins. Lily for left...and Rose for right, *Ciao* for now."

Click.

- Chapter 35 -

"Marly...everything okay? Get any sleep last night?" I ask

"I got a few hours...no incidents. Very quiet here last night. Where are you?" she asks.

"I am at the U-haul rental, took a cab from the airport. Just leaving now...should be there about 1:30. You ready to go baby?" I ask.

"I was ready like a year ago. Yea...I'm packed and can't wait to get the hell outta here. Please be careful Mick. I'm still nervous after my meeting with Jason. Honestly, I don't know what the hell he's capable of. Okay?" she says.

"Okay babe. I'll buzz you at the intercom. See ya soon. Remember do not *even* open the door. Let no one in including me, without the password," I say.

"Mick, I'm afraid I have some really bad news for you. Pauly just told me that Richard Rudalski is dead. He was facing jail time for spousal abuse with his girlfriend. It took three cops to restrain him. The day before he was to be sentenced, he blew his brains out with a shotgun in a car. Left a note, saying he just couldn't handle the headaches anymore. The autopsy showed massive traumatic brain injury...probably from all those years in the NFL. I'm so sorry Mick."

"Goddammit! Rhino, dead? Okay, can't think about that now."

By 1:20 I'm at the kiosk intercom of the complex.

"Yes? Who is it?" she asks.

"It's me, Mick," I say somberly, still grieving Rhino's lousy exit.

The gate slowly slides open. As I drive through, I catch a glimpse in the side view mirror a portion of another vehicle behind me, a black vehicle, so close that I can not make out the driver or the make or model of the vehicle. He's probably pulled up so close, because it's a common courtesy to allow other tenants to pass through close behind, to not have to wait for the gate to close. I double park in front of her unit, open the side sliding door of the small enclosed U-haul rental truck, and take the elevator to Marla's unit. I knock on the door.

"Who is it?" I hear through the door.

"It's Mick...and uh...Woody," I say.

"Woody *who*?" she asks.

"Okay...Marla, come on. It's me, Mick," I say still bummed out.

"What's the password?" she asks.

"Okay, ha, ha, now I don't have time for the *knock...knock...jokes*. Come on open up," I say getting irritated.

"Who is it? With the password. Or I'll call the police," she says more assertively this time.

"Uh...*Monsieur Wilson*...Marla," I say.

"*Monsieur Wilson who?* State your full name...or I *will* call the cops. I mean it!" she says.

"Okay...*Mista Woodrow Wilson*...now open up," I say.

"Not good enough *Mista Woodrow*...for the last time. Before I call the cops. State your full name including middle initial," she says.

"Okay. *Jeez. Mista Woodrow H. Wilson*," I say.

"Sorry...having a hard time hearing you through the door. The middle initial as in? And state your business," she says

"H...as in uh...*head-ache*...as in EX-cedrin. I'm here to whisk away you and the girls, the Dyson twins...Lily and Rose. I'm holdin' in my hand as we speak...*two tickets to Paradise*..." I croon. "Oh...and I'm kinda in a hurry here. My U-haul chariot's like double parked."

"Well...why didn't you say so in the first place. The girls are all dressed up...with hopefully someplace uh...*Paradisical* to go. Just fair warning. They've been behaving rather petulantly even unruly, waiting for the both of ya." Over the sound of rustling movement of sliding boxes, I hear a cackling laugh from the other side, then finally the door slowly creaks open.

There she is...even with dark circles under eyes looking weary from lack of sleep she's still a beauty. I think to myself what a lucky guy I am to be able to wake up to a woman who, without make up, is so beautiful, even in the morning. She flies into my open arms throwing her arms around me. I hug her tightly.

"Oh Mickey...you feel *so good*...just squeeze you to death!" she says. I give her a wet kiss on her exposed neck, then we go inside and close the door.

"Well...nice to be squeezed...by my main and only squeeze. But...we'll have to put the intense mutual squeezing session on hold for now. Show time baby. Ready to rock 'n roll?" I ask.

"Yeap. The girls...and I are in a full state of arousal, uh...readiness," she says.

A man walks up to the U-haul truck, looks around, then casually kneels down and hides a magnetically affixed transmission device on the rear frame of the truck. He turns on the hand-held receiver and immediately begins to receive a strong signal, displaying GPS coordinates of latitude and longitude beaming down from the Navastar satellites, the first of which was launched in 1978. Good to go.

He then drives the Suburban through the security gate, parking in an obscure location not observable from the front gate and waits. Something he is very good at from Reagan's CIA-lead *Contra* days in the early 80s, patiently laying in wait to assassinate the *Sandinistas* and members of the democratically elected Nicaraguan government.

- Chapter 36 -

It takes about 5 trips each to get the truck loaded. Marla leaves the keys to the condo and her Audi company car on the kitchen counter. And with no pangs of nostalgia or ceremony, by 3:30 PM, we're off...heading for the Interstate Highway 80 West then to Interstate 84, Northwest to Seattle...a distance of about 1,300 miles.

Hawk will be expecting us to hit Seattle in about two days. I'll call him on his mobile when we're a few hours out from Seattle. He'll take some much deserved accrued time off from Microsoft...and show us around the Puget Sound area. I'm looking forward to seeing my best pal. It's been over two years since we got together, when he came to Tahoe for a short visit.

Following behind at a safely undetectable distance, about 3 miles back, is the black Suburban. The signal from the transmitting device, providing the continuously changing GPS coordinates to the driver, including speed and distance to the target vehicle.

His pulse revs up...just like all the other special ops when stalking his unsuspecting prey. Then the warm glow, as the addictive adrenalin rush kicks in. He's now in unstoppable killing machine mode, trained by the best in the business, America's finest, U.S. Marines Force Recon Special Ops.

The first day on the highway, after logging only about 200 miles, we decide to find lodging early, to get a good night's rest as both of us are a little punchy from sleep deprivation. We find some unremarkable roadside lodging chain, grab a light meal and fall asleep early, in warm embrace.

The next morning we rise early, feeling rested and refreshed from a much needed rejuvenating night's sleep. We have a light breakfast at the motel coffee shop, and we're on the road by 8:30 AM.

The second day on the road gives us a lot of time to talk. She seems genuinely interested in hearing more about Ad Hoc Shapiro, the Hawkster. I briefly outline the circumstances of our meeting at UCB and of our long undying loyalty and friendship. She's very interested in my past. But first I had to deal with the loss of my pal, Rhino Rudalski.

"Marla, did Pauly give you any more details about Rhino's death?" I say.

"Just that he had been having episodes of massive migraine headaches...and bouts with anger, and depression. A daily cocktail of antidepressants and pain killers, a deadly combination with copious

amounts of alcohol. He was living with Becky, when he started to get violent toward her...inexplicable fits of rage. Finally, one day I guess he just lost it...beat her up, pretty seriously. She called the cops. It took three cops to subdue and arrest him. He caused some major damage to two of the cops," she says.

"How sad, how utterly tragic. Such an ignominious end for such a basically kind and gentle guy. All those years of head trauma...college at UCB, then the NFL Broncos. RIP Rhino...you're finally at peace, big boy." I say wistfully

"I'm so sorry Mick. I know you were very close. So, tell me about your family, do you think your mother will like me?" she asks.

"Okay, babe. Yeah, best we change the subject. Mom...my pal is quite the *broad*...and Diva. A potent cocktail of a stiff Martini of 3 parts 100 proof Auntie Mame...one part diluted Simone de Beauvoir....stir vigorously and garnish with a generous slice of Lucille Ball.

Discovered in her 50s...she has now become somewhat of an international celebrity, teaching oil painting on a weekly nationally syndicated series on PBS TV, *Paint Along with Pia*...and in the U-K on Independent TV—with almost a cultish-fervor following.

My father was and is difficult...they got divorced about 20 years ago...about 19 years too late. She moved to Rome Italy, to get away from his toxic, dark and tortured alcoholic persona. A real womanizer and all-around autocratic son-of-a-bitch. We have no contact.

Got one sister...older, who lives in Philadelphia...unmarried.

And yea...Mom would love you. As long as she thinks you make me happy...even if you had two heads to go along with your two beautiful girls...of course," I say.

It seems like a good opportunity to learn more about Marla's upbringing...and her family, which up to now, she has never really wanted to talk about.

"So Marla...how do ya think your family will take to idea of you gettin' spliced to giant of a man? A man among men," I ask.

"My mother will absolutely *love* you. A warning, she may put some moves on you...if she can find the time between her bridge club, golf and tennis at the country club," she says with more than a trace of bitterness.

"And your father? What's he do?" I ask.

"He's a partner in a big corporate law firm. Dyson, Mathews, Flowers and Associates specializing in corporate mergers and acquisitions. He's a *very* active alumnus of U-Illinois Law School, Chicago. A big reason why I ended up at Stanford Law and a large part of the reason I ended up in Denver with ACT, even though Daddy wanted me to come to work for him...with the other fifty drones practicing cubicle law," she says.

"Where'd you grow up?" I ask.

"Chicago...that's where I went to undergrad. Couldn't wait to get the *hell* out of the Midwest away from my family the whole country club Jones-in' scene," she says.

"Sibs?" I ask.

"Yea...two brothers, both older. One's a cardiologist, a real type A...and the insufferably pain-the-ass perfect son. How is it that people who have no heart...no capacity for empathy...end up being a heart surgeon?

The other brother...Johnny's my favorite. One reason I ended up at Stanford. You remind me a lot of him...tall, always joking. He lives in the S-F Bay area. He's in uh...pharmaceuticals. A drive-up street dispensary, if you get my drift. According to my parents a professional bum.

Lives a life totally free of conventions and orthodoxy...which *pisses the hell* out of my parents...probably in large part why he does it. Johnny and I are very close. He's the only one I've told about you and me. He was very happy for me...probably not the case when my snobbish other brother, Alfred or my father John senior, hear that I left a good paying career at ACT Inc...and about our getting married in a non-country club pedestrian ceremony. My mother will be particularly devastated that she will be precluded from conspicuously overlooking inviting some of her socialite contestants. Johnny's the only family I would even invite to our wedding," she says.

We continue driving...both us of comfortable without conversation for long stretches of straight flat highway. A good sign...enjoying the solace, embracing the white line fever of being on the great expanse of open highway. We just grind out the miles, stopping occasionally to view some of the beautiful vistas. The big skies of Wyoming, the Sawtooth Mountains of Idaho, the rolling green Palouse of Oregon and Eastern Washington, then the breathtaking drive up and over the Cascade Mountains down into Western Washington toward the vast Puget Sound.

After another night on the road, by the third day, at noon when we're about two hours out of Seattle, from the mobile phone, I call Hawk at work at Microsoft.

"Hey...Hawk. Mick here. Howya doing, man?" I ask

"Hey Koz...where ya at, man?" Hawk says.

"According to the map...looks like maybe a hundred miles out from wheels down...heading West toward Seattle on I-90," I say.

"Okay. Meet you at my place. I got a house near Capitol Hill, in Seattle, I'm just North of Seattle U. From I-90 just take I-5 North toward Vancouver to the James Street turnoff...left on Broadway...right on Madison...and left on 12th...right on Harrison. I'm at 1256 East Harrison. It ain't new or manicured, with lots of natural indigenous vegetation uh...weeds in front. Park on the street. Piece a cake...for anyone else. But in your case...call, not if...but *when* you get lost and I'll talk you in. Okay

brother? It's noon, so you may hit some killer Seattle afternoon traffic by the time you hit downtown. One of the vicissitudes of urban living. Just deal with it...with a minimum of whining *sil vous plait*," he says.

"10-4...and roger that. Hey...nothing to it. See ya soon...you'll see me waiting for you, parked in front of 1256 E. Harrison...in case you can't remember where you live. Your landmark is a U-haul truck with a beautiful lady passenger, a hitch hiker that I picked up along the way. Bye *mon frere*," I say hanging up. Then I look at Marla...just shaking my head, "I think Hawk forgot that maybe I'm not as quick a study as he is. Ha! I'll take I-5 to James Street then pull over and call him," I say. She just nods smiling.

Yeap...we picked up right where we left off. The Hawkster sounds good...on his game with the constantly good-natured ribbing of each other. It feels good to be going to see my pally...been far too long.

By four o'clock in the afternoon, Hawk has talked us in to *Chez Shapiro*. Indeed overgrown with weeds, it's a huge old craftsman bungalow, I think, with wonderful exterior period architectural details, and a covered full-width porch.

Seattle still has many neighborhoods with pockets of these beautiful old bungalows, built in the late 1920s and 30s, many having been faithfully restored. As Marla and I get out of the truck, the Hawkster exits the front door, and starts walking toward us.

Catching first glimpse of him after a period of absence, always hits me like a karate chop. He's comparatively short, with a thick heavily muscled upper body of a wrestler. For a big man, he moves with the lithe grace of cat. He's totally hairless...no eyebrows or facial hair, a small hoop pierced earring in his right ear lobe. His hugely disproportionate head, stuffed with more than his share of brains, is completely shaved reflecting the low evening sun. I glance over at Marla for her reaction. She is obviously trying to contain her initial surprise...and not doing a very good job of it.

"Don't worry he doesn't bite. Just let him sniff the back of your hand until his tail starts to wag...then you should be okay," I say half-kidding.

"My *gawd*," she gasps, smiling.

Hawk walks right up to her and throws his arms around her, picking her up like a large stuffed animal, spins her around then puts her down, "You're Marla, I would assume...after all the big buildup. Well I must say Koz didn't exaggerate...for a change. He said you're a real beauty. From the look on your face, you have probably deduced that I am...the one...the only Hawkster," he says putting her down, with a big toothy grin in an incongruously high pitched voice.

"Maybe later you can tell me how you came to take in this stray mongrel," he says looking at me, beaming with a big smile.

"Hardy...har...har. You're a riot Alice...a regular riot. Bang! Zoom! To da moon...Alice," I say.

And the anticipated rejoinder from his pal Ed Norton, "Sheez...what a grouch! How can you put up with such a grouchy old man?" he says to Marla.

"Well there are parts of him...that more than compensate for his sometimes grouchy disposition." Marla says smiling.

"I like her already. I can tell she's going to be givin' ya a run for your *dinero*...which probably isn't saying much," he says.

He then walks over to me throws a bear hug around me, lifts me completely off the ground and shakes me up and down like a toy, crushing the breath out of me, "Hey Mickey...*goddammit* it's good to see ya *mon frere*." I throw my arms around his broad shoulders, "*Jezus man*," I gasp.

"That's it? After all this time...that's the best you can do to your best pally?" he says continuing to playfully shake me like some Silver back gorilla playing with his food.

"So stop mit da wrestle-mania *schtick already*, so I can at least catch a breath...and I might have more to say on the matter...unless I pass out from *ox-gen de-priv-ation*..." I'm barely able to exhale out, as I nod a fake faint. The man has no idea how strong he is. He then drops me like a duffel bag of dirty laundry feigning a hurt expression, to Marla "Like I said...a *real grouch*."

We gather up the stuff from the truck we'll need for our stay. Hawk leads the way, effortlessly carrying Marla's several bags, through the front door into the living room.

The place looks like a newsreel from the aftermath of one of those 50 or so twisters that levels some poor Podunk town on the plains of Kansas every year. Magazines and newspapers strewn all over, pizza delivery boxes propped open, some not empty, partially consumed Corona beer bottles, and *tres beaucoup* 16 once Starbucks coffee paper cups...everywhere. There's a modest attempt at 'furnishings', with a large 4 foot ex-telephone cable reel on its side, the center piece of the 'décor' of the living room in front of a Lazy boy recliner facing a huge TV. That's it...except for the no less than seven or eight glowing CRTs, on Seattle-based Costco folding tables and an array of several printers and scanners. It looks like a college computer lab.

"Like what you *haven't* done with the place," I say.

"Going for the Seattle-techno chic urban uh...minimalist look."

"More like a one man ghetto...hazmat site." I say

"Glad you like it. I was laying awake nights, grieving that it might not meet your epicurean decorating sensibility," he says.

"*Jezus!* Think you got enough computers? Did ya rip off a Radio Shack...for *Chrissakes*?" I ask

"Nah, the stuff I do at Microsoft, a lot of it I can do at home...writing code for programs for MS-DOS and for the new operating system called Windows, all very hush-hush. Eventually Windows will replace Microsoft DOS for the primary OS. I do a lot of testing and debugging here where it's quiet, and I'm not prone to interruption from other code writers looking for help with their work. I'm a team leader on development and internal *alpha* testing...before it goes out to the field to high security selected *beta* testers," he says matter-of-factly.

During the whole exchange Marla is observing this interaction with a wry smile on her face, recognizing that here are two pals who have not seen each other in quite a while probably picking up the conversation where they left off two years ago. She gets it. The ultimate demonstration of male friendship...of fraternal love with the incessant good-natured ribbing back and forth...with no offense intended and none taken.

"Of course...somebody's got to make sure all those little digital soldiers...zeros and ones, line up properly in the correct formation and follow marching orders...and that's a mission only Captain Alpha Man...alias the Hawster...can be trusted to fearlessly execute," I say.

"Men...you have been personally chosen to undertake a very dangerous mission...some of you may *not* survive it. The very existence of our cyber-savior Bill-yonaire Gates depends on it. *Secure the perimeter men...and make e-very byte count!* Anyway...so Windows is in very preliminary dev because Apple Macintosh and Commodore Amiga are ultimately going to kick our ass if we don't figure out a way to make the damn PC OS have a more user friendly GUI uh...Graphical User Interface," he says.

"WTMI...man. *Waaay* Too Much Information," I say.

"Yeah...sorry. Forgot you're techno-challenged. Hey...you guys hungry? I know a nice little Asian place up on Capitol Hill, walkable...where we can grab some dinner. You like Thai and East Indian?" he says.

"Sure...let us stow our gear *mon Capitain*...and we're ready to go. Right Marly?" I say.

"I could eat...give me few minutes to deal with some deferred personal grooming issues and I'll be good to go," she says.

We walk over to Capitol Hill, with a funky eclectic mix of restaurants and bars and bookstores, and what we used to call head shops in the 60s.

"Well now...this reminds me of The Castro district in San Francisco...a lot, crackling with sexual energy, male and female," Marla says.

"Yeap...this is Seattle's version of the Gay Bay Boy meets Boy....and Girl meets Girl. Target rich...if you every decide to switch teams," Hawk says grinning.

We walk into a not-so-small place on East Broadway, that sports a diverse menu with predominately Thai cuisine with some East Indian offerings. Obviously a happening place, as it's full with a '10 minute wait'...which usually means at least a half-hour if you're lucky. Hawk puts his name in with the non-gender specific host who is dressed like something out of on *La Cage aux Folles*.

"Hawster...party of 3.5. A large table for my freak friend," says Mr Ironic.

We take a table in the bar to have a cocktail, while we wait for our table. It's Happy Hour, so the locals are out. The bar is starting to get lively, mostly catering to an obviously gay and Lesbian clientele. All the servers, men and ladies, are outrageously dressed...some even approaching costumed with elaborate jewelry, all highly accessorized, some with multi-colored radical spiked hair styles.

After we're seated at our table, our male server comes to the table, all smiles, "Good evening...I am F-redo," he announces like he's making a Shakespearean entrance...leaning hard on the F, "I will be *servicing* you. What may I get for you? If you'd like something you don't see on the menu...just ask, we're *very* accommodating and friendly here," he says looking directly at me batting his eyes which draws a smile and an eye-roll from Marla.

"For the lady?" Fredo asks looking at Marla somewhat condescendingly.

"I'll have a Bombay Sapphire gin Martini...with two olives," Marla says.

"For the gentleman?" he says to Hawk.

"A Jack Daniels over...make it a double. Hold the olives," Hawk says.

"And for you...*sweetcakes*?" he's says flashing his perfect whitened teeth at me.

"I uh...think I'll have my usual...Johnny Walker...up, a double," I say.

"Oh goodness me...how *bo-o-o-ring*. I'm sure you could get a Johnny...Tom, Harry or Dick...up...anytime...anywhere you want. Where's your sense of adventure uh...*Ball-hawk*?" He asks.

"Sorry? *Ball-hawk*?" I ask quizzically.

"No need to be coy with F-redo. I've positively *lusted* your profile on the CompuServe Bulletin Board...*Man to Man*. And your *yummy* picture...but I must say you're much...*much* taller and impressive in person. If I recall correctly your profile said five-foot-ten inches. Why would you want to lie about such an obvious *positive* attribute?" he says.

Marla is now staring at me, "Is there something you'd like to tell me uh...*Ball-hawk*, since you are *so much taller* in person?" she asks, desperately trying to contain her laughter.

"Maybe later Marla...or not. As to your second question...possibly on older photo...say when I was 12 years old. And, *Gee* uh...F-redo, that's an *excellent*...and I must say very *penetrating*, if you will, question. Why don't we ask our friend here uh... Mick. Mick why do you suppose one *might* lie about such an obvious factual disparity? It's okay...feel free to level with us uh...*Man to Man*?" I ask looking directly at the Hawkster.

"Well...I uh...really couldn't begin to presume to get into someone else's, uh...head as to why they might not be truthful...in such potentially relevant and serious matters of the heart," he says smiling wickedly.

"*Aw gee*...go on Mick. Take a wild guess...hypothetically? I'm sure Marla, along with F-redo here are very interested in your...opinion?" I ask.

"Yes...*sil vous plait* Hawk. I obviously can't speak for F-redo here...but I am *just dying* over here...waiting to hear your hypothetical..." she can't finish before she is busting out in convulsive laughter, her eyes tearing up, slamming the table with her hand.

Now poor F-redo...not in on the joke is starting to look a little bemused by all this back and forth and laughing—his eyes narrowing as he is starting to suspect it may be at his expense.

"Well...speaking strictly hypothetically my guess would be that someone might be tempted to engage in these kinds of deceptions to perhaps present, *shall we say* a more attractive image, literally and figuratively," he deadpans.

"Ah...of course! To dangle a bit more attractive bait on the hook...*shall we say*?" I say, smiling at the Hawkster.

"A distinct...dangling possibility, *mon ami*," he says.

"Very. Okay...F-redo, thanks anyway. But I think I'll just stick with my ol' boring pal, Johnny...up, as we're in kind of in a committed relationship," I say to F-redo.

"Well okay, *Ball-hawk* boy...but if you should ever be lookin' to trade up here's a number you can call...day or night 24-7. Leave a voice mail," he says, hastily scrawling his phone number on a cocktail napkin, leaving it in front of me, then with a flirtatious wide smile wiggles off to fill our order.

I slide the napkin across the table to Hawk.

"Your lucky day, *mon ami*," I say.

"Obviously he was trying to get to me...through you. But no thanks, don't think it's a good fit for me...*too* gay," Hawk says.

While the U-haul truck remains parked on the street, Hawk takes next three days off, and shows us around Seattle, the usual *tourista* stops

like the iconic Space Needle, built for the 1962 World's Fair in Seattle and the famous Pike Market.

We also check outlying beautiful West Seattle, situated right on the Sound. Alki Beach reminds me a great deal of some of the bedroom beachfront communities in Southern California, around Los Angeles, like Venice and Manhattan Beach. The locals, much more laid back and relaxed than the in-*tense* metro-sexual Seattlites.

We take the ferry to the San Juan Islands and spend some time seeing the highly growth managed and beautiful untamed country on Islands like Lopez Island, where folks have a deep sense of identity and community with island life. Retaining the Pacific Northwest Seattle sensibility...but not in it.

On the fourth day, Hawk throws us the keys to his pride and joy, a red 1984 Mustang convertible Turbo GT with a stick shift.

"Have fun up in Vancouver...and keep an eye on the speedometer...easy to let that wild little pony get away from ya. And since you're an artist...might want to check out La Conner, an artist's community about 70 miles North. One of my favorite authors, Tom Robbins lives there. Ya know. Another Roadside Attraction, Even Cowgirls Get the Blues. Just tell 'em I sent ya.

Then take Chuckanut Drive North up to Moody Seaport on the way up...about 50 miles South of Van City. A nice little college town, with a decent University. Interesting history and beautiful old buildings like the City Hall built in 1890, and the Mount Baker Theater, a real vintage 20s cinema," he says.

The next morning, we rise early, and we're off before the morning traffic, headed North on I-5, most of the traffic is Southbound toward Seattle once you get past Everett about 30 miles North, home of Boeing Aircraft, maker of commercial jet airliners.

We check-out La Conner, in Skagit County, mostly flat and agricultural. Even with our esteemed *entre* of *Hawk Shapiro sent us*...Tom Robbins in not taking visitors.

La Conner is basically a wide spot in the road, a small, but charming artist's intimate enclave right across the slough from the Swinomish Indian Reservation.

From there, as we head North on I-5, the landscape begins to change dramatically, with heavily wooded mountains seemingly leaping out of the horizon. The top is down and it's a spectacular day, with big white fluffy clouds against a brilliant blue sky. We take the Chuckanut Drive turnoff, which winds all along the coast of Puget Sound with beautiful turnouts for scenic vistas looking to the West and the San Juan Islands. Visibility must be close to 50 miles.

I turn the Mustang loose through the twisting turns with the Turbo charged engine, the hard braking, then acceleration exiting the

turns is exhilarating, giving Marla a bit of a white-knuckler adrenalin rush.

We pull into Moody Seaport, to the snap crackle and pop of the wound up Turbo charged high performance engine and the pungent smell of overheated smoking brake linings around lunch time in a small community called Fairhaven. We decide to have lunch there at a charming little cafe, called the Colophon Cafe, right next to Village Books, both situated in beautiful old brick buildings, which according to the cornerstone were built sometime in late 1891.

Directly East is the ever present, ever vigilant great white sentinel, snow covered Mount Baker of the Cascade mountain range rising to an elevation from sea level to almost 11,000 feet, the third highest mountain in Washington state, some more Western Alps. It reminds me a great deal of the towering mountains of the Sierra Nevada, only the base elevation of Lake Tahoe is about 6,000 feet, with the highest peak about another 6,000 feet, making Mount Baker seem much taller. Another big difference is that Lake Tahoe is essentially high desert, dry climate with not much lush vegetation.

Because Moody Seaport is at or near sea level, situated right on the Puget Sound with 40 inches of rainfall a year, all the surrounding mountains are very green with lush vegetation, densely populated with cedar and fir trees, some even old growth, if not yet clear-cut by the *logging industry...one of the primary sources of jobs, along with commercial fishing* we're dutifully informed by the local Chamber of Commerce as we pick up a complimentary map of Moody Seaport and surrounding areas.

After lunch, we browse Village Books for an hour or so, holding hands like two teenagers deeply in first-love. We have a light lunch at the Colophon Cafe. I have their legendary white clam chowder, Marla a cob salad with fresh hot baked bread.

It's a perfect, yes even idyllic day, just me and my baby on the open highway with the top down listening to some cassettes of Joan Baez love ballads, as she wistfully sings one of her former lover's anthemic classics, Bob Dylan's...Blowin' in the Wind:

*How many roads must a man walk down
Before they call him a man
How many seas must a white dove sail
Before she sleeps in the sand*

*How many times must the cannonballs fly
Before they are forever banned
The answer, my friends, is blowing in the wind
The answer is blowing in the wind*

How many years can a mountain exist

: : Michaelangelo's Renaissance — m.a.kominsky : :

Before it's washed to the sea

*How many years must some people exist
Before they're allowed to be free*

*How many times can a man turn his head
And pretend that he just doesn't see
The answer, my friends, is blowing in the wind
The answer is blowing in the wind...*

Somehow we both seem to be hearing the lyrics as though for the first time as it deeply resonates with our own situation of leaving the dark and sinister world of ACT Inc. and Jason Mahoney behind us.

*How many times can a man turn his head
And pretend that he just doesn't see...*

Of moving on to a new and fulfilling life...together in *our* home in beautiful Lake Tahoe, full of hope and promise that all things are possible.

It was the first time, since Sora Eagle Feather, that I had ever felt such an overwhelming, deep emotional connection of unconditional love with a woman, so much so that frankly it somewhat frightens me because of the potential for painful loss. Again.

Something that I had vowed never to allow happen again after losing Sora...not even with Annie Trudeau, to never again expose myself to the heart wrenching, when not in a drunken stupor, laying awake nights, kind of emotional chaos.

Yes, as I will soon enough have reinforced, the only sure way to truly drown one's sorrow, is not through drink, but to jump off one of the *leapers*...very high bridges, like the Golden Gate, Aurora 99 Bridge in Seattle or later Deception Pass, of Whidbey Island. A few times, I admit, I will have seriously considered after spiraling into dark episodes of post-partem depression, a tempting alternative.

Those enchanting days together, bittersweet memories will be often fondly reflected upon for the rest of my life. We vow to return to Moody Seaport someday. Only one of us will.

By three o'clock, we head North to Vancouver BC. It takes us only 45 minutes to get to the Peace Arch Border Crossing into British Columbia. Traffic is light, so we are through the Canadian Customs in less than 10 minutes, and on our way North to Van City.

We check into our hotel, The Sylvia...a classic old hotel with Ivy covered walls, originally built in 1912. It still retains the charm of historic old Vancouver. Situated right on Beach Ave. overlooking

beautiful English Bay, it's a short walk to famous Stanley Park, the Vancouver equivalent of Central Park in New York City. We talk a long walk along the Seawall, stopping often to gaze at the spectacular sunset...seemingly made just for our eyes only.

We find a lovely quiet little bistro, the Tea House in Stanley Park overlooking the Bay and have an intimate candlelit dinner, with a nice bottle of Merlot.

The next day we rise early, check out of the hotel and drive around Van City. As big cities go, it's a very clean and well maintained metropolis. We end up in East Vancouver for lunch. Commercial Drive has much less gloss. Its funky-fun atmosphere reminds Marla and I of parts of San Francisco, up to now, our favorite Left Coast City. East Van's loaded with mom-and-pop family shops and restaurants...anything you want from East Indian to Sushi to Italian, at comparatively modest prices compared to downtown Vancouver, especially the Kitsalano area. We have a light lunch of Tandoori chicken with fresh out-of-the-oven Naan bread in a little sidewalk cafe called the Tandoori Palace. Obviously East Indian family-owned with three generations working side-by-side there, including three beautiful coffee-eyed, raven haired pre-pubescent boys eagerly acting as servers and busboys. Learning the family business from the ground up.

By 3 PM, we head back to Seattle. It's a brief visit, because we're both rather eager to get back to Tahoe...*home*. We spend one last night with Hawk. We take him out for a great dinner out on the Waterfront on Alaska Way, Anthony's Seafood.

I'm very pleased that Marla and Hawk seemed to have bonded. There is absolutely no awkwardness in their interaction, as if they've been old friends for years, both of them giving...and taking good-natured ribbing. I can't recall him ever being so sociable and accepting with one of my lady companions. Maybe he realizes that probably for the first time, this one is a keeper for me. As for Marla, she likewise realizes and yes even honors, how important my friendship—more like the brotherhood that I never had, is with the Hawkster.

So, after a delightful three-day visit with Hawk, like Ben Franklin's wise old trope says...*house guests like fish, begin to smell after three days...time to go*.

We're up early, and after a farewell breakfast with Hawk, we're back in the U-haul, heading South on I-5 toward Tahoe...*Homeward Bound...*

- Chapter 37 -

The audible alarm on the hand-held homing device, starts squawking early in the morning, indicating that the GPS is picking up change in latitude and longitude. He casually finishes his usual morning rations of ham and eggs, toast and coffee. As experience would prescribe, it's not healthy to eat too fast or to kill on an empty stomach. So even though it's been a nice little 4 days liberty in Seattle, it is time to get back on mission. Within 15 minutes, the black Suburban catches up until visual is confirmed on the U-haul truck. The driver then falls back a few miles so as not to be detected. As usual, he's done meticulous research and planning. He knows the address of their final—make that *very final* destination in Lake Tahoe.

Because we're eager to get home and sleep on a decent bed in familiar surroundings, we decide to go for it. Despite it's about a 15 hour drive including stops for gas and food, and stretch breaks, we'd rather drive straight through with both of sharing the driving, rather than stay at some shabby roadside roach motel.

We take I-5 then just before Medford, Oregon, cut over Highway 161 Southwest to Highway 395 South, a straight shot to Carson City Nevada. From there, we're almost home with short drive over the familiar Spooner Summit into Lake Tahoe, Nevada.

We keep grinding out the miles, until we hit Reno, Nevada just before midnight. Time to refuel. We decide we're desperately in need of a break, so we stop for a decent meal at a casino buffet, and take a little walk to stretch our legs along the scenic Truckee River walk, before the final leg home, about an hour and half. From fatal accidents that I have investigated, learning from the tragic experience of others, it's not wise to attempt to drive over Spooner Summit if you're fighting sleep.

They're so close to Tahoe, they're probably going to go for it...maybe have dinner in Reno then make the final push home. Good. They'll be exhausted from driving all day and night and not particularly aware. Maybe not thinking as clearly if it was daytime after a decent night's sleep. In either case, their homecoming will be a surprise...a very *big and loud* surprise.

The first rule of successful ambush is to take maximum advantage of the element of surprise. If you can wait for the enemy to reach a high state of fatigue, and get careless about their security, then the chances of success increase exponentially.

The driver of the black Suburban, does not exit in Reno, but instead floors it. There is little development between Reno and Carson City. It's a straight and flat shot—few if any vehicles on the road at that hour. He'll want to get there at least a full hour ahead of his prey, to set up his little welcome-home party. He's making good time, the speedometer needle is flirting with 100 mph, when suddenly out of nowhere, the cab is full of a flashing red glow from behind. *Dammit...Nevada Highway Patrol. Shit.* I forgot to turn on my radar detector, *stupid*—from the last time I stopped for dinner and a six-pack. All those noisy false positives driving around the city.

The driver takes his M45 MEUSOC .45 caliber semi-automatic, standard-issue side arm for the Force Recon, with a full magazine of 7 hollow-point cop killers, from under the seat, and places it under his black windbreaker between him and the cooler, on the seat in the darkened cab.

There's two of them. As he intently observes their movements in the side view mirrors, one of them, a lady officer, with no personal armor vest walks around to the passenger side, shining a cop's long black Maglite, like daylight, into the interior of the car. The cooler, obscures the view between the cop and his hand under the windbreaker. Then the dreaded sharp rap on the driver side window from the other officer.

"Roll down you window...driver's license and registration, please," he says standing well to the rear of the window opening. *Cautious...*not a good sign, but also no personal armor vest. Improves the odds. The first shot to the torso, then the deadly kill shot to the head.

The electric window goes down, "Sure officer," the driver says.

He hands him his drivers license and registration.

"California, eh? Where ya headed in such a *big* hurry, uh...Mister Rice?" he asks.

"Back home to Southern California. I was getting sleepy so I was in a hurry to find a place in Carson City...to spend the night. How fast was I going officer?" the driver says. The lady NHP turns out her flashlight and returns to the patrol car, probably to finish her donuts and coffee while it's still hot. Anything to keep from falling asleep during the normally, excruciatingly boring graveyard shift. This makes his odds much better, he can take out the one cop easily. Then shoot the lady cop through the windshield of the patrol car before she even has a chance to put down her cup of coffee, maybe even before they have called it in to the dispatcher with car and driver info. *New meaning to the term graveyard shift*, smiling to himself.

"Clocked on radar at over 100 miles per hour. Have you had anything to drink tonight, Mister Rice?" The officer asks.

Shit...if they open the cooler on the front seat, they'll see 4 empty cans of Coors from the six-pack. Probably if he does a breathalyzer on me, he'll get enough of hit to bust me for suspicion of DUI, usually an

arrest, and a blood test, which will blow the whole time table and my bogus identity. And if for some bad luck reason they decide to check out the vault, the custom built THULE ski roof box, they'll find all the custom sniper rifles with scopes and cop killer ammo, along with the R-P-G launcher...with grenades. Then I'm really fucked.

He casually slides his hand under the black windbreaker and grips the handle of the already chambered .45, flipping the safety off.

"Nope...nothing to drink. Gee...I'm really sorry officer. I had no idea...open highway. I guess I must've let my foot lean on the accelerator a little to hard. Thanks officer...for pulling me over. I was probably on the verge of falling asleep at the wheel," the driver says contritely.

The cop shines the light in his face, to check his pupil reaction, then says, "You're uh...ex-military? A U-S Marine Corp decal on your window?" he says.

"Semper Fi...Force Recon...you?" The driver says.

"Yeah...did some time in-country in 'Nam...'68 Tet offensive. Special ops guy, huh? Okay...wait here...stay in the car," the officer says, smiling before going back to the patrol car to check for wants or outstanding warrants.

For a consummate professional like Ernie Porter with his vast experience in sub-Rosa work, it is SOP to anticipate the possibility of a routine stop by police or for a witness to jot down a license number at a crime scene like Kozlov's place in Tahoe.

It is not a difficult proposition to have access to high quality counterfeit documents like multiple driver's licenses, along with a selection of very authentic phony personalized license plates, in pinch pulling plates of totaled cars in a wrecking yard and registration documents from any number of the states, always in a different state from his "assignment". This greatly diminishes the likelihood of the authenticity of his documents being called into question as most likely the cops would not have access to the out-of-state databases. Maybe...maybe not.

But shit can...and often does happen. A routine stop with a little bad luck can cascade into a regular shit sandwich.

The window of opportunity is rapidly closing. He puts his hand on the door handle, but some kind of finely honed battle intuition from countless missions, perhaps the smile before calling it in. The smile that will maybe save he and his partner's life on that lonely dark stretch of highway?

Hmm...so maybe the ex-soldier's going to cut him a break. It's a calculated risk. Once they call in a DUI...I'm dead meat, which means they will have to die. But something in the cops tone...some deep recognition of camaraderie, of brothers in arms. Okay. Go with it...but be cool. Let it unfold...been in tighter spots. The most important thing is to stay calm.

I can always wack 'em and put the spare plates on from another state.

About five minutes later, the NHP officer returns, "Mister Rice...bad news...not-so-bad...and good news," he says smiling, "the bad news. I'm going to have to write you up for speeding. Not so bad news. I'll write ya up for 82 in a 70 speed limit...otherwise, at over 30 miles per hour over the speed limit we impound the vehicle. And the fine would be about double. And finally...the good news *for you* is, next time you're in Nevada...do not...I repeat do not drive after you've been drinking. I can smell alcohol on your breath...and your pupils are not reacting properly to light. You've been warned. Got it?

I'd suggest you *very slowly* drive to Carson City, and get a good night's rest. Have a safe evening, and slow down Mister Rice...*Semper Fi*," the officer says smiling with a casual salute to his Mountie hat as he hands him the speeding ticket, license and registration, then heads back to his patrol car.

"Thank you...*roger that*...'preciate it. I'll be extremely careful, offica. Have a good naght," the driver says to the back of the officer as he disappears into the black night. He then places the gun under the front seat again, safety on. He waits until the patrol car drives past him, before he slowly pulls on to the highway following behind about 200 yards until the patrol car crosses through a paved median turn-out and heads back the opposite direction. He reaches over and turns on his Fuzzbuster radar detector. *Won't make that mistake again.*

As soon as the tail lights of the patrol car disappear, he's back up to over 100 mph, making up for lost time...racing to get to Tahoe to prepare the homecoming...a *very special* surprise party.

By the time we get to Tahoe, and drive up the hill to *our* home...*Casa Nevada*, it's almost 2 AM. Both of are us exhausted from being on the road for almost 15 hours.

I hit the hand held garage door opener on my key chain, and the door magically begins to lift.

"I'm going to back the truck up to the garage door, so we can unload it in the morning," I say.

"Mickey...I've got to *pee so bad*, my eyes are burning. Can I hop out...before it's *too late*?" Marla says.

"Sure...you can go into the house through the interior door of the garage through the kitchen...it's always unlocked," I say.

Marla hops out and runs in through the interior door leaving it open. I slowly begin backing the truck up. Because it's heavily coated with road film, I put the window on the passenger side down so I see the side view mirror. I immediately detect the very strong, unmistakable odor of natural gas.

Then almost simultaneously, the sound of a ringing telephone from the kitchen...*who the hell could be calling me at this hour?*

: : Michaelangelo's Renaissance — m.a.kominsky : :

"Marly!" I yell.

KA-B-O-O-OM!

The huge explosion catapults the U-haul van twenty feet into the street, coming to rest, laying on the driver side. The concussion of the blast renders me momentarily dazed. It takes me several seconds before it begins to register...an explosion! Probably from natural gas. *Oh my gawd...Marly!*

A full block away from the carefully chosen observation post where the black Suburban is parked, the concussion of the blast shakes the ground. The Black Mamba coolly puts down his binoculars, and presses the disconnect button on his mobile phone. *Mission accomplished.*

He inhales deeply, savoring the moment. Like the deranged Lieutenant Colonel Bill Kilgore from Francis Ford Coppola's anti-war masterwork, *Apocalypse Now*, the bittersweet after-scent of the smoke from the explosion, is an aphrodisiac to the Black Mamba:

I love the smell of napalm in the morning. You know, one time we had a hill bombed, for 12 hours. When it was all over, I walked up. We didn't find one of 'em, not one stinkin' dink body. The smell, you know that gasoline smell, the whole hill.

Smelled like...victory....

But his elation is tempered by an inchoate feeling of letdown. The lack of challenge, the seeming ineptness of his prey and the relative ease of completing the mission.

Anyway, a nice little payday for doing what the government had paid him to do for next to nothing. Truth is all those years he'd probably have done it for free, essentially to feed the addictive high of an adrenalin junkie. Now he gets paid, very handsomely for the same work...and the same rush. *Easy money.*

He drives about a mile and pulls into a darkened gas station, where he replaces the California license plates with bogus New Mexico plates, and begins his long drive back to Southern California—to his base of operations, near Camp Pendleton, about 40 miles North of San Diego where he trained almost 20 years ago. Just another day, field work away from the office.

It's now almost 3 AM, even while making sure to observe the speed limit, he can make a good coupla hundred miles distance away from the scene of the crime, before daybreak, before he stops for his usual morning ration of ham and eggs, and sourdough toast, coffee with cream and four sugars. All this stalkin' *sho 'nuf* works up a *man's* appetite. *Yesiree...*

I struggle to right myself, but the shoulder harness and seat belt restrain me. I have to release it or I'm not going anywhere. I attempt to get to my feet. Standing on the driver side window I manage to climb out the open window on the passenger side, collapsing on to the hard pavement outside...my legs shaking and unsure, as I try to stand up. I turn and look back towards the house, or what's left of it. *My gawd*, the whole front of the house is gone, completely blown-out exposing the interior of the front of the house. A fire is now starting to rage on the roof and spreading rapidly to the rest of the house.

I run toward where the kitchen used to be, hysterically screaming, "*Marly! Marly!*"

The fire is now spreading to the interior. The smoke and heat are starting to get oppressive; visibility is getting worse by the second. The flexible gas pipe that feeds where the stove used to be is spitting out a licking orange flame several feet long.

I hear groaning under some debris in the kitchen. I frantically throw off the charred boards and sheet rock, to reveal Marla, laying there, her clothing already blood-soaked. *My gawd!*

I kneel down, place my arms under her and try to move her. She screams loudly from the pain. I gently lay her back down.

"Marly...can you hear me! *I've got to get you out!*" I yell over the fire.

"I can't move my legs. Mickey. What...*what happened?* I...I just had walked into the kitchen...when it...just exploded," she murmurs now going into shock.

There's a large ceiling truss pinning her at the waist. I try desperately to move it, but it hopelessly lodged. I frantically throw off some more sheet rock and debris, to expose Marla's legs. *My gawd*, both of them are badly mangled above the knee, the one barely connected. I rip off my belt and apply it as a tourniquet to the severed leg, but the femoral artery of the other leg is pumping blood. *She's bleeding out, before my eyes. I can stop it!*

"Don't try to talk baby...just lay still. I've got to get some help...call for ambulance! I'll be right back...don't go anywhere. Okay? I've got to get to the mobile phone in the truck!" I say.

"Okay. Wish I could say I like what you've done with place..." smiling gamely, then as the pain now intensifies. "Oh Mickey...please hurry...*it hurts so bad*. I...I don't want to...*die alone*..." she whispers. *Die alone. Jezus Christ!*

I sprint back to the truck, shimmy in through the open window and begin frantically groping the dark for the mobile phone.

Just about then I hear voices outside. I stick my head out of the cab and see several of my neighbors, in their night clothes and slippers, walking toward me.

"Mick...what the *hell* happened?" says my sixty-year old neighbor Tom Malloy.

"Tom...call 911! Get an ambulance up here ASAP!...and the fire department...hurry! Marla's badly hurt...she's still in the house!" I yell over the roar of the fire.

Tom runs back into his house.

I jump out of the truck, and run back into the house, to be with Marla.

I kneel down beside her taking her still beautiful but bruised face in my trembling hands. The smoke is making it difficult to breath. The heat from the fire is intensifying.

"Mickey...am I hurt *bad*? Don't lie to me..."

"Marly...it's uh...not good, baby. But I promise...I won't let you die. The ambulance is on the way. *I love you Marly!*" I say, over the frenzied approaching sirens.

Marla gazes up at me, reaching for my hand which I take in mine. She is rhythmically squeezing it as she writhes in spasms of pain. Her eyes, now glassy and unfocused meet mine.

"Mickey...just hold me baby...*just hold me...*" she whispers.

"I'm right here baby...don't give up...fight! You've got to fight...*please...for me! Don't you dare leave me, baby!*" I beg

"Mickey...I guess I knew it was all too good to be true. That you and I could...I sold my soul, and now...*I didn't deserve you baby...or to be happy...ever. I love you Mickey...forever...*" she says starting to sob.

I gently stroke the hair back from her face with my trembling hand. I bend down and gently kiss her quivering soft lips...for the last time as her teary eyes slowly flutter shut, the grip from her hand slowly releases, becomes limp.

"*Marly! Marly!...oh gawd! Marly...don't leave me...Please! I can't live without you baby!*" I yell as I hold her lifeless body against me, rocking back and forth.

I feel someone firmly tapping me on my shoulder. I look up to see a paramedic.

"Sir...*please sir.* Please let me have a look at her," he says softly while taking her other wrist desperately searching for a pulse, shaking his head side to side.

"*No! She's not dead...she's just in shock...she'll be okay.* She just needs some rest...after the long drive..." I yell rocking back and forth with Marla Dyson in my arms.

"I'm sorry sir...but there's nothing more that can be done for her. You have to leave, *now* sir. The fire is closing in on us *fast!*" the paramedic says, grabbing me by the arm, trying to pull me away. I shake him off, "*Get the hell away from me...I'm not leaving her!*" I yell.

Then another paramedic shows up, both big strong guys, they each grab an arm, dragging me clear, kicking and screaming.

: : *Michaelangelo's Renaissance* — *m.a.kominsky* : :

"No! No!...My gawd No!" just as the roof collapses with a deafening crash, totally engulfing the entire house in flames.

- Chapter 38 -

After losing Marla, I spiral into deep depression. Within two days Hawk flies in from Seattle—he stays at my side constantly, incessantly, sometimes irritatingly shadowing me even to the bathroom, essentially on suicide watch. Since losing the love of my life I am basically dysfunctional, that day September 10th 1985, at 2 AM is indelibly seared into my memory and consciousness. Forever.

The house had been leveled by the explosion and the fire. In some places burned down to the foundation. I'm so emotionally traumatized, I can't even bring myself to look it again. It's a total loss along with my Porsche which was in the garage. Everything, all the contents, including all my clothes and personal effects, family photographs...gone. Even all the production equipment, cameras, tape decks and post-production equipment—all gone. The only thing that survived is my trusty pickp-up. The Great White, parked on the street in a turnout, sustained minor cosmetic damage but is drivable.

Hearing the news, many friends attempt to make contact, to offer condolences and support. But my phone line, and of course my answering machine is not functional. Just as well, as good intentioned as their attempts are at consolation, I really don't feel like dealing with it—any of it.

I'm staying at a hotel in town, which the insurance company is paying for under the coverage of the Homeowners Policy. After Hawk arrives, at his insistence, I check into a room with double beds so that he can keep on eye me—so I *don't do something stupid*.

"Hawk, I really appreciate you being here, man...but you're starting to get on my nerves, being my shadow okay? Don't you have to be back to work?" I ask

"Screw the job...I've taken a leave of absence. And it's just too fuckin' bad if you don't particularly want my excellent companionship. Got it? You got no choice in the matter, bro...so just fogitabout-it!" he says.

"So...for how long do you intend to be in my grille, man?" I ask.

"That depends on you. For as long as it takes for you to stop feelin' sorry for yourself and decide to get back in the game. In the meantime...get used it," he says.

One of the most difficult calls I've every had to make is to notify Marla's family of her passing. I speak with her mother over the phone. Not surprisingly, I find her very assertive with an accusatory edge in her tone...as though I was somehow responsible for her death. Despite the fact that Marla's body was consumed by the fire, her family, insists that

she be interred in the family plot, in Chicago...*it is not open for discussion*. It is a very short and terse conversation, with her essentially hanging up on me.

Because I have no legal standing with Marla, and her last will and testament has her mother appointed as executrix, legally I can have no say in anything about her memorial or funeral arrangements. Before I can even object the family quickly has Marla Dyson's remains, flown to Chicago. It will be a closed casket. They send their son, John Jr from the Bay Area to make the arrangements for transfer. John and I meet for the first time. He is devastated by the loss of his sister. We spend the day together. He strikes me as a nice guy, and says that he's harboring no blame or responsibility toward me for the death of his sister. He goes through Marla's clothes and belongings that were in the U-haul, that I have stored in the hotel room. The antiques and lamps etcetera are stored in the underground parking structure. He sorts out the family mementos, photos, heirlooms and jewelry, and says, "Just give the rest to Goodwill...including the antiques."

The three of us go out and get blind drunk. The next day, with no goodbye, he is gone. I never hear from him or anybody else in Marla's family again.

When I call the mother again to find out when the funeral is, I am referred to the family attorney by the manservant, who says Mrs Dyson is unavailable.

The attorney tells me I will be contacted when the arrangements have been formalized. After a week of hearing nothing, I call the attorney in Chicago.

"Can you tell me when and where the memorial and funeral service are going to be held?" I ask.

"Oh...Mister Kozlov, didn't anybody from our office contact you? The memorial and the funeral was held two days ago. I'm very sorry. As you can imagine with all the chaos of preparations, you know compiling guest lists, finding a caterer to do the wake...etcetera...very challenging. I guess Mrs Dyson forgot to contact us with the information. We just found out the day before, so I guess contacting you somehow slipped through the cracks. I'm very sorry," Attorney George Flowers says.

Of course having a 'just so' proper funeral with a proper guest list, properly catered must have been emotionally draining for the model of social propriety, Mrs Dyson. *Well the good news, baby...wherever you are, glad you're not going to have to sit through your own platitudinous funeral extravaganza...*

Hawk and I had been staying at the hotel for almost two weeks, when one day over breakfast in the hotel coffee shop, he says, "Koz...staying in this hotel is the shits man. Having to eat all of our meals out...no cooking...not good. Our diet's the shits. You've got to eat

Mickey or you're going to get very sick. You've lost at least 15 pounds already. Now that Marla's arrangements are resolved, let's get the hell outta here. It's not healthy for you to be around here, man. It's been almost two weeks now Mickey. There's nothing here...or..." Hawk says.

"Or no one? Say it Hawk...she's gone. I'm not sure I want to...go on, pal," I say starting to tear up again.

"Mickey...that's how I felt after Berkeley...after that beating from the campus cop that scrambled my brains when I had to quit law school, I thought my life was over. Do you remember what you said?" he asks

"Hawk...this is different. Much different, man. She was *everything* to me," I say.

"Do you remember what you said to me, *goddammit!* Answer me!"

"I suppose you're going tell me...whether I want to hear it or not?" I say.

"Yeap...you said that if I took myself out...ofted myself, it would break *your* heart to lose me. That someday, after the pain had begun to subside that I would be okay. That I would still have you...and that someday I would *thank you* for not letting me do *something stupid*.

Well, I'm telling you...right now. *Thank you* Mickey for keeping me going. I love ya, man...now let's just jump in your truck...hit the road and get the *hell* outta Tahoe, back to Seattle. I'm beggin' ya man...there's nothing more you can do here. Let's just leave...right now. *Allons-y!* Okay *mon frere?*" he says.

"Okay man...okay. Let me think about it. But Hawk...there's something still nagging me about this whole damn thing. I still can't even imagine how this could've happened. What caused it? How could there be a natural gas leak. It would have had to be leaking from the time I left...for at least the week I was gone. Unless someone broke in, like a burglar. But even with that remote possibility...why leave the gas on? A prank? Nah...very thin.

With that amount of gas in the house over a prolonged period of a week, it would have blown long before we got there...probably even from the electrically timed night light, programed to go on at dark and off at midnight.

No...there's something I'm missin' here, man. When I finally do fall asleep at night...the same nightmares come a callin'. It's like I'm reliving it each time. They're talkin' to me, man...tellin' me something ain't right with this whole friggin' deal.

And each time I wake up, upright in the bed in a cold sweat yelling *Marly! Marly!* To the sound of the phone ringing, then...*KA-B-O-O-OM!*

Ringin Hawk. None of my phones had bell ringers...except the one in the office downstairs for my direct dedicated outbound business

line only which you could never hear upstairs. All the rest were all newer DTMF key pads with ringing tones...instead of bells, including the kitchen. And just a coincidence that the phone rang just before the explosion...at 2 AM? And how the hell could the gas start leaking by itself.

In my nightmare from hell...I'm with Marly. Trying to comfort her...telling her everything's going to be okay...*ha!* Just before the collapse of the ceiling...before the paramedics drag me clear, then Marly's now haunting, prophetic words just before we left for Tahoe...

After what you told me about Pauly...dying so young...really focuses the mind on how fragile life is...with news like this, how your priorities can change overnight when you realize how vulnerable you are to the vagaries of life...that you're not invincible.

Whatever time you and I may have left, I want to spend with you Mickey...and live each day with you...as if each day may be our last. I love you Mickey...

I keep seeing the gas flex line from the wall fitting jet...snaking loose...spitting flames. The stove was completely gone...blown away, probably acting like shrapnel on Marla's legs. But the coupling that *would* have been connected to the stove is intact on the flex line...not damaged. The explosion would have severed the soft copper flex line leaving the coupling connected to the stove. Makes no sense, man I gotta go back out there...to the house, take another look," I say

"Okay, man. Now that's more like it...you're startin' to actually *think* again. I know it's tough Mickey, and man if there was any way I could make it easier for you...to take some of your pain on to me, you know I'd do it in a New York minute. But one thing you do not need right now is pity...especially self-pity. You're startin' to come around...a good sign, pally. And you're right...something really stinks and it ain't the smell of natural gas.

So...if it will help put your mind at rest...let's go, right now! But...after we do that I want you to promise that we'll leave. Go back to Seattle. Okay?" he says.

"Hawk...all I can promise ya is that I'll consider it. Let's go!" I say.

It's been almost two weeks since the explosion. With Hawk driving my truck, as we get closer, I started to break out in a cold sweat. My stomach is doing jumping jacks.

Finally, we pull up to where *Casa Nevada* used to be...*our* home...*our* future...for Marla and I. *My gawd*, it's almost totally leveled. I get the tennis ball in the throat...big time.

It's a beautiful day. The spectacular view of the lake from the street, now totally unobstructed belies the horror of my loss of Marla. I sit in the truck, staring in disbelief, my right hand shaking as I reach for the door handle...*maybe this wasn't such a good idea...*

"Mickey...you okay, man?"

"Yea...just give me a minute to process this," I say.

"Okay...I'm going to get out and have a look. Take as long as you need."

Hawk gets out. I watch him walk over to where the kitchen used to be, as he ducks under the yellow tape set up by the fire department, I'm filled with deep sense of appreciation for his unconditional friendship and love. Maybe...just maybe...I'll stick around. At least until I can get to the bottom of what happened here.

I finally manage to compose myself enough to open the door, when I am struck the acrid smell of burnt structure, transporting me back to the horrific night. Something I had experienced before, while investigating fire losses of other peoples homes but never had such a violent reaction.

I now can fully appreciate the comments of the owners when they said that the unique smell, henceforth forever, triggered some deep visceral response, a gag reflex like an aversion to food that had caused food poisoning, that made it almost impossible to dig through the remains, even for their salvageable memoirs. I immediately blow my breakfast. *Shit*. I *do not* want to be here. But I've got to find out what happened...*for Marla*. I rinse out my mouth with a some bottled water from the truck.

"Hey, Mick...you got a shovel or something in the truck, to move some of the debris?" Hawk asks.

I open the rear tailgate of the camper shell, and pull out a shovel, something that most people who live in the mountains where there's heavy snow fall, always carry with them to help themselves or others dig out if stuck. I usually carry two, a snow shovel and a spade tip. I walk over and duck under the tape, handing the spade tip shovel to Hawk, keeping the snow shovel.

"Be careful, man. That floor is probably unstable. You could step right through it, big boy...probe it with the shovel...hard, before you step," I say.

"Got it. Mick...so what are we looking for here?"

"Okay...first you try to find the gas flex line that went to the stove. I'll look for the phone that would have been in the kitchen...closest to the gas leak," I say pointing to where the stove would have been.

After about 10 minutes of moving debris Hawk says, "I found it...still connected to the wall pipe. Yea...you're right, the coupling is intact on the stove end," Hawk says.

"Good...let me get the tool box out of the truck...and I'll break it loose. But first I want to take some pictures of it," I say.

I go back to the truck and get the tool box which I, like most mountain dwellers, always carry with some wrenches, screwdrivers and jointed pliers, in case I have to do some rudimentary road side repairs, like a water hose or fan belt tightening. I also get out one of my 35mm SLR cameras which I always keep in a day-pack in the truck fully loaded with film, formerly for my investigation work, now for art photography like landscapes and sunsets.

I hand Hawk the tool box, and take 7 pictures, 3 establishment shots, one from each side, one from dead on and 4 close-ups, one with the macro on the coupling that was connected from the wall to the stove.

While Hawk is removing the flex line, I take the snow shovel and start moving debris where I think the kitchen wall phone would have ended up. After rooting around for about five minutes...*bingo*.

I find the kitchen wall phone...and right next to it, another desk phone. The plastic is melted on both of them, but I can make out the metal base plates. The wall phone essentially dissolved from the heat, but the desk phone, some of plastic is still unmelted. It's orange, the same color as the phone from my office downstairs! The bell ringer being metal is still intact. Before doing anything else I take numerous photos of the two phones, right where I found them.

"Hawk...come over here. See that phone with the bells...*somebody* moved it to kitchen from downstairs. The ringing...*of course*. With the flex line totally removed from the stove, the house especially the kitchen would fill up with gas in maybe an hour or so. Someone had to release the flex line after the light timer turned on...and off for the night light, my guess, sometime after midnight when it was programmed to turn off. It had to be placed there...in the kitchen close to the gas jet plugged into the wall outlet, after unplugging the wall phone. The spark from the bell solenoid would be enough to ignite the copious ambient gas fumes. The wall phone tone would not create the necessary spark...like the bell phone. That would explain the call...just before the explosion at 2 AM. They would've had to be close by to visually coordinate the call with our entry. In my nightmares, I remember the ringing just before it blew. *This was no fucking accident!*" I say.

"*Dammit, man...we're talking some heavy shit here...like murder,*" Hawk says.

I then place what's left of both phones along with the gas flex line in a spare pouch in my large day-pack in which I carry the camera and film.

"Yea...obviously I wasn't supposed to survive it. Who ever did this wanted to take out me...and poor Marla. They didn't figure on me not being inside when the phone rang. If Marla hadn't gotten out of the truck first, I would have smelled the gas...and maybe been able to save her. *Jesus...this house has been friggin' cursed...since the day I bought it. First with Annie Trudeau...and now Marla.*"

I take another 10 photos before touching anything, to preserve and record the scene. I am now in full investigation mode. After years of experience, now in my element, I start to function in a cool, collected methodical way. It feels good to be temporarily distracted from my overwhelming grief of losing Marla.

"Any idea who'd want to do something like this to you, man?"
Hawk says.

"Yea...more than an idea. Much more..." I say.

Proving it and payback would be quite another matter.

But I have nothing but time to plan and savor la vengeance.

- Chapter 39 -

About a minute after I knock on the front door, with a frenzied dog yapping in the background, the door opens. It's Tom Malloy...my next door neighbor. He's in his early sixties and has lived in Tahoe for over 30 years. He married a woman of mixed American Indian descent, her nickname is Dolly from Dolores.

"Mick...Hi, how ya doin'? Com'mon in," he says warmly, opening the door widely inviting Hawk and I in.

"Honestly...been better Tommy. This is my friend Hawk Shapiro," I say.

"Pleasure," Hawk says engulfing the hand of the relative slight Tom Malloy.

"Same here," Tom says obviously slightly taken aback by Hawks unusual Mr Clean appearance and massive muscular development.

"Dolly...Mick's here. Teddy...quiet!" He yells over the frantic barking of Teddy their Toy Schnauzer.

Dolly comes out of the kitchen and immediately gives me a hug and a pat on the cheek. She's a short compact woman, slender with strong features and kind coffee eyes. Still a handsome lady, with long pure white hair, drawn back into a ponytail with a Native American beaded barrette.

"Mick...I'm so sorry for your loss, son. Is there anything we can do to help?"

"Thanks for the kind words, Dolly."

"Would you like some coffee or anything to drink?" Dolly says.

"No thank you, Dolly. We can't stay. By the way I didn't get a chance to thank you for calling the ambulance and the fire department that uh...night. Thanks," I say.

"Of course Mick. We're so deeply sorry about your lady friend. What a terrible accident. The fire almost took our house too, if the fire department had arrived when they did," he says.

"Tom what I'm about to tell you and Dolly must be kept in strict confidence. Okay? This may not have been an accident," I say.

"Accident?...no way. Nothing personal Mick...but it's the curse...the curse of my people, the Washoe Indians for what has been done to their beautiful sacred land. All the development...casinos...condos and timeshare...*da ow a ga*...mispronounced Tahoe "edge of the lake" in Washoe...and the ancient ceremonial Cave Rock just up the road...where some of my

ancestors were buried, until they built those huge ridiculous houses...*on their graves*," Dolly says bitterly.

"Yea...I'm beginning to think that this was *much more* than an accident myself. I'm just curious...did perhaps either one of you see or hear anything or anyone unusual around my house, oh, maybe a day or so before the fire?" I ask.

"Well...now that you mention it, Mick...the night of the fire sometime after midnight, Teddy started barking like crazy. I've got insomnia...usually don't fall asleep until well after midnight. Anyway Teddy was going crazy...as you know, that *damn* dog does that with every *damn* car that passes our front door but usually settles down after they pass, but this time he kept it up. So when I looked out the window, I noticed your exterior spotlight on the garage, was on. I guess it's on some sort of a motion detector. There was a car...no, a truck, parked in the driveway, one that I didn't recognize. I thought it might be a friend or a relative...so I didn't think anything of it," Tom says.

"Have you told anybody besides us about what you saw that night?" I ask.

"Nope...nobody asked," Tom says.

"Good. Keep it that way...at least until I have a chance to look into this further. I don't want to alarm you but don't open the door for anyone you don't know. Okay? Do you remember anything about the truck? The license plate number? How long was it there?" I ask.

"Are we in any danger Mick?" Dolly asks anxiously.

"No...as long as Teddy here's on duty. I doubt that anybody could get close enough...but just be on the safe side. Can you remember anything about the truck or the driver?" I ask.

"Well if the same truck comes around...he'll be staring at the business end of my 12 gauge. Yea...so anyway, it was black...a newer Suburban. Couldn't make out the plate but I could tell it was California by the color since we see so many across Stateline. Was there maybe half-an-hour then left...about an hour before you came home," Tom says.

"Were you able to make out anything about the driver...anything at all would be helpful," I say.

"No...sorry...never gotta look at 'em. The windows of the Suburban were tinted...black, ya know like a president's car. Vice-president Bush would call it a Texas Cadillac," he says with a grin.

"Anything else you can remember?" I ask.

"Well, there was one other thing. It had one of those roof thingies...like a black box but sorta sleek, ya know. It had large white letters on the side, started with a 'T' something...ended with an 'E'.

"Probably a THULE molded fiberglass roof box...very high-end, and very aerodynamic," Hawk interjects.

"Anything else, Tom?" I say.

"Not really...sorry Mick. So what are you going to do? Are you going to rebuild?" Tom asks.

"Tom...I'm not sure what I'm going to do. But I think I'll be gone...for quite a while. It'll take several weeks...if not months to totally resolve this with the insurance company. In the meantime, sorry for the eyesore. Here's my mobile phone number, in case you have to get a hold of me...or remember anything else. Okay? And thanks again, neighbor...for everything. You've been really helpful," I say writing my number down on a page of my spiral notebook, then tearing it out for him.

"Okay Mick. Good luck to ya...please stay in touch. You've always been a good neighbor. Dolly and I'd hate to lose you," Tom says with Dolly nodding in agreement.

"Well...I don't intend on letting that happen. Thanks again," I say as I rise, shaking Tom's hand and a returning a hug from Dolly. Hawk and I exit, and climb into the truck.

Well now...a lot to process. Maybe it is time to get out of Tahoe, so my mind can function free of the memories here, both the good...and the bad. I've got some serious reflection...and yes, some investigation to do. I'll have to decide whether I've got enough to go to the local police. Right now, with no concrete leads on the vehicle or the driver...it's pretty thin. They'd probably just dismiss me—postpartum grief...and survivor's guilt, and paranoia.

I'll wait until I can flesh it out a little better, then decide. Nothing more can be done here in Tahoe. I'd have to rent a place and start all over with everything...cooking stuff, clothes...everything, gone from the fire, except my toxic state of mind. All the negotiation with the insurance company on the settlement, on the house and contents, can be done by phone and mail.

"Okay. Where to *Kemo Sabe*?" Hawk asks.

"Well, Tonto...thought you'd never ask. Seattle...and make it snappy. The sooner I see Tahoe in the rear view mirror...the better. Besides F-redo is probably sitting on pins and uh...Space Needles, just waiting for your illustrious return," I say.

"You're a riot Alice...a regular riot," Ralph Cramden says.

"*Sheez*...what a grouch," says Ed Norton.

- Chapter 40 -

We check out the hotel, and by 2 PM we're on the open highway headed North for Seattle Washington. Gotta admit, *Gawd* it feels good to have Tahoe in the rear view mirror.

If there could be *any* good news in this, it is that everything I owned and I *considered* important, and *thought* mattered, is gone. I am essentially a *tabula rasa*, with no material or otherwise, encumbrances to define who I really am. But more importantly who...or what, I want to become.

Several days after the fire, I had been forced to totally re-tool my wardrobe. All my expensive custom tailored freak-sized 50 XLT suits, sport coats and slacks...gone. So I'm relegated to the Tahoe fashion sensibility of Levi red-tag and flannel shirts, with an alternate pair of hiking boots, the only things available in my size in Tahoe. It'd probably play like bumpkin-ville in Seattle, with its *True Black Gothic* look.

"Hey Koz...got any remorse...ya know like nostalgia about leaving Tahoe?" Hawk asks trying to make small talk on the long drive to Seattle to distract me from my grief.

"It's kinda bittersweet, but nah...I guess at some level, occasionally percolating to the surface, there's always been a deep sense of ambivalence about living in Tahoe. Such a dichotomy. The breathtaking beauty of it...the once pristine landscape before the invasion of the gaming corporations, then the real estate and timeshare developers, never far behind...with all the side dishes that come with it, including local governmental corruption and backroom dealing. The Casinos are the biggest single industry employer in Tahoe, on both sides of Stateline, Nevada and California, and they never let the respective local governments forget it," I say.

"Sounds sorta like the gaming equivalent of the one-factory rust belt mill town. Play by our rules...dance to our music. And if you ain't dancin' fast enough to our music...we'll take all our jobs and your economy with us," Hawk says.

"Yea...but it's all really a big bluff, for now at least. Gaming is only legal in Nevada...and since only 1978 Atlantic City New Jersey. Their options are actually very limited about location...or relocation, for now. But now there has been talk for quite a while of gaming venues being expanded...and legalized and built on sovereign Indian land, owned by various Native America tribes, managed by the large gaming corporations. It's now a real threat. So there's an uneasy but symbiotic relationship...mutual benefit, but very fragile. Sorta like the bully on the playground whose behavior is mean and predatory and even though you

find him contemptible, you dance to his tune to appease him...so as not to unnecessarily, at least, piss him off.

But it's a deal with the devil...the gambling...the prostitution and the drugs. And where there's gamblin', the huge potential for profit, one doesn't have to turn over many rocks, man to find the dark and sinister underbelly of organized crime. The inherent evil in the gaming industry...ruthlessly exploiting the expertly marketed jackpot mentality, the age-old hope of hittin' *the big one*. Slots are the biggest revenue source. Always...*just one more roll of nickles* for the addicted widowed and lonely blue-haired granny's suckin' on coffin nails, feeding the voracious slots their modest retirement nest egg...one nickel at a time."

"Lonely hearts...vulnerable to anything that can distract them from the crushing loneliness in their lives," Hawk says.

"Yeah...desperately seeking *some*, even if temporary joy in their miserable lives. More die from a lonely heart. Compulsive gambling, indivisible with substance abuse. The famous loss-leader casino buffets and free cocktails...all you can eat, drink...and lose, causing some serious pain and human misery including home foreclosures, destroying families under the guise of harmless entertainment," I say.

"*Jezus man*...you gotta a serious boil on your backside. Lance Boil...M-D, at your service."

"Thanks Doc...put it on my tab," I say.

So...like Las Vegas, only with pine cones, eh? Hmm...do I sense one of Koz's moral parables comin'?" he asks.

"Yea...sorry man. Already came and went. Interesting...until I said it out loud I guess I never realized how much it was buggin' me," I say.

"It's okay Koz. Time to jettison some baggage...and lighten your load, man. Go for it...you're on a roll," Hawk says grinning.

"And prostitution...Nevada is the only state of the 50 with legalized prostitution, with legal brothels not more than 20 miles from the state capitol, Carson City where the state legislators refuse to ban prostitution. Probably out of professional courtesy," I say.

"Hmm...the faint aroma of a business opportunity...of perhaps filling a vacuum in the marketplace?" he says sniffing the air.

"Yea...a male massage and escort service? I know you're just kiddin' but just in case, *Fogitabout-it!* Gay sex is a crime here. Some serious sodomy laws still on the books. Red-neck Nevada is still living in the Ol' Wild West, man. The wide-open, rugged individual John Wayne B-S, a mythic cowboy mentality...gay *gauchos* need not apply," I say

"So no pink necks, eh? Sounds like they're still stuck in the Fifties, man."

"Yea...the 1850s. Still the boom or bust mentality of the late 1800s, like Virginia City, 15 miles from the state capitol...the gold and silver mining boom town on top of the Comstock Lode of the 1860s.

The same strike-it-rich mentality that spawned the emergence of the gaming industry in Nevada," I say.

And even though Tahoe is where I had first met Marla Dyson while producing the telethon for ACT, after Marla's death just being there, now evokes within me, a rancid bitter after-taste. Because among other things, it is initially the path that eventually led to my involvement with ACT Inc., and Captain Ahab, one J. Murdock Mahoney.

As Pauly...and Marly had bitterly lamented—I too, was far from proud of the things I had done with...and for J. Murdock Mahoney. *I wish the hell I had never met that son-of-a-bitch...*

And Marla...*for you, babe*. I still have some unfinished *bidness* to conduct with Jace Mahoney. But I'll have to bide my time, until I can prove that he's behind Marly's death.

Then I will take great pleasure in personally administering Koz-assisted Karma to one J. Murdock Mahoney...for Marly, and yes, the kid, Trey Mahoney.

And it ain't over, *until I say it's over...*

- Chapter 41 -

I'd been staying with Hawk for about 6 months in Seattle until I could settle with the insurance company on the house and the contents including the production equipment. Thankfully I had a business equipment rider on the homeowner's policy.

In the end, after doing research on land values, it made more sense not to rebuild my lake view home, *Casa Nevada*, but instead demolish the remains, and sell the lot to a builder. This would allow me to move on—to make a clean break with Tahoe. Because of the stunning view, the lot was prime location. It still had a useable grandfathered foundation making it be immediately build-able. A virgin lot often required extensive and costly watershed environmental impact studies and mitigation measures. As a result, I had only listed it for two weeks when I got a full price offer. So I was now, physically and financially out of Tahoe. That with the proceeds from the insurance settlement for the contents including production equipment, gave me a nice little asset to move on and start over.

Hawk continued to work at Microsoft, but was getting burned out. Big time. Excessively long hours, not getting any fresh air, sunshine or exercise, being sedentary inside all day staring at a computer screen. With Body Mass Index of over 40, he was not flattered, or amused with his comparison to Orson Wells.

In the meantime, I had reconnected with Max Mesmer, President of Mesmer Strategies Inc. the political consultant I had met working with ACT Inc. when I was flirting with the position offered by Jason Mahoney as liaison with the Entrepreneurial Corporate Caucus, or ECC. That of course, never materialized. More later on that.

While in Seattle, Max started sending me production work for some of his clients. Because I was just starting out, my rates were very competitive, which was always a consideration for *Mesmerizin' Maxie*. Even though Max was not a bad guy, he could be a real pain in the ass to deal with. But he always paid his bills in full...and on time, somewhat of an anomaly in the production business. So I put up with his constant kvetching.

Some of my production work, the more edgy, *angry* political campaign stuff that I had written and directed that ran on network broadcast caught the attention of some national ad agencies.

I guess at some level because I was still *very angry* at the world, for having taken Marla from me, the anger found its outlet, and projected itself into the cynical scorched earth, but highly effective, political ads that I wrote, produced and directed. My dubious reputation

as a take-no-prisoners contract hit-man—a hired character assassin for the Media Mafia, was born.

Like the notorious Italian Mafia, or the Cosa Nostra, my peeps, the Media Mafia functioned below the radar, behind the curtain, manipulating and controlling the levers of power, defining the rules of engagement. If you “made” or a 'wise guy' insider, you were within the inner circle of power. The local politicians danced to your music, through intimidation, bribery and corruption, or they did not get 'elected'—an atmosphere of a constant tacit threat of 'sleepin' wit da fishes' if politicians attempted to confront the status quo.

With the media, that meant that the veracity of the message delivered to the public was often subservient to the interests of the messenger, or the clients, who created vast sums of revenue in advertising for the media conglomerates.

As government regulatory oversight of the hegemonic concentration of corporate media through mergers and acquisition was relaxed by the DOJ, and the FTC, large faceless corporations, the traditional gatekeepers of the sacred constitutional duty entrusted to the Fifth Estate, now controlled print and broadcast journalism, and therefore the shaping of content and its prioritization which began to have a profound effect on the perception and opinions of the *vox populi*.

Corporate media gradually began to commingle and conflate news and information with entertainment and celebrity in an effort to distract, dissemble and polarize news to increase ratings, and therefore the CPM, which translated into an obscene increase in advertising revenue. The advertisers, very large multinational corporations like Big Oil, and Big Pharma, could now heavily influence, if not control the news cycle, and suppress anything that was potentially harmful to their economic interest, oftentimes to the detriment of the media consuming public.

The huge multinational corporations including media, became political kingmakers...or assassins, through political contributions and control of the content and news cycle—more sanitary and sophisticated but no less sinister and effective as their heavy-handed Italian Mafia brethren. It redefined public moral hazard.

I began to get some jobs doing the creative including writing and directing TV commercials for Fortune 500 companies, hiring local contract production companies to do the actual shooting...then post-producing them myself at a contract post house which was often very expensive.

The work often required travel to New York and L.A., which gave me an opportunity to spend some time with friends, most of whom lived in Marina del Rey, Santa Monica or Malibu. So I got some much needed beach time. I really didn't mind the travel because the money was very good and frankly it was a good distraction from my occasional bouts with depression over the death of Marla Dyson.

Pretty soon I had more work than I could handle by myself, and by that time, Hawk was ready for a change. So he left Microsoft with a handsome stock portfolio—Microsoft got a huge bump in revenues and stock value after the release of Windows 2.0. So Hawk came to work with me as an equal partner.

We formed a production company in Seattle, but at some point we realized, that we'd need to have a bigger space to accommodate some of our production work, including having a sound stage for chroma keying and a high-end luxurious post-production suite, where the clients could come to view the actual production work, and sit-in on the edit decision process. Even though Hawk had little production experience, he was a quick study, and dove into the technology, like most endeavors with Hawk, with passion and intensity. Since production was rapidly evolving away from analog to a totally digital platform, his knowledge and facility with computers and software programming, would be a particularly invaluable asset as we migrated into the digital production age. He had particularly good innate creative instincts in editing...something that can be taught, but only to a degree.

Looking around Seattle, we found the cost of property, plus the remodel costs to create the kind of space necessary for a first class production and post-production facility, was prohibitive. Forget about new construction.

During our visit to the Pacific Northwest, I had remembered how Marla and I were smitten with Moody Seaport, a tony little maritime enclave about 100 miles North of Seattle right on Interstate 5...about an hour and a half away, a direct shot to Seattle and only about 45 minutes to Vancouver BC. Moody Seaport had its own airport with inter-connect service to SeaTac airport and Vancouver YVR airport.

About a year after Hawk and I had been doing business out of Seattle, during a lull from getting all our regional political and congressional campaign ads done, we decided to take a trip up to Moody Seaport, just to have a look around.

Studying the maps of the area, I had noticed a very large lake just a few miles East of the downtown corridor, called Cascadia Lake. We retraced the route Marla and I had taken almost two years earlier, through Skagit Valley, then taking the scenic Chuckanut Drive into the delightful Fairhaven area of Moody Seaport

When we arrived, I connected with a realtor that advertised they specialized in real estate around Cascadia Lake. The lake was unique, in that it was quite long and somewhat narrow, compared to Lake Tahoe. It was a beautiful decent sized lake about 12 miles long and 1 to 2 miles wide. Because it was essentially the reservoir for the City of Moody Seaport, the water was crystal clear, and the surrounding watershed was lush with native vegetation and cedar and fir trees, with spectacular fall colors from the Alder, Maple and Cottonwood.

After spending a few days, staying at a local B&B, Hawk and I both decided that Moody Seaport had some potential as an alternative to the high property costs, and cost of living of Seattle, along with the now infamous Seattle traffic, with an all too common major metropolis I-5 sig-alert, *overturned gas tanker on fire...watch out for flying shrapnel, craters...and body parts on the roadway*, often gridlocked at any time of day, much like Los Angeles.

So we decided to view several properties, to get some idea of property costs, running anywhere from one-third to one-half of Seattle for the same square footage in commensurate neighborhoods and amenities. About 12 properties later, after viewing assorted *bastard modern* to *neo-non-descript*, architectural nightmares, we realized that there was probably no existing structure that could incorporate the commercial and residential uses that I was looking for.

By the time I had spent all that money trying to renovate something, including extensively upgrading the electrical power, I could probably custom build from the ground up, including extra tall 7 foot door jamb. After 30 years, I was plenty tired of braining my gourd on 6'8" door jambs. I would design it to the necessary specs including more electrical capacity for studio lighting, with high ceilings for a light grid for the actual shooting studio, and with ample ventilation and air conditioning. Also, a complete high-end lavish post-production suite where the client could participate in the editing decision process. I would also include a complete two bedroom two full bath apartment, a nicely appointed perk for my clients to stay at when coming in town for production work.

Combining my business with my living space, included many benefits like no rent on studio space, and tax write-off advantages and on a busy day even if there was a little gridlock around the kitchen coffee pot, maybe a 2 minute morning commute—max.

Additionally, for the first time, I wanted a completely separate, dedicated workshop and studio, to seriously pursue my painting and sculpture, which I had put aside for far too long.

So we decided to look at undeveloped lots, instead of improved lots with dwellings. We finally came across a lot, right on Cascadia Lakefront on the Southwest Shore about 10 minutes from the downtown corridor of Moody Seaport, just about a mile from the Moody Falls park, with lovely water falls, arched by a beautiful indigenous sandstone bridge built during the Great Depression. There were miles of pristine hiking trails along Moody Creek, which ultimately emptied into Cascadia Bay.

It was a large lot with just a modest seasonal cabin on it, probably built in the post-war 50s when the country was experiencing record middle class prosperity and upward mobility. It was under an estate sale; the surviving widow had recently passed away, and the family wanted to liquidate the estate including all real estate holdings for

cash to divide up among the surviving children who all lived out of area, so it was priced to sell quickly.

The cabin, actually more of an elaborate boathouse was charming—it had some potential as a rental. With a little extra work, it would be big enough to give us a place to live while building the new structure. After the construction was complete, Hawk could stay there, since working together would be challenging enough so that we wouldn't be living on top of one another as well. Because he was still doing some work for Microsoft as an outsourced contractor and consultant, Hawk would keep his house in Capitol Hill in Seattle, which would also give us a base of operations in Seattle if we needed it.

After much discussion, we decided that I would buy the lot and build the production facility, workshop artist's studio and my residence on my own with the proceeds the insurance money and the sale of the lot in Lake Tahoe. The cost of the lot was about half of what I had received for the sale of the Tahoe lot, and construction costs, with the lower snow load requirement were about 30% cheaper. There would be enough money left-over to upgrade the existing a boat dock— deep enough for a keeled sailboat of about 30 feet. Hawk could live there rent free in the boathouse, until he made up his mind where he wanted to finally settle down.

So we closed the deal, and returned to Seattle, where I begin sketching out some ideas for a design. I had always had a keen interest in architecture, as I started out as an architecture major at UCB, so this was a creative challenge that I heartily embraced. Now that the building lot with the setting and sun exposure was identified, I begin designing it in earnest.

So after two months I had what I considered to be a good utilitarian design incorporating both commercial and residential elements, about 5,000 square feet. But my art studio was what I was most excited about; an additional 1,000 square feet of dedicated heated workspace with lots of additional electrical, including 220VAC for an arc welder.

Twelve foot ceilings, with many overhead light fixtures with lots of windows and three roll-up full size doors, which could be completely open in the summer months. Creative Nirvana.

So now the task was to get financing, and identify a licensed contractor, which would be required to get the construction loan. I breezed through the financing qualification because the loan to value was less than 30%.

The realtor, Vincent, *my friends call me Vinnie* Costanza who handled the purchase of the lot had a 'friend', Sonny, who also happened to be a builder who he represented as specializing in lakefront construction.

Thus, I embarked on Michaelangelo's Great Architectural Adventure; the Sistine Chapel it ain't, but it would prove to be a true test of one's faith in *gawd*.

It is not uncommon for victims of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder to block out a past trauma.

I don't remember much after the contract was signed with Santino Salvatore, La Seconda, *the second...you can call me Sonny...you know like the Sonny in the Godfather*. Even with his 2 inch cowboy cheaters, still a good foot shorter than *moi*. In our first encounter Sonny was like a male dog sniffing out the other, while not so subtly fingering the massive gold rope chain, focusing one's attention on his *Travolt-ing* furry chest, framed by an open Saturday Night Fever polyester shirt. Very Italian, with his own unique Early Disco-Napoleonic kinda look.

Besides making sure that I was aware of his manly bulging *bona fides* within the first 5 minutes volunteering, *yeah...in the good ol' days...lived in Alaska for nigh on 5 years...Kodiak, where I killed many a Griz*. Not shot, but *killed* leaving open the unspoken possibility of a *mano a mano* encounter with a Grizzly bear. A *paisan* Jersey boy ending up in Alaska? Hmm...the distinct whiff of a witness protection placement.

Not long after that joyous moment, *oh, by the way* Sonny announced, while he carefully caressed his perfect hair, that he had left wife number 2 of 22 years for a *very mature* 22 year old, and he could sure use an advance to enable him to get 2 tickets to see his girlfriend's favorite country singer. *Garth Brooks Tickets ain't exactly cheap...he enlightened*. The perfect preamble for my Homeric Home Odyssey below.

Always a quick study, it was at this point that I begin to suspect that I was being conned by a pro, coupled with the fact that he had christened his brand new 22 foot Cabin Cruiser *Koz-ation*, an apparent gift attribution. I was not flattered by the homage. I begin to sense a pair of patterns emerging, as he peeled out in his Corvette convertible with the personalized license plate "2 MUCH" serenaded with Sinatra's, I Gotta Be Me, blasting. About 2 weeks later, you guessed it, 22 days to be exact, she moved to Nashville to be closer to Garth.

2 bad.

But the good news is that Sonny had found religion to console him for the loss of his true love, and the nasty hit he took on his divorce. The bad news—after he had converted from Numerology to The Holy Church of the Rush, as with most new converts, he became a zealot, relentlessly preaching against the evils of The Great Satan, the Liberal with daily full-volume AM radio indoctrinations playing from the time he arrived at the job site until he broke for his typical two hour lunch and nap, exhausted from the emotional drain of absorbing the feverish

sermon of the day on how America was *going to hell in a hand basket...from the Commie liberals.*

The AM radio deity, Rush Limbaugh, uncomplicated Sonny's life immeasurably of all those messy little moral conundrums, replaced with much less complicated binary bumper sticker solutions: *Rush is Right...and Right is Right and Left is Wrong.* Under the circumstances, I thought it prudent to remain in the liberal closet until the project was completed, then invite the unsuspecting Sonny to a Tofu Burger Barbecue Coming Out House Warming Party with normal people.

"So...where's the beef, unh *paisan*?" muttered Sonny.

Ah, revenge is sweet, when served cold with no red meat. A true *Kodiak* moment.

After 2 weeks of his love-sick pining of love lost, no-shows and general malfeasance I'd finally had enough of Sonny the Builder's burlesque. So I made him a Godfather offer...one that he couldn't refuse. I wouldn't file a complaint with the state contractor's licensing board. And, I'd let him remain general contractor of record, pay him a fixed amount essentially for doing nothing other than the use of his contractor's license to satisfy the lender, if...and only if, he promised to never show up again. Not surprisingly, with feigned indignation, he countered with an obvious bluff *two-shay* demand for more than was offered. Sonny and I reached an amicable agreement, and I never saw him again until the day of the final building inspection almost a year later when he flew in *specialy* from Nashville, where he had 'relocated' now as Donato, *you can call me Donnie*, Antonio Morandi. *Jezuz...another Donnie.* Flashing his new business card...*DAM! Insurance Broker...my guess was if you don't pay up for protection, Broker becomes Breaker.*

Mick's Great Adventure like all great moral fables, needs to start by laying a proper foundation. There was no turning back...my fate was cast in cement. His name was Roy and he loved country music. His favorite: *My Baby Done Left Me in My Pickup Truck and Now I miss IT so much!* How do I know this? A cassette player with *auto-continuous-rewind-play auto-continuous-rewind-play auto continuous-rewind-play* is a dangerous, if not lethal instrumentality in the hands of a Man-child. By the time the foundation was done, I was ready to murder Boy Roy.

"Gotta a plumb bob", I innocently queried. "Ya mean Cuz'in Joe Bob? He don't work here no more." My guess is he jumped on the first Greyhound back to Bubbaville, to *ex-cape* from Boy Roy.

To Roy, a mason's level served no useful purpose other than it was the perfect Appalachia Chic accessory to compliment the rifle rack in his pickup. He kept beating on the level muttering something about *the damn bubble won't stay put in the middle.*

The Framer's name was Rob, a dropout from Trade Tech, *majoring in Technical Writing, with a minor in Major Eastern Religions*, he proudly announced. He elevated sophistry to a new level of

artistry. To him, the pre-job bid was a mere formality that was designed to get him the job. Rob never lost a job to a low bidder and he never finished a job below the high bidder.

To a Framer, a Change Order, a CO, is a more powerful tool of revenue than any other tool in his tool box. I begin to suspect that Rob was not a derivative of Robert, but more of a descriptive term of his business practices when the avalanche of CO's started. Not much of a Framer, but he was positively eloquent in his writings. "The Art of The Change Order"; he made The-Art-of-the Deal Donald Trump look like a chump. To add a small 2'0 x 4'0 window became a case of felonious "feng shui" to wit:

An architectural reconfiguration of the vertical structural members to positively amend to the ventilational capacity by eight square feet of the Southwest facing wall by means of the addition of a horizontal sill, supported by multiple cripples, a load bearing header of sufficient strength commensurate with the span which is supported on each end by a jack stud firmly affixed by multiple pneumatically injected 16p fasteners on each side to a king stud.

As your Framing/Feng Shui Facilitator I strongly urge you to consider the lifelong spiritual consequences of adding a yang without a corresponding yin in the form of another balancing window facing North.

which took longer to write than to actually do the work.

The plumber, whose charming and well-earned nickname was "Leaky" LeBrun pressure tested the system after the sheet rock was up and painted etc. Leaks? Does feces flow downhill? New meaning to the term "wet dream"...a wet nightmare.

The electrician aka "Sparky" ran several circuits in which he failed to furnish a circuit back to the breaker panel. Shocking you say?

The insulation guys aka "Larry, Moe and Curly" negligently wrapped a cold water supply line in an exterior wall so when the gas company failed to provide ample pressure/volume due to over-demand the plumbing froze and ruptured, trashing the hardwood floor and ceramic tile floor causing \$15,000 physical damage.

Ah...but the good news is that \$2,000 later, my analyst thinks my prospects for a complete and full recovery from *domicilus constructus traumati* are better than, uh...2 to one, as long as I avoid flushing the toilet in the master bath, while the lights are on.

- Chapter 42 -

New production work had ceased almost overnight just after the beginning of the Gulf War in Iraq in August of 1990. The phone had almost completely stopped ringing, and several clients had decided to postpone or cancel production work because of the precariousness of the economy over concerns that the flow of American's economic engine...the *black blood* from the Middle East would be disrupted.

An eerie air of collective apprehension had fallen over the country because of the uncertainty of the world economy. My reverie of images of Marla, was rudely interrupted when I was startled by the ringing phone, as it was coming up on the fifth anniversary of losing the love of my life, my Marla, in the explosion and fire of *Casa Nevada* in Lake Tahoe.

"Kozmick Productions," I answer hopeful that it's some new production work.

"*Bonjour Michel! Comment avez-vous été mon homme de la montagne?*" The familiar voice on the other end says warmly...*how have you been my mountain man?*

My gawd...that vivacious voice always twinged with a bit of irony. It could only be Annie Trudeau.

"Annie?" I ask in disbelief. We had not spoken since we had parted in Tahoe, when she had to returned to Los Angeles after our near disastrous run-in with the DEA at *Casa Nevada*.

I had never told Marla, that after about 6 months of our parting, Annie had started sending me long letters, the first of which were rambling almost incoherent apologies asking for my forgiveness, begging for a second chance. The rest were returned unopened, but they never stopped coming for almost a year. I guess that's when her male obsession with *moi*, was replaced another one—Jesus Christ.

"*Well...does anyone else call you my mountain man, mon chere? Hmm?*" the voice playfully says as if we had talked just yesterday.

I was in the midst of a profoundly nostalgic moment, bordering on bittersweet maudlin depression, lamenting my loss of Marla, as I usually do on the anniversary of her death. Hearing echos of what would turn out to be her foreshadowing dying declaration, *Mickey...I trust you...with my life, baby*. I had failed that trust so miserably, so completely, she had died a terrible death...because of me. *Gawd-dammit!*

I am filled with ambivalence on hearing the voice of a woman that I once had very strong feelings for, that I thought I knew and loved, intruding into my one man pity party.

"How did you get this phone number?" I rather ungraciously respond.

"Well I'm so glad to hear your voice too," the always irrepressible Annie says with a giggle.

"Yea...sorry 'bout that. I was someplace else, way far away, when the phone rang," I say still flooded with conflicted emotions on hearing her voice stirring memories of our very serious relationship which ended with revelations of her consummate capacity for deception, toward me in particular, when I had discovered that she had been involved in dealing drugs, despite her intense assurances to the contrary.

Had I not received a tip-off call from my friend at El Dorado County Sheriff, Randy Benson that the DEA was on the way over to execute a search warrant that morning, I'd probably still be stamping license plates as a guest of the state of Nevada.

*Of all the gin joints in all the towns in all the world, she walks into mine...*says Bogey, when he learns that his ex-lover from Paris, another *femme fatale* who had deceived to him, is back in his life, the also vulnerable, also *very* beautiful Ingrid Bergman. Yes...there were some alarming similarities between Annie and Elsa. I'm filled with the same kind of conflicted feelings of apprehension and attraction—my lingering unquenchable appetite to immerse myself in the same wholesome beauty.

It caused me to revisit my strong physical and emotional connection I once had with Annie Trudeau. One of the last conversations Marla and I had had about our relationship moving on to the ultimate level of commitment centered on her apprehension and anxiety about whether I was over my deep feelings for Annie Trudeau. I remembered at the time, that the mere mention of her name by Marla had caused within me an inexplicable upwelling of emotion. *Where the hell did that come from...I thought I was over her.*

"Where are you calling from?" I ask.

"I'm in Seattle. Oh...and I got your phone number from your neighbor Tom. When I went by your old house to look you up about a month ago, he remembered me, and gave me your phone number. He told me about your house...and Marla. I somehow always knew you and Marla would end up together. I'm so very sorry for your loss," Annie says almost mechanically.

"Thank you for that heartfelt condolence. Why Seattle?" I ask with a tone of sarcasm...and wariness.

"I'm here with Y-W-A-M, Youth With A Mission, I work in administration, for the past year...one of our ships, of the Mercy Ship ministry the Africa Mercy has put into Seattle shipyards for some maintenance and repairs," Annie says.

"YWAM? Sorry...never heard of it," I say.

"Of course not. Mick when I returned home to my family, I realized that my life wasn't working for me. All of my family had

converted to Evangelical Christians. They were on fire with the Lord Jesus Christ. I had a born-again experience when I went to see Reverend Billy Graham with my family at the L.A. Coliseum...with 60,000 other seekers of the Gospel of Christ.

It was then that I walked down the isle with thousands of other lost souls, and said the sinner's prayer of repentance...

Dear Lord Jesus, I know that I am a sinner, and I ask for Your forgiveness... I believe You died for my sins and...

I impatiently interrupt her, "Well...*Hallelujah* for you! Annie," I say with no small twinge of sarcasm.

"*And thanks for your heartfelt...uh condolences as well,*" she says with a giddy laugh.

"No offense intended...just heard this all before with you Annie. So what's with the ship. Some sort of Christian Love Boat kinda deal? " I ask, getting more and more annoyed with the sermonette.

This is the same gullible Annie Trudeau who started out as Roman Catholic, then made the religious rounds, first stop Scientology with the same rabid fervor, then Buddhism, and *gawd only* knows what else, before finally landing on the board with Evangelical Christianity. I'm sure due in no small part to her immersion in the proselytizing Christian culture of her family.

"*Ha...yea, I guess you could say that. Actually, if you're truly interested in Youth With A Mission, we send missionaries throughout the world, including the hospital ship African Mercy...to preach the Gospel, to literally and spiritually heal by giving free surgeries for things like cleft palate...and the Good News, about salvation through Christ,*" Annie rotely recites as she had with the Scientology dogma. I begin to wonder if it is indicative of some kind of a character flaw that allows people to mercurially jump from one ideology or religion...or relationship to another? If so, then maybe Annie and I *were* meant for each other?

"What? You passed on Paganism? My favorite *ism* right after hedonism. Got something against Pagans? Cavorting in the moonlight bare-ass naked around the ol' bonfire...howling at *la luna*?" I ask.

"*Well now ya tell me...sounds like something you and I could have shared...a special Pagan Eros connection kinda deal, which I'm assuming ends with wild, animalistic sex?*" she says not missing a beat. Still disarmingly charming and as quick with the *bon mot* as the night I rescued her on that mountain after her near fatal accident, *eh ma cherie*?

"Never too late..." leaps out of my mouth.

"*Well if I thought it could bring us back together...I'd be willing to give it a serious try,*" she says with a twinge of earnest.

Well there it is. So this is not just a social, *hey, howa-doin'* call. The crazy thing is deep down, I'm diggin' the idea of seeing her again

and making love to her, as it's been many years since I'd been intimate with a woman, any woman, since I lost Marly. I now realize that I had never totally been able to put Annie in the rear view mirror. A vague outline in the distance had always remained, with me in denial about it. Do women in fact have *another level* of knowing? Is that what Marla was sensing?

Is it possible to love two, or more women with equal fervor simultaneously like I had with Sora Eagle Feather, that special one that I had let get away. Followed by Annie. And now the guilty memory of Marla starting to seep in with the rekindling of desire for Annie Trudeau. What a piece of work is *man*...as the deeply conflicted Prince of Denmark notoriously remarked.

Other than an occasional one-nighter after drinking myself stupid to try to forget how I had lost Marla...yea, I'd been tempted a few times, but nothing serious, something always pulled me back from the brink—the haunting images of her last minutes with me.

And Annie Trudeau is no ordinary woman, *my gawd*, we both had the same voracious appetite for each others' body. For one of the few times in my life I'm at a loss for a comeback as my imagination launches into full-blown erotic fantasy mode with Annie.

"Hello? Still there, Mickey?" she asks giggling.

Hmm...*Mickey* her favorite nickname for me back then. Is she just having fun with me, messin' me with the flirting? Or is she seriously making an overture to see me, and...

"Yeap...still here. Haven't been there...done that...for quite a while. Be careful what you wish for uh...*ma cherie*," I say.

"*Mickey*, I'd really like to see you again. I don't have access to a car. Can you come down to Seattle just to say hello...ya know...for old times sake? I love to see you."

"How long are you in town for?" I ask.

"Not really sure. The ship will probably be here for at least two weeks. I'd normally be staying on the ship while it's docked. But maybe you could show me around Seattle and perhaps even where you live now," she says coyly.

Gawd she's good...very good. Still knows where all my hot buttons are, even the hidden ones after losing Marla.

"Okay if I bring an ol' friend, *Monsieur Wilson*?" I say not believing what is coming out of my own mouth.

"*Oui...bien sur! Sil vous plait!...my special ami, Monsieur Wilson, whom I have missed on many a dark and very lonely night*," she says again with that impishly charming giggle.

"Would you prefer that I just send *le monsieur*...or is it okay if I tag along?" I ask.

- Chapter 43 -

After a full day of showing Annie Seattle, the usual sites, *tourista* stuff including the Space Needle and Pike Market, then an intimate candlelit dinner with lots of wine at Marco's in Belltown, we arrive at Chez MAK in Moody Seaport very late that night. She's wearing *Amirage*, not overpowering, not too obvious...just subtle enough to get my undivided attention, which doesn't take much with Annie. It's still one of my favorite scents. An instant aphrodisiac *pour moi* as well, not that I...or *le monsieur* have anything to say about it. Like I said. She's good...very good.

All day the air has been filled with building sexual tension and expectation with increasing touching and affection. When we arrive at *Chez MAK*, it's almost 1 AM. I carry her upstairs to the master bedroom. With no verbal foreplay or pretense of reservation, wordlessly we find ourselves ripping off each others clothes with passionate desperation.

My *gawd*...she's even more beautiful than I had remembered, with the lithe hard muscles of an athlete, including her flat firm abs accentuating her svelte waist. Within seconds, I shamelessly surrender any notions of reservation or restraint. I'm just along for ride as *le monsieur* takes over from there...again.

The lovemaking goes on for several hours, with a few rejuvenating lapses into a half-sleep dream state, followed by more indeed Pagan animalistic consummation, our bodies vibrating in perfect synch in hyper-arousal.

Multiple orgasms punctuated by nipping and clawing, filled with groans and gasps of ecstasy, ending with both of us drenched in a full sweat. *New meaning to the term pent up demand*. Even after over five years, it's like we've never been apart. But I'm immediately filled with ambivalence. With no small twinge of guilt I realize that Marla was probably always right about Annette Trudeau. A sense of conflict begins to creep into my consciousness. *I need to dial this back, now. Dammit man*, show some restraint and self-control, before this gets out of control. *So now what? I'll sleep on it...*

In the morning when I awaken, I find Annie's back nestled again my chest with my arms around her, my hand resting on her beautiful full warm breasts. The long ago but familiar scent of our lovemaking permeates the sheets and the room. Raising her long lustrous hair from her neck...the lovely scent of *Amirage* still lingers. I gently place a wet kiss on the nape of her neck as I had done so many times before. She is immediately aroused out of a deep sleep. We kiss deeply, passionately,

:: Michaelangelo's Renaissance — m.a.kominsky ::

and it starts all over again. So much for self-control...guess *le monsieur* didn't get the memo.

- Chapter 44 -

By mid-morning, we're in the shower together, playfully fooling around a little, like we had always done in the past after a night of fervent lovemaking. It feels so familiar and natural to have Annie in my space. *My gawd*, it's as if she had never left. At about noon we finally make our way downstairs to the kitchen, with Annie wearing my bathrobe. We're both ravenous.

"Any special requests for breakfast?" I ask.

"Sure...I'd like a Big MAK...with nothin' on it."

"That'll have to be lunch. How 'bout some eggs. I can make you one of the many specialties of Chez MAK....a LEO...Lox, eggs and onions in an omelet or scramble, bagels and creme cheese, and coffee," I say

"Sounds *de-vine*. Scramble...and coffee *sil vous plait*."

"Deal. While I'm playing chef, why don't you put on some music for breakfast. Coffee's on the way, baby," I say.

As I watch the back of Annie going through the CD's, seemingly perfectly at ease and comfortable in my space, her long ropey hair still wet, glistening over the collar of my ochre terry cloth robe which almost perfectly matches her large luminous lupine eyes, I have a brief nostalgic episode of our time in Tahoe, before the *big revelation*.

Then as the music starts and her graceful body starts to sway to the rhythm of a love ballad...*my gawd*, it's Lionel Richie's Endless Love. The same music we had made love to so many times before. A song, that somehow had sacred meaning just for Annie and I, that I had never listened to with *any* other woman...including Marla.

*My love,
There's only you in my life
The only thing that's bright*

*My first love,
You're every breath that I take
You're every step I make*

*And I want to share
All my love with you
No one else will do...*

By now the coffee is ready. I turn down the heat in the skillet with smoked salmon and onions sauteing, and pour out two cups, add

creme to hers as I had remembered, walk over and placing the coffee down, reach around from the back, untying the draw on the robe exposing her lovely breasts, and place my hands under the open robe cupping her warm breasts and then sliding one hand down her taut stomach, and begin to stroke her inviting moist mound gently. While swaying back and forth, she leans back into me.

"I'm Mick...I'll be your server this morning. Can I get you started uh...on a beverage? Coffee?" I whisper in her ear.

"Remember this song, *ma amour*? It was *our* song...long ago," she coos.

"Still is...Endless Love...just our song," I whisper.

She turns to face me.

"Oh Mickey...this feels so right. I have a confession to make. I am truly sorry that you lost Marla...especially the way it happened. But...and you'll probably think I'm a terrible person...I'm not sorry to have you back in my life. *My gawd*...I've missed you *soooo* much. *Je t'aime ma cherie*...I've never stopped," Annie says throwing her arm around my waist burying her face in my chest.

The mere mention of Marla's name somehow causes my body to stiffen, and retreat from the embrace which Annie senses immediately.

"Oh Mickey...I'm so sorry to have said that. *Dammit*...I've ruined the moment. I was so overcome with emotion, it's been bottled for so many years...since we parted, I just had to let it out," Annie says, her lips starting to tremble as her eyes tear up.

"It's okay Annie. Here...have some coffee. Let's have some breakfast, we can talk about the other stuff later. Okay?" I say stiffly.

I guess the mention of Marla name had reeled me back to the reality of the moment and the situation with Annie. Despite my repression of the fact this was the woman whom I had once deeply loved, she had betrayed my trust. Big time. Almost causing Annie...and I, as collateral damage to get pulled into the deep vortex of the dark underbelly of the selling of drugs in Lake Tahoe, narrowly eluding prosecution and probable conviction for running a criminal enterprise, worthy of some pretty hard time.

As we sit down to eat our breakfast, she grasps my hand, bows her head, " Bless us, O Lord, and these your gifts, which we are about to receive from your bounty. Through Christ our Lord. Amen." releasing my hand with a squeeze.

Then there's that...to deal with too. Or not...

Annie had been staying with me for almost two weeks, with long discussions into the night about the past, the present and eventually the future. Because of the economic slow-down from the Gulf War, there is little or no production activity. Hawk was staying down in

Seattle doing some consulting for Microsoft, which gave me an opportunity to spend some undistracted time with Annie.

She seems genuinely contrite and deeply ashamed about not having been truthful with me about her more than passive involvement with the selling of drugs in Tahoe.

There is still an undeniably deep emotional and physical connection with her which I guess was probably always there...and always would be. Some of which was perhaps due to the deep psychic connection one shares with someone, in a life and death situation, as we had that dark night of the *great blizzard* up on that mountain on that deserted highway, where I had fortuitously come along, rescuing her from a certain cold and lonely death after she had gone off the road.

"So Annie, when do you have to be back to the ship?"

"It looks like the ship will be ready for departure within two or three days. So I guess I should be thinking about getting back for staff meetings in preparation for the voyage. Looks like we're headed for the Dominican Republic...with a high incidence of HIV patients. Oh Mickey...little innocent babies born with HIV...it's so tragic. And they just keep popping them out. Sometimes it makes me want to rethink the whole idea of abortion. These poor children...they have little or no future," she says.

"So how long will you be gone be this time?"

"Probably be there at least 6 months. *Gawd* there's just so much misery in the world. Sometimes I just don't know how much more I can bear to see!" she says tearing up.

"Annie...do you *really* want to go back to the ship?" I ask

"What are my options, Mickey? I'm pretty much a girl without roots...or a home. I thought that it would be a great adventure to be on a ship...helping third world people who have no access to any kind of meaningful medical care, and in the process, spreading the word of the Gospel. But after spending this time with you here...of experiencing some happiness and joy in my life for the first time in over five years, I'm not so sure I'm up to it anymore. For every person...every child we help, there are *thousands* more behind them...dying. Honestly, I sometimes wonder if it would be more humane if we never showed up. We preach the Gospel...take care of a very small percentage of the ill, giving them some sense of hope in their lives, then dashing that hope when we leave," she says.

"I think that anytime you do the right thing for the right reasons, especially helping the weak and powerless among us...it's a good thing. Even though you can't save everybody...physically and I guess spiritually, that's no reason not to try," I say

"Why Mickey...you sound almost like a closet Christian!" she says.

"Annie, you don't have to be a Christian...to do the right thing. Frankly it sounds like you might be ready to jump ship, *ma cherie*?" I say.

"Ha...jump...like where? Overboard?" she asks.

"Well, maybe there's a slightly more attractive alternative," I say.

"Like?"

"Well, you could stay here with me, for a while, at least until you and I...can figure some things out. I'd be willing to entertain the idea of some kind of a trial period for us...say 6 months. But I have to be honest with you Annie. I've still got some scar tissue from our last time together. And I have some serious flashbacks...and bad episodes over the death of Marla. Frankly, I'm not quite sure I'll ever quite get over losing her...especially the way it happened. I feel like if it wasn't for me she might still be alive today." I say.

"Oh Mickey...I can't even imagine how difficult it was for you. I'm...truly, so sorry," Annie says.

"And just so you know, I'm just biding my time...for payback on that human piece of garbage that took her life...some unfinished business with Captain Ahab. When I've got the conclusive proof I need...there will be hell to pay for anyone...and everyone connected to her murder. So when the right time comes...without warning, I may have to be gone for a while. It's something that I personally have to do with my own hands...not just for Marla, but for me, to close that chapter in my life. I...I have no choice," I say.

Annie fleetingly registers concerned surprise in her eyes by the ferocity of my declaration of vengeance, then it's gone.

"Okay Mickey. I guess understand. But in the meantime I'd like us to try to live in the present. Okay? I guess, from the first time we were together, I had always hoped that we could make a good life together. I've never really been able to let go of that dream. This past two weeks have been so wonderful...so filled with hope. So yes...I do want to stay with you...and to prove to you that I'm even a better person than the one you loved then," she says falling into my arms.

I wrap my arms around her, and hug her tightly, then release her, and cradling her face in my hands, her lovely lips part, and we kiss deeply.

"Annie, there's one other thing we need to discuss," I say.

"Okay...anything. I'm just so happy I can't stand it," she says beaming.

"While I respect your right to your beliefs...and the practice of your religion...I want you to understand that I *cannot...will not* be expected to participate in your religious life. Like I have no problem with you saying grace before meals...just don't me expect me to join in, okay?" I say holding her squarely by the shoulders.

"Agreed Anything else we need to discuss before we make love?" she says smiling.

"As a matter of fact, yes...it'd probably be more fun, for me at least, if you were willing to have an open mind about my religious Pagan rites. Ya know Christianity had its roots in Paganism, so it would be like returning to the source...but without that whole Catholic guilt trip. If you're a little squeamish about the animal sacrifice part...just to demonstrate my ability to compromise, you can go shopping or whatever." I say.

"How 'bout after breakfast, we get started on my conversion...like *tout suite*. Mind if we skip the moonlit cavorting...and go straight to the animalistic sex?" she says.

I think this is the beginning of a beautiful relationship...again.

The next day, we drive down to Seattle for Annie to give notice that she will not be continuing on the *Africa Mercy* to the Dominican Republic with the rest of the Pilgrims, and to pick up the rest of her clothes and various spare belongings from the ship.

The leadership of YWAM is not at all happy with her decision. They desperately try to get her to reconsider. First a full-blown attempt at instilling guilt for deserting her post, as if she was abandoning a sinking ship...ahead of the women and children. When all that fails, they finally bring out the Big Closer, invoking the name of Jesus Christ, and doing the Lord's work.

In a last ditch effort, to exorcise the Koz demons she has recently acquired, they form a circle around her, holding hands they intensely begin to pray, some might say prey...over her, some *speaking in tongues*. Hmm...very Pagan-ish.

I remain silent the whole time I am witnessing this exorcising exercise. I realize that although I applaud the good intentions of the ministry, that even though they do good works helping many disadvantaged and gravely ill folks, especially children, it does not come without strings attached—they must first hear and acknowledge the message of the Gospel. There is an unsettling undercurrent of cultishness in their zeal.

During the entire exit interview, they barely acknowledge my presence, occasionally casting their eyes upon me with the obvious disgust and disdain as some Satanic, corrupting influence on Annie.

On the way back home, I say, "Annie...are you going to be okay with this?"

"Yea...fine. I actually feel a big sense of relief of being off that damn boat...the constant smell of diesel exhaust fumes in the oppressively hot, confining tiny quarters. Thanks for being there Mickey. If I'd been alone I might have faltered," she says.

"Hungry?" I ask.

: : *Michaelangelo's Renaissance* — *m.a.kominsky* : :

"Ravenous...and I could sure use a good stiff drink...or three," she says.

"Deal. As your Satanic Enabler, Anthony's Fish House on Alaska Way has a killer happy hour...coming up on our starboard, *matey*."

- Chapter 45 -

"Mickey, do realize that at the stroke of midnight, January first 2000 the Millennium Bug could totally cripple...demobilize the entire world. Total chaos...the Apocalypse ending with Second Coming of Jesus Christ. It's Biblical eschatology, Mickey...The Book of Revelations...and it's the final book of the New Testament. What does that tell ya?" Annie says.

It was June of 1999, and Annie and I had recently gotten married.

"Those *damn* Pharisees again. Not much has changed except they took the wardrobe upgrade from Aramaic...to Armani. The more things change...the more they stay the same." I say.

"*Oui ma cherie*. But Mickey, I'm really serious about this...please don't make fun of me!" she says with a rare earnest.

"Okay, Annie. But maybe you could explain to me how this whole Apocalypse thing is going to unfold? There are 24 different time zones on the planet. That's right...one for each hour of the day.

The Earth rotates from the west towards the east. As viewed from the North Star or polestar Polaris, the Earth rotates counter-clockwise. So when it's midnight here Pacific Standard Time..." I say.

"Your point?" she interrupts impatiently.

"My point is a simple one of facts...common sense based on science, unless one still believes that the earth is flat, and that the sun revolves around it...which should be settled science even in the mind of the Reverend Robertsons' of the world," I say.

"Well you don't have to be sarcastic about it. Mickey...I'm scared for us...and really scared for my family in Southern California," she says

"So again, when the clock strikes midnight in the Pacific Time Zone, midnight has already come and gone like 8 hours earlier, in London, at the International Date Line, a human construct what they call GMT or Greenwich Mean Time.

So help me out here...*whose* midnight? Is the Lord working his mysterious ways on GMT? When it's midnight and theoretically the Apocalypse is devastating London, it's 4 PM from San Diego California all the way up to Seattle and Vancouver BC, including here in downtown Moody Seaport. So things here will just be normal...hunky dory? What? A Rolling Apocalypse?" I ask.

"Yea...I uh...guess so. And don't try to confuse me with facts, Mickey. This is about faith...*So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen, since what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is*

eternal...Corinthians 4:18...and 2 Corinthians 5:7 For we live by faith, not by sight," she rotely recites.

"Well hell, if this is true, then we've got an extra eight hours to party hearty before the end of the world. Hey...in honor of the Coming Apocalypse, here's a new dance step that I just put together for the special occasion...it's called the Apo-calyps-o...to a Calypso back beat," I say while busting a move ending with rather spiffy three-sixty spin with outstretched arms and, "*Ta da!*"

"Not funny...Mickey! I had hoped you could understand and honor my faith in this. But obviously you cannot. Honestly, I'm not surprised." she says with a tone of bitterness.

"Ah...I see. A pattern of religious intolerance by *moi*? For what it may be worth, I've talked with Hawk about this. As you know...he is among other things a savant when it comes to computers. Do you even know what's causing this Y2K craze?" I ask.

"Pat Robertson says it's all about Biblical prophesy," she says.

"Ah...again I see. I didn't know they knew about computers back then. Now that's what I call some *serious* prophesy. Maybe if God's Main-Man Moses had a laptop...could've skipped lugging around that whole cumbersome stone tablet thing?

Actually, there's nothing Biblical about it, except maybe the Biblical proportions of hype surrounding it. Y2K is simply being caused from the inability of the firmware chips of many older computers along with software programs, to accommodate the change in the year date field from 1999 to 2000. All very fixable," I say

"Maybe so...but it's all pre-ordained! It's in the Scripture...and Mom and Dad are preparing the family for the Rapture," she counters.

"Sorry to disappoint you, babe, but the Hawkster assures me that while this whole Y2K thing initially had *some* merit, the reality is that it will be a big fat non-issue. That the media is exploiting the hell out of it...just to make a quick buck," I say.

"Okay...I can see you don't have an open mind. So...let's just drop it. Okay?" she says.

I can see you don't have an open mind?

Annie had continued to be untruthful to her family that we were living together, because of the pressure she knew would be imposed by her Mother and Father for 'living in sin'. She rebuked overtures for visits by her family, for fear of they would discover that we were actually living together. She had fabricated this elaborate narrative that she was merely working with Kozmick Productions, which at some level became unsettling for me—that she was still capable of perpetrating such consummate deception. Again. The red warning light on the dashboard was starting to flicker.

It finally all came to a head, when her Mother and Father had announced that they were going to come up for a visit in a month,

preparatory to the impending Y2K. A kind of farewell tour, before the Apocalypse. Period.

"Mickey...Mom and Dad are really putting pressure on me for a visit. I don't think I can put them off any longer. I think they suspect that we're living together. I don't know what to do," she says.

We had been discussing marriage on and off up to that point. Because she was so distraught, my love for her had overruled my reservations about getting married.

"Okay Annie. If it'll resolve the situation...I guess I don't have a problem with us gettin' spliced, *matey*...if that would make you happy," I say.

We had quiet civil ceremony with Hawk in attendance. More of formality really. When her parents would show up it would be, "*Surprise...Mick and I eloped.*"

Annie had been working with Hawk and I at Kozmick Productions, answering the phone, scheduling and coordinating production jobs, and taking care of the accounts payable and receivable. With her disarming charm and light and airy disposition, she was a natural at diplomatically requesting payments on overdue invoices, always a major problem with production clients, who somehow were always in a state of emergency to get the production done like yesterday, yet placed our invoices at the bottom of their priority list.

For a whole year leading up to the Date of Big Denouement, the evangelical Christian community was being inundated with books and videos on the coming of uh...the Second Coming from Y2K, like the national best-seller *The Millennium Bug*. Annie was being feed a steady diet by mail of the books and VHS recordings of the 700 Club from her family, and as December 31st 1999 drew closer, each one more urgent and alarming than the one before.

The satellite delivered electronic church, Christian Broadcast Network or CBN, originated by Southern Baptist Pastor, televangelist and President Pat Robertson, was taking in enormous donations and selling Y2K related 'survival' books and videos, at record pace. Quite a nice little revenue stream, a not-so-sacred profit motive.

Annie and her family were absolutely rapt in front of the TV with a daily dose of Apocalyptic updates from the 700 Club on CBN, zealously hosted by former candidate for U.S. President in 1988, Reverend Robertson himself.

Up to this point, Annie and I had managed to get along well enough, without her practice of Christianity causing any serious friction between us. Live and let live until the closer we got to Y2K, when that dramatically began to change.

"Mickey...I think we should get all our money out of the banks before it's too late. Mom and Dad, said that Pat Robertson's been telling Christians on the 700 Club, on TV, that Y2K will cause a massive bank

failure...like the Great Depression of 1929. They've been slowly pulling all their money out...so as not to attract any attention. In cash," she says.

"Really. And exactly what are they doing with all this cash...hiding it in the mattress, like the last place a thief would look?" I ask.

"Nope...they're not stupid, ya know. They've been hiding it in the backyard... safely buried in unsold Amway Tupperware laundry soap canisters after pouring the soap out, of course.

"Of course. Hmm....new meaning to hiding laundered money?"

"Ha...ha...very funny. They said we should be doing the same thing. Unless we get our money out in time...we could lose all of it!" Annie says.

"Ah...so that Amway dealership with all those cases of unsold Amway detergent in the garage finally found a uh...*divine* purpose...heavenly revelation and fate. Annie...we've been through this so many times now. And frankly it's getting very tiresome rehashing this some old...same old," I say with no small degree of exasperation.

"Mickey...Mom and Dad think that we should come down next week for the holidays to be with the family...for Christmas and ushering the New Year. Can we get away? What do you think?" she asks.

"Sure...I think that would be fine. But without the *we*. As you know Christmas has never been a big deal for me. Just another crass commercialization of a religious event. And...I'm guessin' your family would like you to be there to ring in the Rapturous Y2K," I say.

"Sometimes you can be so uh..." she starts to say.

"Skeptical...you were about to say?"

"Well honestly...a little stronger than that..."

"Don't confuse healthy skepticism with cynicism," I say.

"Okay, are you sure you don't mind if I go?" she asks with an air of relief.

"*Bien sur!* Positive. Annie, frankly, it seems to me that we've kinda reached somewhat of a crossroads in our relationship...again. I think this whole obsession with Y2K has revealed some major, perhaps insurmountable differences in core values...and world view. Take as long as you need to sort things out. It'll give us both a chance to decide where we want to go from here," I say.

"Mickey...are you saying that our relationship might be on the line because of my dedication to Christ?" she says with more than a twinge of confrontation.

"Annie...I'm saying that all this irrational...wild pandemonium over Y2K, and your unwillingness to entertain any alternative views about it, has brought it to the surface. Frankly, it creates for me some serious conflict about priorities...that up to now I've been able to transcend because of my love for you. But to paraphrase your Bible...*one cannot serve two masters*. I am not asking you to renounce

your faith...your Christian religion...or your family. That would be unfair."

"Well...how generous of *you*," she says with a bite.

"Think nothing of it. And it is also unfair that you would expect me to follow, what I consider to be blind faith that flies in the face of all rational and reasonable thinking, which frankly I'm beginning to doubt will probably ever change over time. Your assertiveness bordering on obsession about this whole Y2K deal...and our finances, long term, I think is capable of causing some serious repressed hostility...for both of us, and harm to the relationship," I say.

"Oh...Mick, I won't go if you think it's that serious. Please...I don't want to lose you...again," she says.

"And I don't want to put our relationship on the line either...but this has been building up now for several years with you becoming more and more strident in the expression of your beliefs each year. And your practice of them toward me, in no small part from your family's uh...forceful input...to try to convert me to a *believer*.

So I think it's better that we deal with this...sooner than later. I don't want to have to continually defend my reasons, to wrangle incessantly, for not being willing to make irrational decisions on things like our financial assets based on some, I'm sorry to have to say, blind allegiance to some reactionary religious thinking. So yea...I think we both need to take a step back. Okay?" I say."

"My gawd...I had no idea you were so offended by the practice of my faith! It's not fair! That's religious discrimination!" she cries.

"Fair? Discriminatory? Oh *please* Annie. Let's not turn this into some Constitutional crisis. This is just between you...and me. Not anyone else, most especially not your Mother and Father, and their uh...profound influence on your thinking. I think enough has been said on the matter...for now.

Besides, if Rev Robertson and the Evangelicals are right about their prophesy of the Second Coming Apocalypse...and the Rapture, leaving behind all the heathen non-believers like *moi*, it sorta makes this whole discussion moot. 'Cause you and your family are outta here...*sans moi*," I say with a smile.

"Okay Mickey. But you don't have to be so condescending. I can see you're harboring some hostility toward me, my family...and our faith. So I think I'll just take up Mom and Dad's offer to visit for the holidays. I'll probably drive down in the next few days. Okay?" she says coolly.

Harboring some hostility toward me, my family and our faith? Jesus...is it hopeless trying to reason with this kind of logic?

"Okay Annie. If that slant on this works for you...if you honestly believe that...well...

If you like, we can talk on the phone...or not. I'll definitely miss you, baby. And please give my best wishes to your family...for a speedy and smooth uh...ascension. Okay? Settled?" I say.

"Okay...okay, I get it. Settled. I'll miss you too...but I guess it's for the best...for now at least," she says with resignation.

- Chapter 46 -

"Mickey...it's getting close to midnight. I just wanted to call to tell you that when the Lord takes us to up to heaven, that I love you...and that it's not too late for you to say the sinner's prayer...to give your life over to our Lord Savior Jesus Christ. You can still be saved...so you can be with me and my family...in heaven," Annie says on the phone from L.A. at 11:30 PM on December 31, 1999, the eve of Y2K. Annie had been down in L.A. with her family for the past two weeks, in preparation for the Great Rapture.

"Annie...thanks for the heads up. So I've got about 30 minutes to choose between the everlasting ecstasy of heaven...or eternal damnation in the fires of hell? Cuttin' it kinda close aren't we?" I say.

"There's still enough time. I can bring you to the Lord...right now!" she says.

"So...if I did decide to take the plunge uh...the pledge, how does the Lord know that I'm sincere...not just hedging my bets?" I ask.

"The Lord knows...after all the Lord is omniscient. He knows everything...what's in everyone's heart," she says.

"And don't forget the other omni's."

"Sorry?" Annie says.

"Omnipotent and my personal fav...omnipresent. He's probably listening in right now...so he knows deep down how I feel. Even if I was willing to try, I couldn't bluff da Man. Annie, I'm so sorry...but I can't do this anymore. I know in your heart you truly believe in all this...that you're doing this out of love for me, and I'm deeply touched by it. But I can't pretend to believe in something that I really don't...for you, or anyone else," I say.

"So Mickey...that's your final decision? That's how much I mean to you...that you couldn't even do this for me...for us?" she says.

"What kind of person would I be...and over time...what would you think of me, if I was willing to go along with this...to live a lie, a deception just to make you happy...to cover my ass, just in case this whole Rapture fiasco has a chance in *hell* of happening? How could you ever trust me...or even respect me, if I did. In the end, no matter how we much love each other, I guess with us, it's always been, and always will be, about trust...*mutual* trust," I say indirectly and not-so-subtlety raising my concerns about her own capacity for deception.

"Oh...Mickey. I guess you have never really been able to forgive me...for Tahoe. You're making me so sad...but I guess I'm not surprised. You've always been a non-believer in the Lord, and sadly in me...and probably always will be," she says now convulsively sobbing.

"Amen to that, Annie. And since you've been gone I given *us* a lot of thought. I've laid awake nights...thinking about how much I love you, but you're asking me to be someone I'm not. I just can't do that...no matter the consequences for us."

"Okay Mickey...it's getting late...close to midnight. Mom and Dad and the rest of the family are starting to prepare...they're calling for me. So I guess this is goodbye, huh?" she says.

"Yes...Annie...it is late...on *that* we agree. I guess someone has to say it out loud. Sadly, it's probably too late...*for us*. So I guess this *is* goodbye...one way or another. No matter how this Rapture thing unfolds, my only wish for you and your family is happiness.

Tomorrow...in the light of day, we'll all still be here...the world will still be an imperfect mess, but with nothing changed other than the calendars on the wall. After this passes, if you ever want to just talk, give me a call...or not. I'm not going anywhere...and frankly neither are you nor your family. And Annie...never forget that I loved you...with all my heart," I say.

"They're callin' for me...I gotta go now. I love you Mickey...forever. Goodbye," Annie says now crying uncontrollably.

"Goodbye...Annie," I say.

Click

- Chapter 47 -

"Mom and Dad think it may have something to do with the difference between the Julian Calendar...and the Roman Calendar...which of course would have been the calendar during the time of Christ...it had only 304 days..." it's Annie on the phone, as usual irrepressible, obstinately not giving up on us. Like I always said, plucky.

It's a week later, Annie and the rest of her family are still packed, anxiously awaiting the Apocalypse...and the Rapture.

"Ah...of course. Musta been a real bummer for all the believers. *Jezus Christ!*...a no-call no-show. Maybe somebody shoulda checked with The Omniscient One...which time zone and calendar He's on. And there's always the possibility of sun-dial error," I say.

"Well...we're all praying on it. Thankfully due to our prayers, Pat Robertson said that God spared the 700 Club on CBN...so it escaped the technical meltdown. We're getting daily updates. Still holding out hope that the End of the World is near. We're so confident...we're still wearing our tasteful understated white robes."

"Hmm...all dressed down...with no place to go. I'd imagine...definitely a potentially career limiting event to violate the dress code in Heaven right outta the Pearly Gates. And to quote Will Rogers...*You never get a second chance to make a good first impression,*" I say.

"Mickey...where were you...and what were you doin' at midnight? Were you thinking of me?" she asks.

"Actually I had few Heathen friends over for a P-A-P. A uh... Pre-Apocalypse Party...kind of a potluck Pagan festivity with roasted sacrificial lamb...ya know cavorting around the bonfire buck naked...with me doin' my special rendition of the Apocalyp-so which after several hours of drunken debauchery turned in a post-Apocalypse party...and the mother of all gawd awful hang-overs," I say.

"Mickey...you can be so...sarcastic sometimes. Mom and Dad say it's a sign of your spiritual immaturity. And they...and everyone here is praying for your soul to reach eternal Heaven with us."

To reach eternal Heaven...with us? Is she describing Heaven or my idea of Hell? I could barely get through the week with the maelstrom of religious platitudes during the family visits.

"Sometimes? Now that really hurt...that I might be losing my edge. Anyway, tell your Mother and Father, thanks for the good intentions, but the chances of me getting into Heaven? Hasn't got a prayer," I say.

"Mickey...have you givin' any more thought about...you know...us?"

"Annie...I've given it a lotta thought. I think it would probably be a good idea for you to stay down there for a while...ya know at least until this end-of-the-world thing kinda blows over. Then we can talk about the practicalities, of where to go from there," I say.

"Oh...Mickey...I miss you so much...not being able to make love to you. I'm so confused...so conflicted. I want to come home and be with you...but... Anyway...Mom and Dad are putting pressure on me to go work for a TV church...T-B-N, Trinity Broadcasting Network in Orange County on the daily P-T-L...Praise the Lord program. With my production background working with you...I got a job offer. Oh Mickey...what should I do?"

"Well Annie...why don't you give it a shot. You'd be close to your family...and living and working with fellow believers. Sounds *de-ivine*."

"You wouldn't miss me?" Annie says.

"Sure. But I would be making a personal sacrifice...to indirectly serve the Lord. Guess I'd just have to forebear my personal wants...to serve the greater Glory of God. Can I get a *hallelujah*, brothers and sisters?" I say.

"Okay Mickey...I get it. I'm going to say goodbye now. I'll be back in touch about where I want to go from here after I've talked to Mom and Dad on this...and we've prayed on it," she says.

"Fair enough, Annie."

"Well then...I guess this is *au revoir*...*adieu*, again," she says.

"*Au revoir* and *bon voyage*...and gawd bless you and yours, Annie," I say.

Click

A month later I was served with divorce papers with a demand for 50% of all my assets, despite the pre-nuptial agreement. My guess is that the divorce was an answer to intense prayer...*par sa mère et son père*...by her mother and father.

Part Six - Koz and Effect -

- Chapter 48 -

Moody Seaport, Washington State - October 15, 2001 10:25 am
A hospital room at St. Paul's Hospital

"How long have I been...out?" I ask still half-groggy from the battery of coma inducing sedatives.

"On and off...a coupla days. Lots of tests. CAT and every other acronym scans of your gourd and gray matter. Like up, down, sideways, continuous...and often," Hawk says.

"Find anything?" I say.

"Nope. Nada. Coulda told 'em not to bother...save a lot of time and money...'cause ain't nothing up there to find...like a *tabula rasa* man," Hawk says grinning.

"Ha...ha...a regular riot, Alice. Make yourself useful and pour me some water. My mouth's like the Gobi desert," I say.

I chug two glasses.

"More...could sure do with a pint of Guinness right now," I say.

"Slow down man...that'll be our first stop after we bust ya outta here."

"Speaking of which...get my clothes will ya. I'm blowin' this germ factory, like yesterday man," I say.

"Not so fast...you're hooked up to like 10 different *apparati*...not to mention a catheter in *Monsieur* Wilson drainin' into a diddy bag on the side of the bed," Hawk says.

"*Jezus*," I say, reaching down to feel the tube leading out of the covers.

I throw the sheet back to expose the catheter.

"Like...this *really* sucks man."

"Uh...*yeah*? That's the general idea," Hawk says.

I reach down and tug on the end of the exposed catheter.

"Ouch...that hurt. I want this thing outta me...now!" I say.

"Hey, go easy man. It's a Foley catheter, so first we gotta release the fluid from the balloon which keeps it from sliddin' outta your bladder...like this," Hawk says deflating it.

"So, how do you know about all this stuff?" I say

"From experience, when I was in that coma for few weeks in Berkeley in '64? So anyway, there are two schools of thought on this procedure. "A" you can slowly try to slide it out...one agonizing millimeter at a time...or "B" which I personally prefer....just yank it out...get it over with, like this," he says grabbing on to it and yanking it out in one continuous motion.

"Oww! Goddammit man...that *really* hurt!" I scream wildly swinging both fists at his massive bicep in retaliation, tears streaming down my cheeks while scissor kicking my legs up and down in pain.

"Done. Trust me the other way is more like death from a thousand paper cuts. *Awh*...did my big brave Koz get an *owie*?" he says laughing his high pitched man-child giggle.

"Don't *even* try to pretend that you didn't enjoy doing that."

Silence...just that familiar mischievous smirk framing an over abundance of mouse teeth.

"I thought so...don't just sit there grinnin'. Help me get all these wires and tubes disconnected...before the Doc comes in," I say.

We just get everything disconnected, when the alarm on the heart monitor starts screeching, bringing in a nurse running at full speed.

"And just *what* do you think you're doing?" she sternly says.

"What's it look like? I'm checkin' outta here...and don't try to stop me or I'll sick my Rottweiler on ya," I say.

Hawk then turns to face the nurse and starts savagely barking and growling, baring his teeth.

A blood curdling scream leaps from her mouth, as she runs out of the room yelling, "Doctor! Doctor! Stat! Stat!"

"Well said. Oso would be duly impressed with your rabid response. Now...let's blow," I say.

Even though my legs are little shaky from several days of being completely sedentary, I get dressed in record time. We are standing at the elevator, when door opens with Doctor Khan stepping out, his deep set coal black eyes staring at us under his bushy black eyebrows knitted with incredulity.

"Hi Doc...just on our way out. Thanks for all the uh...hospitality. Bye," I say breezily as we step past him into the elevator.

As the elevator door slowly closes on a truncated, "But...you..." and as it begins to descend Hawk says, "Did the Doc seem somewhat at a loss for words?"

"Hmm...not so much as a single 'sustain'. The word that springs to mind uh...quizzical?"

"Puzzled...even," Hawks says scratching his head in mock confusion.

When we get down to the hospital parking lot, my huge dog Oso who is poised on the front seat of the truck, eyes patiently fixed on the entrance to the hospital, spies me.

"Oso...come here boy! Come to papa bear!" I yell slapping my chest with both hands.

He immediately starts barking frantically, jumps out the passenger side window his big body barely fitting through the opening and races over to me, rising on his hind legs, he puts his massive webbed paws on my shoulders, almost bowling me over, barking and whining,

lapping my face with his huge pink sandpaper tongue. I sink my hands into the thick fur, grabbing his huge head shaking it side to side, then give him a big hug.

"*Osito!* Man, did I ever miss you, big boy!"

Oso

In was in the late fall of 1999, that I was hiking and taking pictures of the fall colors on Mount Baker at Artist's Point, when I came upon a huge dog, a mixed breed with a pure white head and solid black body. His massive white head was caught in the under-brush. He had no tags, nothing but a blue bandana around his neck which was caught on a limb of one of the branches, and when he tried to move, it choked him. His coat was dirty and matted with brush and debris, he looked like his owner hadn't been very attentive to his needs. He was just lying there, exhausted, tongue hanging out, panting wildly. I freed him, and gave him some water from my canteen, his big tongue lapped up 3 cupped handfuls. For about an hour I tried to find his owner. No luck. So I decided to leave the Big Dog, certain the owner would connect with him. But the dog followed me back to my pick-up truck at the trail head. There were no other vehicles at the trail head, but I figured the owner would come back, so I decided to leave him at the trail head.

I said to the Big Dog, "Guess this where you and I part company, big boy...your owner should be along shortly looking for ya."

But when I opened the door to get in, the dog, maybe 150 lbs. standing three feet high, effortlessly just jumps into the front seat, walks over to the passenger side of the seat, sits down with front paws on the dashboard like some impatient person and stares forward. I get in the truck, and look at the dog, who turns to me, and starts barking, "*Man, like let's get movin'...andale!*" "Sorry boy, not movin' fast enough for ya, huh?"

So I take the Big Dog home, where he devours about a pound of fresh ground-round. I give him a much needed bath, and brush out his thick black body coat, then his all white massive head, including his ears, which he loves. With a full belly, clean and content, he soon falls fast asleep on the floor of the living room. But within a few minutes the dog's legs start twitching—nightmares, whining in his sleep. Not a good sign.

About midnight, in the upstairs master bedroom, the creaking floor boards from the weight of footsteps, alarm me that someone was in the room. I instinctively reached for my 9mm handgun which I keep in a special holster on the headboard of the bed, ever since that night in Tahoe when Marla and I were setup to be killed in an explosion...in what was supposed to look like an accident. Sadly, Marla had not survived it....dying in my arms. And even after fifteen years, that terrible night is revisited countless times in nightmares. Even though, I *know* who

ordered the hit...I still don't have enough definitive proof...as I want to make sure that the main perpetrator, J. Murdoch Mahoney, can't lawyer up and wriggle off the hook because of inadequate circumstantial evidence if ultimately I decide to turn it over to the law. Unless I take care of it with my own hands, which I must admit is a personally more appealing resolution. But in the meantime there's a high probability that Captain Ahab still has some unfinished business with *moi*, to silence me, due to my knowledge of some very damaging facts about him that only I, Marla and Pauly Berman knew—both now dead. Pauly from natural causes, a protracted and painful end from leukemia.

I quietly chambered a round under the covers to muffle the sound. After my eyes adjust to the dark, in the dimly lighted room I can barely make out Big Dog walking around the room seemingly checking the perimeter, then he walks over to my side of the bed, and puts his huge head on the side of the bed next to my hand. I pet him briskly, and say, "that's a good boy..." whereupon he jumps on to the bed, stepping on me with his huge webbed paws, with the full force his full hulking mass narrowly missing my *cojones*... drawing an "*umphhhh*" from me, does a three-sixty and plops down on the other side of the king-size bed with his head on my lap next to my left hand. He nudges it with his wet nose until I place it on his massive head, as I holster the gun with my right. Within minutes, we both fall into a deep, contented sleep.

The next day I put an ad in the local paper in the lost and found pets section with a description and location found. Nothing, for about a week—now I'm getting very attached to this Big Dawg. I had bought him a collar and brushed him out almost every day...which he loves. About a week later, I get a call. The caller correctly identifies that the dog had a blue bandana and no tags, which only the owner could know.

When the owner comes to pick him up, he's driving a beat-up, old pick-up. I go out to meet him with Big Dawg. He is tall skinny, and unkempt, with long greasy stringy hair wearing a ball cap that's filthy, like the rest of his clothes. The owner seeing the dog, reaches into the truck for a thick rope with a slip knot for an improvised leash. He smiles revealing his yellow rotting teeth, and calls to him, "Here Bozo...come here boy...come to Sammy."

The dog bares his teeth slightly with a low half-growl bark. As the owner starts to walk toward him, he gets down low and starts barking ferociously, whereupon I grab him by the collar. It's all I can do to restrain him.

I say, "Looks like he's not real happy to see ya uh...Sammy."

The owner snarls back, "Hey that's *my* dog, man...let 'em go," and takes the end of the rope and starts slapping it hard, against the ground, as he moves toward the Big Dawg, like he's going to beat him. Now the dog is going crazy...barking bearing his teeth.

"Stop right there, man...he's not buyin' it and neither am I," I said.

The owner yells, "Let go of my fucking dog...or..."

"...or what," I say.

Sammy takes a step closer and telegraphs a wild right hand, which I easily block, grab his arm, and put it behind him, with him yelling obscenities.

"So Sammy...just how much pain are you willing to endure before you shut the hell up?" I say, giving it just enough pressure until he becomes quiet.

"Okay...that's better. Now let's see if we can facilitate a little attitude correction, without you ending up with a broken humerus," I say.

"Humorous? This aint fuckin' funny, man. That fuckin' dog is worth a lot of money...you can't just take him. I'll call the fuckin' cops and tell them you stole my dog...and that you assaulted me...you *muthafucker!*" Sammy screams.

Sigh.

I walk him around to the back of his truck, "Somehow I get the feeling that you *really* don't want to call the cops...just for starters looks like your registration tabs are about 2 years past due...and maybe there's a few warrants out on you...traffic and probably assorted other offenses," I say.

"Go *fuck* yourself...*fuck*-face." Sammy yells.

"Not a particularly compelling uh...*prima facie* argument. Apparently, what we've got *hiya*, uh...Sammy is a *failya ta communicate*," I say giving it my best Strother Martin with a little more lift of his arm.

"Stop it, man...you're gonna break it!" Sammy yells.

"So here's what I propose. A little business proposition. I've got two crisp Benjamins. They're yours, if you get in that piece of shit pick-up and drive off, and forget about the dog...forever. Got it?" I say.

"He's a fuckin' Great Pyrenees man, he's worth a lot more than that," Sammy whines.

"Maybe half Great Pyrenees...the other half, with the all black body and webbed paws looks like New Newfoundland. No matter. But if I call the Humane Society, they'll probably impound him...and you'll get nothing, 'cept maybe being prosecuted for abusing this animal," giving the arm just a little more pressure.

"Do we have an understanding?" I say.

"Okay. Okay...just give me the *fucking* money," Sammy says.

"And it ends here...and now? It's over...done deal?" I say.

"Okay...*goddamit*, just don't hurt my arm no more, man, I cut firewood for livin'. Come on man, please...just lemme go. Deal...okay?" Sammy whines.

"Wait here," I say. I bring the dog inside and get two crisp \$100 bills from my wallet, and a pen and paper and write out a bill of sale,

and say to Big Dawg, "Stay here boy," which he does laying down on all fours.

I walk up to Sammy and say, "Sign here, and you get the two Big Benjis."

Sammy hesitates.

"Don't even think about asking for more bread...you made out okay...better than you should on this deal," I say while conspicuously writing his license plate number on the bill of sale.

Sammy grudgingly signs it, snatches the two bills out of my hand, stalks off and climbs into his pick-up. As he starts it up, leans out the window, and flips the middle finger salute and peels out of the driveway, and is gone.

"Geez...what a grouch," I say to myself, and go back into the house where Big Dawg is waiting expectantly by door.

"Looks like I've got a new roommie, huh boy? Great Pyrenees...from the Spanish Pyrenees mountains, huh? Well, Bozo will never suit you. How 'bout something with a little more class...since you look half baby polar bear and half black bear...*habla espanol mi amigo?* Bear...*Oso*...or the diminutive, *Osito*. The Big 'O' for short," I say.

He barks like he understands every word, his tail wagging furiously—he lies down on his back and gestures his approval waving his front paws wildly.

"Okay...done deal. Now lets you and me go for nice long hike big boy...whataya say, Oso?" Oso jumps up and cavorts side to side, and follows me to my pick-up barking with joy, jumping up on my back almost knocking me down, then jumps into the truck to take his place riding 'shotgun', for a long, long time to come.

From then on, when anybody, including me exclaims, "Oh!"...or "So..." , Oso responds with muffled woof, punctuated with a few tail slaps of his long fluffy tail. Eventually I trained Oso, so that if I say "Oh...So *now*," that is a code command to attack whoever is menacing me.

I build heavy-duty custom kayak, a *badarka* design with aluminum tubing ribs and heavy canvas hull, built for serious sea kayaking, fashioned after the Inuit design, 19 feet long with a double cockpit. I can paddle from the back cockpit, while my navigator Oso sits on his haunches, on special platform in the front cockpit. We spend many happy hours in it, fishing, swimming, camping and exploring the San Juans, Gulf and Charlotte Islands off of Vancouver Island.

- Chapter 49 -

After the happy reunion with Oso, on the way back to Chez MAK from the hospital, we stop at the local Irish Pub, Uisce downtown where I chug the first pint of Guinness in one long gulp.

"Aye...Pagan nectar...for the gods! Pour me another laddy...and keep 'em coming til I'm on me knees," I say to Jimmy the bartender, leaving the signature white froth on my mustache.

"Got Guinness?" the Hawkster says appropriating the now-famous very successful drink-milk-campaign punchline while slamming down a pint 'o Guinness punctuated with a massive belch.

"So okay Hawk. Get me up to speed on what's been goin' on since I've been in never-never-land," I say.

"Well, man...while you've been doing a flawless impression of the dead man float, lots going on. First, if you're up to it, I think it's time to make a run up to Van City...to play that mp3 audio from the video I shot of you talkin' to the kid after the explosion...for his father Dr. Tehrani. See if we can get it translated and figure out what he said...just before he uh...*ascended*," Hawk says with air quotes.

"Okay. Good place to start. What else?" I say.

"Yea, I ran that license plate with a contact I have with Cascadia County Sheriffs on that Corvette that fled the scene...and get this. It's registered to Anthony Rogers aka Tony Rogers in Fernwood," Hawk says.

"Rogers...Tony Rogers as in the County Supervisor of Cascadia County. Mr Helmut Hair...the Don Juan of the San Juans?" I say.

"Duh Sherlock? With a vanity plate of S-U-P-R-M-A-N? A 2000 red Corvette. Not reported stolen. So we have to presume that the vehicle license plates also were not stolen and that the vehicle was being used with the knowledge and consent of Mr uh...Rogers."

"So I take it, if we connect his car to the explosion scene...it's not going to be such a *beautiful day in the neighborhood*, for Mr Rogers?" I say.

"Looks like it could it get less and less beautiful. 'Cause when I do a little research on Rogers online, I find out that he's married with two kids, a son Tyler who is a senior at Fernwood High and a daughter, a junior at Moody U...a Jennifer Rogers," Hawk says.

"Bingo. Smart money...Hassan's forbidden fruit. Has to be the same Jennifer the Tehrani's said was seeing their son on the Q-T. Curiouser and curiouser, man. Looks like we may want to have a little chat with Ms Rogers. Probably get more out of her if we get to her direct without involving the parents. I doubt that they even know anything

about her presence at the scene of the explosion, but once they do you can bet they'll lawyer up and we'll get nothing from her," I say.

"Further Google hits indicate Jennifer Rogers is a standout on the woman's volleyball team...with a handle of J-Rog. Lots of images of her in her uniform...spiking and blocking at the net. Looks like the quintessential All-American jock coed," Hawk says.

"Except for her little dark secret, the romance with her Muslim Montague, probably just a regular middle class Juliet. Can see how Supe Tony Rogers might perceive his daughter's affair with an alleged terrorist in a pipeline blast, as a politically CLE...Career Limiting Event, especially in Right-of-Rush-Limbaugh Fernwood. Okay. Maybe we can catch up with her after VB practice at the gym. Anything else? I ask.

"Probably. *Waaay* more," Hawk says.

- Chapter 50 -

The next day after making an appointment with Hassan's father, Dr. Tehrani by phone, we head up to Vancouver British Columbia to play the mp3 audio of his son's final words before he died in hopes of getting a translation.

The border crossing at Peace Arch is backed up for an hour and half, before we finally get to the kiosk manned by Canadian border control. On the US side leading up to the crossing, it's crawling with border patrol, with some appearing to be US military in all black full battle gear, all carrying assault rifles, with side arms in robocop body armor.

"Citizenship? And where do ya live, eh?" the Canuck agent officiously asks obviously harried by the unrelenting volume of traffic and high state of alert.

We both reply US and Moody Seaport, handing him our US passports which he carefully scrutinizes, then enters the numbers into his computer.

"Your professions?" he robotically asks.

"We're independent filmmakers...and journalists," I say with my best winsome smile.

"Are you bringing anything into BC...and do you have any firearms or weapons of any sort with you?" he says.

"Nope...just our pens, which as you know are mightier than the sword," I crack.

Which causes kiosk-man to look at me with complete and utter disdain like I am soliciting a date with his sister.

"The purpose of your visit," he says with an icy stare.

"To visit a friend," I say realizing that recent post 9/11 is probably not the best time for me to crack wise or to be visiting an Iranian.

"Your friend's citizenship...and name?"

"I'd rather not say..." I say.

He hands back the passports and tells us to take the slip of paper with his notes, "Pull out of line, park the truck and go into the office with the sign over the doors which says 'Customs Inspections'".

"What's this about?" Hawk asks.

"I don't have time for this, eh! Just do as I say. Ask no more questions or I'll turn your ass around and refuse you entry. Next!" he says.

I turn toward Hawk, as he starts to say something, give him the look, waving him off as we pull over to the parking space by the Customs office.

"Geez...what a grouch!" Hawk says as we drive away from the line.

"*Phew*. Man...talk about post 911 paranoia. Gotta a feeling that maybe we shouldn't mention that we're visiting Dr. Tehrani? Let me handle the questions. Okay?" I say.

"Sure. I'll be the poster boy for laconic. Uh...a model of discretion...and if he questions why we're entering BC I'll just tell him...it's not like we're visiting the father of a suspected Iranian terrorist...who just blew up a pipeline...eh?" Hawk says.

"Again...just let me do *all* the talkin'," I say.

"Just sayin'," the Hawster says as he runs his meaty hand across his lips in a zipping motion.

The Canadian Customs Officer at the counter takes the slip of paper, reads it and says, "Give me your passports and the all the keys to your vehicle. And wait right here until I return. Then we'll have a little chat." the overweight, short Officer Grouch says with a bureaucratic officious power smirk then leaves, giving the keys to another guard who begins tearing the truck apart...presumably looking for terrorists hiding out under a tarp in the back of the truck.

He returns and says, "Step into this room and have a seat. I'll be with you after I check you out in our databases."

"How long is this going to take?" Hawk asks.

"Depending on what if anything that we find in your vehicle. And the more questions you ask...the longer it will take," he says over his shoulder as he pulls the door shut with a loud thud. We both sit down on gray metal chairs facing a gray institutional metal desk with an empty metal chair behind it.

"Hmm...feels like we're waiting for the boy's vice principal to bust us for smokin' in the head. Well so much for reputed Canadian courtesy. I think..." I start to say when Hawk grabs my hand and motions with his head at small closed circuit TV camera mounted high on the wall, the red LED blinking.

I nod back in affirmation, and say "these border guys are so efficient...and thorough, wouldn't you agree?"

"And professional...don't forget these are trained pros in the art of detecting terrorist threats. I feel safer already knowing they are guarding our vulnerable Northern border against attack by those mean ol' terrorists," Hawk says.

Five minutes later Officer Grouch returns, waddles over to the chair across from us, plops in it, and with no preamble or introduction just stares at us for a full minute without saying a word. An ersatz

attempt at the dead-eyed cop pants-wetting stare—from watching too much US cop TV. Sorry, it just doesn't translate into Canuck Cop.

Finally, Hawk says, "Okay...I confess. I was the mastermind behind the 911 attacks on the Twin Towers. Please. Just...no more silent treatment. I'll tell ya anything ya wanna know."

"A coupla Yankee smart asses, eh? Okay let's get down to it. What is the purpose of your trip...and the name or names of the person or persons you're visiting."

"We're going up to meet a dear friend of ours...who wishes to remain anonymous...but he's very famous in uh..."

"...the Catskills," Hawk interjects.

"Yea...that's it. Yea...da Catskills. And he's in Vancouver only for just a short time," I say.

"This person have a name? And we're going to check it out," Grouch asks.

"Sure...but I'm not at liberty to divulge it. He's here incognito...domestic tranquility issues," I say, winking, my mind racing to summon some plausible name that can't be verified.

"Okay. Maybe your friend, Mr Clean here who seems to be in a confessin' kinda mood, can help me out," Grouch says.

Again with long steady cop stare directly at Hawk for another full minute. The only sound the labored breathing of the obese Officer Grouch.

"Go on...get the rubber hoses, 'cause you'll have to beat it out me. You'll *never* get me to rat out you dirty screws," says Jimmy Cagney.

Nothing. Just a long continuous stare for another full minute.

"Johnson. Raymond C. Johnson. There...ya satisfied? Now that you've humiliated me in front of my friend. I'm a broken man. But please...just no more silent treatment. Okay?" Hawk whines cradling his head in his hands giving the performance of lifetime.

"Johnson? Never heard of 'em. Who the hell is *he*, eh?"

Hawk then quickly raises his head abruptly terminating the masterful broken-man scene with a big smile, and begins bobbing his head, waving his index finger like a metronome, side to side to some imaginary inaudible beat in cadence with, "Ooooh...ya don't gotsta call him Johnson. You can call 'em Ray...or you can call him R J...or you can call him Jay...but ya doesn't gotsta call 'em Johnson...Hotcha," doing his best Borscht Belt, one-trick pony Billy Seluga vaudeville *schtick*.

Officer Grouch abruptly stands causing the chair to screech on the floor, jabbing his finger at Hawk and says, "You smart ass...I'm..."

Just about then another officer sticks his head around the door.

"Hey Norm...the truck's clean, eh," he says and disappears.

Officer Grouch pauses, takes a deep breath looking skyward for patience, then "Okay...you ass wipes are wastin' my time here...if we

didn't have such border backlog. You two clowns can leave now...get the hell out of my sight before I change my mind," then storms out the door.

"Geez...I'll tell ya. I don't get no respect," says the now Rodney Dangerfield.

By the time we're done with the dance at the border it's close to noon. We pull up to the Tehrani home on Pinecrest in Shaughnessy, Vancouver's home to the city's very rich with large detached estates, some are heritage properties from the pre-1950s many which are gated on several acre parcels. Old money.

I press the intercom button, announce myself and the massive wrought iron gate slow creaks open revealing a long tree-lined horseshoe driveway leading up to a colonial style mansion complete with two large columns framing the massive front portico. As we approach the entrance, the massive solid oak door slowly creaks open. *Tara...mit gargoyles, yet*

We are wordlessly ushered in by a young Asian woman in classic maid attire to a large study, where we find Mr and Mrs Tehrani standing. The study looks more like the Vancouver public library with floor to ceiling dark mahogany book cases, with many large original oil paintings of landscapes, presumably of Iran, and a life-size painting of the patriarch himself gazing pensively into the distance, along with elegant very expensive Persian rugs adorning the floor.

They come toward us, with Dr. Tehrani offering his hand, and the missus offering a stately nod with a tentative smile.

"Would you gentlemen care for some coffee...or tea?" Mrs Tehrani graciously offers.

"Thank you, but no. We won't stay very long. Crossing the border as you well know is now a nightmare of delay and we'll want to head back as soon as possible," I say.

"You said over the phone you may have some new evidence that may shed some light surrounding the circumstances of our son's death. Could it possibly provide proof of our son's innocence?" he says.

"Yes...that is a *possibility*...but *only* a remote possibility at this stage of our investigation. But until his words are translated initially by you, and then perhaps validated by an independent third party translator, we cannot be certain if it would have *any* exculpatory value. In fact, it may even incriminate your son even further. Eventually, in either case we will be required by law to tender it to the authorities. As of now, they do not know of the existence of the recording."

"And why, may I ask, have you withheld this from your authorities?" he asks.

"Because frankly we are becoming increasingly concerned about the level of objectivity of the investigation and we did not want it to be seized and sealed before we could investigate it further," I say

"I see. Please be seated," the elegantly dressed perfectly coiffed, urbane Dr Tehrani says gesturing to a sofa.

We both take a seat, sinking deeply into the massive Cordoba brown soft leather sofa, which in our normal casual attire, leaves me feeling like we should have come in the entrance for deliveries.

"Thank you doctor. May I ask what your title of Doctor confers?" I ask.

"A PhD in mathematics...I'm a professor at UBC. I teach particle physics," he casually replies devoid of any ego.

"I see. And may I ask how long you have been living in Vancouver?"

"My wife, children and I immigrated to Canada in 1980 to escape the repressive Islamic theocracy of the Iranian Revolution of 1979. My family was very prominent in politics under the Mohammad Mosaddegh regime...the democratically elected Prime Minister of Iran from 1951 until 1953, when our government was overthrown in a coup d' état orchestrated by the British Secret Intelligence Service and the American Central Intelligence Agency...installing a puppet regime of Mohammad Reza Pahlavi...the Shah. We were able to escape with...shall we say our...assets intact, before the purge of many even remotely potential political dissidents by the Ayatollah was started in 1980," he says matter-of-factly, without any perceptible bitterness toward America.

"Thank you. Dr Tehrani, before we begin, I feel that I must prepare you and Mrs Tehrani for what may be an exceedingly difficult experience for you both. We have been able to resurrect a recording of the conversation that I had with your son...right after the explosion...just before he uh...passed away. Mr Shapiro my associate here, it turns out, had the camera rolling when I encountered your son. The video is too horrific to view.

But we have lifted off the audio in which your son and I are talking over the roar of the fire. The quality is less than perfect. We have been able to remove much but not all of the disruptive background roar. We think it may be intelligible...hopefully, enough for you to provide a translation of, sadly, your son's last words spoken to me in your native language. If you think you feel up to it, I would like to play it for you using our portable mp3 player, with high quality headphones for maximum fidelity. I would strongly advise that Mrs Tehrani *not* listen to the playing of the sound clip...as it may be very traumatic indeed for a mother to listen to," I say.

"With Allah's help, I believe that I can endure it...please proceed," he says.

Hawk stands up, removes the mp3 player from his coat pocket, and moves the Bose headphones from around his neck up to his ears. He plugs the headphone jack in, and pushes 'play' to check the volume levels, which he adjusts. He then says, "Okay...it's cued up at the

beginning. Dr. Tehrani, may I place the headphones on you, sir?" Hawk says.

"Yes...you may," he says.

Hawk carefully positions the headphones on Dr. Tehrani and says, "Okay...I'm going hit play...tell me if the volume level is okay," Hawk says hitting the play button.

"Yes...I can hear that very clearly...the loudness is fine," he says very loudly.

"Good. On the player, the icon with the arrow pointing to the right is the play button. The buttons to the left and right are rewind and fast forward respectively. To repeat a portion of the clip, press the rewind button momentarily, then hit the play button again. Here, I'll let you control it. Again, I must prepare you that this is probably going to be very traumatic for you to hear...your son's last words. If at any time you want to pause it just hit pause button with the two vertical lines or the square stop button to re-cue from the beginning," Hawk says handing the player to him.

"Thank you...I think I've got it. Shall I begin?" he asks.

Mrs Tehrani sits down on the sofa next to me, and with her trembling very moist right hand grasps my left hand very tightly.

"Anytime you're ready Dr. Tehrani. But I'd suggest you listen to it all the way through the first time...then we can go back and replay the parts that need translation. Please proceed," I say turning my head meeting Mrs Tehrani's kind, plaintive eyes, giving her hand a light squeeze and a token smile. She's already beginning to tear up.

Hawk takes out a pad and pen from his coat pocket and is now poised to make notes.

Dr. Tehrani over-forcefully presses the play button.

Within about 15 seconds, his eyes also begin to tear up, but he stoically perseveres to the end of the clip which lasts less than two minutes total but in the deathly silence of the room, seems like an eternity.

His eyes meet Mrs Tehrani's. He shakes his head from side to side with tears copiously pouring from his eyes down his cheeks, darkening his white starched shirt front with tears of anguish. Mrs Tehrani's already tight grip grows tighter, digging her finger nails into the back of my hand.

"Are you alright Dr Tehrani?" I ask.

Removing the headphones to his neck he says, "Yes...but I think I need a glass of water."

Hawk pours him a glass of water from a pitcher on the coffee table in front of us.

Dr. Tehrani drinks the whole glass in one long continuous motion, then looks at his wife and says several sentences in his native language, which she acknowledges, smiles faintly, and releases the death

grip on my hand. Dr Tehrani takes a silk handkerchief from his suit lapel pocket, and deftly with great dignity wipes the tears from his cheeks.

Hawk and I look at each other quizzically.

"I'm so sorry gentlemen...I did not mean to be rude. I just told my wife in Persian, that our son died a hero...trying to prevent it," he says through a faint smile of a father's pride in his son's bravery. I guess it's the same emotion that a father would express in any culture...in any language in acknowledging that his son died heroically.

"Dr Tehrani...can you please be more specific. We need to have every word spoken in your native tongue translated, if we're going to have any chance whatsoever of convincing the authorities of your son's innocence," I say.

"Yes...of course. I will play it again from the beginning and translate each word," he says, pressing the rewind, and re-cuing the clip from the front.

Dr. Tehrani then repositions the headphones and proceeds to methodically translate every word, giving the context and idiomatic meaning, as Hawk furiously takes notes.

"Praise be to Allah...I knew our son is no terrorist!" says the tearful mother of Hassan Tehrani.

- Chapter 51 -

After returning from our meeting with the Tehrani's in Vancouver, the reality of what really happened on October 10th is starting to come into clearer focus. At about two in the afternoon the following day, we head over to Moody U. to see if we can connect with Jennifer Rogers after practice at the woman's V-Ball gym. We have to assume she was with Hassan just before the explosion. She's the key to providing some answers to the crucial unanswered questions, which at this point we can only speculate as to the answer. And she is the only eye-witness that can testify as to what really happened, that is if we can get her to cooperate.

M U is an old highly rated mid-sized four year land grant university. It's a beautiful campus situated on a hill with a commanding Westerly view, overlooking Cascadia Bay and many of the San Juan Islands.

We decide to look up an old friend of mine from our UC Berkeley days, who was also deeply involved in student activism and FSM demonstrations. Ivan Tarnowski, aka 'Ivan the Terrible' because of his fearless dedication to the cause for civil rights and his moral and physical courage in relentlessly confronting the 'establishment'.

I had heard that he was a professor at Moody U, so this provided a good excuse to finally look him up.

He was about two years ahead of me and had been close friends with Charles Washington and Mario Savio at UCB. Tarnowski had been a veteran of social activism, having been on the Freedom Rides in the early sixties in the deep South.

I had met him during the Sproul Hall sit-in, in December of 1964 at UC Berkeley where Mario Savio had delivered his iconic '*put your bodies upon the gears*' speech on the steps of Sproul. His sobriquet of 'I-T-and-T' was an ironic spin of the acronym, the antithesis at the time, of one of the most powerful multi-national corporations in America, International Telephone and Telegraph. The personification of the enemy establishment.

In March of 1965, he had also marched with John Lewis and Charles Washington in the deadly "Bloody Sunday" march from Selma to Montgomery Alabama, where John Lewis the young Chairman of SNCC, Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee and Charles had been brutally beaten. It was supposed to have been a peaceful non-violent demonstration for voters rights until the Alabama State Troopers turned it into a blood bath, unleashing attack dogs, tear gas and billy clubs on the unarmed and defenseless demonstrators.

C-Wash never regained consciousness. This incident sparked national outrage leading to the eventual passage of the Voter Rights of Act of 1965. His tragic death devastated all of us, in particular Ivan and Mario Savio.

Tarnowski had split to BC Canada in the late sixties to avoid the Vietnam war draft. In 1977, President Jimmy Carter had granted unconditional pardons to hundreds of thousands of men who had evaded the draft during the Vietnam War by fleeing the country. It was rumored that on his way South to his home in San Francisco, he discovered charming Moody Seaport, stopped for a beer, met a coed beauty while wandering aimlessly around the campus. He eventually enrolled at M U getting his graduate degree in environmental studies from the prestigious Huxworth College of the Environment.

A Google search tells me he's now Doctor Tarnowski with a PhD in Environmental Studies and Chair of Huxworth, with his doctoral thesis on the effects of the unchecked human consumption of fossil fuels on the atmosphere, or the Greenhouse Effect.

"Is the professor in?" I ask the secretary at the office of Dr Ivan Tarnowski.

"Do you have an appointment?" she replies with some apprehension after sizing up Hawk's massive muscular bulk and hairless alien planet Mongo appearance and my towering frame—obviously not students or from academia.

"No. Just tell him that an old friend of C-Wash is here to see him," I say.

"Can I tell him what this is about?" she says coolly as she picks up the phone poised to punch in 9-1-1.

"Tell him we're looking for some fellow travelers to start a revolution...and heard that he was available," Hawk says.

"I'm very sorry, but Dr Tarnowski is a very busy man...and without an appointment," now intently focusing on the keypad on the phone when she's interrupted by, "What is it, Greta? Are these gentlemen giving you a hard time?" Ivan the Terrible says with his familiar NYC edge from the open doorway of his office, then looking up at us, finally with an expression of utter disbelief, "C-Wash...revolution...of course, Mick? I don't believe it, man!" he says with a big grin.

"Yeap...Ivan, tis the former Berkeley B-ball Bad Boy, now inhabiting Moody Seaport. How the hell are ya, brother?" I say holding my open arms out to my side.

I-T is short and compact—now balding with a goatee, but still has the intense blazing gray eyes under bushy black eyebrows. He's dressed chic professorial with tortoise shell glasses with rose colored tint, complete with a soup-stained red and blue striped tie open at the collar. He's in blue oxford button down, rolled shirtsleeves, revealing no

small middle age spread with the bottom buttons of his shirt severely challenged.

He ambles around Greta's desk, walks up to me, and gives me a big bear hug lifting me off my feet, his head barely reaching my chin. Pulling back we clasp hands as he says "*Goddammit* Mick...great to see ya again brother," tears welling up in his expressive eyes.

"Yea, man...been a long time. Too long," I say, then nodding toward Hawk, "This massive hulk of humanity here is my pal Hawk Shapiro....he was at UC with us in '64."

"Hey, Hawk, pleasure man," I-T says smiling extending his hand to Hawk.

"Same here," Hawk nods shaking hands.

"Hey...come inside my office. We got some serious catchin' up to do," he says.

We follow him into the office, with Hawk closing the door behind us. We take a seat in front of his desk. He slides in behind his desk placing his right Birkenstock with black and gray argyles on the edge of the desk, leaning back with his hands behind his head. Behind him a wall of numerous plaques, framed awards and assorted degrees. A long way baby, from Haight Asbury...and Sproul Hall sit-in paddy wagons.

"We can't stay too long. We've got some business to take of here on campus. But we'd love to connect with ya later, man...over a few beers after we're done," I say.

"Yeah, sure man...it's a deal. But what brings you to our humble little university?" he asks.

"Well, we're chasin' down some leads on this pipeline blast. We just happened to get pulled into this mess. More on that later. You may recall the article in the local birdcage liner, about our involvement?" I say.

"Michaelangelo Kozlov's heroism blah...blah...blah," Hawk says.

"So that was *you*, Mickey? *Jezuz* I didn't connect the names. I guess I've always known you just as Mick...not sure I ever knew your last name. Some serious shit huh, man? If I recall you spent some time in the hospital...you okay?" I-T asks.

"Yea...I'm fine. Got my bell rung pretty good...but I'll survive," I say.

"So you're living in Moody Seaport now for how long?" he asks.

"Yeah...several years now...doing video production, documentaries and indie films," I say.

"Ah...so the paper said it was an act of terrorism. How are you involved?" he asks.

"An alleged act of terrorism," say Hawk.

"I don't understand Mick...you mean the causation may not have been what the papers said? By the way, we lost one of ours in the blast,

one of the best and brightest, a tenured professor, a mom with her two kids, blown away. Jessica Allison. She was highly respected in her field, bright...and a real beauty. Whatta terrible waste man," he says.

"Yea...when I was in the hospital her husband John Allison paid us a visit. Poor bastard's a broken man. Ivan, the statement *don't believe everything you read in the papers* was never more *approprié* man. So, anyway Ivan we're going to have to get going here pretty soon. We're trying to connect with a possible witness to the blast who is unknown to the authorities at this point...a student...a Jennifer Rogers," I say.

"I know who she is, don't know her personally but I hear she's a good athlete...and an excellent student, by all accounts a great kid. What's the connection?" he asks.

"Perhaps we'll know more if we can talk to her. We're going to try to catch her after volleyball practice. Ivan it's very important that no one knows our business here. There are a lot of unresolved questions, and frankly we feel the Feds and local law are rushing to judgment on this...that the investigation is making some very premature assumptions as to the causation. So, can we trust you to keep this in strict confidence? And can ya tell us where the girls' gym is?" I ask.

"Yea...sure...on both accounts," he gets up opens the door and says, "Greta, can you run a copy of the campus map off...circle our location, and circle the girl's gym. Thanks."

"Thanks Ivan. So when and where can we meet after we're done?" I ask.

"Okay. How about five at the Irish Pub, Uisce...on Commercial?" he says.

"Know it well...a little too well. The time should work. I'll call your office if we're going to be delayed. Got a card?" I ask.

"Yeah...sure," he says removing a card from the card caddy on his desk, scribbling some numbers on the back, "my home...and cell phone," he says handing it to me as we stand up to leave. I give him one of my personal cards with my cell phone.

"Hey Mick...did you get taller or did I get smaller?" he says giving me his hand again smiling broadly.

"Uh...I-T...all I can tell ya pal, is that I did *not* get taller?" I say.

"Was afraid of that...and it's *Doctor* I-T now," he says puffing out his chest with that familiar ironic smirk. "See ya tonight. Nice meetin' ya Hawk," the always affable I-T says as he walks us out the door where Greta is waiting with a copy of the campus map.

By the time we find our way to the girl's gym it's almost three. The door to the front of the gym is unlocked, so we enter the lobby, and take the stairs to the grandstands where we hear the sound so familiar to former gym rats like myself of squeaking sneakers on the hardwood floor mixed with some yelling and whistle blowing along with omnipresent faint scent of years of accumulated perspiration.

We take, what we hope is an unobtrusive seat, one level up from gym floor. The girls are doing a hitting and blocking drill, with the coach, a middle-age lady with short mannish hair and masculine physique who looks like she could still play, yelling alternating words of encouragement and exhortation.

Hawk points out Jennifer Rogers and in a low voice, "She's the tall blonde with long ponytail, third in the line getting ready to hit."

I nod, not wanting to draw any attention to us. She's quite tall, maybe 5'10" and rather slender, but with a nice figure with a pleasant roundness in all the right places. Her body language projects an aura of disinterest...of not wanting to be there, as she's staring down at the floor with her hands on her hips, looking totally disengaged. When it's her turn to hit, she lackadaisically passes the ball to the setter, who makes a perfect two hand set about three feet back from the net. She takes two steps, gets almost no air, and hits the ball into the middle of the net. When she lands, her head is down, shaking from side to side. Coach blows the whistle.

"J-Rog what the *hell's* that supposed be. What's wrong with you, girl? You haven't been here for a few weeks now. First league game is just a week away. Are you hurt or ill or something?" she yells.

"Sorry coach. I'm uh...coach, I can't do this right now. I...I...just can't!" she says breaking into tears running off the floor into the locker room.

"Alright ladies...take a blow...and hydrate. I'll be right back," she says following Jennifer out to the locker room.

All the other girls on the team are now buzzing with gossip. We're close enough to hear the cackling speculation by a few of her teammates.

A few minutes later, coach comes back into the gym, blows the whistle and says, "Okay ladies...gossip session is over. J-Rog's going to take an early out today from practice...some personal issues that *do not* concern you. The rest of you get your butts in gear...league play starts next week. So wind sprints...line up on the end line," she hisses.

They line up, the coach blows the whistle, "Move it...come on ladies show me something! Move it! Move it!" she exhorts.

That's our cue to leave the gym and wait downstairs in the lobby by the door that says locker room above it. We hang back about 50 feet from the door in the lobby keeping the door in sight.

About five minutes later, Jennifer Rogers comes out the door, fully dressed, her oversized gym bag hanging from her shoulder, head down walking dejectedly toward the parking lot. She's so preoccupied she does not even notice us standing there, or realize that we are following her. We trail her outside to her car. When she gets to her car, she throws the gym bag on the hood, lays her head on her arms on the roof of the car and starts sobbing, her whole body convulsing.

I tell Hawk to hang back so she won't be alarmed by his massive presence and walk over about 10 feet behind her.

"J-Rog..." I say quietly so as not to startle her.

She quickly looks up in my direction, her eyes all red and puffy, snot pouring out of her nose, her face even contorted in pain, still beautiful, and says, "Who are you? What do you want?"

"Jennifer, my name is Mick Kozlov. I'm here to try to help you." I say.

"What do you mean *help* me?" she sobs.

"Jennifer...I know about your loss...about Hassan Tehrani and that day at Moody Falls Park. Maybe I can help you...if you'll let me," I say

"You know *what* for instance?" she says now squarely facing me.

"Well for starters, I know that you and Hassan were lovers...and that he loved you very deeply...so much so that he risked alienation and isolation from his family to be with you on that day," I say.

"How...how could you possibly know this? *Any of this?*" she says stridently.

"Jennifer...I was there. You almost hit me with your father's car, a red Corvette, when you sped away from the scene. I was the last one to speak to Hassan before he died," I say.

"Oh *God*...I just can't take any more of this!" she says and starts to collapse. I barely get to her in time to break her fall. She's fainted probably from exhaustion of not being able to get any rest, and the stress of the intense bereavement.

"Hawk, get over her, quick man!" I yell.

Hawk's quickly there kneeling down beside us.

"Check her gym bag for some water," I say.

He dives into the bag and comes up with a bottle of water and hands it to me.

I unscrew the top, and placing her still unconscious head on my lap, pour some water into my other hand and gently stroke her cheeks and forehead with my wet hand. Her eyes begin to flutter, then one eye opens, seeing me bending over her she's startled, and tries to sit up. I gently restrain her.

"What happened?" she says surrendering back into my lap.

"You passed out on me...just lay still here for few minutes...take some deep breaths, okay?" I whisper to her.

Her eyes spot Hawk—she gasps.

"Don't blame you for being scared...sometimes I scare myself when I look in the mirror. I'm Hawk...and we mean you no harm, Jennifer. Mick here, and I, at the moment just want to make sure that you're okay. So just relax...whenever you're ready...we're here to help you...through all this," Hawk says waving his meaty hand vaguely in the air.

"Please help me up," she says.

Hawk and I each take an arm and ease her up to her feet so that she is now facing us.

"Who are you? Why do you want to help *me*?" she asks.

"Jennifer...I think we need to have a talk...but frankly this is probably not the best time or place to do it. We are willing to answer all your questions...but not here. Your team mates will probably be coming out pretty soon from practice. As Hawk says, we mean you no harm. But we believe you may be the key to understanding what *really* happened that horrific day at Moody Falls Park. We also believe that Hassan Tehrani *maybe* has been unjustly accused of being a terrorist...of causing the explosion, and..." when I'm interrupted.

"My God...what a nightmare. I loved him...more than life itself. I can't bear the thought of this any longer. It's not true...none of it, that he caused the explosion. What do you want me to do?" she pleads.

"Okay Jennifer, we believe you. We believe that there may be another plausible explanation for the explosion. And that *maybe* somebody who has a lot of resources and power...and it goes without sayin'...money, that they may want to prevent the truth...and themselves from being exposed, probably at any cost. But we have no proof...yet. That's why we need to talk with you. And since you are the only eye witness, I do not want to alarm you, but you may be in danger," I say.

"*Danger?* What kinda danger?" she asks.

"Again, we shouldn't discuss this any further here. If you're willing to trust us, we're supposed to meet a dear old friend at the Irish pub...Uisce, downtown at five. Someone I think also might be able to help you, Doctor Ivan Tarnowski. Can you follow us there? We can talk there without drawing any attention. Besides, I think we could all use a drink...I know I could," I say giving my best reassuring avuncular smile.

"Professor Tarnowski...from the U? I've heard from some of his students that he's a good guy. Okay, I uh...guess so...but I'm so torn. If this comes out my father won't be very uh...*understanding*. After 9-11, I was forbidden to ever see him again...*or else*. My little *terrorist* he called him. I...I guess I'm just going to have to trust you. I don't have many other options, do I? But I'd like to go back to my place first...to shower, change clothes and pick up my phony I-D. I think I could use a drink too. I'll meet you there around five, okay?" she says.

"Are you sure you can drive okay? I can drive you over in your car and wait for you," Hawk says.

"Thanks. But I think I'll be okay. Honestly...I guess I'm glad in a way that this is going to come out...it's been tearing me apart. For the first time I have a sense of relief and hope...that I'm not dealin' with this alone," she says.

"Okay...if you're sure, here's my card with my cell phone number. Call if you're going to be delayed. Can you give me your cell

phone number?" I write it down in my small spiral notebook. "See ya at five, okay?" I say.

"Okay. I'll be there," she says throwing her duffel bag in the front seat, climbs into her car and drives off with the semblance of a faint smile on her beautiful youthful face.

Laying the highly directional, very sensitive Sennheiser ME66 shotgun microphone on the front seat, The Black Mamba starts up his black Suburban, and slowly, innocuously pulls out to follow Jennifer Rogers.

For the last week, since the call from NPI VP Howard Roland, he's been in Moody Seaport, tasked to ensure that the lid doesn't come off.

He's been following Kozlov around ever since he left the hospital, with the hope of finding out how much he knows about the pipeline explosion. Kozlov and that nosy bastard Jew, Shapiro have already been up to Vancouver to visit the parents of the kid...not a good sign. He begins to suspect that Kozlov may be on to something...from talking to the kid's parents. He's already nullified that threat vector. By pretending to be an advocate for their accused son, amazing how easy it was to gain their confidence...to penetrate their defenses, then once inside their perimeter, capitalizing on the element of surprise. That's when the Black Mamba is most lethal.

But through the miracle of technology, from almost one hundred yards away, parked in the gym parking lot where he has followed Kozlov, he has been able to monitor the conversation between Kozlov, Mr Clean and Jennifer Rogers.

His suspicions are now confirmed. Jennifer Rogers was there...an eyewitness. The good news. Apparently she's the *only* living survivor who knows what really happened...what caused the explosion and could testify to it first hand. But up to now, other than Kozlov, she has confided in no one.

If she's allowed to be heard, the whole lid will be blown off this thing. No telling how deep...or how high it will go. Pulling a single thread, until eventually the entire quilt of conspiracy becomes completely unraveled.

While following Jennifer Rogers from a safe distance, Ernie Porter speed dials Howard Roland on his secure satellite phone.

"Porter here. Can ya'll tawk?" he drawls.

"Yea, sure *Negrato*. What's up?" Roland says.

"God news...bad news. Which da ya'll want first?" he asks.

"Shit, man...do not *even fuck* with me. I've been walkin' on eggs for the past few weeks...just get to the *goddamned* point," Roland says.

"Okay, Howie...losing our sense of humor are we? Anyway that busy-body Kozlov and his pet albino gorilla may be on to something. They've located, apparently the one surviving eye witness who was there

at the time of the explosion. Must have been the driver of the car that sped away from scene that almost hit Kozlov. Somehow they've identified the driver. They've just connected with her. They intend to meet with her later this afternoon, probably to get her story...knowin' Kozlov's background, wouldn't be surprised if he recorded it," he says.

"*Shit!* So okay...what's your recommendation?" Roland says.

"Well Howie...it should seem obvious to even you. Just to be safe...termination of the threat vector. But it's your call. I can tell ya that once you cross that line, there ain't no turning back. And it's going to cost you...*mucho dinero amigo*," Porter says.

"*Goddammit* man, that's a whole 'nuther level. We're talkin' uh...murder here, right? *Jesus!* Okay. Uh...can you make it look like an accident...like that Injun squaw in New Mexico? *Shit* man...if the coverup's exposed...we are all royally fucked," Roland says.

"Whattya mean *we*, whitey?" *El Negrito* says laughing mockingly.

"You asshole...you enjoy fuckin' with me don't ya. Just do whatever it takes...we're in so *goddam* deep now. *Fuck it!* Get it done, and pronto!"

Click

A pleasure. And to think I even get paid for doin' this. Is 'merica a great country or what?

Oh...and those rugheads in Vancouver...that one's on the house...payback for 9-1-1...fuckin' terrorist hadji bastards," *El Negrito* muses.

We get to Uisce about a quarter to five and take a table way in the back where we can talk undisturbed with Jennifer Rogers. We figure it would be good to have Ivan Tarnowski there as an independent witness. Plus, since he's a member of the faculty, maybe he can put Jennifer more at ease, and perhaps direct her to some mental health resources available at the university. We know we can trust I-T...but we'll make sure that he's on board about what's going down before we start debriefing Jennifer.

While waiting, we order a coupla pints of Guinness. About ten minutes later, Ivan the Terrible walks in. I stand up and wave. He smiles broadly, and comes over to the table.

"Whattya drinkin', I-T?" I ask.

"That Guinness looks pretty damn good," he says.

I get the bartender's attention by pointing downward, waving my hand for another round all the way around. He nods.

I-T takes a chair, "So...Mick, tell me what you've been up to for the last, what...almost forty years?" I-T says.

"Love to I-T...but what's the rush? Actually, there's been a development since we left you. Remember I told you we were going to try to find Jennifer Rogers on campus? Well we got lucky."

The bartender arrives with three pints of Guinness.

"Mud in yer eye, mates!" Hawk says with a brogue as we clink glasses, each of us taking a long pull.

"Funny...with your last name, wouldn't have guessed you're a mick," says I-T wiping the foam off his upper lip with the back of his hand.

"The O'Shapiro's...of da County Bronx," I say

"Net result's the same...being screwed up 'cause of Catholic guilt...or Jewish self-loathing, eh...my *mensch-y matey's*?" Hawk says.

"Ivan, again, what I am about to tell will have to be held in strict confidence, okay?" I say

"Jesus Mick...sounds really serious. But okay...if you say so. Shoot," I-T says.

"This afternoon, beyond any reasonable doubt, we were able to confirm with Jennifer Rogers, who is the sole surviving eyewitness to the pipeline explosion, that Hassan Tehrani, was her boyfriend with whom she was to rendezvous...a lover's secret tryst at Moody Falls Park," I say.

"So...that terrorist theory *maybe* becomes totally bogus, then? And that would mean what?" he says.

"Yeap...up in smoke, literally. And that means that *perhaps* some very powerful people would prefer that the truth did not come out. So it's time to look for MOM," I say.

"Your mother, what's she got to do with it. She like some kinda Agatha Christie?" Ivan says smiling.

"M-O-M...motive, opportunity...and last, but not least...means. Considerable big bucks means," Hawk says.

"Ah...so I guess you'd have to ask, who'd have the greatest motive to want to cover this up? Or...*cui bono*?" I-T asks.

"Translation?" I say.

"Latin...a legal term. Who stood, to gain from a crime, and so might have been responsible for it," Hawk says recalling from his Berkeley law school days.

"Or...who has the most to lose...which usually means follow the money, baby. But right now we've got no proof...just suspicions. Nothing that would hold up in court. So we're hopeful that Jennifer can start to nail some loose ends down for us," I say

"Hey, Koz...it's already about five-fifteen. Maybe you should give Jennifer a call...to see if she's still going to meet up with us?" Hawk says.

Ivan and I spend about an hour catching up. After a few beers, he's just getting warmed up and with great passion, begins to outline his work. He promises to send over a copy of his Doctoral Thesis on climate change.

"Mick, if you actually read it...that'll make three...counting my wife and I. It's a three hundred page scientific tome with the light-hearted title of "The Anthropocene—The Coming of The Sixth Mass Extinction." Not exactly good bedtime reading, but a great doorstop," I-T says.

While discussing climate change, his whole demeanor changes. His intense smoldering gray eyes penetrate your soul, reminiscent of the Ivan the Terrible that I remember from the 60s when he was taking on the corporate establishment.

"So what you're sayin' is, that unless some drastic changes are made in policy...of consumption of fossil fuels for energy...were basically doomed. Unfortunately, a recurring theme in my life...I'll explain later. Like a ship of fools on the Pequod sailing under a mono-maniacal nut-case Captain Ahab...inexorably toward a final rendezvous with the whale," I say.

"Yea...except in your little analogy, Captain Ahab is the corporate oligarchy...the captains of industry and technology...and the whale is the catastrophic and calamitous effects of centuries of unfettered unregulated capitalism. Massive dumping of CO2 into the atmosphere of Gaia, to borrow chemist James Lovelock's term for Mother Earth. In short leading to the eventual devolution of civilization as we know it...the return of a second and even more extreme Dark Ages, man." he says shaking his head side to side.

"Jesus! Hey bartender three Johnny Walker's...up," I say.

"Make em doubles...and don't be stingy, baby," yells I-T

"Or to quote Vizzini from the Princess Bride...*inconceivable!*" Hawk says with a perfect Wally Shawn lisp.

"And to paraphrase Bette Davis as Margo Channing, 'Fasten your seat belts, it's going to be a bumpy...uh century'," I say.

"Or three," I-T adds.

"Hey, I hate to be the one to change the topic from such a fun and uplifting thread as mass extinction etcetera...but it's almost six. Looks like Jennifer's a no-call...no-show," Hawk says.

"Yea...probably should call her again. *Jesus*...I've already left three voice mails," I say.

At little after ten that evening, Hawk and I are sitting around having a few beers, discussing Ivan Tarnowski's not-so-pleasant forecast for the future of civilization, when my cell phone rings showing Jennifer Rogers on the caller ID.

"Jennifer...are you okay? I've been trying to call you all afternoon and this evening? I say frantically.

"Who is this?" a man's voice asks.

"Who wants to know?" I ask.

"This is Detective Jimmy Hadley, with the Moody Seaport police department," he says.

"This is Mick Kozlov. What's this about Detective?" I ask.

"What was your relationship to Ms Rogers?" he asks.

"Was? She's an acquaintance," I say.

"How long have you known her?" he asks.

"Just met her this afternoon...why?" I ask

"I'm calling you from her cell phone...the inbound call log shows five calls from you, with several voice mails, which I cannot access without her PIN...yet. Why were you trying so hard to reach her?" he asks.

"Well...we were supposed to have met this afternoon at five...downtown at an Irish pub. She never showed...or called. So I was concerned about her," I say.

"Did she seem overly distraught...or depressed when you last saw her?" he asks.

"Yes...at one point she was upset...but less so when she left. What's this about Detective...is she okay?" I ask.

"Do you know what she may have been so upset about that she would try take her own life? Were you romantically involved with Ms Rogers?"

"Jesus...no, I had just met her. What are you saying...is Jennifer alright?" I ask

"I'm sorry to have to inform you that this evening, about eight thirty, when her father could not reach her on her cell phone, he stopped by her apartment. He discovered his daughter's body in the bathroom...naked with the shower still running...dead from an apparent suicide. She apparently had hung herself from the shower head with a waist tie from her bathrobe. The ME thinks she probably died around five this afternoon," he says matter-of-factly.

"My gawd...Jennifer...dead. I can't believe it. Are there any signs of foul play?" I ask.

"Why would you ask that, Mr Kozlov? And you haven't answered my question, why do you think she was *very upset*?" his cop curiosity now fully aroused.

"Detective...she *was* very upset, but I do not think it rose to the level of her wanting to take her own life," I say.

"Okay...I'll have some more questions for you. I think it would be better if we discussed this in person. Are you available tomorrow morning, say around ten...at your home?"

"Sure...not a problem...here's my home and busines address..." I say.

"No need...I'll already have it, and a lot more. See you tomorrow morning. Ten sharp," he says.

Click

The streaming shower water drowns out the sound of the door, as it slowly, warily swings open to her apartment. Then the screech of

the sliding rings as the shower curtain is ripped open—the last sound Jennifer Rogers will ever hear.

Jennifer Roger's cell phone just rings, and rings...and rings...

"Man...you're white as a ghost. What the hell was that all about Koz?" Hawk asks.

"Jesus...that was a detective from the local police. They found Jennifer Roger's body...dead...in her apartment...from an apparent suicide, this afternoon. They say she hung herself...in the shower, man," I say.

"Suicide my ass, man! When she left she actually seemed relieved and eager to help us. A bunch of *Bolshoi*. Not buyin' it. *Goddammit* man, I feel responsible for the death of that beautiful young girl. I shoulda insisted to drive her to her place and wait. I just had a bad feeling, man. I'm just sick about it," Hawk says shaking his head.

"Yea...me too, man. *Shit!* So...under the circumstances a suicide...probably not plausible. But *if* and that's a big if, she didn't kill herself...and we can prove it, you know what that means, my Dear Watson?" I say.

"Yea...the stakes just went up an order of magnitude. We're talkin' murder...a whole new ball game," Hawk says.

"And from here on out...different rules of engagement. *If* they're desperate enough to kill an innocent young woman who they perceived as a threat...then I doubt that they'll stop there. Then anybody they might even perceive as a threat to expose their not-so-little cabal, is also at risk for grave bodily harm...or worse. Including *moi et vous*." I say.

"*No shit* Sherlock?" Hawk says.

"So how the hell did they find out that we were starting to unravel this thing...we didn't even know for sure until this afternoon that Jennifer Rogers was a witness. Somehow...it had to be revealed this afternoon, or they would have taken her out sooner. Musta followed us to the gym...waited outside in the parking lot, then followed her to her apartment. *Shit!* We got complacent and sloppy...and let our guard down. And it cost that beautiful young girl her life. That won't happen again," I say.

"I'm going to resurrect those 9 millimeters. Clean 'em up and load up the clips...with few back-up clips. So what are we going to tell the cops tomorrow man? Just how much should we tell 'em, like "*...oh by the way we don't have any proof, but...we think Jennifer Rogers may have been murdered by the same folks involved in a massive cover up conspiracy over that pipeline blast...and oh, that it wasn't no fuckin' terrorist attack?*" Hawk says.

"Yea...right. Probably should keep our cards close to our vest...at least until we can get some hard evidence before we take it, if ever, to the cops and the Feds," I say.

The next day, over breakfast, our normal morning ritual while Hawk and I are watching the morning Canadian Broadcast news on CBC which is carried by the local cable company, the lead story is:

This morning, a prominent Vancouver Physicist and his wife, Doctor and Mrs Amir Tehrani were been found dead in the study of their home in the exclusive Shaughnessy area of Vancouver. They apparently had been dead a few days before being discovered by the maid. According to a source close to the investigation under the condition of anonymity, who gave CBC this exclusive. They had been shot in the back of the head, execution style. There were racist anti-Muslim epithets scrawled on the wall presumably in their blood with references to terrorism...and nine eleven. Local residents many of the Muslim faith are unnerved, fearing additional reprisals against Muslims.

The Tehrani's were the parents of accused terrorist Hassan Tehrani who died when he allegedly blew up a petroleum pipeline in Moody Seaport, Washington state on October 10, 2001. The RCMP is treating it as a hate crime with possible vigilante retribution for the son's alleged act of terrorism as a motive. There are no known suspects or persons of interest at this time the RCMP source said.

More later on this evening's news, with a special in depth report from the scene with our very own Mindy McClain. You won't want to miss...Slayings in Shaughnessy.

In other news, in part because of the high oil productivity of the Alberta tar sands, the Canadian economy is exhibiting very strong positive growth trends with the Looney rising sharply against the US dollar on reaction to the positive news...

And now the weather....

"My gawd, man. Doctor and Mrs Tehrani murdered. Jezuz Christ! Can't be sure...but five should get ya fifty yen...got to be related to our investigation. Poor people...they just wanted to know the truth about their son. Man...we could be dealin' with some very, very bad people here...and gettin' in further and further over our heads each day. If it is true, who the hell are these sociopaths...capable of such ruthless murder of innocent victims?" I say.

"Koz...are you thinkin' like I'm thinkin'?"

"Gawd...I hope not." I say

"No I mean that we were the last people to see both the Tehrani's and Jennifer Rogers alive. That their phone logs can connect us to them...both on the day of their murders, man?" Hawk says.

"Yea...and they'll have a record of our border crossing when we went to see the Tehrani's...on the same day they were murdered," I say.

"Hmm...won't take an Inspector Poirot to connect the dots. That people just seem to turn up dead when we talk to them. Not good," Hawk says.

"So this detective Hadley's supposed to be here in about an hour. He didn't say that he intended to take recorded statement. But...what if does?" I say.

"Nope...no deal. Ya know even though I didn't finish law school at Berkeley, before that campus cop scrambled my brains, there's a few things I do remember. The most important that comes to mind is the right against self-incrimination aka, the Fifth Amendment, and the second relevant thing is that they have to Mirandize you before asking you to give a statement under oath that could possibly be used against you in a court of law," Hawk says.

"So...how do we deal with this detective? If I now refuse to cooperate...he's going to start getting even more suspicious. Right now I think he's proceeding on the notion that Jennifer committed suicide...but that I may have been the source, or at least contributory for her reasons for doing so. But if I try to stone-wall him he may try to push harder...eventually they might even connect the Vancouver murders to us." I say.

"Yea...but one thing that I'll always remember Daddy Shapiro telling me. *A lawyer who represents himself has a fool for a client*...and that goes double for a lay person. So I think we should do this. You act all cooperative. Answer his questions truthfully...as if you have nothing to hide. And this is important...that your mindset projects exactly that. Answer his questions directly. If he resorts to long pauses...he's messin' with ya...wait him out. And do not...I repeat...do *not* volunteer any information that is not directly responsive to his questions. These coppers are trained at perceiving deception...with body language etcetera. Just tell the truth...and never, *ever* say I have *nothing* to hide. And don't forget to breathe," Hawk says.

"Okay...the truth...and nuthin' but. Got it. What else?" I ask.

"If he asks you to give him a statement under oath...he'll first have to read you your rights under Miranda. He's got to have some pretty strong probable cause to do that...something maybe we don't know about. That's where we have to draw the line...for both you and me. We shut it down...and tell him under advice of counsel...blah...blah...blah. At that point advise him that we are represented by S. G. Shapiro...aka Daddy.

"Has he got a ticket to practice in Washington state?" I ask.

"Nope...but he won't know that right away at least. Maybe if he does some research, he'll figure out that Daddy would probably eat the local DA's lunch and give it some serious thought. It'll at least buy us some time to find local counsel," Hawk says.

"Won't come cheap," I say.

"Never does. Lawyers gotta eat too."

"Thought they eat their young," I say.

"That's just considered hors-d'oeuvre. Okay...because Jennifer's father has some serious local juice as the County Executive, Hadley to score some brownie points with the Exec, may press you to admit that you were involved in making daddy's little girl unhappy, intentional infliction of emotional distress...blah...blah...thus causing her to commit suicide. To assuage his own guilt re her and Hassan...perhaps to lay the groundwork for a big civil suit later on. That's easily refutable, Hawk says.

"Hmm...if you cut us...do we not bleed?" I say.

"Right...probably not a good time to play the victim card, uh... Abie. Geez, you just met her that day. How much emotional damage could you possibly inflict on a woman in just one day's exposure? On second thought...strike that argument. In any case I'm not aware of any *criminal* statute that could prosecute you for being an arrogant, predatory asshole with women's emotions," Hawk says.

"Gee thanks pal. So what do I tell him when he asks me about our relationship and why we were going to meet later on?" I say.

"Okay...excellent question. You're startin' to think like a lawyer," Hawk says.

"I beg ya pardon, *suh*...I resents da *allegation*...and I resents da *alligator*. By the way do you know why lawyers break for dead skunks on the highway? Professional courtesy," I say

"Yea...hardy har har...I get it. You're a regular riot Alice. Lemme think. Okay...tell him uh...that you're a documentary film maker and that we were interested in doing a documentary on high achieving student athletes in woman's athletics at Moody U...and that Professor Tarnowski, an old friend, recommended that you talk to her. Our visit with him is easily documented with his secretary Greta. Then call I-T and give him a heads up in case he checks it out further," Hawk says.

"Okay...sounds like a very plausible, magnanimous narrative...consistent with my character. I can sell that. Also, that I'm a very nice, thoughtful sincere gentlemen...sensitive and caring towards woman's inequality issues," I say.

"Don't *even* try to spin that one on, pal. If he asks you for woman's character references, he'll bust you like a cheap *pinata*," Hawk says.

"Oops," I say.

"So...the big question is, if in fact Jennifer Rogers *was* murdered to make it look like a suicide...then is the murder of the Tehrani connected?" Hawk says.

"For the sake of argument, let's assume they are. The points of connection are that both the murders were committed very soon after we connected with the victims. *Shit*...we must have led the murderers right to the Tehrani's! Which would mean we've probably been under surveillance the whole *fuckin'* time. Somebody's got to be following us around, cleaning up and destroying any evidence that would discredit the terrorist's narrative. *Goddammit*...we 'teed' 'em up for the bastards! And those three vics were our only potential leads that we had so far, to prove that the explosion was not an act of terrorism. Hawk, these guys? *Not amateurs, man.*"

"Yeah...maybe way above our punching weight. So...where do we go from here, man. Now we got nuthin' in the way of witnesses...or evidence. All we got is the video and audio from the explosion...and the translation notes from Dr Tehrani in my handwriting," Hawk says.

"Yea...but who ever is tracking us doesn't know that. If they are led to believe that we've got recorded statements or some other evidence, they might try to make a move on us. So maybe we need to dangle some bait on the hook...to try to draw them out. Got any ideas?" I say.

"Back to M-O-M. Let's start with motive...who's got the most to lose? Time to follow the money, and..." Hawk says when there is a knock on the door.

"Show time," I say.

I get up and go to the front door to find a short, stocky *schlubby* guy in a crew cut, with a goatee, maybe thirty five, in a cast-off sport coat and tie with jeans. With him is a short woman dressed in civies, tope woman's pants suit. She's matronly, with broad shoulders, and a thick unfeminine tree trunk body. Her hair is cut short in a boyish bob. She's wearing little if any makeup, carrying hard-shell briefcase.

"Detective Jimmy Hadley...Moody Seaport police. This here is my partner Detective Rhonda Pirelli." He says, both of them robotically flashing their badges.

"Come on in...let's go back into my office where we can talk," I say flashing them by best disarming winsome smile. They follow me back to the office where the Hawkster is sitting in an arm chair behind the coffee table.

"This his Hawk Shapiro, my business partner...he will be sitting in on the interview," I say.

Hawk does not stand, but just nods.

Both detectives nod back...all business.

"Would you care for coffee?" I ask. Mr Hospitality.

"No thanks...just had some," Jimmy Hadley says.

"Care to have a seat on the sofa?" I graciously offer with a sweeping gesture.

They take a seat on opposite ends of the sofa. I sit down behind my desk.

Jimmy Hadley just looks around...then fixes his eyes on me for about ten seconds, then finally says, "Mr Kozlov we have a few questions we'd like to ask you about your relationship with the deceased, Jennifer Rogers"

"Okay," I cleverly answer.

Detective Pirelli takes out a spiral notebook, and conspicuously flips to a new page, pen eagerly poised in expectation of an incriminating utterance.

"We are here to try to ascertain the events that lead up the death of the deceased, which in the absence of any other compelling evidence, at this time is being treated as self-inflicted. We understand from interviews with her teammates, and her coach, that for about the past few weeks she has been extremely emotionally distraught," Hadley says. He stops there, for about ten seconds staring into my eyes searchingly...looking for any kind of a reaction. I meet his gaze by first staring back at him then to Pirelli adding my best disarmingly charming smile, adding a wink...*forgive some sinner, and wink your eye at some homely girl*, I recall from H. L. Mencken's tombstone.

Her face reddens...probably construed as some sexist pig oink. Oops...reminding me not to stray to far from the script.

"How long had you known Ms Rogers?" he asks.

"As I told you on the phone...I had just met her...that day," I say.

"And how would you characterize the nature of your relationship with her?" he asks.

"As a recent acquaintance." I say not volunteering anything.

"Were you romantically involved with Jennifer Rogers?" asks Pirelli staring at me intently.

"No. I had just met her that day," I say.

"What occasioned your meeting?" Hadley says.

"My partner here and I make documentary films. We are always on the lookout for compelling human interest narratives. A friend of mine...on the faculty of M-U, suggested that we might want look into doing a short piece on the uh...relatively under-exposed, girl's athletic program. He felt that there were some very impressive student lady athletes...both athletically and academically, and he felt that it would be a nice project for us...and in the process give them a little good publicity and media exposure. As a place to start, my friend mentioned the name of Jennifer Rogers as possibly a good candidate for an interview, as she was a good athlete, and an exceptional student," I say.

"The faculty member's name?" Hadley asks.

"Professor Ivan Tarnowski," I say.

Pirelli is now furiously taking notes.

"And you never had any contact with Ms Rogers before yesterday...physical or otherwise...including email, social or dating networks?" Hadley asks.

"No." I again shrewdly reply...that'll show 'em.

"Mr Kozlov...did you know that Jennifer Rogers was twelve weeks pregnant when she died?" Pirelli asks staring intently into my eyes for some kind of a visceral response.

"No...I did not." I say meeting her gaze unflinchingly for several seconds, but the tragic revelation does unnerve me internally.

"And you had never had *any* sexual relations with Ms Rogers and you are not the father of her unborn child. I remind you that a simple DNA test could conclusively identify the paternity," Pirelli says.

"Unequivocally no. And I would remind *you* that that question infers groundless accusations which as far as I can tell have not even a scintilla of factual basis. If you continue along this line of questioning I will terminate this interview forthwith and refer the matter to my attorney for all future interviews, along with a formal and forceful legal response for attempting to intimidate me with groundless slanderous accusations against my character," I bluff.

"Okay...no need to get all legal on us. Do you have any suspicions as to who the father might be?" Pirelli says, causing Hadley to shift uncomfortably in his seat realizing that in her misandrous feminist zeal, Pirelli may be stepping over the line...and taking him with her.

"I do not. Now that I've answered all your *germane* questions, unless you have any further *relevant* questions...I have nothing further to add. This interview is hereby concluded," I say standing up.

"No...nothing further...at the moment. But we might want to interview you again later as the investigation proceeds. Thank you for your cooperation Mr Kozlov," Detective Jimmy Hadley says, standing up, nodding his head toward Pirelli that they are done. She opens her mouth so say something...but Hadley gives her the look and she stifles it, and stands up petulantly grabbing the briefcase.

"I'll walk you out," I say coolly as I lead them out the front door without another word spoken between us.

I return to the office where I find Hawk pacing back and forth.

"Pregnant. *Jesus*. Man...whoever is behind this...if I can get my hands on them...just for two minutes, they'll wish they were dead, man," Hawk says tearing up.

"Yea...that's a tough one. But it's important we keep our heads here, man...whoever is out there would love for us to get angry and careless...and start making mistakes. Do not forget for a New York minute that we're probably also on their hit list. Okay?" I say.

Hawk just nods in agreement then leaves, "I need to go for long a walk, man..." he says over his shoulder.

I pick up the phone and call Ivan Tarnowski's cell phone, after three rings he answers, "Hey, Mick...what's up man?"

"Ivan...Detectives Hadley and Pirelli from the Moody Seaport PD just left here after questioning me about Jennifer Roger's death," I say, filling him in on her death, with my version of his role in my connection with Jennifer Rogers.

"Jennifer dead...my *gawd*...how tragic, man. What the hell's going on? Ivan says.

"Man...all I can tell ya is that Hawk and I are all over it. But frankly, the more we dig...it's beginning to look more and more like a major conspiracy. A massive and now, very violent coverup. With some serious resource behind it. Stay tuned for further developments. Can I trust you keep this quiet...and back up my story about Jenifer with cops?"

"Sure...no problem, Mick. Got your back. By the way...Sanjana, my wife would like to meet you two reprobates from my past life...have you over for dinner," he says.

"Okay...sounds great. And thanks," I say

"I'll get back to ya on the date. Talk later."

Click

Part Seven - Thursday October 10, 2001 -

- Chapter 52 -

October 10, 2001 Thursday about 2pm

U.S./Canada from British Columbia - Border crossing station - Peace Arch Crossing - Blaine WA.

Due to heightened security after 911, the border wait going South to the U.S. from Vancouver British Columbia is at least an hour longer than usual—cars are backed up over 3 miles. Behind the wheel alone, in a 2001 Silver Mercedes C240 Sedan is a 22 year old college student at the University of British Columbia, with olive skin, thick raven hair and dark coffee eyes.

Hassan Tehrani is impatiently waiting in the excruciatingly creeping line to cross into Washington state, to clandestinely meet up with his young coed girlfriend, a student at Moody U, in Moody Seaport, Washington. When he finally gets to the Peace Arch crossing kiosk, he hands the U.S. I.C.E. agent his Canadian passport from British Columbia.

"What kind of name is Hassan Tehrani?" the agent says.

"It's Persian," Hassan says.

"Where's that, Persian? What rughead country is that?"

Hassan replies, "It is Iran."

As a smile slowly forms on his face, the agent just stares at him, he then yells some code number, keeps Hassan's passport, and tersely says, "Uh...that would be the *same* Iran that kept over 50 Americans hostage for over 400 days, from 1979? Pull out of line to that designated parking area, just to your left. Your passport will be returned after the screening process...or maybe not. Leave your keys to the car, including the trunk and the glove box, in the vehicle."

As Hassan pulls into the parking stall, two burly Border Patrol guards, with hands resting on their holstered guns, immediately order him out of the car, and with one officer under each arm, briskly march him into the main building, like he's some kind of criminal...or terrorist. With no response to his entreaty to explain what's going on, they then half-walk and half-drag him to a windowless interview room.

It is very hot in there, the air is dank and stale, it stinks with B.O. The walls are filthy, a pale penal green. There is nothing but a steel institutional gray table with a chair on either side, directly under a big bank of flickering florescent lights—constantly buzzing. Without a word, they loudly slam the door and leave. After about 20 minutes of just sitting there, with the extreme stress and oppressive heat, he is

already in a full sweat. The same two uniformed U.S. Customs agents, both still wearing guns, enter the room.

The one officer ceremoniously places a portable cassette tape recorder on the table. The second agent is standing behind him the whole time out of Hassan's vision...so close, he can feel his hot breath on the back of his neck. The first agent, a short stocky guy with a buzz-cut, with small mean pig eyes, takes a chair at the table across from Hassan, and continues to stare at him without saying a word for about a minute—it seems like an eternity.

Finally, he says, "*Mister* Tehrani, my name is U.S. Customs Officer Harold Bingstad, and that's Officer John Hardin. We have a few questions we'd like to ask you...do you mind if I record this interview?"

Hassan says, "What's this about officer...have I done something wrong?"

"No...not that we know of...yet," he says with a smirk

"Do I need to have an attorney present for this?" Hassan says.

"Well, that's your right to have an attorney present...but of course we would have to detain you until your attorney was able get here. If you waive the right to an attorney, anything you say, might be used against you in a court of law. So, unless you have something to hide...if you want to be on your way, I would strongly advise you to proceed with this recorded interview," he says.

"Don't you have to have a reason to detain me? I have done nothing wrong. I was just trying to cross the border for an appointment...which I am very late for now that you've kept me here for over a half-of-an-hour...for as far as I can tell, no valid reason," he says.

"Now you listen to me, *Mister* Tehrani...we can make this as hard as you want it to be. If you don't start cooperating...like right now, *Mister* Tehrani, we might begin to get suspicious of your intentions to come into these United States. Do you *understand* what I'm saying here?" he says.

Hassan is becoming very anxious. They must have the heat turned way up in the room, it seems like 100 degrees in there. His shirt underarms are soaked with sweat—he senses that the officers can also detect the scent of fear from his strong, rank body odor. Finally, he relents, because he doesn't want to keep his girlfriend waiting any longer and because he thinks they might try to contact his father. This would alert him that Hassan is seeing his "infidel" American girlfriend, which had been strictly forbidden under Islamic Sharia law by the orthodox Islamic autocratic father. Forbidden fruit.

"Okay...but I really have to get going...so please hurry this up. How long will this take?" Hassan says.

"We make rules here. We're gonna take our time...as long as takes to get to the truth," the agent says.

He then over-deliberately depresses the record button,"This is U.S. Customs Agent Office Harold Bingstad. It is Thursday October

10th at 2:15 pm. This recorded interview is being conducted at the U.S. Border crossing at Peace Arch, Blaine Washington. Present in the room is Officer John Hardin, and the interviewee, Hassan Tehrani....spelling Tehrani... "T" as in uh...Terrorist, "E" as in Edward, "H" as in Henry, "R" as in Robert, "A" as in uh...*A-rab*, "N" as in Nora and "I" as in Ida.

"Mr Tehrani, is this recording being made with your full knowledge and consent?"

"Well... I guess so..." Hassan says

"Yes or no."

"Okay. Uh...yes," Hassan says.

"And are all the answers you are about to give true and correct to the best of your knowledge and belief?" the agent says.

"Yeah, uh...yes,"

He says, "Do you wish to have an attorney present for this interview?"

"I guess not. Uh...no," Hassan says.

"State your residence address for the record." he says

"1408 East Broadway, Vancouver, British Columbia," Hassan says.

"The purpose of your visit to the U.S...business or pleasure?"

"To see a friend," Hassan says.

"Your friend's name and address?" the agent says.

"Why do you need that? I don't feel comfortable giving that information," he says.

"You either provide that information, correctly and accurately, which I can assure you will be checked out, or you will be refused admittance into these United States, now and in the foreseeable future. Do you understand?"

Anticipating where this is going, and that they may check on his answers, he uses a fabricated internet date site screen name of "A-Rog." using her middle name, instead of Jennifer.

"Okay...Allison Rogers, Moody Seaport, Washington...I don't know her street address," Hassan says.

"Your relationship with this Allison Rogers?" he says.

"I don't see what the nature of my friendship has anything to do..." he is cut short.

"I'm not going to tell you this again. Answer all my questions....and truthfully, or you *will* be refused admittance to the US. Am I making myself *perfectly* clear?"

"Okay. Okay...a friend. I met her on an internet dating site. This is our first date," he says.

"Her phone number for verification purposes?"

"I don't have any more info than that...because we set up this meeting online with email. The dating site doesn't even give personal email addresses...and for security reasons, most women who date online don't give out their phone number before the first meeting," Hassan says.

"Okay...we'll come back to that question after you have had a chance to reconsider your answer...remembering that failure to be truthful to a US law enforcement officer is a separate and punishable crime," he threatens.

"Your occupation in British Columbia?" he says.

"I am a graduate student at UBC, uh...University of British Columbia...an Electrical Engineering Major," Hassan volunteers.

When he sees the agents eyebrows fleetingly raise, he realizes he has made a big mistake, by volunteering too much information. A long pause ensues. Both men are sizing each other up, searching each others gaze, like a game of chess, trying to anticipate the next five moves of the other.

Finally, "So you would have a knowledge of electronics, electrical circuits, like timers and the like?" the agent says.

"Yes...I guess so...but..." he is cut short again "How do you feel about United States? What is your opinion of what happened on September 11th, 2001?" the agent says.

There it is. Finally, it is now confirmed. Because of his name, features and coloring, his ethnicity is assumed to be Middle-eastern, and because he has admitted to being Iranian, the agent in the kiosk knee-jerk profiled him as a potential terrorist threat to America. Now he is really beginning to worry—he starts sweating even more profusely with beads of sweat now sprouting on his entire face. The other agent's hot breath on the nape of his perspiring neck accentuates his anxiety.

"Like most Canadians, of which I am citizen and have been since birth, I am deeply saddened by the events of 9-1-1. It was a heinous and cowardly act...and because many will be tempted to brand all Muslims as potential terrorist, it is the worst possible act that could have been committed in the name of Allah. I think America is a great country...I have the utmost respect for its people, and the culture," adding a cringe-worthy patronizing, "...and of course, its government." Agent Bingstad momentarily flashes a superior smile, tantamount in chess to a "check". He's got him on the run, keep up the pressure, and it's just a few more moves for "check mate".

Just as agent Bingstad begins to open his mouth, there is a knock on the door. A head peers around it, and says, "We've gone over the car with a fine tooth comb...nothin'...like zippo. The boss says to cut him loose...we need you two out at the crossing, to deal with the heavy volume. *Now!*" the door slams shut. Seeing that agent Bingstad's attention is distracted from him momentarily, Hassan glances at his Rolex, it's 2:28. He's already a half-hour late, with a minimum half-hour drive time left. He realizes that unless he leaves immediately he has no chance of meeting up with Jennifer. The interruption gives him time to gather his faculties. With his car having been meticulously searched, and coming up empty, he is emboldened by the prospect that they don't

have enough probable cause to detain him any further. He decides to go for it.

Removing a small spiral notebook from the inside pocket of his expensive tailored sport coat, and selecting a red felt pen arrayed with several other pens in his engineer's pocket protector, he elaborately flips to an empty page, stares at the badge of Bingstad, and begins furiously scribbling notes while consulting his watch. He decides to go "all in" with his bluff—no turning back now. "Now...unless you intend to charge me for something...Agent Bingstad and uh...Agent Hardin, is it? I suggest we terminate this interview right now. Or you *will* be hearing from our attorney...for violation of my civil rights, including unlawful detention without probable cause and racial profiling...for starters. And that *is* for the record...on the recording at 2:29 pm. Am I making myself *perfectly* clear?" Hassan says slowly and loudly to ensure that it is clearly recorded.

Agent Bingstad just stares at Hassan, realizing he has lost the advantage of surprise and intimidation—a stalemate. His face flushed with anger, he finally says into the recorder, "That concludes the interview on Thursday October 10 with Hassan Tehrani. It is 2:30 pm."

Click.

"Now that that thing is turned off. The next time...you little Hadji smart ass...you might not be so lucky. You're in our computer system now. So every time you cross the border, you'll be flagged for an interview. And I promise you, that I will make it a point to take a *very* personal interest in your border activity. You're free to leave. Now...get the *hell* out of my sight," Agent Bingstad says in a menacingly calm voice dripping with malevolence. Then, both agents arrogantly cop-strut out of the room.

Badly shaken, on rubbery legs, Hassan finds his way back to his car. He finds his passport thrown on the passenger seat. The backseat is askew and the side trim panels on the doors have obviously been removed, but not put back in place properly. His hand is shaking so badly, after several tries, the key finally finds the ignition, but for a few seconds too long, as the engine catches, the starter motor screeches against the flywheel.

His nerves shot, he fights the urge to vomit, as he speeds South to rendezvous with his forbidden fruit. He makes record time, and arrives at the parking lot of Moody Falls park at 2:55pm just as Jennifer Rogers is starting to pull out the parking lot in her father's 2000 red Stingray Corvette.

He intercepts her. She slides into the familiar backseat of his car with him. They wordlessly embrace for over a minute...his body still shaking from anxiety, and anger over the draconian interrogation tactics.

- Chapter 53 -

*Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life
for his friends.*

John 15:13 - King James Version

October 10, 2001 Thursday 3:00 pm - Ground Zero

Josh and Wayne both have their eyes glued on the minute hand of the big black numbered clock in Mrs Rawlston's sixth-grade class, at J.P. Moody Elementary. Josh's foot is impatiently tapping the floor, as he looks admiringly at his new Nike Air Jordan's the envy of his classmates. The big hand is excruciatingly poised at the twelve, when suddenly, the bell rings, ordinarily the sweetest sound in the world for any happy healthy young lad. For these two best friends, it has rung for the last time...

Despite Mrs Rawlston's futile injunctions, the boys leap from their desks and sprint for the classroom door.

Once outside, like two day-is-done care-free cowboys, they blithely mount their high-end mountain bikes, poised in the bike rack like waiting stallions, a young boy's ultimate symbol of independence and mobility.

"Joshie...let's head over to the falls...see if Glen's having any luck fly-fishin' today," Wayne says.

"Okay man...race ya!" Josh says.

Hooting and whistling, they pedal, joyously, laughing all the way toward their favorite after-school playground Moody Falls Park. They are at the parking lot to Moody Falls Park in less than 3 minutes. An old beat-up '76 Ford pick-up is incongruously parked near a 2000 blood-red Chevrolet Corvette Fastback, and a new Silver Mercedes Benz with British Columbia plates, with the closed side windows fogged up.

"Glen's truck is here....he's probably fishin' his favorite spot....just below the bridge," says Josh.

"Okay...looks like Hassan's here too...the silver bullet. Let's go say hi...see if he's got any more cool new tunes on his MP3 player for us," says Wayne.

"Nah...they look busy, we'll do that later. Let's catch up with Glen," says Josh

"Yeah...he and Jen won't be going anywhere....for quite a while," Wayne says with a wry grin.

"Hey, what's that smell, man...smells like gas...seems to be coming from the falls?" says Josh.

As they lock up their mountain bikes in the rack, Wayne says, "Let's check it out...see if we can find Glen."

The boys make their way across the bridge, then down the steep slope to a trail that parallels the stream, and start walking away from the bridge. The stream is waist deep in places. The current is fast as the boys continue looking for Glen.

"Hey, there's Glen's tackle box...but I don't see him. He'd never leave his tackle like this, with all of those hand-tied flies," says Josh.

"He's probably got a big one on the line and he's playing him downstream," says Wayne.

They leave the trail and slide down to the edge of the stream to the tackle box. As they near the edge of the stream, the gas fumes are now becoming very strong. What they could not know is that young Glen McCauley has been overcome by the noxious gasoline fumes—passing out, filling his waders with water pulling him below the surface to the bottom of the creek, drowning him. The boys are now giddily laughing, starting to feel a high from the fumes.

"Hey...I saw this guy on America's Funniest Home videos, throw a match on his barbeque after he used gas to start the coals. *Kablew*, man, funnier n' hell. Blew the barbie about ten feet straight up in the air," says Josh.

"Whoa, that musta been cool...like the Fourth of July," says Wayne.

"Hey...got any matches?" says Josh with a sly grin.

"No...but I've got a Bic lighter. But Joshie, I don't sink hit's a very good idea...seems like a lot of gas," says Wayne starting to slur his words like a drunk.

"Aw man...common...it'll be a blast," giggles Josh with a Norman Rockwell big toothy grin.

"Yeah...zat's what wurrries me," says Wayne.

"Don't be chicken, Wayno *braack braaack braack*...gimme dat ting," says Josh as he snatches the lighter out of Wayne's hand.

Just then the boys hear someone yelling from a distance coming from the bridge.

The man screams through his cupped hands but they cannot hear his words over the roar of the water.

As the man gets closer he can barely make out the flickering flame of the lighter poised in Josh's hand. He frantically screams, "NO! Don't do it!...NO!"

The man, racing toward the boys, watches helplessly, as if time stood still, as the lighter falls in slow motion from Josh's outstretched hand toward the gas filled stream of death. He has just enough time to dive behind a large boulder on the trail, before the waiting time bomb of high-octane jet fuel...patiently, hungrily awaits its *raison d' etre*—ignition, as the lighter innocuously cartwheels toward the senseless obliteration of two innocent, unfinished lives. The two pals lock eyes,

: : *Michaelangelo's Renaissance* — *m.a.kominsky* : :

with unspoken recognition of their imminent incineration, they clasp hands.

KA-B-O-O-OM!

A massive, ear drum shattering explosion. Then...all white.

Peering from behind the boulder, the man witnesses the huge fireball traveling at over sixty miles per hour, through the overpass bridge, eventually to the estuary where the stream meets Moody Bay.

- Chapter 54 -

Two households, both alike in dignity. In fair Verona, where we lay our scene. From ancient grudge break to new mutiny, Where civil blood makes civil hands unclean. From forth the fatal loins of these two foes. A pair of star-cross'd lovers...

-The Prologue - Romeo and Juliet
1596 - William Shakespeare

October 10, 2001 Thursday 3:01 pm - Moody Falls Park: Ground Zero

Anxiously drumming her fingers on the steering wheel of her father's 2000 Corvette with a 'Moody U Alumnus' decal emblazoned on the rear window, Jennifer Rogers, a pretty junior at Moody University, has been waiting patiently in the parking lot for the arrival of her lover. Since September 11th, they have not been able to enjoy their normal afternoon secret lover's tryst at Moody Falls Park.

Both families of the young lovers agreed on one thing, probably the only thing, that Hassan and Jennifer should not, indeed would not be allowed to continue this love affair—a foolish infatuation with no possible future. They had pleaded, cajoled and finally threatened the lovers, to cease this senseless romance, that they were, perhaps prophetically, 'playing with fire'. Hassan was supposed to have met her here by two o'clock.

She turns the key of the ignition, and the powerful engine rumbles to life. Looking over her right shoulder, she slides the shifter into reverse, when suddenly a Silver Mercedes shimmering in the late afternoon light, skids into the space to the left of her. The driver, a well dressed handsome young man in his early twenties, with wavy jet black hair and large deep-set luminescent black pearl eyes climbs into the rear seat of the SUV. Once inside, the other rear side door springs open. Jennifer, turns off the ignition, and immediately throws open her door and scrambles into the beckoning open door of the SUV. Once inside, they passionately embrace, and kiss deeply, holding on to each other tightly as if it will be for the last time. Finally, they release each other enough to be able to talk.

"I'm so sorry that I am so late, Jen...I was terrified that you might leave before I could get here," says Hassan.

"What happened? I was just about to leave, my car's in the shop, so I have to get the car back to my father, before he gets suspicious.

After 9-11, he'd kill me if he ever found out I was seeing you again," says Jen.

"The US Customs Border people detained me...and gave me the third degree for almost half an hour. More like he'd kill me...literally, if my own father didn't first. They forbid me to use my cell phone to call you...my Father had U.S. calls blocked on my calling plan so I couldn't call you or receive your calls," Hassan says.

"But why would US Customs do that to you? I don't understand," says Jen.

"Since 9-11, the world has changed Jen....and not for the better for anyone with an Islamic sounding name or worse, appearance. Once inside the interview room, with no windows, the one agent interrogated me like uh..."

Jen interrupts, "Do you smell gasoline?"

"Yeah, it's really strong too. I'd better check it out, maybe they did something to the car," says Hassan.

Hassan gets out of the car and his senses are immediately assaulted by the intense smell of gasoline coming from the direction of the stream. As he looks toward the bridge, he notices two young boys whom he immediately recognizes as Josh and Wayne. In the past three months, he had struck up a casual friendship with boys, while waiting for Jennifer to arrive. He had let them download some of his music from his new cutting edge MP3 player. They were great kids, and very interested in what it's like to live in another country—Vancouver BC.

Hassan runs back to the SUV, jumps into the back seat and grabs Jen's hand.

"Listen to me...there's something very wrong going on out there...it smells like it's coming from the stream. That much gas, is very dangerous...it could blow any minute! I just saw Josh and Wayne crossing the bridge going toward the stream. I have to try to warn them. I want you to get back in your car and wait for me there. If something happens, don't wait for me...get out of here *as fast as you can!*" says Hassan, now breathing in very shallow rapid breaths.

"But I can't leave without you. I love you Hassan. I love you so much I couldn't stand to live without you," says Jen.

"I know, dear one. I love you too...more than life itself, but I've got to try to stop those boys...they're very young. They have no idea of the danger of the situation. Promise me, Jen...you have to promise that you'll do as I say if something happens....please Jen!" pleads Hassan.

"But...okay, I guess I promise...but please hurry back! I'm already sick with worry," says Jen.

"It's probably nothing, but I have to go. I love you, Jen," says Hassan.

Hassan, cradling her face in both hands, gives Jen a deep kiss, then slides out of the car, and starts running toward the boys, yelling. "Hey you kids...get away from there!"

Soon it will not matter if the boys ignored or did not hear him over the roar of the falls.

Jen dutifully, climbs behind the wheel of the Corvette and waits for what seems like an eternity, as has often been confided from others, that during times of great stress, time seems to be frozen in place. In real time, it is less than a minute before her life will never again be the same.

Overcome by the guilt of escaping...of survivor's guilt, of leaving her love, and the overwhelming, unrelenting grief of the loss of the love of her life, tragically, her own life will also be, prematurely abbreviated.

Hassan continues to run after the boys, as they cross the bridge then walk down the slope of the bank to the trail along the stream. He is now on the trail, trying desperately to get their attention over the roar of the white water. They seem to notice something, stop, and slide down to the edge of the water. The smell of gas is now overpowering...after running, and inhaling the gas fumes, he is feeling lightheaded, having a hard time breathing. The boys stop by the water's edge—he can hear them laughing. Then suddenly, something catches his attention, in Josh's hand, the faint flicker of a flame.

"NO!...Don't do it...NO!" Hassan screams.

Then he watches helplessly as the flaming lighter cartwheels toward the water. He dives behind a big boulder on the trail, just as the stream erupts into an inferno, then the massive explosion.

KA-B-O-O-OM!

The shock wave of the blast throws him against the boulder, rendering him senseless. For about 30 seconds he is disoriented. When he finally regains his senses, he is bleeding, profusely from his temple from the shock of the blast driving his head into the rock. His vision is blurred by the blood now streaming into his eyes. He wipes the blood away with his sleeve, enough to be able to see, that one of the figures is moving, screaming in agony.

He runs to the boys and immediately sees that one of them is beyond any help. He bends down and picks up the other boy, and cradling him in his arms starts to run back toward the parking lot, when there is a second blast, throwing him to the ground. His clothes are now on fire. He can feel his own skin melting. He tries to avert his eyes from the white bone material now exposed on his arms and legs. Where was once his luxuriant thick black mane on his head is now smoldering wisps of smoke. Somehow, by sheer will and adrenalin, he manages to stand up. He continues on...staggering, one agonizing step at a time, he refuses to release what is left of his now completely still young friend in his arms, until finally he makes it to the bridge.

Jen having felt the first blast, is now terrified. She is torn. Should she leave Hassan down there in that inferno, or should she keep

her promise to escape? Suddenly the second explosion galvanizes her will and she knows that there is no hope for anyone caught down there in that burning hell. She is riddled with indecision...paralyzed with fear. For almost five minutes...her body trembling. Finally, crying hysterically, but keeping her promise to her dear one, she throws the shift lever into reverse. The front windshield is covered with a black gooey film. She can barely see well enough to discern the exit to the parking lot. She turns on the windshield washer, but it only makes matters worse forming a gooey black sludge on the windshield. Now committed, she forces the shift lever forward and floors it. The big powerful engine just spins the rear tires in place—an eerie whining high-pitched screeching, the smell of burning rubber—until finally the rear wheels catch, pinning her against the seat, as she is propelled forward by the powerful G forces of acceleration.

Suddenly, out of the roiling black smoke, she vaguely senses the motion of a figure in front of her, but out of panic, she presses the accelerator even harder to the floor. The last split second the figure jumps out of the path of the screaming Corvette. As she approaches the exit, she breaks hard to make the sharp left turn. The brake lights cast a ghostly dancing pall onto the smoke, making it seem to come alive with a red-tinted malevolence.

Hassan continues across the bridge, carrying the limp, charred unrecognizable torso. He refuses to drop it. He is now on the verge of collapse. Every breath is pure agony. His whole body is now throbbing with pain. Yet he continues to struggle...to stay upright. He has somehow mustered the courage through sheer force of will, but now can go no further, and collapses. Suddenly, through the black bellowing smoke, he spies some movement, just ahead of him.

"*Sera don nee!...sera don nee!*" *Help me...help me*, Hassan yells.

"What-the-hell happened?" the man yells over the roar of the fire.

Then, suffering unbearable pain as Hassan tries to explain to the man what happened, he lapses into his native Persian tongue, Farsi.

Kneeling down beside Hassan, the man yells over the roar of the fire, "I can't understand you...can you speak English?"

"Help...in the name of Allah...I..." Hassan whispers.

As he slowly begins to exhale for the last time, the intense pain is now melting away, he knows his suffering will soon be over. There is another very close loud explosion. The last earthy vision he will have will be this figure in front of him, levitating off the ground and disappearing into the smoke.

"*Allahu-u Akbar!*" *God is Great*, he defiantly screams.

Then...all white.

- Chapter 55 -

October 10, 2001 Thursday 2:58 PM. - 21 Kilometers from Ground Zero

The Cascadia Pipeline Pumping Monitoring Station - Fernwood WA.

In a large very dimly lighted cinder block room, with no windows, the digital wall clock with the big red LED numbers flashing seconds is agonizingly advancing. It is eerily illuminated by the wall of computer monitors and the blue glare of a large back-lit LCD screen of a schematic depicting the path of the pipeline extending the entire length of a thirty foot wall, with each pump station displaying the constantly changing pressure and flow levels of almost 400 miles of petroleum pipeline.

"Thirty two more minutes and I'm outta here," Frank Gutowski whispers to himself.

Thursday is Frank's Friday. His normal days off are Friday and Saturday. In early October, the Salmon fishing for Coho is just finishing up, probably the last good chance to stock his freezer for the winter, so by this time of the week he's usually starting to methodically check the NOAA weather forecast and the tide tables for the next two days. Because it's against company policy to install any programs or browse the internet for fear of external cyber-security compromise on the two DEC VAX/VMS system monitoring minicomputers, he's browsing the internet with his personal notebook computer. To enable this, Frank temporarily removes the Ethernet cable to the VAX Cascad02 and plugs the Ethernet connector into his notebook computer.

The low tide will be extreme and early Thursday evening...which makes it a lot tougher to launch from a trailer, his sole joyful diversion, a 2000 C-Dory 22 foot cabin cruiser, at the municipal boat ramp. He will want to "get wet" this afternoon so he can head for the San Juan Islands, to be at the good fishing spots by sunrise, Friday morning. He decides to print out the tide tables and the Washington State Dept. of Fish & Wildlife Weekly Creel Report, about twenty pages.

"Damn...low tide is early and really low tonight," he laments to himself.

The two minicomputers, Cascad01 and Cascad02, are designed to provide redundancy, both of which would normally be online monitoring the various telemetry stations approximately every mile or so, on the up and down stream length of the pipeline for pressure and

flow readings via a dedicated high speed data line interfaced with an internet connection to allow for monitoring and querying from remote locations by Sys Admin Frank Gunderson.

His co-worker, Tom Hyatt is a trainee, who has just completed his 30 days of training—"30 day wonders" they are called by the "veteran" employees. It's boring and tedious work, with not much pay, which results in a lot of employee churn. Both Frank and Tom have a family. Frank, a wife and a 10 year old daughter with major health problems and Tom a wife, two very young kids and a Black Lab. Because it is one of the few jobs that offers excellent group medical insurance coverage for dependents, even though the pay is relatively low, the medical insurance would otherwise be unaffordable. Frank is considered a veteran operator with only about 11 months of experience.

Neither one has ever been confronted with an emergency situation, even in training exercises, because it is the operational philosophy of the parent company, National Petroleum Inc. that because an accident is so unlikely due to the sophisticated automated monitoring and remediation technology, and because of the inherent employee churn, they can save money on training by starting with the premise that "nothing can go wrong". And in the unlikely event that it does, the system with its built-in redundancy is deemed highly "fault tolerant" or "unsinkable", and would react quickly and properly to correct any anomalies that might interrupt the flow of the liquid alchemy.

Of the six such monitoring stations in Washington state, the Fernwood Station is the closest monitoring station about 21 Km about 12 miles, directly upstream from Moody Seaport, which are designed to monitor the status of the pipeline which delivers petroleum from Northern most Cascadia County, the Goose Point Refinery, to all points South, including high-octane jet fuel to SEATAC Airport, about 20 miles South of Seattle, and the Southern-most PDX Airport in Portland Oregon.

The over 400 miles of pipeline, of sixteen inch steel pipe, with an operating pressure of around 1000 Pounds per Square Inch or PSI, which can move the highly flammable and volatile liquid at about 50,000 GPM, or Gallons Per Minute. The factory wall thickness is nearly half of an inch, before inevitable reduction from the external rust and interior corrosion which naturally occurs each year. In some areas, like Moody Seaport, the original, direct buried steel pipe, has been in service for over forty years.

And like most aging infrastructure these days, unless something breaks...or something goes very wrong, to save money, there is little or no repair, scheduled maintenance, or replacement. Soon the residents of Moody Seaport, will become tragically aware that for all these years, they have been living, literally on top of a ticking time bomb of highly explosive jet fuel.

Tom Hyatt's normal shifts starts at 3:00 PM, which theoretically allows for about a half hour of overlap with the operator of the next shift to be fully briefed on the monitoring status of the previous shift.

"Hey Tom...I'd like to get outta here a little early this afternoon. I gotta pick up some fishing tackle at Yeager's sporting goods store...and I'd like to get an early start before low tide hits. Mind if I cut out a little early? And maybe do me a favor and punch out for me at 3:30," says Frank.

"Geez, I don't know Frank...I don't want to get in trouble. You sure it's okay to punch out for ya?" Tom says.

"Sure man...we do it all the time."

Because he is new and eager to please his co-worker, and to be perceived as a good guy, "Okay...I guess 'd be okay...just this once," says Tom.

Before Tom can change his mind, Frank quickly folds up his notebook computer, but in his haste to leave, and his reverie about his fishing trip, he forgets to tell Tom that minicomputer Cascad01 is currently down for routine backup maintenance, which was supposed to have been completed before the end of shift, which Frank had forgotten to do because his attention was consumed by his searching on the internet for what kind of lure the Coho Salmon were hitting on in Puget Sound. Cascad02 is the only monitoring computer not occupied with maintenance tasks and the printer which normally prints system data readings real-time screen dumped from the big board display, has just a few pages left in the bin.

"See ya Sunday, Tom...and thanks pal," Frank says over his shoulder, as he hurries out the thick metal security door to his pickup truck with the trailered boat already hitched up.

- Chapter 56 -

October 10, 2001 Thursday 3:02 PM.
Pumping Monitoring Station - Fernwood WA

Almost immediately, after Frank leaves, a loud audible siren begins to sound accompanied by a flashing animation graphic "alarm" alternating with "low pressure event" at the next monitoring station on the LCD wall schematic indicating a precipitous drop in pressure at Bayview Pumping Station which is the next monitoring system about 33 Km, downstream from Fernwood.

Suddenly the printer "out of paper" alarm sounds, after printing just one page of screen dump, which will mean that none of the data history of this horrific event from that point, would be recorded and logged by the printer, which is normally a hard copy back-up of the data sent to a text log file to the VAX online.

Tom's ears are now being bombarded by a cacophony of alarm noises, which he has never heard before. He frantically searches for the switch to suppress the irritatingly shrill siren alarm, but staring down at the control panel, now all lit up with flashing warning lights, with a vast array of illuminated buttons and switches, he can not remember which one turns the audible alarm off. The graphic animation on the wall persists, and now the graphic is cycling through colors of orange to red, then finally constantly red, with a new message flashing "dangerously low pressure level" and then "major critical system failure event in progress - contact system administrator immediately!" with the time and date flashing " 2001-10-10 - 15:03:23 hrs."

Because Tom is such a neophyte, he's very tentative about how to proceed. He is growing increasingly anxious. The screaming alarms are now making it more and more difficult to concentrate. He picks up the phone, looks at the white-board just to his right where "emergency contact phone numbers" are scribbled, barely legible, in the low light and from multiple erasures, and hastily punches in the mobile number of his boss, George Gunderson, the system administrator who's got the day off.

"I'm sorry the number you have reached is no longer in service, or you have dialed it incorrectly. There is no new number. Please hang up and try again." the recording matter-of-factly says, followed by a rude tone. "Reeeel helpful...thanks bitch," he says.

"Jezuz Christ...is that last digit a one or a seven?" Tom curses.

He hangs up, redials and this time punches in the last digit as seven. The phone after what seems like an eternity, begins to ring.

"This is George Gunderson, I'm not available at the moment, please leave a message and I'll return your call as soon as possible...have a nice day."

"George, this is Tom Hyatt at Fernwood. We've got a uh...situation here. The alarms are going crazy, the big board is displaying 'dangerously low pressure level' and then 'major critical system failure event in progress—contact system administrator immediately!' I don't know what I should do. Please call me back as soon as you get this...thanks!" Tom says, trying desperately to control the panic in his voice.

After what seems like forever, but is actually only about 2 minutes, the phone rings. "Hi Tom, George Gunderson here. Got your message. What's up?"

"George, there appears to be a critical system failure in progress...it looks to be South of here, at or upstream from the Bayview Monitoring Station...there's also very low pressure warnings downstream from me. I've never had to handle one of these...the alarms are going berserk. I don't know how to turn them off...it's driving me crazy and the big board is telling me to call the Sys Admin. Tell me what I should do."

"Tom...first thing...stay calm. Probably just another false alarm. First thing to do is to suppress the alarms. It's the red button on the upper right hand of the control panel...it should be flashing. Just press the button, and that should do it."

Tom presses the button, and the alarm from the big board mercifully stops, but the printer "out of paper" alarm is still beeping.

"Okay...the big board alarm is off, there's still another beeping sound, but at least I can hear you now. Now what do I do?" says Tom.

"Log on to Cascad02, and run the telemetry search program, select all sensors South of your location, which will tell you the status of the pressure sensors downstream from you. If there is a major anomaly in pressure, it will give an approximate location."

Tom logs on to Cascad02 and selects "Report Telemetry Sensors Status of Pipeline" from the on-screen menu. Tom runs the program, but an error message comes back, "Computer cannot connect to the network, please try again." Tom has no idea that the Ethernet cable has been left disconnected by Frank. He frantically tries again. Same result.

"George, I can't connect to the system...now what?" says Tom.
"Try Cascad01!" says George.

Tom goes to Cascad01 to log in, but the Monitor displays "Cascad01 is currently backing up data files. Do not disturb until this task is complete"

"Cascad01 is in Back up mode...now what...where are you? Can you get over here right away?" says Tom.

"Shit! Okay, uh...you've got to get on-line and check those telemetry stations...to determine if there actually is an escape event occurring in the system, where it is and how serious it is. The pressure

relief valve upstream at Fernwood should sense the low pressure and automatically shut down the flow, but if it had, you wouldn't be seeing those very low pressure warnings downstream from you...the flow would theoretically be zero if the relief valve did its job. In any case, to be on the safe side, you've got to get on-line and shut the flow down from your upstream location. Do you understand, Tom...it could be very serious," says George.

"I can't get the goddam Cascad02 to connect! What the *fuck* do I do now? Where are you George?" pleads Toms

"I'm just returning home from Division Office in Bellevue, took off from Lake Washington in the company pontoon plane...just now flying over Cascade Lake...to make a landing. I'm at about 2,000 feet, about a mile from Moody Seaport...so I can't possibly get over to you for at least another 45 minutes."

- Chapter 57 -

October 10, 2001 Thursday 3:08 PM.
About two thousand feet above the Cascade Lake

KA-B-O-O-OM!

A huge explosion. The corporate de Haviland Otter single engine 'high wing' float plane is rocked by the concussion of the blast. George manages to stabilize the aircraft. He then looks down at the origin of the explosion. The flames are now even with his altitude. The black smoke he knows only too well can mean only one thing—a petroleum fire. He can feel the heat of the blast. He knows that the pipeline runs right through the area.

Tom says, "George...what was that noise...sounded like an explosion. Are you okay?"

"*Jezus Christ!* Tom...listen very carefully to me. I think we have a major catastrophe on our hands. Looks like the pipeline might have blown over here by Moody Seaport...by Cascade Lake. This is very serious. Do not...I repeat do not talk to anyone about this until I can get there...do not answer any questions. If you are contacted by the authorities or the media, all you are allowed to say is we are in process of investigating the matter, and can offer no comment at this time. Is that perfectly clear Tom?"

"Yes sir...but..." says Tom as the connection clicks off.

After hanging up on Tom, George Gunderson immediately calls the Western Division Corporate Vice President of Operations of Cascadia Petroleum Inc., CPI in Bellevue, Washington. Howard Roland VP from corporate headquarters for NPI in Houston is visiting Bellevue for a corporate golf tournament.

"This is George Gunderson, Sys Admin Cascadia Pipeline. This is an extreme emergency. Put me through to Howard Roland, VP...I repeat this is an emergency, I don't care what he's doing, even if he's in the middle of taken' a shit...get him to the phone. *NOW!*"

About a minute later after the call is patched to Howard Roland's mobile phone, "Hey Boy George...you still pissed off about last night's Texas Hold'em game? So what's so *goddam* important that you had to distract me at the *goddam* 17th hole at the *goddam* Country Club, when I'm up one hole headin' for number 18 for a 100 big ones. This fuckin' better be good *goddammit!*" Howard says chidingly.

"If my assessment is even half right, that hundred bucks is going to be carfare compared to what this thing may cost you in personal

lawyer fees. I'd strongly advise you to skip the 18th, head straight to the clubhouse and turn the TV to CNN. Pretty soon now, the reports of a petroleum explosion in Moody Seaport Washington should be hitting the wires and airwaves. After today, none of us, including and especially you, may have a job. Looks like the Cascadia Pipeline blew about 3 PM this afternoon in a densely populated area of Moody Seaport. I personally witnessed it from the air...this is very big...and very bad. There's got to be major casualties, maybe triple digit fatals, and massive property damage. Remember the natural gas pipeline explosion in Carlsbad New Mexico in August of 2000...12 dead. From the looks of it, this could be order of magnitude," says George.

"Please tell me that you're just *shittin'* me...prankin' me for stickin' it to you for 90 bucks last night," says Howard.

"Cut the shit and listen up Howard...*and listen good!* We don't know what happened yet...but you know, as well I, pipelines, under Federal law, are considered to be a common carrier, absolute or strict liability those 500 dollar an hour lawyers call it, so we'd be presumed to be completely at fault, and 100% liable for all damages, actual and consequential, unless the proximate cause, and therefore the liability can be shifted or imputed to a third party. So I would strongly suggest you get somebody over there as-soon-as-fuckin'-possible to start shiftin'...before the NTSB locks it down.

Be-cause 'shit happens' ain't going to float as a defense. So it's time for major 'shit happens'...' cause if you could see what I'm seein', you'd be shittin' your pants as we speak. I'm flying over it right now, and as far as I can tell it happened near Moody Falls Park...a burning jet fuel fireball, barreled down the creek all the way down to Moody Bay...flames and black smoke billowing several thousand feet in the air already, man. Feels like a blast furnace up here even at 2,000 feet. Am I making myself abundantly clear here Howard?" says George.

"*Shit...* don't give any statements to the *goddam* authorities or the *goddam* media until I can tell you what the official corporate response will be. And tell all the *goddam* employees, involved and even uninvolved, to keep their *fuckin'* mouths shut if they want to keep their *goddam* jobs. We gotta get somebody out there...eyes on the ground...and from corporate over there to start working up some creative alternative liability narrative, at least to create some doubt to detract from the obvious, until we can buy some time. This is a *fuckin'* PR nightmare, especially with the Feds really lookin' down our throats at the safety issues of our proposed petro-pipeline from British Columbia, Canada into the US. I'll get back to you." Howard says.

Click.

October 10th @ 3:50pm

About 45 min after the explosion at Moody Falls Park

Howard Roland is about to make the worst call of his life, so far, to Corporate Headquarters, National Petroleum Inc., parent company of CPI, in Houston, Texas.

But his first call will be to Ernest Porter, President and CEO of SHOPS, Silent Hand OPs...or operations LLC, a turn of phrase on the father of free market capitalism, Adam Smith's "invisible hand" of the controlling forces of the marketplace in lieu of government regulation. The home office is strategically located in Chula Vista, California about 5 miles from the Mexico Border. The recently constructed multimillion dollar 900 square acre training facility for paramilitary troops is a convenient gateway for access to oil rich South America where many petro-corporations, and an occasional drug cartel, have need of his services.

Unlike the paramilitary equivalent of Blackwater Worldwide, founded in 1997, a private military company, most of the clients of Silent Hand OPs are non-governmental organizations, NGOs, large multi-national corporations, like the huge international energy and manufacturing conglomerates, who occasionally need clandestine "special OPs". Porter, who founded SHOPS in 1998, is an ex-caseworker, from the Special Activities Division, SAD, of the CIA, specializing in "black OPs". Formed in 1947 by the National Security Act, the CIA's mission was to obtain "through any means necessary" Signal Intelligence or SIGINT, including audio and/or video, and photography surveillance, and Human Intelligence or HUMINT, "to get eyes on" intel, and if possible, to compromise security of US political enemies, of which there was no shortage, according to the leadership of the CIA.

Porter, whose code name is Black Mamba from his Force Recon days, named after one of the most deadly venomous snakes in the world, the Black Mamba, They are known for their stealth, highly aggressive behavior, and ability to strike with deadly precision. They are also the fastest land snake in the world, capable of reaching speeds of up to 13 miles per hour. These fearsome snakes can strike up to 12 times in a matter of just a few minutes. On the circumference of his forearm, he sports a tattoo of three coils of a Black Mamba, with the long forked tongue flicking from the head spelling "*El Negrito*" on the back of his right hand.

Because of his ability, like the Black Mamba, to move undetected in the dark recesses, to attack with surgical precision and legendary lethality, then quickly disappear into the darkness, he was particularly adept at Black Ops—liquidating perceived enemies of the US government. Eventually, he came to be known simply by his comrades in clandestine warfare as *Negrito*...Blackie.

In addition to his extensive training, highly honed skills at staging accidental deaths of political enemies of the US government, because of his disarming, seemingly harmless good ol' Southern boy

demeanor which he has consciously cultivated to gain the confidence of his unsuspecting targets, he was also particularly skilled at espionage: "Successful espionage is nothing more than gradually getting somebody comfortable with betrayal."

"Can I speak to Ernie Porter, tell him this is Howard Roland VP Operations of National Petroleum Inc...tell him it's a major emergency."

"One moment please, I'll see if he is available," the voice says.

After about a minute, "Hey Howie...long time. How ya all doin', *amigo?*" says the always affable Ernest Porter.

"Been better, *Negrato*...much better. We've got a situation up here in Northwest Washington...Moody Seaport, about 100 miles North of Seattle. Looks like one of our pipelines blew...according to my Supervisor for that leg of the pipeline, George Gunderson. He witnessed it in the air while coming in for a pontoon plane landing on Cascadia Lake, about 1 mile from ground zero. He says it's bad...real bad," Howard says.

"Okay...stop right there...are you calling from your office land-line phone? If so, hang up...NOW! Call me back on your private cell phone...not your company Blackberry mobile...phone records can be easily subpoenaed...that will be one of the first things the NTSB will do as a matter of routine investigation. Multiple calls or calls of a duration longer than five minutes could raise a flag for follow-up. Call me back on this secure line, to my personal satellite phone, number...619-555-1345, any and all future calls will be done in this manner. And pick yourself up about ten throw-away prepaid mobile phones. Pay with cash only. Each time we need to talk, call me on a new phone, when we're done, take a very large hammer to it, and throw in the trash. Are we clear on that?" says Ernie.

"Yea, but..." says Howard.

Click.

Howard pulls out his personal mobile phone and calls the number back.

"Okay...Howie, what can I do for ya?" says Ernie

"George Gunderson, got a call about a half an hour after the blast, from an FBI agent out of Seattle, a Charles Cunningham. He told George that he believed that the explosion might have been an act of terrorism. He said he wanted to alert us for security purposes to ensure that all the other vulnerable legs of the pipeline, which runs South all the way to Portland, Oregon, were secured. He said, after the explosion hit the wires, he got a call from a border agent...a Hal Bingstad, at the Peace Arch Canada border crossing on Interstate 5, that he suspected a fishy acting rughead might have been involved, that he had detained him at the border. But had to release him, about thirty minutes before the blast because a car search came up negative for any violations of contraband etcetera. He was driving a brand new Silver Mercedes Sedan, with Vancouver BC plates. I don't have exact plate numbers....but apparently

first responders reported that a vehicle matching that description was in the parking lot at ground zero. George thinks we need to get someone out there before the NTSB shows up, and prevents access as a potential crime scene. We need to make damn sure that when the NTSB does their typical nit-picky investigation that they conclude the cause was an act of terrorism," Howard says.

"Hmm...what does George think caused the blast?" says Ernie

"George, seems to think, that based on the early interaction he had with the pump station operator on duty at the time, a Tom Hyatt, who was pretty green...on the job about a month, that it could be a combination of mechanical malfunction of a pressure relief valve...and operator error, in dealing with it. The system is supposed to be fail-safe...with lots of redundancy, but apparently the network was down, and the operator on duty panicked and didn't know how to shut 'er down.

Because that pipeline has been in service for almost forty years, the wall thickness through corrosion etcetera is probably, in some places, about forty...and in some cases maybe thirty percent of original. Our most recent readings with a pipeline pig that inspects the line, indicated that the wall thickness at the explosion site was about thirty five percent of original.

If there is any kind of structural damage, like deep scoring from incidental construction, any kind of extreme pressure build-up, if not dealt with early could blow out the pipeline...the integrity of the pipeline obviously is only as good as the weakest place.

Can you get somebody out there...like yesterday...we need a pair of eyes on the ground. Neither George nor I should be seen out there...in case there was a system malfunction...we need somebody to do this clandestine like, so naturally, I thought of you...we've always been able to count on you in the past...like when you took care of some urgent business for us, in New Mexico....what, about 20 years ago?" says Howard.

"You know Howard...sometimes you gotta *really* big mouth. In the future...nevaa *EVAA*, talk about past assignments, especially if it involves a potentially capital offense. No statute of limitations...got it?" Porter says sending a chill down Rolands' back.

"Hey Ernie...sorry man. Yeah, got it, man. You don't have to be so touchy about it," says Howard.

"Forget it. Okay...here's the deal. I couldn't get anybody up there...for at least 2 days. But I seem to recall that you hired, on my recommendation, Frank "Guts" Gutowski, about a year ago. Frank was a Special Forces guy in the Gulf War in 1990. A 'special ops' behind the lines kinda guy...whose mission was to disrupt and disable the enemy communication, using explosive charges etcetera. He's an expert in pyrotechnics. He came to work for me in 1992, when I was freelancin', before I founded SHOPS, doing the same shit. He was good...very good at what he did, but about a year ago, he decided he wanted out of the

merc biz. Said he had a sick kid, a young daughter with serious health issues, and he wanted to spend some more time with his wife and family...she grew up in Cascadia County...lots of her family still there. I hear the kid's still kickin'...but they're barely keepin' her alive with some major cutting-edge medical procedures and medications...very expensive. That's why he wanted a job with good medical coverage. If he'll do it...right now, he's your best shot at keepin' a lid on this," says Porter.

"Okay...but everything has to go through you...all payments and all contact...so that there is NO paper trail back to me or the corporation. Agreed? So here's what's on the line here. We've got a big pipeline deal cookin' from British Columbia, a transnational through several US states. It's under regulatory and environmental review in Canada and the US. We *can not*, I repeat, *not* afford to be at fault for a negligent system failure of this magnitude, especially with fatals and major property damage. It could literally blow-up the whole *fuckin'* deal...*comprendooh amigoooh?*" says Howie.

"I'll get on it...but it ain't gonna be cheap, *mi amigoooh*. I'll get back to ya," says Ernie.

Click.

October 10th @ 7:53PM

About 7 hours after the explosion at Moody Falls Park

Frank Gutowski, is on his boat anchored off the San Juan Islands for the last 3 hours, to get an early start at fishing for Coho Salmon at daybreak, when he gets the call from Ernie Porter on his cell phone. He immediately turns the boat around, and heads back to the boat launch at the marina. He pulls the boat out of the water on to the trailer, and disconnects the boat trailer from the hitch on the truck and leaves it in the marina parking lot.

His boat has become his sanctuary. It's the only thing that gives him some semblance of pleasure and sanity. It is the boat and his unconditional love and commitment to his gravely ill young daughter Alicia May, the boat's namesake, that keeps him from just saying "*screw it...screw all of it...*" and bailing out of his home situation, including eating a bullet, as many of his Gulf War brothers in arms have done.

When he is alone, out on Puget Sound on his Sea Dory, all his personal problems, seem to fade away. The disharmony of his marriage, his daughter's tormented existence, and the stack of exorbitant co-pay medical and prescription drugs bills, he struggles to pay every month.

His first stop is at the Fred Meyer mega-market about 4 miles from ground zero. First he purchases two throw-away prepaid cell phones with cash. He then goes into the Home and Garden Department and purchases a 25 pound bag of harmless mulch, and 50 ft. of quarter inch nylon rope...making sure to pay for everything with cash. He then

leaves the store, outside, out of view, he cuts a hole in the bag of mulch, big enough for a visible leak. He returns to the Home and Garden Department and tells the clerk that handled the earlier purchase, that he wants to exchange the leaking bag of mulch so it won't get all over his trunk.

"No problem," says the clerk.

He then puts the mulch back, and walks over the fertilizer section, throws a bag of ammonium nitrate fertilizer on his shoulder, and walks out the door with the bag on his far shoulder to obscure the clerk's view of his face—the clerk never looks up. He walks through the door with a "Thanks...have a good night."

He then goes to the gas station at Fred Meyer, and fills up a 5 gallon jerrycan can with diesel fuel, again paying with cash. He then drives home...telling his wife that the boat bilge pump had a malfunction, and he had to abort the fishing trip. Now that the bilges have had a chance to drain, he has to go back out to bring the boat home, but he'll first need to get some tools from the garage.

"Whatever..." Cindy says distractedly, still in her robe, pajamas and slippers, stretched horizontal on her Barco Lounger recliner, grazing on a giant bowl of potato chips perched on her considerable middle, chased by her third white-wine spritzer. The only light in the darkened room is the eerie flickering of the TV, reflecting off her dull eyes, as she stares trance-like at the evening re-run of her daily dosage of Oprah. The copious amount of white wine consumed daily is the only anesthetic that seems to numb the unrelenting monotony—her sense of futile desperation of feeling trapped in this never-ending nightmare as a full time care-giver who never can let their daughter out of her sight, because of the frequent daily epileptic seizures.

Frank and his wife of 12 years, Cindy have not been getting along since his full-time return from 'assignment' a year ago. After the birth of their daughter, once attractive and active, Cindy has "let herself go"...allowing her weight to balloon to over 200 pounds. The stress of the constant custodial care of their mentally impaired daughter, now almost 10 years old, and their attendant financial problems, has taken a heavy toll on the relationship. Alicia will never be able to fend for herself. For the rest of her life, she will need care. No semblance of a normal life, for Cindy and Frank...and no more children. And for Cindy's parents who live nearby, no 'normal' grandchildren to dote over.

Cindy and Frank...and now Alicia, like many families of all wars past, are considered unfortunate but oftentimes necessary collateral damage of the vagaries and vicissitudes of waging a "just American war"...oftentimes half-way around the world.

After years in the military, Frank who had always been articulate...and a good student before enlisting 'for the cause', had gone back to college and received his B.A. in English on the G.I. Bill, with the hope of maybe someday becoming a high school English teacher.

But his occasional flashbacks caused emotional outbursts from PTSD triggered from any kind of stress, had rendered him unfit to be in any kind of a captive classroom situation. He had often mused over the unequal sacrifice, too often the ultimate sacrifice, that he and others of the mainly lower-middle-class all-volunteer army had been asked to make in the name of American freedom and democracy.

While the children of the rich and privileged, including the sons of the hawkish US Congressmen, George Washington's "impostors of pretend patriotism"—jingoist ideologues who had never experienced the horrors of war first hand, but were quite willing to glibly almost frivolously, send American's young warriors off to fight and die in foreign lands. They had sacrificed *nothing*. After his multiple tours of duty, and countless 'emergency' re-deployments he had come to realize that every "just war" in the end becomes just a war...for economic hegemony, in other words money and natural resources and in the case of Iraq, the "Black Gold" of petroleum.

It has only been in the last five years, that they have become aware of the fact from some independent scientific studies by NGO's that Cindy found searching the internet, of the pathological health effects Gulf War Syndrome. That Frank's repeated and continuous exposure to depleted uranium treated ordnance used by the US military in the first Gulf War—that the exposure to weaponry impregnated with uranium, to enhance armor-piercing penetration capabilities, can cause genetic damage. Cindy is convinced that Frank's prolonged exposure to radiation "messed up his genes" and is responsible for their daughter's mental impairment, and myriad of other health problems. As a further consequence, Cindy is terrified of conceiving another child with Frank for fear of having another child with birth defects. The Veterans Administration has steadfastly denied any responsibility for consequential genetic defects, leaving them with a tremendous financial as well as emotional burden for long term care of their daughter.

Before leaving the house, he goes into Alicia's bedroom, seeing her fast asleep cuddled up with "Freddy", her Teddy bear, peaceful and quiet for a change. As he kneels down, his eyes moisten...he strokes her hair gently, kisses her always feverish forehead, and whispers. "I love you baby girl...you're daddy's little girl. I'll always be here for you."

He then gathers himself, goes into the garage, and digging through his army locker which he always keeps locked, finds his night vision goggles, and face-black, then slips on his dark gray and black night camo. He slides on two pairs of surgical gloves to insure there will be no transfer of traceable fingerprints, from the first pair. He then roots around and finds blasting caps, a ZEB/D/CU 30 capacitor blasting machine, and a custom circuit board which he had personally designed and built, both left over from his paramilitary tours of duty for Ernie Porter.

The circuit board can turn any ordinary off-the-shelf electronic device into a remote detonation device, using the capacitor-blasting machine, when fully charged with a hand crank provides the 600 volts necessary to detonate the blasting caps with a relay connected in series to the blasting cap by the mobile phone, which provides necessary contact closure for detonation.

He pries open the "slave" phone, to expose the electronics. He files out a notch in the case to accommodate passage of the wires. He carefully solders the two wires to the phone circuit, which will not be connected to the blasting cap circuit until he's on site, to prevent accidental ignition.

He snaps the phone back together. Since the inception of the 1G analogue cellular network in the mid-80s and the digital 2G network in the 1990s, cell phones have been the detonation device of choice by asymmetrical warfare warriors...especially in Operation Dessert Storm, the First Gulf War in 1990—clean, safe, and relatively cheap. Compared to the previous relatively primitive technology, their reliability was unmatched, in the high ninetieth percentile for successful ignition of blasting caps. He has used it successfully many times in his mercenary "black ops" missions for Porter.

He then digs out an old green zippered generic army duffel bag—it will be untraceable. He lines it with a 4 mil black plastic trash bag, empties the fertilizer into the duffel, then pours the diesel fuel on it, mixing it in with his hands, insuring the fertilizer is evenly soaked with fuel. He wipes his gloved hands clean of the toxic diesel fuel, then changes gloves, again two pairs.

Working quickly, but confidently, as he had done so many times before, he imbeds the eight blasting caps wired in parallel every six inches to insure complete dispersion and detonation, he then connects the circuit board to lead wires. Finally, he ties off the top of the trash bag, to keep the deadly mixture from leaking.

He puts an ohm/voltmeter across the wires now coming out of the first prepaid cell phone, and calls it with the second prepaid phone to make sure it will receive his call, and that he gets a continuity reading indicating contact closure. Good to go. He enters the number into the auto-dial of the slave phone. He will leave the cell phone disconnected until he gets to ground zero. He throws the duffel bag in the back of the truck, the mobile phone into a day-pack on the front passenger seat and heads out for Moody Falls Park.

Ground Zero - October 10th @ 11:14PM
About 8 hours after the explosion at Moody Falls Park

Frank parks his pickup about a half-mile from the main parking lot on the far side of the park. He throws the day pack over his shoulder, picks up the duffel bag and hikes into the park from the other side;

through the woods, so as not to be detected. His heart is racing...his adrenalin is pumping, giving him that familiar rush. A seductive high of "hyper-arousal", like having the wild, uninhibited sex that he and Cindy used to have...before Alicia. All his senses are acutely aware. For the first time in over a year he feels completely alive...in control, the weight of all the family obligations completely recede. Adjusting his night vision goggles on his blackened face, he angles toward the parking lot. He is coming in from the opposite side of the creek—the ruptured pipeline, on the other side.

He slowly scans the scene, seeing nobody around, he crosses the beautiful old stone bridge, which somehow has withstood the blast. *Don't make 'em like that anymore.* Couching low, as trained, to minimize his profile in the pitch black night, he is invisible as he soundlessly crosses the bridge, and makes his way to the pipeline. He follows the black charred vegetation up to a point where he can see the origin of the blast—a huge crater.

He slides down to the ruptured pipe. He is able to see the jagged edges of the pipe flayed outward. The forces causing the rupture were internal...no doubt about it. Roland's not going to like it...a clear system failure. No way the NTSB would attribute the proximate cause to an external event...unless. Having been briefed by "the boss" Ernie Porter personally...and his generous payday, means it's a VBD, a Very Big Deal. Money which he can desperately use to satisfy the burgeoning exorbitant health insurance co-payments and exotic outrageously priced medications for the treatment of his daughter.

He knows what he must do to complete his mission. He securely lashes the duffel bag to the top of the pipe with about five wraps of the nylon rope. He opens the duffel bag, charges up the capacitor detonation device by cranking the hand crank 20 times, connects the wires from the cell phone to the circuit board...and powers up the phone, silently praying, *"I hope no random-robo telemarketing asshole calls the number by accident."* At least all *his* problems would be over; worth more dead than alive, the three hundred K life-insurance would at least allow Cindy and Alicia to live comfortably for the rest of their tragic, pathetic lives. The system is now armed and ready.

Ground Zero - October 10th @ 11:46PM
About 9 hours after the explosion at Moody Falls Park

Sitting in his truck, about a half-mile from ground zero, he pulls out the prepaid mobile phone, and auto-dials the prepaid mobile phone attached to the duffel bag of explosives.

Almost instantaneously....

KA-B-O-O-OM!

A smile begins to steal across "Guts" blackened face, *Mission accomplished...yeah baby. I still got it! Back in the game...damn that felt good!*

Before driving home, he gets out of the truck, places the prepaid mobile phone on the ground and repeatedly crushes it with the heel of his combat boot, he then scatters the pieces in different directions into the roadside bushes.

Those people who are able to hear the blast, assume that it is just another one of those many secondary blasts that have been going on all day...just "pockets of unspent fuel igniting", the official Cascadia Pipeline spokesperson, George Gunderson, explains on the hourly local TV news briefings.

Part Eight - Secondary Koz -

- Chapter 58 -

After checking my email, I was cleaning out my Junk Mail folder where most of the spam usually ends up. As I was quickly scanning the subject lines as I usually do before deleting the messages just to check if that wealthy Nigerian gentleman who needed help moving hundreds of millions of dollars from his homeland, had sent me my commission check yet for \$2,320,000—US of course. Nope. But I did notice a curious subject line entry.

Your LAN-IP 24.12.33.14 has been hacked

Normally I would disregard such a message as spam, trying to lure me to some website that was trying to sell something, or worse, but this one correctly listed my IP, so I decided to open it.

From: atsa_ee@hushmail.com

Date: Thursday October 17, 2001 2:15 AM

To: mak@koz Mick.com

Subject: your LAN-IP 24.12.33.14 has been hacked

your LAN has been hacked by malware. A Trojan horse has been installed on all you computers connected to your LAN which has complete access to all your files, including email. all of your keystrokes are being logged including your passwords for online banking etc.

searched everywhere for your PGP, (Pretty Good Privacy) public key>>>can't find it. have to assume that you are not using the encryption program>>>that puts anyone who communicates with you at risk.

if you want to know who is behind hacking your computers>>>etc., and why, for security of future correspondence, please install PGP. let me know when that has been done by reply email.

*totally delete this message right away from your client email computer *and server* after printing it out.*

use a computer that has not been connected to your LAN for future correspondence with PGP installed.

more later

@ *eagle*

I call Hawk over who is also checking his email.

"Hey man...take a look at this email I just received..." I say.

He comes over reads it, looks at me and says, "Looks credible to me...need to check this out further. Print out the email and delete it from your computer...also confirm it's been deleted from the ISP POP server. Then let me sit down and do some digging on your computer to see if there's any merit to it. If there is...somebody theoretically has got access to all our files including video and audio from the day of the explosion. Not good...definitely not good," Hawk says.

"Can you tell who sent it and where it comes from?" I ask

"Probably not...looks like an anonymous mail server...probably web mail using an encrypted browser...something like TOR," he says

"What do you make of the sender's handle...think it's some kind of clue as to their identity?" I ask.

"Well...could be a randomly generated hacker email address...but it doesn't look like it...not enough upper and lower case and special characters...might mean something in another language. I'll check it out further," cyber-Sherlock says.

"Do you have a computer that hasn't been connected to our LAN?" I ask

"Yea...got a couple old notebooks...not very fast but for email, they'll do the job. If there is a Trojan horse running on our LAN, they should be free of it, as they've never been connected to it," he says.

I print out the email then delete it from the computer which under my email settings automatically deletes it from the ISP email server. Yeah, right.

"How long will it take you to figure out if someone's gotten into our nickers?"

"Maybe an hour...let me slide in there behind your computer." he says.

Hawk's meaty fingers are a blur. He places a CD that he has removed from his voluminous library of CD's in the drive and copies several programs on to one of the hard drives, not the system hard drive, and begins running some diagnostic tests.

"Running a few of these programs should tell us within an hour if there's any malware installed...for a preliminary read...probably longer to locate the actual Trojan horse on the root directory where it's most likely hiding...and related log files...another couple hours to set up an intrusion logging program. Now...let's just sit back and let them do their thing. In the meantime I'm going to dig out two of my old Apple notebooks...never networked with the LAN so we should be okay. If we do hook it up to the LAN, doubtful the malware would be compatible

with the Apple OS. We won't set them up for file sharing with the Window machines...but you and I can share files on the notebooks. I've already got PGP installed on both of 'em," he says.

About four hours later Hawk is looking at the reports generated from the programs, sagaciously stroking his chin.

"Yeap. Somebody's has definitely been able to compromise our security and log on to our LAN...they planted a Trojan horse malware alright. They've been snooping around even since we received the email. I've set up an undetectable monitoring program, so I could log their activity...to try to get their IP address to do a trace route, and figure out where they're coming from. But whoever it is...they're good...very good. They cover their tracks...just like the Indians...they leave no trace that they were ever there. From the log files, they don't seem to want to access our online bank accounts...yet. More interested in our email correspondence. Very sophisticated breach...and *very good* at covering their true identity. And get this...they also appear to be interested in perusing all the other hard drives and folders...even where all our pictures and video files are stored," Hawks says.

"Any ideas who it might be...and more importantly why?" I ask.

"With this level of sophistication...it's either the Ruskiies...or NSA. Since the collapse of the USSR, the Russian Mafia has had to find new and creative ways to graft and steal...it's embedded in the culture. So they've discovered cyber crime...it's clean, little risk for getting caught or prosecution with minimal capitalization costs...and very, *very* lucrative. And with an over abundance of advanced mathematics majors...PhD equivalents...some of the best programming minds on the planet...with not many other options for them to scratch out a living. These guys mostly hangout in the dark recesses of the Deep Web," Hawk says

"Deep Web?" I ask.

"It's World Wide Web content that is not part of the Surface Web, which is indexed by standard search engines. Shouldn't be confused with the dark Internet, the computers that can no longer be reached via Internet, or with a Darknet distributed file sharing network, which could be classified as a smaller part of the Deep Web.

Most of the Web's information is buried far down on dynamically generated sites, where standard search engines cannot find it. Traditional search engines cannot *see* or retrieve content in the deep Web—those pages do not exist until they are created dynamically as the result of a specific search. As of 2001, the deep Web was several orders of magnitude larger than the surface Web. The one common denominator of most of the hackers is a deep distrust and cynicism of institutions in general and governments in particular. Unless of course, it's the NSA guys. But many of the NSA hires, young hackers some without even a high school diploma but brilliant cybernauts, were

recruited because they know their way around the Deep Web," Hawk says.

"Preemptive hiring practices, eh? So these hackers operate well below the radar of traditional search engines. A whole layer...and level of cyber-troglodytes, who dwell in the subterranean recesses...like some dark radical cult of anarchists," I say

"Yeap...apt description...cave dwellers. More like house cats who seldom venture out of their little cyber-lairs into the light of day. They advocate the overthrow of pretty much all government institutions utilizing cyber warfare. Sorta like highly devolved Ruskie mafia hitmen, only with fewer scruples...but with some serious cyber-game," Hawk says.

"So why are they so pissed off? Like what are they so friggin' angry and rebellious about?" I say.

"Like that famous scene from the "The Wild Ones" They would probably answer that question, with a *well whaddya got?* Instead of motorcycles, it's microprocessors. Redefines cynical misanthropes, many on serious meds, man. But it's the one's off their meds you gotta worry 'bout," Hawk says with grudging admiration."

"So who do ya think these guys are that are *so* interested in lil' ol' *moi*?" I ask.

"My best guess is it's in the US...maybe NSA...or some cyber-snooping contract security corporation doin' their dirty work...or maybe both. If it was the Ruskies they'd be trying to log our keystrokes and access...and eventually drain our bank accounts online. Just to be safe...I've changed the passwords and moved most of the big deposits to a bank which can't be accessed online...leavin' a minimal amount in each, at least until we can get to the bottom of this," Hawk says.

"So maybe it's connected with this explosion of the pipeline at Moody Falls? Like the Feds are trying to figure out what we know...that we haven't told em? Can you tell when it started?" I say.

"Yeah...it was sometime after the so-called terrorist event...no record of intrusion before that. Anyway, I moved all of our video and still images from the day of the explosion to a USB portable hard drive, then disconnected so it's not accessible on the LAN. I left a little honeypot...some other unrelated video and stills so they wouldn't suspect that we're on to them," Hawk says.

"What about all the existing computers on our network...anyway to recover the OS and data files from before we were hacked?" I say.

"Yea...I'm pretty sure of the earliest date of intrusion. I've got multiple secure off-line disk image clones on every hard drive, of all the computers, dating back at least a month before. I'll restore the backup on all the network client machines after we resolve who is behind this so we don't tip them off that we're on to 'em. Then I'll install a killer firewall, hardware and software...that even I couldn't hack," Hawk says smiling.

"So have you been able detect the inbound...or outbound destination IP that could give us a clue as to where they're comin in from?" I say.

"Like I said...these guys are good. But I'm better," he says without a trace of irony, "Each time they enter, it's from a different IP...when I query the IP database...it's from all over the world. So they're able to spoof their originating IP address. But if they're using a TOR anonymous IP, it'll be too slow for them to download any big files. Eventually, I'm thinkin' they'll want to go to a direct IP with enough bandwidth to download some of those huge multi-megabyte video files. So up to know, they've just been sniffin' around. They won't be able to tell what the video or stills are until they download them...then we might get lucky and get their true IP. From there I should be able to figure out the country...and maybe the region. If it's the Feds, I doubt if I'll be able to pin-point who the IP may be assigned to...but maybe if they get sloppy or complacent, we might...and I emphasize *might*, find out the general geographical vicinity," Hawk says.

"So help me out here, man. Who's this TOR dude?" I say.

"Not a who...a what, man...an open source program. T-O-R...an acronym for The Onion Router, which conceals its users' identities and their online activity from surveillance and traffic analysis by separating identification and routing. It encrypts and then randomly bounces communications through a network of relays run by volunteers around the globe. These onion routers employ encryption in a multi-layered manner...ergo the onion metaphor," Hawk, whose brilliant savant-like intellect does not suffer fools graciously, says with no small amount of exasperation in his tone at my relatively colossal lack of the rudiments.

"So who has access to this TOR?" I naively ask starting to enjoy watching Hawk's increasing frustration with my lame questions.

"*Jezus* man! Okay...okay. I can see I'm dealing with a real cyber retard," Hawk says closing his eyes and taking a deep breath like a parent desperately trying to summon the patience of dealing with questions of a three year old.

"*Geez*...what a grouch."

"Okay I'll break it down into elementary terms...even you can understand. Anybody can download it off the web...the good guys, bad guys and everybody in between since it's free under a BSD license...a family of permissive free software licenses. As a matter of fact, we should probably start implementing the use of it for some of our research so down the road, the Feds...or whomever can't figure out where we've been browsing by massaging our cookies...or peeking at the history, all of which are not retained by browsing with TOR. Only problem is that it's really slow compared to direct access," Hawk says.

Morphing into Jeffrey Lebowski, "This is a very complicated case, *maahn*. You know, a lotta ins, lotta outs, lotta what-have-you's. And, uh, lotta strands to keep in my head, man. Lotta strands in ol' Koz's

head. Luckily I'm adhering to a pretty strict, uh...drug regimen to keep my mind, you know, limber."

"Limber?...more like overcooked Linguine."

"Hey *maahn*...they like touch *my* cookies...there's like uh...such a thing as personal boundaries of like ya know...*inappropriate* touching *man*...that makes it like *very* personal. This aggression will not stand, man. The Koz does not abide!" I whine deliberately baiting him with inanity, which draws an eye roll and head shake of exasperation from the Hawkster.

I meet his ire with a big smile. Finally, when he gets it that I got him, but good, with a smile, pointing a finger at me releasing a cocked thumb a la Wiseguy Robert Deniro, "You. You're good...you, uh...Dude...*very good*," then a fist bump.

The next day, I log on to my email account with the Apple notebook, and create a reply from the printed copy:

From: mak@kozmic.com
Date: Friday October 18, 2001 10:12 AM
To: atsa_ee@hushmail.com
Subject: RE: Your LAN-IP 24.12.33.14 has been hacked

Tell me more...

PGP is installed on this 'clean' machine.

Here's my public security key:

Version: PGPfreeware 6.5.8 for non-commercial

use<<http://www.pgp.com>>mQGIBDp1yy0RBADVlyDewVwlt
Bs7HnHCG3bXlVUODFkn/00TdbM2SPnOAIkj4giBylOP
7Mg+Hr5y7FIBvmPWx06In6JjNQiSbpshP5YHv57UfE7
9nEJdWuSTQt/7j7IJGkHYtBRHQMIAHMgT8IB5d3gFq5
2jSa8hw/ixMP09a0Rw8RP9+kOE4s9UrQCg/zVHIHswd
c/mb50PjdeXwnjxQbkD/3lJYEzz8eUlFHB4rVaC1yRi
21Lypf0DIMfQg5j9xBxY4odFJKyf22PeuAjp9roURRI
bGIkIGH8eXF+Mav9OqEdD80JbEnlhZuaLk1RFk1XJjm
FRdKXz+Q7JmRdbS3zXXav2cYwalgzEXT5kuXuN1ThLT
nLoEFop8H13xM4/PdqMBACKkHb07vPY51429tdXqL00
lE6Led1BW4FLjI534QgselsrUxq5U5y0Wg1Z//a6615
QkyaMrpsHKfkLHdaPOVCs/WeG6eLwD/cUBEM1Y9Yb5D
aB0njdzB3Yxcm8W23hpKjDanb7SbaSA16gBIWRlvrB/
qU+MZAj+EXRDJmwMJq2y7QjbmV0aXZhIGNhZnRvcmkg
PG5ldG12YWNAb25lYm94LmNvbT6JAE4EEBECAA4FAjP
1yy0ECwMCAQIZAQAKCRDFpFclYzXzSwiRAJ0S3djCkJ
JPUalRyE+vWnfnhvJmDgCfTEBN2N6G1GW0mrOg1tQlZ
oWbd5q5Ag0EOnXLLRAIAPZCV7cIfwgXcqK61qlC8wXo

:: Michaelangelo's Renaissance — m.a.kominsky ::

+VMROU+28W65Szgg2gGnVqMU6Y9AVfPQB8bLQ6mUrfd
MZIZJ+AyDvWXpF9Sh01D49V1f3HZSTz09jdvOmeFXkl
nN/biudE/F/Ha8g8VHMGHOfM1m/xX5u/2RXscBqtNbn
o2gpXI61Brwv0YAWCv19Ij9WE5J280gtJ3kk

What's your public security key?

~mak

After a few emails back and forth obtaining private security keys, now that we are communicating in encrypted secure email, I receive this from @eagle :

ok>>>sounds like you've got some tech savvy on your end>>>i'm assuming then that's your partner Shapiro>>>and he's on board about the intrusion of your LAN and taking some remedial measures.

**but*>>>to be completely secure, from now on you'll need to do all your browsing, searches>>>*everything*>>>including online banking using TOR. if the bank server rejects your IP as an anonymous server>>>then go find another secured internet connection, like a friend, log on to your bank and go through the authentication protocol from then on you'll probably have to access it through that IP>>>or start over again with the bank from another IP.*

*acknowledge you are using TOR in *all* your internet use before we can go forward.*

@eagle

I look at Hawk whose reading the messages over my shoulder.

"Whattay think, man...look legit?" I ask.

"Yea...looks legit, alright. And, like whoever it is...and we can't be sure if it's a male or female, is highly fluent in tech...extremely thorough...and very cautious," Hawk says.

"Okay...so what's our response?" I say.

"See if you can tease some more info about him or her...to start off...the *who*, what and *why*...and if you can the *where*...but good luck with that," Hawk says.

I reply:

OK...now enough with the deep throat preambles. Who are you? What's your involvement in this? Why are you doing this? And

: : Michaelangelo's Renaissance — m.a.kominsky : :

where the hell are you?

~mak

Within 5 minutes @eagle replies:

deep throat? wtf is that?

*look man>>>let's get some rules of engagement
straight>>>like right now.*

*i'm offering some high-risk info to you>>>no strings>>>with
no expectation for anything in return except that you bust this
cabal wide open and take down the bad guys.*

*i'm stickin' my neck out a mile with this>>>some serious
consequences for me if i get busted.
but I gotta tell ya>>>you guys are in waaaaay over your head
here.*

*so here's how it has to go down>>>or not at all. i tell you
only what *i* think you need to know about me etc>>>if
that's not good enough for you then were done here. adios.
period.>>>are we clear on that?*

@eagle

"Hmm...maybe a clue. Starting to think maybe it's a guy...with the attitude and *wtf*...let's assume so for now. Sounds like @eagle doesn't know who deep throat was...might mean he's too young to know about deep throat from the early 70s Watergate coverup. Maybe he's a young gun...but with the use of *cabal*, instead of the more common *conspiracy* could be he's semi-erudite...at least for a hacker. Back off for now...toss him a *mea culpa*....let's try to build some trust first...get some info from him on what he knows before we scare him off. Like who is behind this and why," Hawk says.

I reply:

Hey @eagle...sorry man...my bad.

*Ok then...got it. You da man. Now from your original email...can
you at least tell us who is behind hacking our computers...etc.,
and why?*

~mak

@eagle replies:

: : Michaelangelo's Renaissance — m.a.kominsky : :

okay>>> accepted.

don't have the time to break it down for ya right now. i'll get back to ya. maybe later tonight>>>maybe not>>>maybe never:)).

only thing i can tell you for now>>be afraid>>be **very** afraid>>>you have **no** idea what shit you're gettin' in to>>>or what and who you're up against.

later

@eagle

"Shit...think we ran him off?" I say.

"Nah. Don't think so...he's just establishing who has the power in this uh...relationship. Just *fuckin'* with us to make sure we know *he da boss-man*. He'll be back. Hackers are an arrogant bunch...it's almost a prerequisite. It's all about control. It's also a front...acting cocky. Usually they're socially inept and uncomfortable in conventional physical relationships so they tend to overcompensate. In the meantime I'm going to research the *asta_ee* email handle...maybe a clue there...or not," Hawk says.

Later that day, Ivan Tarnowski calls back with an invitation for dinner at his home for next Tuesday at seventy thirty.

"Sure...we can make it. Looking forward to meeting the missus that finally corralled the Terrible One...must be pretty special. What can we bring?" I ask.

"Oh yea...be prepared for the third degree. Bring somethin' red, white...or pink...with a cork in it...preferably earlier than 2001...something that won't clash with Tofu," Ivan says giving me his address.

Hawk comes in just as I'm hanging up. "Hey, dinner at I-T's next Tuesday. What kind of beverage would your epicurean palate recommend to wash down Tofu? I ask.

"Liquid draino," says Hawk a hopelessly incorrigible carnivore.

"Let me handle the wine...okay?" I say.

"Thanks for the warning on the bill of fare. I'll have dinner here before we go...then politely push the Tofu around the plate...if we're lucky they gotta dog, I can sneak it to under the table. May need you to provide a diversionary tactic to distract the missus so as not offend. Can you B-O-D...uh belch on demand?" Hawk says.

"Ah...not a problem...my peeps, on the Ruskie side are notorious belchers...a sign of appreciation and affirmation to the host, of a good meal," I say

"Don't matter with my peeps...they *always* *grepse*...good or bad," Hawk says.

"Just to be safe we'll take the omnivorous canine food processor *Oso* with us," I say. *Oso*, laying in his normal place under my desk at my feet, hearing his name gives a muffled bark, followed by a loud three thumps on the floor of his massive tail.

"Hey Koz. In checkin' on the possible language connection with the eagle and the email handle, doing a Google search I think I might have a clue about the language. Entering *asta* and *ee* along with *eagle*, I got a hit. *Asta*...may mean *eagle* in Navajo. If it is Navajo...then *ee* means feather. So it could mean *eagle feather*...or not." Hawk says.

"*Eagle feather...Jesus!*" the mere mention of the name sends a chill down my spine. A name I haven't heard for over thirty years.

"Koz...man, are you okay? Your face just blanched to pure white, at the mere mention of the name," Hawk says.

"Yea...man, that name...from my past Probably just a coincidence," I say badly shaken by hearing it.

Hawk leaves the room, back to his office.

My curiosity aroused, I do a Google search entering in the keywords, *eagle+feather*.

I get way too many hits talking about the species of eagle etcetera and who can legally possess eagle feathers...blah...blah...blah. When I do an advanced search with *exact word or phrase* I start getting some native American surnames, one of which Leonard Eagle Feather, Chief of a Navajo tribe on an Indian Reservation near Santa Fe New Mexico. The same gentleman who was the father of Sora Eagle Feather...aka Nora Feather, folk singer and songwriter and the love of my life in the early 70s. On a long shot I decide to enter an *exact word or phrase* for Nora Feather, and bingo...I get multiple hits. As I am scrolling down, I notice one in particular that is from a national AP press release from 1982:

Nora Feather, American Indian Folksinger dies in fiery automobile crash

The world of folk and social conscience music today is mourning the untimely, premature death of the beautiful Native American folksinger and songwriter, Nora Feather (nee Eagle Feather) 33, who died in a fiery single vehicle accident on a deserted highway in New Mexico on the night of December 23, 1982.

It is believed that she had fallen asleep at the wheel while returning from a special benefit concert held to protest the encroachment on a sacred native American burial ground by a proposed petroleum pipeline by energy conglomerate National Petroleum Inc, NPI. The New Mexico Highway patrol related that there was evidence at the scene of alcohol being contributory to the cause of the accident.

Born Sora Eagle Feather in 1948 on an Indian reservation in Santa Fe NM, she went on to become one of the most important and influential native American musical artists to emerge for the cause of the American Indian. She and her father, a Chief Leonard Eagle Feather, a practicing attorney in New Mexico, were fierce opponents of the petroleum pipeline. Her later original songs advocated for social justice, in particular on American Indian land-use sovereignty issues. She is survived by her father and collaborator, Chief Leonard Eagle Feather, many aunts, uncles and cousins too numerous to list, and a son.

Jesus! Sora...dead! All these years and I never even knew it...and the way she died, in a fiery car wreck at only thirty-three. *Gawd* my heart is breaking in two.

My whole body is now shaking...cold and clammy with a flushing sensation in my face.

"*Goddammit!*" I yell. Oso, sensing that I am excited and upset is now up on all fours barking loudly. He comes up to me, nuzzling my leg with his big cold wet nose. The commotion brings Hawk to my office.

"What the hell's going on Koz?" Hawk asks.

Hawk stares at me. seeing that I'm emotionally drained with no color in my face, "Are you okay, Mickey?" he asks.

After about thirty seconds, "No, man...I'm *not* okay! Here...read this AP obit online about Nora Feather...from 1982," I can barely get out, my voice cracking with emotion.

"*Jesus*, man...Eagle Feather. Uh...wasn't that your ladies' name down in L.A. like...back in the 70s? Hawk asks.

- Chapter 59 -

Santa Fe New Mexico - December 24, 1982 - 12:17 am.

It has been a good night for Nora Feather. She had performed her original songs, to resounding applause with national press coverage for the anti-pipeline rally in Santa Fe on December 23, 1982.

After performing her last set of songs, she tells her father, the organizer and leader of the rally, Chief Eagle Feather and her 9 year old son Michael, that she's exhausted—she wants to get a head start home.

"Mother...is it okay if I stay a little while longer with my pals...I can ride home with grandfather. He's got some business to finish up with some of the elders of the tribe," Michael says.

"Okay, Mikie...but don't be too late," then she says something that he will always remember as if were yesterday. It will haunt her son for the rest of his life, "I love you son...never forget that...goodbye son," and grabs him, hugging him tightly, kissing him on the forehead. Then mussing his thick dark Indian hair—a traditional shoulder length brave-cut—she smiles that special smile of unconditional love that women reserve only for their children...and their lovers, climbs into the 1976 Ford pickup and drives off into the black desert night.

She's has been on the road about 15 minutes, driving South into the pitch black horizon on a remote desert two-lane road when she realizes there are absolutely no city lights visible. It's one of those spectacularly beautiful moonless primal desert nights, free of the artifacts of civilization. The sky is alive with millions of stars. The majesty of the moment, overcomes her with a deep sense of awe...and wonder.

But a deep chill slowly creeps from the nape of her neck along her spine. She feels an overwhelming sense of relative insignificance in the universe. Even though she has made this drive on this particular isolated stretch of highway countless times at night, for the first time, scanning the ubiquitous blackness around her, stirs a sense of extreme vulnerability. She tries to ignore it...but...

She can feel the drowsiness beginning to overtake her. She glances at her trendy over-sized watch with big white numbers against a black face, on a wide lime colored wrist band—twenty minutes past midnight. She rolls down the window, and rests her chin on the door frame, the cool desert night air washes upon her face, streaming through her long thick ebony hair. A familiar song comes on the radio which always reminds her of *her* Mickey...and *always* congers a bittersweet nostalgia with wistful *what if* smile. In an effort to resist the descending

veil of sleep, she turns the radio up loud and begins to sing a duet with Joni Mitchell.

*Well, I've heard of heart breakers
But you take the cake
Ladies' man
You could charm the diamonds
Off a rattlesnake*

*Ladies' man
Ladies bring it on over
When you give 'em the glance
They don't stand a chance*

*First, you unfold them
Then you pigeon-hole 'em
Ladies' man...*

Her mind begins to reflect on the events of the rally that evening. One of the elders, Raymond Running Bear, has been very vocal in his support for the pipeline, and has consistently opposed every move that Chief Eagle Feather and the other elders have made to fight the pipeline. He argues that it will provide much needed jobs and revenue for the tribe from lease payments. The Chief suspects that he's being paid off by the pipeline corporation. He confronts him but he vehemently denies it...*doth protest too much*. He is now convinced that the corporation, NPI has infiltrated at least one of the tribal elders.

I'm not surprised...there's big money in play here. It just shows ya how desperate...and dangerous these people are. But for Raymond to sell out his own people...for money? Leonard Eagle Feather had lamented, just shaking his head.

Bright headlights in her rear view mirror of an approaching vehicle behind her, overtaking her very rapidly, distract her reverie. Its headlights are on high-beam, which is almost blinding her from the reflection in the rear view mirror. She attempts to shield her eyes with her right hand on the mirror. She slows down with the intention of letting the vehicle pass her on the left. But the driver only slows, maintaining the same speed, right on her rear bumper. She stops singing and turns down the radio.

What's your problem? Probably some brave that's had a little too much to drink just trying to have some fun with me, as she speeds up, but the truck stays right on her rear bumper, as though the other vehicle is tethered to hers. Sora is now getting concerned. She considers pulling over to the side of the road, but the highway is so dark and deserted that she is afraid that if she stops, she might find herself in an even more vulnerable situation.

In the distance her headlights are shining on the overpass of the Interstate highway which crosses the road. Immediately she senses the other vehicle pulling out to her left to pass her. A sense of relief washes over her. The other vehicle, a black late model Suburban with black tinted windows, pulls abreast and maintains the same speed. Sora, slows down....the other vehicle mimics her every move...every change in speed. As they approach the overpass, the other vehicle begins to drift toward her. The over pass, with a concrete abutment support, set back about 30 feet from the edge of the road is getting closer. Closer.

The other vehicle is now so close she can reach out and touch it. The passenger-side black tinted window slowly slides down. For the first time she can make out the driver. The interior light is on in his cab. He is not an Indian. He is a white man. He is smiling at her. Both his hands are on the steering wheel. On his right forearm there appears to be some kind of a spiral tattoo.

With the abutment closing fast, the right hand of the Black Mamba pulls the steering wheel hard right, making violent contact with Sora's truck. In a vain attempt to correct from the impact, Sora fights the steering wheel while slamming on the brakes, but it is too late, laying down about 100 feet of skid marks. The other vehicle rides her truck off the road, straight into the abutment at 40 miles per hour. Sora's truck crashes into the abutment head on, crushing the front of the vehicle around her legs, and compressing both the truck doors against the door frames, making them inoperable.

She is rendered unconscious by the impact. The other vehicle slows, makes a U-turn and then slowly circles around and pulls over to the side of the road next to Sora's demolished truck. The driver steps out, and casually walks toward the wreckage—he is carrying something.

Sora is beginning to regain consciousness, but she is still dazed. The hissing of escaping steam from the punctured radiator, is the only sound, piercing the black silence of night.

She begins to sense movement around the truck, then the strong smell of gasoline. Although she can barely see in the desert darkness, she realizes that someone is walking around the truck. *Thank gawd...someone to help me out of the wrecked cab.*

Sora is frantically trying to open the door to get out, but it is jammed shut from the impact. Her legs are trapped under the steering wheel and collapsed dashboard.

"Help me!...please...help me!" Sora cries.

She now hears footsteps and a sloshing sound, then the unmistakable smell of gas being methodically sprinkled on the wreck, some of it landing on her clothes from the passenger side broken window.

The man then comes around to her side of the truck, and begins to pour whiskey from a bottle on top of her head, all over her clothes and

the interior of the truck. He drops the open bottle where it will be obvious and easily found. His lifeless, unblinking shark eyes meet hers.

She is now screaming, "*Help! Help me! Why are you doing this!?*"

He then pulls a disposable lighter out of his pocket and ignites it, "Nothing personal...just business. Y'all have a nice night now, ya squaw bitch," the Black Mamba says icily, as he casually tosses the lighter onto the gas-soaked truck.

"Whoosh!" Within seconds the truck is engulfed in flames.

The heat is now becoming intense, with the flames licking at her legs, and arms.

Now screaming, "*Help! Oh...God! Help me!*"

Chief Leonard Eagle Feather and his grandson Michael are driving home into the ubiquitous black. There is little talk as both have had a very long and intense day. In the distant roadway they notice a flickering glow.

"Look grandfather...looks like a car is on fire!" Michael yells.

Leonard Eagle Feather instantly floors the accelerator for in his heart of hearts somehow, he knows that it's his daughter's truck.

As they get closer, Michael yells, "It's mother's truck! There's another truck..."

Leonard Eagle Feather frantically skids to a stop right beside the burning wreckage. He and his grandson are so consumed with alarm that they fail to make note of the license plate of the vehicle driving away.

For many years, Michael is repeatedly awakened with the same nightmare of the fiery death of his mother. Each time ending with the sound of his mother's screams of agony. The bright flames of the fire clearly illuminating the driver of the other vehicle. He's carrying something...some kind of can. Yes, it's a red gas can.

He's a white-man. The flickering firelight dancing on the dead expressionless eyes, that smirking face, are indelibly burned into Michael's consciousness, as the driver impassively looks directly at them, casually opens the door of the late model black Suburban and slowly drives off.

The intense heat immediately hits them. Her father jumps out of the truck and runs toward the metal bonfire, now totally engulfed in flames as the tail lights of the other truck slowly recede, smaller and smaller, until they are red pin pricks in the ink black night.

The heat is so intense, that he can get no closer than 50 feet. Suddenly he senses his grandson sprinting past him toward the inferno. He chases him down, and tackles him before he can get to the wreckage. He knows that nothing can be done to save her. His only thought now is saving his grandson from futilely rushing into the flames trying to save his mother, as he drags Michael away, furiously kicking and wildly swinging his arms as he resists his grandfather's hold on him, screaming

"Lemme go! Lemme go! Please! Lemme go! Mother! Mother...I'm coming Mother!"

Finally, from exhaustion, he surrenders to his grandfather's iron grip on him. Resigned to the reality, he slowly closes his tear-swollen eyes burying his face in his grandfather's chest, away from the now, petroleum funeral pyre.

The only sound now is the roaring inferno, and the final screams of his mother's ebbing life, her last words of her tragically abbreviated earthly being, *"Mickey! Micke-e-e-ey!"* then silence.

His arms tightly wrapped around his grandson, trying to cover his ears and avert his eyes from the horrific scene, the grandfather knows that this was no accident, that his daughter was murdered. He vows retribution, *Whoever did this...you shall pay for this many, many times over. I put a curse on you...and your family. I will not rest until I find you.*

The loud rapid heartbeat, a cadence evocative of the drumbeat of the now, only ceremonial tom-tom war drums at the evening campfire, is the only sound Michael hears, seemingly coming from the center of his head. Firmly embraced in his grandfather's still powerful muscular arms, pressed against his hard massive chest, his head is rained upon by tears of anguish from above.

- Chapter 60 -

The NM Highway Patrol investigation will later conclude from the skid marks which lead directly into the abutment, that the driver probably fell asleep or passed out from alcohol as evidenced from an open half-full whiskey bottle laying beside the wreckage, and the last second woke up, slamming on the brakes, but that it was too late to avoid the concrete abutment. Just another *Firewater Fatality*, in a string of many around the rez, almost a monthly occurrence. Usually young braves whose wellspring of hope and dreams have been poisoned by the *white-man's firewater*.

At the memorial service, attended by hundreds of people from the rez, and the local community, with many giving heartfelt, beautiful eulogies, there is an outpouring of love and emotional support for Leonard Eagle Feather and Sora's son, Michael. Among the mourners, is Raymond Running Bear, who comes late and leaves early, making sure not to make eye contact with Leonard Eagle Feather.

At the wake, there is much drinking and crying. It is traditional Indian memorial service which celebrates the life of the departed, but more profoundly embraces the journey into the next life.

After his mother's death, Michael is going through some of his mother's things. Inside of a packed suitcase, he finds a beautiful hand-carved wooden box. It is locked. The suitcase appears to be packed to leave at a moments notice. He forces the lock open, inside are a stack of letters wrapped with a pink ribbon carefully tied in a bow—nine letters that have been addressed with postage but obviously never mailed. Also in the suitcase is a very sexy negligee, with tears streaming down his cheeks, he buries his face in the silkiness of it, drinking up his mother's scent. There are also a lot of photographs of very tall man with his smiling mother, on the back a date of 1972, obviously happier times.

He immediately sees the resemblance with the man—very tall, and lean with broad shoulders, and the same wry smile. As a boy growing up, he was always curious about his biological father. When he had asked his mother about his father, she told him they had met in 1972 when she was performing in Los Angeles. She was lonely, had gotten drunk and slept with a musician.

It was a one night stand—she hadn't taken precautions, stupidly allowing herself to become pregnant. She then concocted a story to appease his natural curiosity, that she had heard later that he had died in

Vietnam as a draftee not long after she had returned to the reservation to give birth.

He opens the first letter, written almost nine years ago—it is a love letter...of sorts. As he reads, he becomes aware of the circumstances of his birth. In the letter she makes reference to the terrible argument and subsequent parting. Also in the suitcase is a brown manila envelope with Michael's name on it. He opens it—it is his birth certificate with the father listed as Michelangelo Kozlov.

He realizes that his mother has lied to him all these years and he suspects this man in the photographs is his biological father:

December 21, 1973

Dearest Mickey,

We have a son...

It's been a year to the day since we parted...painfully. It seems a little awkward to be writing this, but I felt I had to find some release for my emotions, otherwise they would burst me wide open.

So, I'm not sure where to begin this letter. I'll probably never mail it.

I guess I'll just start by wishing you a Happy Birthday - with a BIG surprise gift for you!

Our son, Michael Ahiga Eagle Feather Kozlov made his entrance into the world on June 18th, 1973, full of fight, kicking and screaming. Grandfather Eagle Feather gave him the middle name, Ahiga...he fights in Navajo...so he is another MAK.

He's a long one...he'll be tall like his father. I've settled into life here on the reservation. The extended family of Navajo wives and mothers have been very supportive. Michael's first few months were difficult...he was only 5 pounds 11 ounces when he was born, one month premature. He had some serious respiratory problems which seems to have stabilized.

Mickey, obviously I decided not to have an abortion. When my friend Elaine took me down to Tijuana, I just couldn't go through with it, by then of course, I was sensing some movement from him. If he was trying to

: : Michaelangelo's Renaissance — m.a.kominsky : :

get my attention...it worked. So I came back home to the rez, to have him.

I now realize that he is a gift...he is part of you, of the man that I could never have in my life. He is doted over by his many aunts and uncles, his grandfather, and the other elders.

After our very difficult parting, where you said some very hurtful things, I now realize that it is probably best for everyone, most especially our son. Here on the rez, he'll have lots of extended family...my father's wisdom will teach him well...our customs and culture. Even at his young age, I some day sense that he may become a chief.

Even though I loved you, and always will...so deeply and completely, because we are from such different worlds, I don't believe I could have survived living in your world...for very long.

Living in L.A. was such a different world...the whole phony scene...me trying to be something I'm not. Nora Feather, then with all that makeup and showbiz BS...what a joke! I know now that our son and I belong with our people. I believe that the true calling for his gifts...and mine, my music, is try to affect positive change for our people...especially the young ones, including our Michael to try to instill some sense of hope and opportunity for a better life.

Mickey, I know that because of your difficult and painful childhood with an abusive alcoholic father, that you did not believe you were suited to care for and nurture a child...that you were so damaged and traumatized, and emotionally closed down because of it. But I think you would have made a great dad...still do. So I hope maybe someday you will be able meet our son.

Every time I look at him...hold him, I can't help but think of you.

Please take good care of yourself.

Love always,

Sora.

He now realizes that when he and his grandfather came upon the wreck that was engulfed in flames, her final screams of life, were not Mikie, but "*Mickey! Mickey!*" It was not his name but the name of *this* man, his father, even after all those years, she was still in love with him, so much so as she was being overcome by the fire, his name was the last words to leave her lips.

He also suspects the man is still alive. He notes the address in Venice Beach California with the date of the most recent letter just a few days earlier—again, never mailed.

He opens each letter and hungrily devours them. They are in some kind of order. Each letter is dated December 21st; each successive letter, a year later. He finally gets to the 9th letter, written just two days before her death:

December 21, 1982

Dearest Mickey,

Our son, Michael turned 9 years old last June.

Already he is starting to show his father in him. He's very tall for his age...much taller than his cousins who are 13 or 14. He's quite slender but lean and strong...with a big frame. He moves with your effortless grace of a big cat. Spending a great deal of time with his grandfather, he is much wiser than his years. Father calls him 'un viejo su alma'...an old soul.

He has my jet black thick straight hair, with your intelligent green eyes and long black lashes. With his high Indian cheekbones and full lips, he is unmistakably a mixed breed. But he is blessed with quick wits, and a disarming sense of humor. So he is able to diffuse most of the resentful comments by his fellow braves about his mixed lineage with humor and grace. A sense of humor like his father...and a serious side like his mother. As a result, he is much liked and respected by his peers, already becoming a real leader.

And like you...he is very strong willed. Stubborn is more like it!

Father and I, and almost all of the tribal elders, have

been actively trying to resist attempts of a large corporation, National Petroleum Inc., to cross our land on the rez for a huge oil pipeline. The proposed route would cross sacred land...burial grounds. As proposed it would run within the water shed for our drinking water for many miles...god forbid if there was ever and accident like a rupture or a spill, it could contaminate our main source of drinking water for decades.

On the 23rd of December, there will be a big anti-pipeline rally at the Santa Fe community center. There will be many speakers, from the rez...and environmental activists opposing the pipeline. I'll sing some of my original songs. Father will be leading a tribal meeting of the elders...a discussion about the pros and mostly cons of the pipeline.

Because of his maturity and size, Father thinks it is time for Michael to do his vision quest. It's a Navajo tradition. It consists of a young brave, spending one to four days and nights, fasting, secluded in nature. A deep communion with the forces and spiritual energies of creation and self-identity. The intense spiritual communication a brave can receive provides a profound insight into themselves and the world. It usually takes the form of a dream...a vision, that relates directly to their purpose and destiny in life. Father will be just near enough, silently observing him, in case he has any difficulty.

Michael is doing very well in school. His bright and curious mind asks a lot of questions, which Father patiently answers. I think he is already thinking of college...he is fascinated with computers, and already seems to have an aptitude for them. Maybe something to do with ancient Indian iconography that is deeply embedded in his genes. A Navajo code talker?

He is also quite an artist...as a young child he drew constantly, which I'm guessing he got from your side.

That's all for now. Wish us luck in dealing with the pipeline. They will not give up easily. In doing some research, we have heard from others, apparently they have a history of becoming quite aggressive when there's lots of money at stake.

: : *Michaelangelo's Renaissance* — *m.a.kominsky* : :

Love always,

Sora

PS

Happy Birthday! Next year...the big 4-oh-my-gawd.

- Chapter 61 -

"Think this *eagle feather* connection is some kinda cosmic prank?" I say.

"A prank on *kozmic*? Maybe. But I gotta tell ya man I just don't buy into coincidences, cosmic or otherwise. Experience dictates it's usually the least plausible explanation. There has to be *some* connection. Could be that who's ever doing this, knows so much about ya, that they're just yankin' your chain. Maybe a setup, like they're trying to lure us into their confidence by tuggin' on your heart strings. They *had* to figure we'd probably parse out the connection of the name. Very clever, man—diabolical even. I don't like it. We need more independent information before we get much deeper with this *eagle* dude," the ever skeptical Hawkster says.

"Could be that there is *no* connection. That the simple explanation is that it's just a coincidence of no consequence," I feebly offer.

"Or...maybe some kind of Indian medicine man's like a Wounded Knee curse...like K-P, Karmic payback...from your past life finally catchin' up with ya. Can never outrun karma, man...she always bats last," Hawk adds.

"Well thanks...I'm feelin' better already," I say.

"Nah...not that you're undeserving of some serious wounded-female Karmic payback...but there's something that we're missin' here. Let's string this *eagle* along...not let on that we've made the connection...yet, and see if we can do some independent investigation to find the connection, then set a trap. We'll see just how smart this *eagle dude* really is," Hawk says.

"Maybe a good place to start is to see if Leonard Eagle Feather is still alive, and try to contact him...or perhaps even Sora's son.

"Okay...you start there. I've got few ideas I want to chase down. Catch up later," Hawk says.

We both go back to our respective computers and start doing some serious Googling. When I continue with advanced keyword search, I come across the Eagle Feather Foundation, initially funded by a large endowment from the proceeds of a large insurance settlement of several million bucks from the estate by the sole surviving member of the family. The family was tragically killed by a highway accident with a target defendant common carrier bus company.

The accident ultimately wiped out the entire family when the survivor-father killed himself shortly after receiving the settlement

check, by driving his brand new Ford pickup straight into a bridge abutment near where his wife and five children had died. There was not one single skid or brush mark leading up to impact. Turns out that was the accident that my investigation and still photos were instrumental at getting one of the largest personal injury settlements, in New Mexico history, as if there could ever be enough money in the world to replace the tragically unfinished lives of those five young children, and the mother and later the father. Sora and her father were extremely grateful for my help. So maybe I've got some positive K-P in the bank...or not.

Anyway, Leonard Eagle Feather is still listed as the active Executive Director of The Eagle Feather Foundation. There's a contact phone number, so I decide to give him I call.

After some serious Googling of Leonard Eagle Feather; he was born in 1930, raised on a Navajo Indian Reservation in Santa Fe New Mexico. He attended the University of New Mexico, where he received a law degree. As an active member of the N-M bar—a notoriously fierce advocate for Native American rights and social justice.

In a rare magazine interview granted during one of the many demonstrations against the petro-pipeline, he discusses his motivation, what compels him, even though woefully legally over matched, to continue to fight the juggernaut corporation NPI in court. *It is for our people, my grandson's generation, and each generation that follows. The only path out of the despair and privation of reservation life, is education...and to mentor our children in the ways and wisdom of our ancestors, to preserve our culture and heritage...and land for future generations, to make a stand here and now, or face certain extinction.*

It is also noted that he raised his 10 year old grandson, Michael after his mother died in an accident in 1982. Ultimately, he sent Michael to the University of New Mexico at Albuquerque, his Alma mater where he is considered a prestigious alumnus.

The call is answered with, “*Eagle Feather Foundation.*”

“May I speak with Leonard Eagle Feather please.”

“*May I tell Chief Eagle Feather who is calling?*” the young female voice with a slight Native American sing-song quality says.

“Michaelangelo Kozlov.”

“*Please hold...*”

A minute later, “*Leonard Eagle Feather.*”

“Chief Eagle Feather...this Mick Kozlov. I don't know if you'll remember me. We met many years ago. I was friends with your daughter Sora,” I say.

There is a protracted silence. The only sound is that of Leonard Eagle Feather's slow rhythmic breathing.

“Are you still there, Chief?” I ask.

“*Yes...*” followed by another period of long silence.

“Do you remember me?” I ask.

“Yes...” again more silence. Redefines laconic.

“Chief, I’m calling to tell you that after all these years, I just recently found out about Sora's death...about the accident. To tell you how profoundly sorry I am to hear of her passing,” I say.

“Two things. Don't call me Chief...Leonard is fine. And my daughter's death was no accident...she was murdered,” he says with icy calm.

“*My gawd!* But when I resurrected the newspaper articles on the Internet there was no mention of the fact that her death was not accidental...or even under investigation,” I say.

“Don't believe everything you read in the papers...in fact, now days you would be wise to believe nothing you read in the papers...especially as it relates to Native Americans,” he says.

“But murdered? Have the authorities opened an investigation?” I ask.

“No...”

“If I may ask...why not? Is there any proof that she was murdered?” I ask.

“*Mick...give me your phone number. I will call you back later,*” he says.

“Sure...I'll give you my home phone number. Available day...or night. I look forward to your call. Thank you,” I say after giving him my number.

Click.

At about eleven that evening the phone rings.

“Mick...this is Leonard Eagle Feather. Before going any further in the conversation, can you call me back on my mobile from your mobile phone?”

He gives me his number and I call him right back.

“Leonard? Mick Kozlov...calling from my mobile.”

“Okay. Good. Thanks. Mick, we've got some things to talk about that must remain in confidence. I have reason to believe that my phone conversations are being monitored,” he says.

“What makes you think so?” I ask.

“It's been going on since the beginning of our efforts, here on the reservation, to repel the construction of a large oil pipeline through our land...beginning in 1982. So far we've managed to hold them off for almost twenty years...but since the death...no, the murder of Sora, which they expected to chill our resolve to resist them, they have intensified their efforts to condemn our land through Eminent Domain proceedings. Still in the courts...on its way to the Supremes, I would imagine,” he says rather matter-of-factly.

“Are you saying that you think the pipeline people were behind the death of Sora?” I ask.

"Yes...unequivocally they are," he says.

"Who is the they?" I ask.

"N-P-I," he says.

"N-P-I...National Petroleum Incorporated?" I ask.

"Yes...one and the same. You have some knowledge of the corporation?" he asks.

"Oh yea. In a prior life working for a large media corporation, I encountered Lane Rector, CEO & Chairman...and his factotum VP Howard Roland. Economic sociopaths," I say.

"Interesting. Roland's been the face of the corporation in this massive pipeline project," he says.

"He's was a real piece a work then...Roland and his dirty trickster Ernest Porter. What makes you think NPI was involved in the death of Sora?" I say.

"That night of December 23, 1982, Sora had left early from the anti-pipeline rally around midnight. My grandson and I were about ten minutes behind her, on a dark, deserted desert highway, when we came upon the wreckage of Sora's truck, already engulfed in flames...just as another vehicle was pulling away. By then, the fire was so intense, that the flames clearly illuminated the truck and it's driver. He was carrying what appeared to be some kind of red gas can.

It was a newer truck...black...a Suburban," he says.

"Were you able to get a license plate number or any other possible identifying things about the vehicle?" I ask.

"Our first impulse of course was to attempt to save my daughter. Too far away to get the plate number, but I'm certain it did not have N-M plates though. It had black tinted windows...all the way around. And it had one of those roof uh...cargo boxes with big white letters. My grandson said it was a THULE roof box.

The driver was a white man...tall and slender, smiling...more of a smirk on his face. My grandson saw him as well. As you can imagine, he still has nightmares about it. He's still able to see the image of his face...as I am, clearly lighted from the flames of the fire. But obviously since our first concern was for Sora...he was able to get away. For now. But, we will catch up with him someday. Us Injuns know many ways to make the white eyes beg for death..." he says mimicking the white man's caricature of Tonto *"...and when we do, he will wish he had also died in that horrific fire that killed my beautiful Sora...and left my grandson without his loving mother at the age of nine,"* he says.

"Jesus...the poor kid. But do you have any proof that N-P-I was behind it?" I ask.

"Clearly this was not an accident. Why would someone drive away from the scene of such a horrific accident...unless he didn't want to have to answer any questions about his presence...or identity? Who else could possibly have had a motive to kill her. Her murder was obviously intended to send us a message...to back off with our resistance

to the project...or else. So while I have no evidence that could conclusively prove that N-P-I was responsible in a criminal court of law, there is no other plausible explanation. No one else would have had a motive. Sora was loved by everyone...she had no enemies," he says.

"Have you told the authorities your story?" I ask.

"Of course. But they just dismissed it. Thought it was just some more of the same old tired Injun-oppressed-people-paranoia against the white man...said I had absolutely no proof for the allegation. They refused to even investigate it," he says.

"How is your grandson doing? Was he orphaned?" I ask

"Okay. No...he's not an orphan..."

Is his father in his life? Is he helping to raise him...to cope?" I ask.

"No...his father doesn't even know that he has a son. Yet."

"Do you know who the father is?" I ask.

"I do. Okay Mick...I've got to go now. We'll talk later."

"When?" I ask

Click.

That night laying in bed in a restless tossing and turning unsettled futile attempt at sleep, replaying my conversation with Leonard Eagle Feather in my head, my subconscious starts to kick in. Something he said about the vehicle leaving the scene of Sora's crash starts to resonate.

A black Suburban...with black tinted windows...with a THULE roof box.

Yes...of course. That's the same description that my neighbor Tom Malloy gave about the truck that was parked in my driveway the night of the explosion and fire that killed Marla! He said it was there about a half an hour and left about an hour before Marla and drove up in the U-haul truck. Just a coincidence? Like the Hawkster says, coincidence is usually the least likely plausible explanation.

"Jesus Christ!" I yell out loud.

So loud, Oso, Big Dawg is awakened from a deep slumber. He immediately jumps up on all fours from his customary place on the floor right beside my side of the bed and starts whining, with a muffled bark, he places his massive head even with the bed near my hand, nudging it with the wet nose of his big white muzzle.

"It's okay, boy...sorry, everything's okay," I say, sinking my right hand into the thick fur of his large head.

His tail wagging furiously...he starts barking.

"That's right boy...definitely something to bark about," I say grabbing his head with both of hands, shaking it playfully side to side, giving him a big kiss on his forehead. He then jumps up on the bed, does

a few three-sixties, then collapses with a big sigh, with his immense head resting my leg, nudging my hand, seeking validation that I'm okay.

“So whattya think about that boy?” I ask Oso.

“Ruf...ruf...” Oso says.

“Yeap boy...rough, very rough out there, ain't it?” I say

“Hey Hawk...” I say at about 9 AM as he wanders into my office with a giant 16 oz. mug of super-caffeinated black coffee—jet fuel, Jet City style, home of Boeing Aircraft.

“Hey Koz...since you're into coincidences, try this out,” he says grinning over the steaming rim of his mug.

“Funny you should mention coincidences... 'cause I've got good one for you too, pally,” I say.

“Okay...you go first. Gotta feeling that after I *share*...” with exaggerated air quotes “...mine with you...you might not be real talkative...for *quite* a while,” he says.

“Okay, man. Like, late last night I spoke with Leonard Eagle Feather...Sora's father. I expressed my deep sorrow about the death of Sora. As you know we lived together for a while back in the seventies...until she got pregnant. I behaved badly...*very* badly and she left to get an abortion. Said she never wanted to see or hear from me...again...ever, she just disappeared. Thought she might have gone back to New Mexico to her people...but I checked several times. Not there...and nobody knew *nuthin'*...or were at least willing to talk,” I say.

“Of course I remember. As I recall, you took it pretty hard, man,” Hawk says.

“Yea...she was the love of my life...”

“Uh...one of them, go on,” Hawk says with a grin.

“Yeah, okay...but top two...anyway. I was too *goddamned* immature to deal with it. I hurt her deeply...and I felt such an overwhelming sense of loss, that for the first time in my life I realized what a total ass I had been toward all those women...for all those years before Sora. And now I was the one who had a broken heart. And I didn't like the feeling...not one little bit,” I say.

“Okay...now that we've shared your little cathartic moment together, tell me about your talk with the Chief,” Hawk says.

Still agitated about my past lousy behavior toward Sora, I stand up and start pacing around the office as I tell Hawk about the suspicions that Leonard Eagle Feather has about the murder of his daughter by NPI and the circumstances surrounding her death.

“And get this...he said that the vehicle he saw pulling away from the crash scene just as he and Sora's son drove up...was a black Suburban,” I say.

“Black Suburban. Uh...*Sora's* son...okay, got it. So?” he says smiling.

“Yeah...just before we left Lake Tahoe for Seattle...for the last time, remember when we went over to talk to my neighbor, Tom Malloy about that night of the explosion...my *gawd* that would have been 1985?” I say.

“Yea...with ya. Go on.”

“Remember his description of the car that was in my driveway about an hour before we arrived?”

“Let me think...been awhile man. What...over 15 years? Okay...as I recall it was black...a black Suburban?” Hawk says.

“Yeap...so here's the coincidence for ya to grapple with, uh...my dear Watson. The vehicle that fled the scene when Leonard and his grandson drove up to Sora's crash site...was a black Suburban,” I say.

“Yea...but there's plenty of black Suburbans out there, man. Kinda thin I'd say.”

“Except for the fact that both descriptions, including my neighbor Tom, indicated black tinted windows...all the way around...even the front passenger side. Not that common man,” I say.

“Okay...I can dig it. But still pretty thin.”

“And with a black THULE roof box?” I say.

“Yeah, I remember that now, the roof box...getting less and less coincidental...by the second,” he says.

“And there's one other possible common denominator. Captain Ahab, aka Jason Mahoney, who I suspect contracted the hit on me and Marla in Tahoe, and N-P-I used the same contract black ops company...SHOPS...aka Ernie Porter...aka *El Negro*. Less and less plausible that we're dealing with a coincidence, okay?” I say.

“Hmm...yea. So you thinking' that it may be the same vehicle...or kind of vehicle that was used in both crimes? And probably the same M-O using fire as means of disguising the murder as an accidental death, destroying all evidence to the contrary...by the same perp?” Hawk says.

“Yeah...makes more sense than some *Bolshoi* coincidence,” I say

“So *nyet* mit da coincidence? Sink shis varrants zum further 'vestiga-shun' uh...comrade?” the now KGB Hawk says.

“*Da* comrade.”

“*Da* indeed,” Hawk says.

“So...you said you've got one for me?” I say.

“Yeap...but before I tell ya, I think you'd better take a seat, there big boy,” the Hawk says with that trademark impish smile framing his pointy mouse teeth.

“Okay. I'm sittin'...go for it,” I say plopping in my reclining office chair, rocking back to accommodate my right foot on the edge of the desk.

“I think I may know the identity of @eagle,” he says.

“Okay...but no way this could be even ballpark top mine,” I say.

“Oh yea, baby...I *garr-an-tee it!* Through the unprecedented democratic power of the Internet, with almost all the state and local government records now available on line, I decided to check out something...which was way too much of coincidence for my taste. I did some on-line searches in the state databases for the name of Eagle Feather...birth and deaths starting in New Mexico, since Sora and Leonard live there. Got lots of hits. But one stood out...a birth...in 1973, Santa Fe, New Mexico. So I did some further checking, man.”

“Okay...so?” I say.

“June 18th, 1973...the j-peg copy of the certified birth certificate says Michael Ahiga Eagle Feather uh...Kozlov. Another MAK-a-saurus roaming and foraging the planet, man,” Hawk says barely able to contain his laughter as he slides the print-out of the j-peg birth certificate on the desk in front of me.

“What the hell are ya sayin', man!?” I yell.

“Sora *never* had that abortion, Koz. Do I have to draw ya *pictya*, man? You're the father of Sora's son, Michael.”

For one of the few times in my life I'm absolutely speechless, dumbfounded by the possibility that I have a son by Sora Eagle Feather.

“Whatsa matta...pally? Gotta a clothes pin on your tongue?” Hawk says giggling like a schoolgirl.

“Hamma...hamma...I aya. You're just screwin' with me, right? Man if you are, I'll make you pay like you wouldn't...couldn't even imagine,” I say.

“Flawless Ralph Cramden...getting busted for doin' something *really* stupid by wifey Alice.

“You're serious, man? No joke...not some childish, at the risk of being redundant, Hawkish prank?” I say.

“As much of a joke as say uh...cerebral hemorrhage.”

“Yea, okay so the personal irony is not lost on me. But *Jezus Christ*...so ya really think I've gotta son?” I say

“Does a *cetacean* shit in da sea, Big uh...Daddy?” he says grinning.

“I can't believe it, man! So he'd be what...about twenty-eight now? So for almost thirty years I've had a son...that I didn't even know existed?” I say.”

“Oh...but wait...there's more Daddy-oh. *So much* more. We're just getting' to the good stuff,” Hawk says.

“*Jezus*...Hawk...give me few minutes to process this. Don't know how much more of the good stuff I can take for one day, man. And just cool it with the Daddy shit, okay?” I whine.

“Okay...'cause I luv ya, man...I'll cut to the chase. Michael A. Eagle Feather Kozlov uh...that would be junior, attended University of New Mexico for two years. And get this, a computer science major. His last known employer...but that can change *very* quickly...lotta headhuntin' goin' on, including from Uncle Sam, was...C-S-I, Cyber-

Secure, Inc., that does contract snooping and consulting for the N-S-A...and C-I-A on, and wait for it...cyber security. The kid's some kinda highly respected hot-shot on hacking into networks and breaking encryption...like tops in his field, man. Googled him under Eagle Feather...with keywords *cyber* plus *security*...all kinds of hits about his white paper reports on cyber security etcetera. Very impressive dude. Surprised Bill-yion Gates didn't snap him up first. Sounds like they drafted him before he even finished college...the Feds and cyber contractors do that when they find a very special talent."

"Hamma...hamma...hamma," I stammer.

"Well said, uh...Ralphie. So like where do we go from here? Time for a new game plan?"

"Don't know about you...but the only time I'm interested in at the moment is Greenwich Mean time...which I figure is just after 5 PM London time...which means Happy Hour. And I intend to go get *abso-fuckin'-lutely* trashed...and you my Dear Watson, will be my designated driver to...and more importantly, from our favorite public house watering hole, Uisce.

We head over to the pub about two-ish with Hawk driving. After several hours of unsuccessfully trying to drown the anxiety of the recent revelation, I realize it's a futile exercise. My mind is so filled with chaotic thoughts vibrating with an unprecedented *melange* of paternal pangs, while at the same time selfishly pondering how this revelation, as a practical matter will start to complicate my life. *Jesus*...I'm a father! Michael Kozlov...aka uh...junior, aka @eagle. My mind is flooded with questions. Is he tall and slender like me? Does he look more like me...or his mother? His temperament? And on and on. *Now what?*

At about 5 PM I lean over to Hawk on the next bar stool.

"Hey Hawk...my not-so-Happy Hour is now officially over. Let's blow, man. Head back to the house...I got some serious *what-ifs* to process," I say.

"Sure Daddy-oh..." Hawk says good-naturedly punching my shoulder gloating that he's found a new button he can push at will to needle his pal.

"You've already worn that Daddy one out...why don't ya give it a rest, big boy?" I say punching him back on his massive deltoid a little harder, like punching a rock, actually hurting my wrist.

"If you say so...Pops. By the way, aren't we 'sposed have dinner tonight at Ivan's with wifey unit? he asks.

"Yeah...forgot about that, uh...Uncle Hawk. Let's stop and I'll pick up some wine for tonight," I say.

Part Nine - The Great Wake-up -

- Chapter 62 -

If justice perishes, human life has lost its meaning
- Emmanuel Kant.

My dinner with Ivan, under the circumstances of the recent revelations, was not something that I was looking forward to. I was preoccupied, unsettled, in a state of agitation and probably not very good company. But, out of respect for I-T, I was determined to show up and try to put a good face on. And I was indeed, to be *very* glad that I did. It would form the foundation for the transfiguration of my very soul. My Great Wake-up.

The evening would closely parallel the same intense, profound discussions with my dearest, and it must not go unsaid now departed friends from Berkeley in the early 60s. It was reminiscent of the great classic 1981 film, a powerfully insightful yet humorous dialectic, *My Dinner with Andre*, written and acted by the brilliant playwright and actor Wallace Shawn.

As we pulled up to Ivan's home, the sun was slowly creeping toward the cloud shrouded horizon, casting amber shards of sunlight like kleig lights on Cascadia Bay. It somehow seemed to settle me. The magnificence of it made my little problems have less importance. I was overwhelmed with a deep a sense of awe, and yes, gratitude that I lived in a place in the world that was endowed with such natural and diverse beauty, near the sea and the majestic Cascade mountains, the Western Alps with the snow-covered sentinel Mount Baker, leaping out of the horizon to the East, a stationary sentry, seemingly standing guard protecting the beauty and majesty of nature.

I-T's home was situated in Fairhaven, one of the oldest parts of town founded in the late 19th century. It sits on a hill with a commanding view of the Bay. It's a modest but well-maintained classic craftsman bungalow with a vintage covered porch the width of the house with a swing bench seat suspended from above with a chain on each end, just wide enough for two, facing due West overlooking the often breathtaking sunsets on Cascadia Bay of Puget Sound.

Hawk and I with faithful Oso in tow trudge up the many concrete steps to the classic heavy oak front door with segmented lights across the top. Immediately the sound of a barking dog inside gets Oso's attention, and he begins his low muffled barking, his tail wagging furiously.

As we step on to the porch, the front door opens to Ivan's smiling face. There is also a large black muzzle with coal black eyes

peering out, connected to large black Labrador, that I swear is *smiling*...barking unmenacingly, tail wagging being restrained by the collar by Ivan.

“Zelda...cool it! Hey, Mick...Hawk. Who's this lovely piece of canine with ya?” he says nodding toward Oso.

Oso sidles up to Zelda, dwarfing her, and starts sniffing her muzzle, whereupon she lays down and rolls over on her back totally submissive.

“Hey I-T. Meet Oso...” I say.

“Well now...looks like Oso had Zelda with a 'wuf'. She's usually not that uh...easy. Looks like she could use some work on her canine comportment,” I-T says.

“Yea...Oso's kind of used to that. He gets by on his looks, sorta like his ol' man most of the time,” Hawk says.

“Not to worry I-T. He's gelded...and like his Uncle Hawk, harmless around females. ”

“*Geez*...you two ever stop pimpin' each other? Ever think about gettin' married? Com'mon in,” he says smiling, as he leads us into the comfortably appointed cozy front room, with a roaring fire in the large fireplace, Two huge fixed pane windows frame the front door facing the Bay. It's an old original house probably built in the late 20s which appears to have been faithfully restored, complete with oak quarter-sawed hardwood floors, beautiful oak architectural details, including a massive hand-carved Newel post at the base of the stairs. The doors and window trim all restored to original. It's full of floor to ceiling oak bookcases loaded with hard-cover books, many with leather bound spines. Permeating the air, the same nostalgic scent of the stacks at the UCB library where I spent many a happy hour listening to classical music while surrounded by the world's great literary works.

“Here,” I say handing him the bottles of Grey Riesling and Merlot.

“Excellent...white and red...and mit a cork, yet...impressive.” he says placing the wine on the candlelit dining room table already set beautifully for dinner with a large bouquet of yellow and lavender fresh cut tulips.

Zelda and Oso, now cavorting around the front room, are pretty hard to ignore or to talk over.

“I'm going to put the woofs out in the backyard...let 'em get acquainted...so we can talk,” he says walking out toward the kitchen with both dogs rambunctiously following him out the rear door.

I notice that there is a middle aged man and a woman seated on an overstuffed sofa, probably in their late sixties, who are now both standing as Ivan returns to the front room with a stunningly beautiful woman with flawless sable skin, taller than Ivan with long slender graceful arms, and fine, delicate features. Her eyes are wide-set, dark

and luminous with a charming slight overbite and full lips, framing a smile of pearlescent perfect white teeth set off nicely by large hand-wrought silver hoop earrings. Her ebony hair is long, worn up on top of her head, exposing her long slender nape. She looks like a one of those *Kiplingesque* East Indian Princess you'd see on the cover of a National Geographic. She's wearing some kind of brightly colored shift—an ethnic print of warm earth tones, accented with a flowing diaphanous ochre sarong that seems alive with her aura. A feminine shimmering sunrise.

“This is my wife...Sanjana. Sanjana...Mick Kozlov and Hawk Shapiro,” he says.

“Pleasure...Sanjana,” I say

Hawk recognizing that Sanjana's East Indian, being a devout practitioner of Hatha Yoga, he places his massive palms together just below his chin, and bows slightly at the waist, “*Namaste*”

“*Namaste*,” Sanjana says smiling beguilingly returning the salutation to both of us.

“And this is my father and mother...Joseph and Ruth Tarnowski, visiting from New York City. Mom and Dad are giving a talk and a book signing at Village Books in Fairhaven tomorrow night. They just did a book signing to overflow crowds at The Town Hall venue in Seattle yesterday, sponsored by Elliot Bay Books. After here they're on to Vancouver the next night to a Chapter's Bookstore in Kitsilano which will complete the Left Coast promotional tour of their book, which they collaborated on...*Worker Cooperatives: The Antidote to Exploitative Capitalism*.” Ivan says which no small degree of filial pride.

Guess the radical apples from the Big Apple don't fall too far from the tree.

“Joseph Tarnowski...from New York City. Growing up I'd heard your name and work mentioned by my father, S. G. Shapiro, many times,” Hawk says.

“Yes...of course. Simon Shapiro...a fellow traveler. I've met him, but know him mostly by his tireless work and writings representing the legal rights of the underclass...a fierce advocate for social justice,” Joseph says smiling effusively extending his firm hand to Hawk, then to me.

“Happy to meet you both,” I say nodding to Ruth Tarnowski while shaking Joseph's hand.

“So you're going to give a talk tomorrow night at VB?” Hawk says.

“Yes indeed. Apparently because of the large crowd expected, the venue has been moved to the auditorium of the local community college in North county to accommodate the large turnout. It is rumored that some folks from North county...conservatives and Libertarians plan to picket the event and to *engage the socialist commies*,” he says with

air quotes “uh...that would be my wife and I...in the Q and A, following our presentation,” he says smiling.

“Pop...some of those folks up there in North county are pretty tightly wound...redefines reactionaries. It's like a 50s time machine up there...especially the evangelicals and the *gun*-ho neo-cons in petty coats and leisure suits...some of 'em still fightin' the Cold War with the Commies,” Ivan says.

“Ah...but where else can you still find a good ol' boy Saturday Night Tractor Pull?” Hawk says.

“People up there do *not* eat granola...and do not uh...suffer graciously those who do,” Ivan says

“Not to worry son, your mother and I have dealt with it many times. Should spark some lively debate...always a healthy proposition,” says the smiling socialist gadfly.

“Maybe if you were to show up in some county-chic Oshkosh bib coveralls, you'll get invited for dinner...and if they really like you...show you their Vintage Tractor collection,” I say.

Joseph Tarnowski is a short compact man, thick in the middle with receding thinning gray hair, gold wire rim glasses framing lively intelligent light coffee eyes with a constant facetious glimmer.

Ruth Tarnowski is almost the same height, attractive, slender and elegantly dressed with modest makeup and understated jewelry. Her hair is professionally colored and coiffed with blond highlights. Manhattan elegance. Her eyes are deep set, inviting, warm and engaging but seem to belie a tough no-nonsense aura just below the surface typically accompanying piercing, unblinking azure eyes.

Both seem very comfortable in their skin which is probably where Ivan got his *sang-froid* in the face of great adversity that I had witnessed first hand at the student demonstrations at UCB in the sixties—his enormous and unrelenting moral and physical courage in confronting the power structure of 'the establishment'.

Two young girls, maybe pre-teens emerge from the kitchen. They appear to have acquired the best from both sides of the family tree, tall and slender with a *cafe latte* complexion—Ivan's gray eyes with long thick black lashes and beautiful thick shiny wavy raven hair of their mother.

“These are my girls...Maya, the older...and Monique,” Ivan says proudly.

“Hiya Maya the older and Monique,” I say.

“Hello,” Hawk says.

They smile shyly, nod toward their mother, who nods back, then retreat back to the kitchen to continue helping their mother prepare dinner.

“Real beauties...by the time they're old enough to date...you're gonna have your hands full keepin' the boys in check, Ivan,” Hawk says.

“Got plenty time to perfect my deterrence strategies...since they won't be allowed to date until they're, oh...say thirty,” he says with a grin which draws a smile and eye roll from their mother who disappears back into the kitchen.

Sanjana Singh-Tarnowski comes into the front room, and announces, “Dinner is served...please take a seat anywhere.”

“Maya and Monique, please sit between Mick and Hawk...to keep Fred and Ethel Mertz separated,” says Ivan with his seemingly ever present smile.

We all adjourn to the dining room where we are silently joined by Maya and Monique who are now seated between Hawk and I, making a total of eight.

“So Sanjana, how did you happen to encounter this raving radical Ivan?” I ask.

“Be glad to Mick...but first I'd like to hear about Ivan's days at UCB...as a revolutionary,” a smiling Sanjana says getting their daughters' attention.

“Okay...fair enough. Ivan and...” I start to say when I'm interrupted by Ivan, “Mick Kozlov you have the right to remain silent...anything you say can and will be used against uh...*me*. And unless you wish to be sharin' a bowl of Kibbles and Bits with the woofs, for dinner...” Ivan says smiling, making a zipper motion across his mouth with his hand, nodding toward his two daughters who are rapt to hear about their father's radical past.

“In other words...*stifle yourself*, Edith,” says Hawk a la Archie Bunker.

“Sanjana, I believe you know my attorney Mr Shapiro here, and having been duly advised of my uh...rights...by counsel, besides of which, I'm *very* hungry, having caught the delightful aroma of the food, I choose to invoke the Fifth. Maybe sometime when it's just us adults...” I say in full diplomatic retreat.

“That uh...*interesting*, eh?” Sanjana says.

“You have *no* idea. I'll put this way...he has every bit earned and is fully vested in the nickname Ivan the Terrible,” I say.

“Okay. Maybe another time,” Sanjana says.

“Maybe not,” Ivan says now staring at me with a thin, pasty smile.

The bill of fare is nothing short of spectacular with multiple dishes of exotic ethnic East Indian concoctions, each one more savory than the last, some with curry...others, subtle unrecognizable seasoning on several kinds of meat and vegetable dishes served with authentic ethnic Indian music, sitar accompanied by tabla drums barely perceptible in the background with the faint scent of patchouli incense. Obviously Sanjana has taken a great deal of time and care in the

preparation. Much to Hawk's pleasant surprise, without so much as even an errant Tofu. Sure beats the hell out of Kibbles and Bits.

Conversation is lively, punctuated by a toast first to Sanjana for the lovely meal, then to Ruth and Joseph Tarnowski. The wine is flowing and everyone's enjoying themselves with lots of laughter, good food and good cheer reminiscent of the wonderful Italian dinners my own mother Maria used to throw for our family and friends.

"Sanjana...before we were cleverly uh...sidetracked, you were going to tell us how you met Ivan the Terrible One," I say.

"Well...I guess I should probably start with how I ended up here. My mother and father...were refugees from the constant civil wars and strife in India during the conflict for liberation from Colonial English rule in the late 40s lead by Mahatma Gandhi. My father, a professor at the University, was highly educated in Europe...and London. He was able to secure a visa because he was offered a job with the American government state department in San Francisco, as a translator because of his fluent English, and mastery of many Hindi dialects.

After we relocated, my mother became pregnant with me. Father attempted to go back to try to bring some of his family to America, his mother and father and siblings. In the process, sadly he was killed, in one of the riots in New Delhi by the separatists seeking independence from predominantly Hindu India...in what would later become the Muslim state of Pakistan. He was Hindu, and like Gandhi, did not support the partitioning of the Muslim and Hindu states based on religion. I was born here in the U.S. in 1948 in Fremont California just South of the Bay area where there was already a growing East Indian population. I was just a baby and never really knew him," says Sanjana.

"Even though Sanjana was raised Hindu, after 9-11 many of the shall we say less enlightened uh...*inbred jingoistic patriots*..." Ivan says barely able to contain his anger, "just assumed that because she was obviously from South Asia, that she was Muslim which sadly trickled down to our daughters in school, with verbal attacks and insults...so much so that we decided to place them in a private school...Arcadia, where we felt they would be more safe and less distracted," Ivan says.

"If I may...Maya and Monique...can I ask you how you dealt with the insults?" I say.

"Mr Kozlov...Monique and I were raised by our parents to never retaliate. When Meghan Allison asked me if my mom and dad were terrorist, I admit that I was like *really* tempted...to lash out at her...for being so...*stu-u-u-PID*. I just took a few deep breaths...and controlled my anger...barely...smiled and said, 'Meghan, when you're ready to listen...I would be happy to *try* to clue you in.' And I was *really* glad that I hadn't lashed out at her...because a week later Meghan...her sister McKenzie and her mom Jessica were all killed in the pipeline explosion," Maya says with Monique nodding in agreement.

“Well said, Maya,” says the uncharacteristically avuncular Hawk patting Maya's hand, now apparently rehearsing for his new role as Uncle Hawk.

“Indeed, Maya. Sorry Sanjana...please go on about how you met Ivan...” I say.

“Thank you Maya...I'm *very* proud of you both, *apane priyajanom ko...* sorry, Hindi for *my dear ones*. So...I was attending graduate school here at Moody University in 1977, majoring in ethnic studies, when President Carter pardoned the draftees that had relocated to Canada. Ivan was on his way back home to America after years of living in asylum from the U.S. Draft, in Vancouver British Columbia. He got off the Greyhound bus to stretch his legs, and somehow found his way to the campus.

I met Ivan one day when he was wandering around the campus of Moody U. He seemed lost. So I asked him if he needed some help in finding his way some place. He said, “*Yea now that you mention it, I've actually been lost for oh...about the past ten years. And if you're not too busy at the moment I was wondering if you could like help me find my way back to some semblance of a normal life in America.*” As you know, Ivan can be *very* persuasive,” Sanjana says turning to Ivan, smiling mischievously.

“And as they say, the rest is *his-tor-ee*. Since that day, we've never been apart,” Ivan adds reaching over gently placing his hand on top of Sanjana's his eyes tearing up.

“Sounds like Kismet to me. So how'd you end up in environmental studies Ivan?” I say.

“Yeah...well, to be honest, not a terribly high-minded decision on my part. I had just enough undergrad credits from UCB to enter grad school here, so I enrolled in the newly formed College of Ecology, frankly because it was new, had a lot of openings, and it was the only one I could get into that late date,” he says grinning.

“And now?” I say.

“Sanjana is the Dean of the Asian Studies curriculum here, a tenured professor with a PhD in East Indian Culture and as you know, I'm Dean of Environmental Studies. Sadly, unless in the unlikely event something *very* cogent dramatically intervenes, my present task is bearing witness and carefully documenting the demise of human civilization...the coming of the 6th Mass Extinction.”

“*Jezus* Ivan...” Hawk says picking up butter knife “got anything sharper than a dull butter knife, to like open a vein? Oops...Sorry, man...forgot about the girls here at the table,” Hawk says.

“Not a problem Hawk...they've heard it all before...many times,” Ivan says smiling.

I look at the girls who just roll their eyes in unison and smile demurely as Daddy is obviously just starting to tune up...again.

“Despite imperative warnings of 97% of the credible scientific climate community...the merchants of doubt are still winning the debate.

Here's the reality of betting against the science of climate change. The odds of winning that bet, are just about the same as playing Roulette. Betting the house, the car, and the wife and kids...everything you own...and civilization as we know it, on *one* number and spinning the Roulette wheel. That's right 37 to 1 odds against, that you'll win. Redefines a sucker's bet.

The *idiot light* on the dashboard is now frantically flashing red, admonishing us to shut down the engine of greenhouse gases...before anymore irreparable damage is done. It is the tragic replay of the Greek mythos of Nemesis, Greek...to pay what is due. Divine retribution for man's hubris as he blithely allows the slow systematic Matricide of *Gaia*...tortured and slowly suffocated by a blanket of CO2 at the hands of Her own ungrateful children—a deadly irony—with the same slow irrepressible efficiency of the technology that caused it,” Ivan says.

“Isn't there anything that can be done to stop it? I mean, there *has* to be *some* scientific solution to this,” I say.

“Mick, the problem we are facing has less to do with the science and more to do with the politics...not a climate crisis...but rather a climate of crisis management, rife with non-feasance and malfeasance...shortsighted reactionary ideology...a tragic and I must say potentially terminal crisis for the planet, in political will and leadership,” Joseph Tarnowski says.

“And as a sociologist slash anthropologist,” adds Ruth Tarnowski “we see that, the geometric evolution of the compression of time has resulted in short term tactical thinking of maybe a seven year horizon, instead of long term strategic thinking, like the early indigenous peoples of *seven generations*. This shrinking of the human construct of perception of time through technology...has created a pervasive sense of immediacy...a priority of short term gain, of quick profits which through the years has resulted in the systematic attack and successful de-certification of collective bargaining units by the Corpocracy along with the tacit ever-present threat of cheap unregulated labor of Globalism. Workers have been coerced into a perpetual state of fear and anxiety, petrified of taking the risk to confront it for fear of tangible short-term loss for some theoretical long-term gain...to them just an abstraction...for now.”

“So what's the solution...where do we go from here?” Hawk says.

“The first step toward grappling with such a huge complex problem, is a recognition, as painful as it may be...of the political, and by extension, existential reality. Defining and quantifying the problem and breaking it down into discreet manageable parts. The most problematic and difficult, yet imperative component of all, the politics of a massive shift in the collective *consciousness of humanity*. In short...*from the ME*

to the WE. And while we're at it, a repatriation...a resurrection of pre-patriarchal governance...sans testosterone, the only sure way to end all wars," says Ruth Tarnowski with a wry smile.

"And just how would you propose to make that happen?" I say.

"Obviously, it's a political improbability to even try to legislate something even resembling compassion...and an even greater practical impossibility to attempt to enforce *make nice*," she says.

"So again, how would you suggest we go about that, short of becoming a police state...and forcing everybody to *make nice...or else...*" I say sarcastically.

"*Becoming* a police state? Ha! It's already a *fait accompli* my dear boy. Just wait until the catastrophic consequences of climate change come home to roost. Chaos and anarchy on the streets of the good ol' U-S of A...the police and the military are already preparing and planning for it...quietly putting infrastructure in place, including the wholesale militarization of local police force assets...subsidized by the Feds. Recycling all those hundreds of billions of tax payer dollars of war surplus equipment and ordnance...ultimately to be used against the very people who paid for them. The magnitude of the irony is...well..." Ruth says.

"Hard to get your head around? So what are you saying, Ruth? Time for a massive revolution?" I say.

"I'm afraid the inescapable answer to that is...an uncategorical *Maybe!* Not quite yet. It would first have to start with a revolution of *consciousness*...a revival of the innate sense of humanity and compassion that has been implacably eroding through the monopolization of consciousness by technology...commoditizing everything...even our human interaction and relationships through social networks, that enables the sociopathy of Capitalism...so gradually as to be almost imperceptible," Ruth says.

"Sounds more like a *definite Maybe*. So do you *actually* think it's possible to put the genie of technology back in the bottle?" I say.

"No, Mick...I'm not that naïve...nor am I a Luddite. So I'm not saying that there are not some profoundly positive innovations and uses of the Internet. But the technology has evolved at a much, *much* higher rate than our capacity to deal with it intelligently. Our relatively primitive *un-evolved* lizard brains still function for the most part at a primal level...seeking pleasure...and the avoidance of pain. Like the Sorcerers Apprentice...possessive of the enormous power of technology, but lacking the wisdom to deal with it.

We live in a collective trance...tranquilized by the trivial. The technology appeals to that part of the brain that seeks, and becomes addicted to pleasure...much like a drug, or alcohol. And if we've learned *anything* from the so-called spectacularly failed war on drugs...and don't *even* get me started on the Corporate Prison-Industrial complex...is that the only answer in combating abuse and addiction, is not through mass

incarceration-for-profit, but through education and early intervention. So okay...like most addictions, humans over time become inured...or normalized with it...constantly escalating usage to feed a growing addiction,” Ruth says.

“Ya know Ruth...” Hawk says “this whole discussion about the profound influence of technology on the traditional American concept of democracy and capitalism, causes me to imagine what a post-capitalism society might look like. While the neo-liberals...the oligarchs, continue to embrace an increasingly automated production model...to keep costs and therefore prices lower and lower by forcing the workforce to compete with the tireless efficiency of computers and robotics, it seems to me, the great irony is, that they have failed to grasp that it will be technology that will usurp and up-end the traditional free-market capitalist paradigm. Because of the colossal failure of capitalism to deliver a sustainable decent quality of life to the working class majority...the constant grinding of the *laissez-faire* machine, slashing the workforce, forcing workers to do increasingly menial work that takes no pride in production. Serving only the Deity of Efficiency...undignified work that is essentially without any meaning beyond rate of return for their masters. Essentially slave labor paid just enough to survive so they can come to work another day. And for this profound increase in productivity they are rewarded with stagnant wages...treated like indentured servants with disrespect and contempt by their employers.

The Neo-Dark Ages...nothing more than a Lord and vassals...now punching time clocks. But as the history of civilized societies has demonstrated, with the arrival of the Renaissance, the universal humanity of man naturally seeks and flourishes in the light of human creativity...humanity and the arts. Infusing into man's quotidian existence, human dignity, mutual respect...and egalitarianism. A reason to keep on keepin' on. Maybe...just maybe a *true* democracy will emerge.”

“Why Hawk...well said. Spoken like a true revolutionary!” a smiling Ruth says to a blushing Hawk.

“Proving Hawk's not just another pretty face, Ruth...” I say with a smirk toward Hawk who better than anyone else knows full well that his face could be considered anything but *pretty*. Masculine yeap...very.

Undaunted by my amiable needling, Hawk continues, “And in this so-called Information Age, of which I have been involved in since its genesis, there is no more of a pure model of democracy than the open source model of information sharing, free and therefore without scarcity, natural or artificially induced. I think it will be the vehicle for the restructuring and reshaping of a new world order. Just consider the launch of Wikipedia, online digital encyclopedia in early 2001. All the information...more importantly knowledge, not the same thing, domiciled there will be easily accessible online, freely distributable with relatively few intellectual property restrictions. It will be publicly

subsidized through donations, maintained and curated by volunteers...without compensation. If indeed *knowledge is power*...as prophetically declared in the 16th century by philosopher Francis Bacon, it will revolutionize, literally, and reconstitute the power structure. The Information Age, eventually will bite the gluttonous hand of the capitalists that have feed it. Because pricing of goods and services is dependent on scarcity, the explosion of an open and free information economy will evolve it away from a classic hierarchical capitalistic model. From *the few-to-many...to the many-to-many* economy.”

“And the natives are getting restless,” Ivan says. “The end of capitalism is coming and the Captains of Capitalism are now beginning whiff the growing putrid scent of discontent. I think the larger question now becomes how will the Ace of Spades...the ultimate dark trump card of the coming catastrophic consequences of unmitigated climate change, redefine the social order...once the collective primal instinct of survival, caused by scarcity is unleashed...with a vengeance. A game changer.”

“Indeed son. In the meantime, in the face of knowing what's coming, *we need to plant a tree*...to incorporate into the curriculum for our children, at a very early age, how to recognize the limitations of technology...to place the use and our reliance upon it in a proper perspective. Basically, technology and media literacy. At some level, long term, the addiction to dehumanizing technology...our blind reliance on it, as more of an end...than a means, poses a far greater risk to the survival of civilization than say...any existential biological pandemic or even climate change,” Ruth says.

“Okay Ruth...so what's your vision on how to accomplish that?” I say.

“Ah...didn't say I know the *how* silly boy!” Ruth says playfully slapping my hand, “that's a much harder question...that's your job *bubbala!*” a smiling Ruth says, “the solution of which will have to come from yours and future generations. But we have little time to waste. The society is already unwittingly voluntarily, and probably irreversibly on a massive scale, relinquishing and abrogating its privacy rights. It's imperative that we infuse future generations, now...with the moral and legal implications, with a recognition that the rights of the individual, embodied in the Bill of Rights, *must* remain sovereign. Inevitably the Corpocracy...and by extension the state...will insidiously and systematically, through gradual accretion attempt to usurp our right to privacy on the basis of some straw-man overblown argument of security.”

“So Big Brother is *already* watching?” I say

“Yes, but only to a degree, for now, Mick. But it most probably will *not* unfold like Orwell's 1949 masterwork, *1984*, *initially*...but rather by slick seduction through propaganda by the Corpocracy, known euphemistically by the innocent and harmless sounding, *marketing*. The *seek-pleasure-avoid-pain* mantra of mainstream media and

technology...as depicted in Aldous Huxley's incredibly prophetic "Brave New World...written in 1932!" Ruth says.

"So it won't start out with Big Brother...or the state controlling the message?" I say.

"No...first by the Corporacy...or *Little Brother*, lead by the Great Prophet of the Capitalism...*Monsieur Baron du Bottom-Line*...through selective seductive dissembling that will gradually compromise our resistance to give up our personal sovereignty...our privacy aka...liberty. Big Brother will come later after all the heavy lifting has been done, to irrevocably bend the nail over. So first be afraid...be *very* afraid of *Little Brother*...because the Corpocracy is not bound by as many of those uh...*inconvenient* Constitutional strictures or prohibitions...as the state is," Ruth says.

"So from years of working in I-T," Hawk says, "it's obvious to me that while we're being paranoid about *Big Brother is watching*, Little Brother has been quietly encroaching...infringing on our right to privacy...like Google, Yahoo, Microsoft, Amazon and social networks like on-line dating, building up massive amounts of linked aggregate *metadata* at an astonishingly granular level. Which by the way, they can sell to third parties without our knowledge or consent...based on our buying habits, our keyword searches and links we click, etcetera...even our political proclivities. *Everything* about each one of us that uses the internet...which at that level of linked, granule data collection is tantamount to content. So they *don't even need to have privy* to our correspondence."

"So if I hear you right, Ruth...you're saying what's needed is not just a modern day equivalent of a Great Awakening of consciousness...but also a more urgent, imperative kind of...A Great Wake-up to the potential pathologies of technology and those who would abuse it for their nefarious self-interest?" I say.

"Precisely! A *Renaissance*...a rebirth of sorts or a Neo-Renaissance of the Age of Reason, if you will...before it's too late, which may already be the case," she says.

"Well, if what you say is true about the militarization of law enforcement...how could a revolution by...and for the people be successful waged against such overwhelming military might?" I say.

Hawk, his eyes smoldering with anger, apparently his anger management strategy on temporary sabbatical says, "Well, to me there seems to be no other viable alternative but to take it to the streets. The French philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre said it best, *mon ami*...'I was not the one to invent lies: they were created in a society divided by class and each of us inherited lies when we were born. It is not by refusing to lie that we will abolish lies: it is by eradicating class by any means necessary' and I underscore, *any*."

“So you advocate the use of violence to that end, Hawk? So you're a closet Karl Marx...a Leninist advocating the violent overthrow of the government as a prelude to a new grand world order?” Ruth says.

“More like a Groucho...” I say, trying to lighten Hawk up, who now in his heat-seeking missile mode, brushes off.

“Hey Mick...*mon ami*, make like Harpo will ya?” he says with zipper mouth motion.

“Geez...what a...what for it...?” I say.

“Dear Ruth...yes, I would...and not necessarily as a last resort which may be too late. I still can recall the words of Malcolm X, in 1965...just before he was assassinated, indelibly burned into my consciousness. When the defenseless Blacks were mercilessly being beaten and slaughtered, *We declare our right on this earth to be a man, to be a human being, to be respected as a human being, to be given the rights of a human being in this society, on this earth, in this day, which we intend to bring into existence...by any means necessary.* It was not until the Blacks began to arm themselves...to fight back in the North...in the Bay area with the Black Power Movement. The Black Panthers...that's when the White establishment began to sense their vulnerability. That Whitey could no longer gratuitously inflict violence on Black people with impunity...without Black blow back,” Hawk says.

“And so you think that violence would have expedited the cause of civil rights of the Black people?” Ruth asks.

“I don't know...but it sure as hell would have caused some folks in the Jim Crow South to take pause...to realize that they could themselves be exposed to physical violence...that some of *their* lily white asses, literally was in the game,” Hawk says.

“And when the oppressed are so far down...Bob Dylan's, “*When you've got nothing, you've got nothing to lose,*” I say.

“You're *so far down*...that down looks like *up*. Ruth, as another Jew, I would think that you, of all people, would realize that the Jews in Germany during Hitler's reign of terror...millions of our people, men, women and *children* where exterminated...like vermin. Meekly following like lambs being lead to slaughter during the Holocaust. But had they resisted *en masse*...*by any means necessary*, including armed resistance, like the French Resistance...the outcome may have been much different from six million Jews being eradicated...erased like they never existed,” Hawk says.

“I understand...and indeed share your anger, but in your rage, you're blaming the victim, Hawk. And by the way...remember that historically our people are from the *merchant class*...*not warriors*...we finance and supply wars...not fight them, present company excluded,” Ruth says smiling facetiously.

“Yeah...like the Rothschilds', just shopkeepers doing a *bisil gesheft*...a little business, eh? Finance and supply *both* sides...so they're always on a winning side...and if you believe in uh...*Kosher Karma*, well

I won't *even* go there with the Holocaust. *Dammit* Ruth...seems to me that having that genetic Jewish victim mentality was, and still is large part of the problem. Yeah...I know it's part of the process...a result of the oppression. But when some of the Blacks had finally had enough, their response to violence was, *Yessuh, Massa Whitey, I'll turn the other cheek...so you can kiss the other cheek...of my black ass*. And guess what, some of the Whites suddenly started to get more than a little circumspect about how they treated Blacks...'cause they were scared *shitless*. Why? Because now, they sensed that what was once considered a birthright, could be taken away from them by violence. Now *they* had something they could lose," Hawk says still seething.

Ruth says, "In many ways the Blacks, have much the same narrative as the oppressed Jews throughout the millennia of history...treated like sub-humans...even in literature. The seemingly benign but no less pathological stereotypes...going as far back as Shakespeare's Shylock, and even before...just because of their ethnic origin. Okay, so granted, short term, they got the attention of the oppressors. But, how exactly, as a practical matter, would you propose that this armed insurrection be implemented...and financed, remember, *I am a Jew...*" grinning, "...and perpetuated long term? And more importantly what does the end game look like? The streets flowing red with the blood of Americans killing other Americans? Another American civil war? In the end, what exactly did *that* solve? Seven hundred thousand dead Americans later, just how'd that work out for everybody?" Ruth says.

"Well, I haven't figured that part out...yet. *That's a much harder question...*" says a sheepishly grinning Hawk with air quotes repeating Ruth's earlier answer. But *I can* tell you this...for me personally? As Emiliano Zapata said during the Mexican Revolution, *I'd rather die on my feet, then live on my knees*," Hawk says still in anger relapse mode.

"*Touche*, Hawk." says a smiling Ruth, "Noble and laudable words, Hawk. I have no doubt as to their sincerity."

"Don't know the *when*...or the *how*...but inevitably, the world's headed for a fiery broadside collision on the corner of Main Street...and Wall Street...between regressive Capitalism and Progressivism. And...*there will be blood...flowing in the streets*," Hawk says.

"Maybe so. But consider this, my dear enraged gladiator friend. An armed insurrection would be exactly how the government...and the oligarchs would *like* it to unfold...thereby justifying a full and overwhelming military response. Long term...not a winnable war for the revolutionaries. No...if history tells us *anything*, including the liberation and decolonization of India from the British, lead by Gandhi...and in this country the successful prosecution of civil rights by the Blacks in the 60s, lead by Martin Luther King Jr...it must be through the same massive *passive aggressive* response. Non-violent demonstration and civil disobedience including rolling strikes and boycotts by the workers. But

first it will require the almost complete solidarity and mobilization of many of the workers. Committed worker solidarity is the key...the necessary condition precedent,” Ruth says.

“But how do you get all the workers to unite? I mean, isn't that rather unrealistic idealism, if not Panglossian to expect that kind of worker unity?” I say.

“My widowed mother,” Sanjana starts, “often spoke of the demonstrations by her people in New Delhi...the heroism of the waves of Mahatma Gandhi's followers, as they stood, totally defenseless, in complete commitment and unity, to *Satyagraha*...non-violent defiance against the government dragoons. As the soldiers mercilessly beat them...as each wave of the injured were carried off, then replaced by the one behind, each wave heroically stepping up into the breach...knowing that they were going to be brutally beaten. Until finally some of the soldiers became so physically exhausted, their blows no longer had any power...either physical or as psychological intimidation over the protestors. Many of the soldiers were so moved by the heroism and self-sacrifice that tears were streaming down their faces. Many of them, knowing that they would face harsh disciplinary action themselves, refused to continue beating their fellow citizens.”

“Inspiring Sanjana. I have often wondered if I would be capable of such physical...and moral courage, to take a beating without fighting back,” I say.

“Yes, Mick...that's what makes it even more remarkable. The protestors had won...without resorting to physical retaliation. Creating a tide of massive moral outrage that swept over the country, which inspired even more protestors to join in...until through geometric progression, a tipping point of critical mass was reached. Eventually the sheer magnitude of humanity, willing to sacrifice their bodies, and the international moral outrage, finally overwhelmed the resource...and resolve of the British. It was a noble moment in the history of civilization...and the history of India in particular...liberation from English Colonial rule. And it was accomplished without ostensibly firing a single shot by the dissidents,” Sanjana says.

“Thank you my dear daughter...for that. The eventual triumph through such extraordinary moral and physical courage by just common, but far from ordinary folks, later would serve as a successful model for the non-violent civil rights protests in the Jim Crow South, lead by Gandhi's disciple, Reverend King,” Ruth says placing her hand gently on Sanjana's, her eyes tearing up.

“Heroic indeed, Sanjana. Like the lunch counter sit-ins where the Blacks suffered merciless beatings...for what? Merely asking to be served? But do you *really* think that today's generation of selfish, relatively affluent people of the West are capable, more to the point, willing to make such selfless sacrifice? I think it was Gandhi, who when

asked the question, *What do think of Western civilization?* replied, *I think it would be good idea,*” I say.

“Yes...I do, Mick. I believe Civil Rights legislation in the mid 60s was a direct result of the *peaceful non-violent* demonstrations by the Blacks in the South lead by Reverend King. And my students are just as committed to righting social wrongs...like gender equality...and for the LGBT community, as our generation during the 60s against discrimination based on race,” Sanjana says.

“Now that you mention it, of course. I lost a young man who was like a son to me. Trey Mahoney sacrificed his unfinished life...attempting to *make* them listen. To do the right thing. His only crime was that he was gay...and for following his broken heart as to whom he chose to love, and in doing so, he was assassinated by the homophobic establishment.

“And Selma in '65...and C-Wash,” says Hawk

“Indeed. *But for* the horrific images coming into the living rooms of Main Street America...via the six o'clock news, of the gratuitous violence and attack of the defenseless, peaceful non-violent demonstrators who were marching from Selma to Montgomery, the capitol of Alabama...*no* Voter Rights Act of 1965. Hawk and I and of course Ivan, lost one of our dearest, most committed and courageous brothers there, Charles Washington...the ultimate sacrifice, martyred. Thank you for reminding us, Sanjana,” my throat tightening up.

“Rest in peace...C-Wash,” Hawk says bowing his massive hairless candle-lit glistening head deferentially.

“Yes, and RIP brother Mario Savio, taken from us in 1996...at fifty-three. They said it was a heart attack. But I believe it was *a broken heart* that finally took Mario. *Weltschmerz*...world pain...or world weariness from the recognition of man's capacity for inhumanity and lack of compassion for one another,” Ivan says one of Mario Savio's closest friends and collaborator in the FSM at UCB.

“Rest in peace...Mario Savio, Charles Washington 1940-1965...at 25, Selma, Alabama and Byron Brawley 1942-1967...at 24, Kontum Province, Vietnam,” I say

“Indeed, Mick. But...again if we look at the history of tectonic social change...general rolling strikes, Syndicalism has been a common union organizing principle in a number of European countries, including France, Spain, and Italy. To be successful, it requires no more than twenty percent of the workforce, in America maybe 40 million of the total 150 million total workforce of rolling strikes, across the complete spectrum of the production of goods and services to bring the oligarchs to their knees in less than two years,” Ruth says.

“So if the workers are the real producers of wealth for the oligarchs...no producers...no excessive cash flow...no obscene wealth?” I say.

“And no oligarchs,” Hawk adds.

“Ergo *bubala*. A bloodless reversal of the current slow-motion Corporate *coupe de etat*. From that point on, the tacit ever-present threat of general strikes would force the few remaining oligarchs to deal with the reality that ultimately it is the worker...the producers of goods and services that hold the power,” says Ruth.

“Hmm...sorry Ruth. But I have to say that this uh...strikes me somewhat as Marxist utopianism...rooted in collectivistic idealism. Can you cite like some big and meaningful example, and I don't mean some obscure little victory of labor in some *banana republic* podunk country, where this actually affected a profound and lasting reorganization of a social order?” I say.

“Sure. Thought you'd *never* ask...*big boy*.” the always affable grinning Ruth Tarnowski says, with her dancing penetrating blue eyes, “the most striking example, no pun intended, of successful non-violent revolution through general strikes was that of 1989...in Poland were part of a revolutionary wave that eventually resulted in the Fall of Communism in the Communist controlled states of Central and Eastern Europe by the end of 1991. Just think of the power of that. All those Trillions with a *T*, of dollars spent by the USSR and the U.S....on armament over four decades...and in the end it was a civil implosion. Ordinary working class people...that was more powerful than the technology of any man-made implosion-type thermonuclear weapon, that ultimately defeated the so-called Red Menace. And the fall of the Iron Curtain. So...sometimes for decades and decades...nothing seems to happen. Then in few weeks...decades happen. That one big enough for ya *miene bubala*, Mickey? Hmm?” says a warmly smiling Ruth Tarnowski.

“Okay, Ruth...ya got me. I can buy that. But look what happened with the power vacuum created by the collapse of Communism. The same oligarchs, the *apparatchiks* become born-again Capitalist...and ended up with all the marbles...again,” I say.

“*Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it...* George Santayana,” Joe says, “using the aftermath of the dissolution of the USSR as a negative paradigm, this revolution will be forced to heed the harsh lessons of the collapse of Communism...or it too shall fail...just as spectacularly. Which translates into the necessity for bold, visionary...and very vigilant leadership. That's where the people of your generation come in, Mick. Old enough...possessing of institutional memory to remember the past failures and follies of history like the American imperialist interventions...the war in Vietnam, the attempts at the overthrow of the democratically elected socialist governments in Iran 1953, Chile in 1973, Afghanistan in 1979 and Nicaragua starting in 1981 ending with Iran-Contra in 1985, to just name a few of America's greatest hits...your tax dollars at work. Meanwhile, back on the home front, a wholesale assault...the deregulation of Capitalism, including the privatization of the vital functions of government, like the sacrosanct

medicare and social security. Your generation is still young enough, and energetic with wisdom of life experience to *shepherd* the process, to mentor the children of our lovely grandchildren's generation...to keep it from straying off course," Joseph Tarnowski says.

"So are you sayin' it's time to start mobilizing like *yesterday* for a uh...revolution?" I say.

"Yeap...you got it. With a little more *re-socialization*," Ruth says with air quotes, "I just may turn you two *schatzi's* into little lefty revolutionaries yet!" Ruth says facetiously with a wicked smile.

"Welcome to my world, boys," says a grinning Ivan.

"So Ruth...what and when's the next step?" I say.

"To survive this unprecedented global threat to our very existence will require a radical reordering of civilization's deeply devolved and perverse priorities. The great tragedy is that the American working class for the most part is ignorant of the fact that they are essentially slaves, *wage slaves* as Marx put it, to a rigged system where *our* democracy, or what's left of it, like a defective gene through incest has run amok...an inbred mutation, into this obsequious, antithetical servant of Capitalism. I like to quote Harriet Tubman, African-American abolitionist and humanitarian when she said, *I freed thousands of slaves, but I could have freed thousands more...if only they had known they were slaves*. For millions of people with today's obscene disparity of wealth, poverty is the new slavery," says Ruth Tarnowski.

"So the answer lies with the media...to sound the alarms, a massive media campaign...a clarion call to action?" I say.

"I'll let Joe answer that since he's the economist...besides I'm tired of hearing myself talk," she says with genuine humility.

"Okay, Ruthy...you can take the rest of night off. Save a little of that fire for tomorrow night at the book signing...honey, you've *more* than earned your dinner tonight," he says with an authentic love and respect, affectionately patting her hand.

"Mick, it was during the 80s with the Reagan administration, that the war against labor unions began. Huge income tax reductions for the wealthy including inheritance tax, massive deregulation and lax anti-trust regulation and enforcement started in earnest, with mainstream media becoming increasingly concentrated and consolidated in the hands of just a few major corporations, with no efficient competitive alternative," Joe says.

"Like the one with the biggest uh...*megaphones* usually wins the argument," I say.

"Yea...like here's ya megaphones...right here," says the Hawkster turning away from the girls seated next to him in a rare display of decorum, grabbing his genitals, doing a spot-on *wiseguy*, which draws a snigger from the girls.

"*A-hem* uh...correct. The notion that the solution to climate change is through more Capitalism is a naive myth promulgated through

the slick dissembling known again, by the euphemism *marketing*. Essentially propaganda. A society distracted from the crucially important social issues by a constant bombardment of our senses with inane, vulgar minutiae, through technology. Social media, electronic gossip mills, the contemporary *bread and circus* of the Roman Empire...promoted by corporate mainstream media, the sycophantic handmaidens of the Corporacy. As Neil Postman prophetically wrote in 1985, in *Amusing Ourselves to Death*...echoing Huxley's *Brave New World*, the public is more oppressed by their addiction to amusement...pleasure, than in Orwell's work, *1984*, where they were oppressed by state control," Joe says.

"Yes...I've read Postman, Chomsky and Zinn and others, extensively. And I too recognize and have often acknowledged the profound prescience of Huxley's fictional masterwork. So the system is so broken...so corrupt, that it's not fixable?" I say

"Yeap...ironically from the third rate actor...like most things Hollywood, pretended president Ronald Reagan's so-called *shining city on a hill*...a Potemkin Village," he says with air quotes "...and that old majestic mansion...up on the shining hill that from a distance looks like all it needs is a fresh coat of paint to restore it to its original splendor? Belies the reality that it's been so infested with termites and rats, of the bipedal kind...for so long, that it's rotting from the inside out. And no amount of propping it up...mere cosmetic change, like every empire before it, is going to save it from eventually collapsing under its own weight. And as Ruth says...poverty is the new slavery. And all the tweaking...all the so-called reforms around the edges only serves to lengthen the chains...it does not break them," says Joe.

"So...time for what? *Bulldoze* the bureaucracy?" Hawk says.

"An apt metaphor, Hawk. Yes...and like any other structure that's in danger of collapse, first it needs to be condemned...then the demolition needs to be planned and controlled to prevent a precipitous, chaotic collapse," Joe says.

"So...*doz* it all the way down to the foundation...and start over?" I say.

"I'm afraid so. Sadly, nothing less will suffice. But if the democratic foundation is solid, and I believe that it is, in time, the process of rebuilding on that foundation can begin," Joe says.

"Assuming there is the equivalent of a Great Awakening...since there is so much economic inter-connectedness through Globalism, what's the rest of the world going to be doing...while America is tuning up for American Revolution 2.0?" I say.

"Through Globalism the highly formidable virulent strain of Capitalism, particularly prevalent in America over the past century has now metastasized all over the world, indeed *tout le monde*. The so-called American Dream has morphed and spread into the World Nightmare," Joe says.

“Greed...without borders. America's main export,” interjects Hawk.

“Agreed.” says a smiling Joseph Tarnowski, “so...the old bromide especially in the era of Globalism, *when the American economy sneezes...the rest of the world catches a cold*, was never more relevant, that is as long as the American dollar is the international primary reserve currency. By the way if that should ever change...the collapse of the dollar would throw the world into a global depression...economic chaos and anarchy. In Europe, for example because it's so fractured politically, with so many competing issues of inter-state sovereignty...with no true central government or bank, perhaps the potential for a contemporary equivalent of the French Revolution in terms of a bloody violence and anarchy is even greater. A Reign of Terror 2.0. And you can be sure that abroad...as well as here, of asymmetrical warfare...by non-state actors, leftovers and dead-enders of the former oligarchy who failed to get the memo, desperately attempting to retain power by exploiting the chaos for financial...and hegemonic gain,” Joe says.

“Yeah...but...” I start to say when I am eerily confronted by a memory seeping in from my past life as an *M-F*, Yes...exploitation, as Jason Mahoney presciently declared, years ago in the early 80s while convening and Chairing the Entrepreneurial Corporate Caucus, the ECC with the other plutocratic Masters of the Universe about the coming chaos caused by climate change. *Never, ever...let a serious crisis to go to waste. This crisis will provide the opportunity for us, the ruling class to do things that we could not before...!*

“Hell-o-o? Earth to Koz-mick...yes, but *what*, Koz?” Hawks says mercifully interrupting the dark reverie of my past with Captain Ahab which sends a chill down to my toes. Hmm...*what the hell is that about? Some unfinished business...from long ago?*

“Uh...sorry. A Proustian moment...Remembrance of Things Past,” I say, “So...you were saying, professor?”

“Sure...Mick,” Joe continues, “so...Capitalism has now devolved into an *international Sociopathology*, with the disparity of wealth worldwide, rivaling even the excesses of the mythical Gilded Age, when John D. Rockefeller...of Standard Oil, his net worth today adjusted for inflation would be a staggering 340 billion with a *B*...and in Europe, the notorious war profiteer Nathan Mayer Rothschild, worth about 350 *billion*.”

“Man...didn't know there was that many zeros. The Second Gilded Age...redefines disparity of wealth to a whole 'nuther level,” I say.

“Louis Brandeis, Associate Justice on the Supreme Court summed it up best, *We must make our choice. We can have democracy in this country or we can have great wealth concentrated in the hands of the few. But we can't have both*,” Joe says.

“Jesus...this level of obscene wealth. Like, today's Capitalism is to a democracy...is uh *what*...pornography is to love?” Hawk says.

“And to extend your metaphor professor, in the process of rebuilding, engineer it to withstand the inevitable challenges...of internal political and seismic external hazards, like the social dislocation caused by the calamitous destruction and chaos from climate change,” I say.

“Sadly, climate change for the most part, is a done deal, Mick. We could have largely prevented the catastrophic consequences of it had we only listened to the respected climate scientists like James Hansen of N-O-A-A, as far back as the 80s,” Ivan interjects.

“So...not exactly a very rosy forecast for the planet...or its inhabitants?” I say.

“Nope...but it's totally self-inflicted. As the indigenous peoples have known for millennia...*Gaia* has only rules. She is impartial. She knows no mercy. We knew Her rules...yet we continued to disrespect Her. Break Her rules...and you pay. You can pay Her now...or you can pay Her later, but in the end, She *always gets paid*. Like the credit card that's been maxed out with minimum payments, the principal and interest are now due but with obscene deferred compound interest,” Ivan says.

“I guess in the end, the people get the kind of government...and planet they deserve,” I say.

Ivan says, “Not much consolation, but yeah. Tragically, it is our innocent children, who will inherit a once democratic country, built on middle class prosperity, at one time the envy of the world, now on the verge of becoming a failed state. And a world civilization...on the brink of collapse. Like one continuous 50 year New Year's Eve drunken profligate orgy of willful, indeed arrogant ignorance by their hung-over parents, the *Biffs* and *O-blivias*. It's the day after and the kids are stuck with picking up the tab for cleaning the colossal mess up...to hose the place down to make it even liveable. The civilization in some perverse degraded form will survive...it always does. But history, will not be kind to our generation for allowing this totally unnecessary fiasco to happen.”

“So no magic bullet solutions...no last second Hail Mary game-winning pass?” I say

“Sorry...but again, nope. Except to maybe literally start praying Hail Marys', like overtime,” Ivan says.

“Hey Hawk...pass me that butter knife, will ya pal,” I say.

Ivan continues, “Now, with the inexorable inertia of it, the positive feedback loop of the melting polar caps, glaciers and permafrost, and the release of methane gas, along with dramatic sea warming, increasing levels, causing more calamitous extreme weather events...well, the only realistic hope is to mitigate it. No one, not the government...not the scientists are willing to publicly admit it for fear of starting a panic stampede for the exits...a mass exodus. We are now entering the adaptive phase of dealing with the inevitable consequences

of anthropocentric climate change, including in the not too distant future, by 2050, dramatic increase of sea level and average global temperatures, displacing hundreds of millions, with mass migration of the populace of the planet to the Northern latitudes...like the Pacific Northwest. Perhaps even in the lifetime of our children, a dystopic diaspora of marauding starving masses of desperate peoples, roaming and foraging to merely subsist. An existence of chaos and anarchy, relatively devoid of any social order or security,” says Ivan.

“*Jezus!* Sounds like it's time for a Hemlock Happy Hour,” Hawk says.

“Yeah...nice uplifting message, Ivan...so now what?” I say.

“Well guys, most of us with children...and grandchildren will choose not to indulge in Hawk's uh...*Hemlock* Maneuver, as we are *now* charged with a solemn duty. To prepare ourselves...our families and loved ones to start to form self-sufficient, defensible communities with others who share the same vision and are able...and more importantly, willing and committed to begin preparation for the inevitable. Survival, with some modicum of quality of life, including the preservation of the arts, and culture, will depend on the ability of these enclaves to produce their own food, water and sustainable energy...to be completely self-sustaining...indefinitely. Everything will have to be produced locally...including security, as the government or what's left of it, may not necessarily have the resources, or the will to protect the populace against the onslaught. Sadly...it will become almost a tribal kind of existence, probably for several decades, at least until the world population through attrition, including starvation, disease, civil strife...and war, becomes viable,” Ivan says.

“So what's your estimate for viable world population?” I ask

“Oh...optimally about three to four billion tops, with zero growth. Eventually finding a homeostatic balance of population and resource for the planet to support it,” Ivan says with a cavalier, almost clinical insouciance.

“*Jezus*, Ivan...you're talking almost a fifty percent reduction of the current levels of world population?” I say.

“Unfortunately...your math is correct, Mick. Vast portions of the planet probably twenty, even as much as thirty degrees North and South of equator will become essentially uninhabitable. Due to sea rise, the global coastal topography, where about forty percent of the world's total population is concentrated within seventy miles of the coast would be regularly inundated by brackish sea water making the land no longer arable, and in many places not even liveable within ten miles of the water's edge.

That's why the revolution must occur first...to form the political infrastructure, an armature, to try to ameliorate the worldwide chaos and dislocation caused by climate change. To allow in a relatively orderly way, for the regeneration and re-emergence of a new world order. A

more egalitarian society, not solely based on acquisitiveness as the main priority, but more on social justice and the universal rights of man,” Ivan says.

“Ivan, I have to say, nice speech, man...but it sounds more than a trifle quixotic, almost naively utopian to me,” I say.

“Indeed. But that's no reason not to strive for it, Mick. At the risk of sounding cliché...to let the perfect be the enemy of the good,” Ivan says.

“Mick, as Ivan says, the planet is already pretty much fully cooked...stick a fork in it,” Joe says

“So what you're saying Joe is...no matter what we do...basically we're *forked*, eh?” Hawk says smiling.

“Ha!” says Joe laughing, “yeah...pretty much, well put Hawk. Even the well-meaning mainstream environmentalist have failed to grasp that the current mutation of Capitalism is as capable of self-reform...as a career crack addict living in daily denial, lacking the political will and courage to deal with climate change. No...Capitalism as it exists today, is not the solution...it *is* the problem,” Joseph Tarnowski says who appears content to have his wife and long time collaborator and equal partner, a highly respected professor of Sociology and Anthropology, unthreatened by the intellectual brilliance and virtuosity in her own right, carry the mantle for social reform in particular as it relates to her area of expertise of the social sciences.

Quite a potent tag-team duo.

“Hmm...well I didn't expect to be breaking bread tonight in the presence of revolutionary uh...*royalty*” Hawk says with exaggerated air quotes to emphasis the irony “with contemporary iterations of Rosa Luxemburg, and later Emma Goldman...and Karl Marx. Raise your glasses to Ruth and Joe...and to all the fellow travelers for the cause of social justice...of the past, the present and the future...everywhere,” says Hawk smiling holding up his glass of wine.

“Here! Here!...well said Hawkster,” I say raising my glass.

“Indeed.” says Ivan raising his glass with Sanjana.

“Why thank you Hawk! We take that as an esteemed compliment,” Ruth says smiling broadly raising her glass.

“Very kind of you...thank you. And here's to S. G. Shapiro...truly a *Sui Generis*,” says Joe Tarnowski raising his glass.

“It certainly was intended as such, Ruth...I only wish Papa uh...S. G. could have been here to join in this discussion with these esteemed fellow travelers,” Hawk says wistfully.

“Uh...don't wish to sound too ignorant...but uh...” I say

“Dat train dun already left da station,” Hawk interjects always enjoying needling his pal.

“Rosa Luxemburg?” I say throwing Hawk a contrived exaggerated sarcastic smirk.

“A Marxist theorist, economist and revolutionary socialist of Polish-Jewish descent...one of the leaders of the German Revolution of 1918...which essentially ended the First World War after of abdication of the Kaiser...aka Mom.” Ivan Tarnowski says with a proud smile.

“A beautiful as well as brilliant *bubba*,” Hawk says winking at a blushing Ruth Tarnowski.

“Uh...by the way...she was martyred at the age of 47. Well, folks, on that happy note...this is probably a good place to call it a night. If you want to hear more about the book...the uh...WMD contra the oligarchy by WSDE, Workers Self Directed Enterprises or Worker's Cooperatives, the rest of this dog and pony show will be appearing at the auditorium of the community college tomorrow night at 7 PM. Might want to get there a little early to get a good ringside seat,” Ivan says only half-jokingly.

So we bid a good evening, thanking Ivan and Sanjana for a lovely dinner and the stimulating thought provoking conversation with Joseph and Ruth Tarnowski.

Again, it is reminiscent of many an evening of long hours of discussion and yes, debate spent, sometimes into sunrise, with Mario Savio, Charles Washington and Byron Brawley at UCB, including many of the things discussed tonight. It profoundly enlightened and informed my, at the time *jejune* world view. Sadly those principles that those young men, the best and the brightest, sacrificed their lives for, I am now deeply ashamed to confess, that somehow I allowed to erode—to eventually become dormant.

And *moi*...seduced by the siren call of the Gods of Capitalism, the Corpocracy, in the unfettered, unabashed pursuit of material wealth, luxury and power.

That is, until 9-1-1 and its aftermath, reinforced by this incredible gift of the breaking of bread, of intellectual communion, with such principled, esteemed fellow travelers.

So...we collect Oso, who has apparently fallen in deep lust with Zelda, and is reluctant to leave as exhibited by his intense whining all the way home to Chez MAK.

I'll try to unpack and process all we heard tonight from some very committed, and yes inspiring folks *manana*, hopefully after a good night's sleep. *Ha!*

Tomorrow night, maybe we'll take in the second act of the Ruth and Joe Road Show if for no other reason than to provide some security backup in case the North county crowd gets a little rowdy.

Still reverberating in my consciousness...

Your generation is still young enough, and energetic with the wisdom of life experience to shepherd the process, to mentor the children...to keep it from straying off course...

Including my own son. Michael...my son!? *Jezus.*

I finally fall asleep about 3 AM after staring at the ceiling for several hours of counting the knots in the knotty pine ceiling, pondering my past with the diabolical Captain Ahab. Indeed, definitely some *unfinished business* from long ago. The brutal murders of Sora Eagle Feather and Marla Dyson. And for *El Negrito* and J. Murdock Mahoney et al...again, some Koz-assisted-Karma. *De-fin-itely*.

And by the way, make that second term U.S. Senator J. Murdock Mahoney, from the *Great Centennial State of Colorado*, with the motto *Nil Sine Numine*. Nothing Without Providence. *Here's ya Providence...right here, Jason...*

- Chapter 63 -

With all the chaos connected with the pipeline explosion, the death and destruction, I am once again moved to go back into the studio, my sanctuary, to release and liberate my consciousness from the intense anxiety, as I had done in the past with the deaths of Sora and Marla—of dealing with the oftentimes crushing reality of the uncertainties of temporal human life. Some folks deal with grief by writing prose or poetry. I make art. For me painting is like writing poetry on canvas—the same process of metaphorical distillation, then unleashing the sometimes angry catharsis of emotion through 'throwing paint'.

The death of the innocent victims of the blast, the murders of Jennifer Rogers, and the Tehrani's, compounded by the recent epiphany that I have an adult son whom I have never met, compel me to paint a group of five very large paintings. The Fragile Status Quo Series just pour out of me over several days. As Emile Zola famously said, *If you ask me what I came into this life to do as an artist, I will tell you: I came to live out loud.*

It helps to lift the veil of dark clouds of depression caused by this senseless tragedy, the recognition of the fragility of human existence. It becomes an elegy—an expression of my personal grief for the innocent, unfinished lives lost, and the mayhem inflicted on a beautiful, very special place.

The only positive legacy I can remotely muster is that maybe this tragedy can serve as an unwavering parable of man's infinite capacity for self-destruction, and the need for constant vigilance to prevent this kind of irresponsible stewardship of industry and technology, from ever happening again, here or anywhere else.

At about 10 AM, I answer the phone, “Kozmick Productions”

“This is the National Transportation Safety Board calling for Mister Michaelangelo Kozlov. May I speak with Mr Kozlov please,” the voice on the phone says.

“Speaking,” I say...quite cleverly.

“Please hold for Ms Takahashi,” the voice says.

“Mr Kozlov, my name is Tara Takahashi. I'm the lead NTSB investigator on the pipeline blast in Cascadia County on October 10th. I would like to meet with you, and Mr Shapiro in person at your earliest convenience. We are the lead agency investigating this incident and we would very much like to hear your version of the facts, as it is our understanding that you were percipient eye-witnesses to the direct aftermath of the initial explosion,” she says.

“I don't know what I can add to the other statements that I have already given to other agencies, including the FBI...and the media,” I say.

“Mr Kozlov, I'm sure you must realize that is a very serious incident with the casualties, some very severe, loss of life and major property damage. We'd very much appreciate your cooperation in determining the cause. It is our Federal mandate to thoroughly investigate every incident involving a common carrier, to determine cause and assess responsibility as in the subject case involving a pipeline carrying toxic or flammable substances...to try to preclude and prevent future such disasters,” she says.

“Interesting choice of words...incident, Ms Takahashi. It would seem that the working assumption...of everyone most especially the FBI, is that the cause of the explosion was an act of terrorism. Done deal. Are you investigating the possibility of causes other than a criminal act perpetrated by terrorists?” I ask.

“Mr Kozlov the NTSB does not deal in assumptions. In every incident...most especially this one, every possible plausible explanation is on the table. We literally start at ground zero, and very carefully, sometimes agonizingly slowly for the public and other agencies...and the media in particular...begin to exhaustively investigate every scintilla of evidence available, and allow the evidence, including testimony of parties involved, such as participants, and witnesses...like yourself and Mr Shapiro to let the investigation go in any direction it may lead. Can we count on the cooperation of you and Mr Shapiro?” she says.

“What is it you want from me and Mr Shapiro, exactly?” I say

“We would like to take recorded statements...under oath, of your testimony as eye-witnesses...from both of you,” she says.

“What did you mean by every incident, most especially this one, every possible plausible explanation is on the table?” I say.

“As a matter of policy...I can not comment...or divulge any direction, issues or facts of an ongoing investigation. But again, we follow the evidence where it takes us,” she says with cold professional detachment.

“And if we decline your uh...cordial invitation to participate?” I say to test her bureaucratic attitude.

“Mr Kozlov...I'm sure you must realize the seriousness of this incident...with your own serious injury, the tragic loss of life...so please help me out here. Why would you not want to cooperate with the investigation?” she pleads.

“Well...we may have some reservations about cooperating with the government on this investigation because frankly up to now, we believe there has been a rush to judgment,” I say.

“I am honestly hoping that we...you and I and the NTSB, do not have to further explore the possibility of compelling your cooperation. Let's just say that we have considerable legal means at our disposal.”

Please understand, that I'm not demanding that you cooperate...yet. But I would think that you would be willing to cooperate at the very least from a sense of civic duty...unless there is some compelling reason that you might have, which I would indeed be very interested in hearing," she says.

"Good answer. I, and particularly Mr Shapiro appreciate that you are not attempting to assert your legal authority...yet. As we've had a particularly distasteful experience with the FBI trying intimidate us. We believe that the conclusion released by the FBI for widespread media distribution is premature...and frankly is in conflict with our own independent investigation, and..."

She interrupts, *"I am aware of your previous interaction with FBI Agent Charles Cunningham...and Officer Gillespie...it's in the file. Off the record, you'll find me much easier to deal with. Much less uh...testosterone...and I promise not to arouse or otherwise antagonize Mr Shapiro's considerable canine protective instincts. And again I would be very interested indeed in hearing about your uh...investigation...and any alternative narrative, including any...conspiracy theories, as to causation,"* she says with no small patronizing tone in her voice.

"Glad to hear it. Ya know sometimes, after the first sighting of Mr Shapiro...coupled with the disclosure that he was the victim of an alien abduction...a spaceship from planet Mongo...in an inter-galactic conspiracy to rule the universe, well for some reason, folks just tend not to take him very seriously," I say.

Nothing...just a long silence.

"Hello? Still with me...Mizz Takahashi?" I say.

"Uh...I uh...yes...sounds positively uh...cosmic," she says with a hint of irony.

"As you may...or may not...soon discover for yourself, five minutes in closed space ship with the Hawkster...and the aliens turned right around and zoomed him back...*tres rapide*. Still game?" I say.

"*Ma oui...and an interview with an alien abduction victim just might kinda perk up my otherwise pedestrian bureaucratic resume,*" she says. Ah excellent...self-effacing humor, but a gamer and *elle parle Francais*, albeit a Nucky brand. Maybe she really is open to an alternative narrative. I decide to give her the benefit of a doubt and because, frankly I'd like to get a *vis-à-vis* with her. Like I said...always a sucker for an alpha Ms...with a finely honed sense of the ironic.

"Good. Hold on a minute while I run this by Rottweiler Man," I say placing her on hold.

I say to Hawk who has just wandered into the room with the ever present bucket of steaming Seattle jet fuel under his nose, "Hey Hawk...the NTSB wants to interview us...under oath, about the pipeline explosion. I've got the lead investigator on the phone. She sounds pretty reasonable...but more importantly seems open to some alternative

scenarios for the *how, who and why?* Maybe this is a chance to present some of the results of our own investigation. Sounds like she's willing to take this investigation where ever it may lead. Probably our best shot at getting to the bottom...and maybe even to the top of this. Your thoughts?"

"Okay. On one condition. As long as they're open to hearing all the facts...act on them even if it's politically uh...inconvenient. And willing to share the results of their investigation with us," Hawk says.

I release the hold button, "Ms Takahashi...Mr Shapiro says...*woof-woof, uh...Oh-kay,*" causing Oso who's sprawled beside my desk to second the motion with his signature deep *woof-woof,* gaveling two loud tail thumps, "the motion is seconded and carried unanimously. When and where would you like to meet?" I say.

"*Okay...good.*" she says "*for me...looking at my calendar...tomorrow afternoon say around 4 PM at your home or place of business where it's presumably more quiet and we can be undisturbed by interruptions. We've set up our investigation control center at Lakeway Best Western...a few miles from the blast site.*"

"And just a few miles from us. Well alright then...at the house...and place of business, one and the same tomorrow at 4 PM. I assume you already have my address," I say

"*I do indeed...looking forward to meeting you and uh...your friend, Mr Shapiro,*" she says.

"More than a friend, Ms Takahashi...man's *best* friend. Oh...and Ms Takahashi...on the first meeting with Hawk Shapiro, it's always wise to follow best canine protocol to allow him to sniff the back of your hand first...until his tail wags," I say.

"*Thanks for the heads-up...I'll bring some doggie treats...au revoir,*" she says with a sardonic laugh.
Click.

After lunch, I log on to my email account with the Apple notebook, and check my email. After almost a week, there's finally something from @eagle.

From: atsa_ee@hushmail.com Date: Thursday October 24, 2001 5:23 AM
To: mak@kozmic.com
Subject: RE: Your LAN-IP 24.12.33.14 has been hacked

*by now it should be obvious that the people>>>*aka NPI*>>> you are chasin'>>>are very good at what they do>>> desperate and *very* dangerous>>>they have been tracking you since the explosion always at least one step ahead of your *pitiful effort* at investigation. you have lead them right to the only witnesses>>>served them up on a silver platter. they have*

: : Michaelangelo's Renaissance — m.a.kominsky : :

*committed murder>>>they will stop at *nothing* including you
2>>>to keep the truth from coming out. do you and your
partner have the *cojones* to take them down?! are you both
willing to *get dirty*>>>to get even for the
murders>>>including marla dyson?*

If so>>>it's showtime>>>lemme know

@eagle aka injun avenger

I yell, "Hey Hawk...get in here, man! You'll want to see this."

Hawk saunters in, "What's goin' on, man? What could possibly be so friggin' important as to interrupt my watchin' I Love Lucy reruns streamin' on the net. *Chew got sum splainin to do Lucy...*"

"Sorry uh...Rickie. But just read these back and forth emails re @eagle," I say, my heart rate kicking up.

"Hmm...as da Kingfish would say, *da plot be thickenin'*," Hawk says.

"So how *in-the-hell* has he somehow connected the murder of Marla Dyson with the people who were behind this ...whatever *this* is, with the pipeline explosion?" I say.

"And the murder of his mother Sora?" Hawk says.

"In the phone calls I had with his grandfather Leonard Eagle Feather I never mentioned Marla's death...and possible connection of the same or similar vehicles involved. That revelation came *after* the phone call with Leonard Eagle Feather and was never discussed with him," I say.

"Only other plausible explanation...he's somehow gained access to the files, probably hacked the security, emails etcetera...maybe phone conversations of the bad guys and possibly us. Like I said...he's good...*very* good," Hawk says.

"Okay...let's step up the pace. See just how much game he's got. Time to go on offense...tell him I know who he is...should get his attention," I say.

"Ya think?" Hawk say.

I reply.

From: mak@kozmic.com

Date: Thursday October 24, 2001 2:21 PM

To: atsa_ee@hushmail.com

Subject: RE: Your LAN-IP 24.12.33.14 has been hacked

The answer is yes....by any means necessary.

So here's the jackpot question for you.

: : Michaelangelo's Renaissance — m.a.kominsky : :

Michael...do you have the balls to come out from hiding behind that screen into the real world...to physically meet with us to help avenge the murders...including the brutal murder of Sora Eagle Feather aka your mother?

~mak aka paleface avenger....and oh BTW...aka your father

Within five minutes I receive a reply from @eagle.

From: atsa_ee@hushmail.com

Date: Thursday October 24, 2001 2:25 PM

To: mak@kozmic.com

Subject: RE: Your LAN-IP 24.12.33.14 has been hacked

wtf>>>guess ur not as incompetent as i thought eh?>>> LOL.

okay>>>busted>>>so *now what* uh pops?

@eagle

Hawk reads the email, then smiling says, "Gets right to the point, don't he. Direct...and some serious *sang-froid*. Cool under pressure. Good to know. So...good question, uh...Pops. Now what?"

"I haven't a fuckin' clue, man...*en I tole yuz once...I tole yuz twice...dun call me pops, Lucy,*" I say.

"Another hamma...hamma...moment eh, Ralphie? At least you're consistent," Hawk says.

"And gettin' pathetically *petite bourgeoisie* predictable. Like this is startin' to sound like some kinda beyond banal online-dating word-dance...coily feigning indifference, not wanting to seem too eager...jockeying to set up the first face to face...for *el momento de verdad*," I say.

"Well you could always cut to the chase, and try the online, more direct uh...gay-way. Basically your place or mine."

"Is that so uh...*Ball-hawk*? Using my picture, howd'ya square that when you finally meet?" I say.

"Works for me. Hey, usually at least two...sometimes three or more consenting and very willin' adults. Gotta go for it, man, life's too short," Hawk says

"T-M-I, man. *And dat ain't all dats showt...ma heb honkie fren*. Come on...so help me out here," I say

"An unkind reference to my uh...shortcomings, resorting to negative cliché cultural stereotypes...unworthy of you sir. To wit, *If you uh...prick us do we not bleed? If you tickle us do we not laugh? If you poison us...?*"

: : Michaelangelo's Renaissance — m.a.kominsky : :

“Stifle it Shylock...mit da Jewish victim *schtick* for *Chrissakes*. I'm dyin' here and you're givin' me Merchant of Menace?”

“Okay...okay, stop mit da whinin' Lucy. Well...employing accepted online mingling orthodoxy, I'd say the first step might be to offer an ice-breaker phone conversation. Exchange some mutual data...then ease into a face-time meet...TBD,” Hawk says.

From: mak@kozmic.com *Date: Thursday October 24, 2001 3:10 PM*

To: atsa_ee@hushmail.com

Subject: RE: Your LAN-IP 24.12.33.14 has been hacked

Okay Michael...time to real-ly connect. No more games.

This email venue is too limiting for me...so lets to cut to the chase. As a place to start...how about a phone conversation...real time...like real people? I'm thinkin' we both might have a few questions:)

See where it goes from there.

So if you don't have it already...here's my mobile number.

360.935.5555

You in...or out?

~mak

And the reply about 5 minutes later.

From: atsa_ee@hushmail.com

Date: Thursday October 24, 2001 3:15 PM

To: mak@kozmic.com

Subject: RE: Your LAN-IP 24.12.33.14 has been hacked

*what's the rush pops>>>LOL>>>only been what about 30 yrs?
i'll think about it>>>maybe, just maybe i'll give ya a
call>>>maybe *not*.*

@eagle>>>aka mak_too>>>LOL

ps

oh yea>>>i got your number, man>>>LOL

So I say to Hawk who's reading the screen over my shoulder, "So whattya think, man?"

"Hmm...lotsa LOLs. But he ain't laughin' out loud. Nope...lotta edge. Probably some major patriarchal figure anger...just below the surface, not that you'd know anything about that. Also looks like he's got some genes from your side of the pool...poor kid, including a marked propensity toward sarcasm and cynicism," Hawk says.

"Kid coulda done worse," I say.

"Yea...Ted Kaczynski aka Unabomber."

"Was thinkin' more like Al Camus and the rest of the nihilist Sunshine Boys," I say

"So...he's going to make you sweat a little...maybe a little payback for what he perceives was your bad Karma with mama. Passive aggressive childish hacker power-play shit. But...he'll call. He's going to make you *earn* his trust. Again...*Chew got sum uh...serious splainin to do Lucy*. Probably make you eat some major uh...*unmentionable indigestibles* in the process."

"So now what?" I say.

"Sit back...relax, and wait. Remember? Like you always say, let the game come to you. Hey man, you're about to connect with your one and only son...for the first time. So how do ya *feel* 'bout that, Koz?" Hawk says thrusting an imaginary microphone in my face, like some inane post-game Bimbo interviewer.

"Apprehensive...ambivalent uh...Bambi," I say with the proper measure of masculine understatement. Mr Cool-breeze.

"How about terrified?" a grinning Hawk says again with the phoney microphone bit.

"There's that. More like uh...*bleep-bleep* terrified," I say so as not to offend Bambi Bimbo and remain PG rated for TV.

But somehow...at some inchoate level, don't ask me how or why, but it actually feels good to say, *your father*...hmm. Dad, daddy-oh, pops and in Ruskie, *batya*, and in Italian...*babbino*. *Yikes!*

- Chapter 64 -

By noon the next day still no reply from *mak_too*. Like the kid said...what's the rush, huh *Pops*?

Hawk meanders into my space, "Any reply from J-R?"

"Nope. Nada. Zip. Hawk, we probably should talk about our meeting this afternoon with the NTSB...define some parameters and lay out some rules of engagement with *Miz* Takahashi before giving her our statements. I think we should hold back any of the results of our investigation, the video...the audio, the translation by Dr Tehrani, etcetera until we see just how open she is to an alternative causation," I say.

"Yea...let's feel her out. Uh...*your* specialty. Probably shouldn't connect the deaths of Jenifer Rogers or the Tehrani's to the explosion until we're fairly certain that she's willing to dig deep into this thing...that she's not some career bureaucrat just going through the motions," Hawk says.

"Agreed. Otherwise, she might think *both of us* are wacko nut-job conspiracy theorists. And we don't give her what we've got until she levels with us about what she's got on her end. I had the impression talking with her on the phone that somethin's buggin' her, man...maybe the scent of a cover-up...dunno. We'll know more after we eyeball her and hear what she's got."

Hawk says, "A uh...*squid pro quo*, man."

"Sorry?" I say

"Where ya *squeeze* the uh...quid it outta 'em."

"A tat for tit...if you will?" I say.

"*Zackly...mon petit sexist porcin*. By now, she must have interviewed all the employees and management of the pipeline company uh...Cascadia Pipeline which as you may recall is a subsid of NPI?" Hawk says.

Yeap. *Gee*...just another coincidence?" I say.

"Might be helpful to have access to the *who* and their version of the *what* happened...just in case somewhere along the way the inconvenient politics of it, gets it buried in the bowels of the BS bureaucracy," Hawk says.

"If there is in fact a cover-up conspiracy...seems to me that with the potential of a lotta of the staff and management knowing about it...like the more difficult, order of magnitude, it is to keep the lid on it. Like Watergate...not the crime but the cover-up," I say.

Hawk says, "Dig it...the more, the less *merrier* it gets...just gotta flip one."

“Uh...that would be *your* specialty,” I say

“Then work your way up the food chain,” Hawk says with his impish grin relishing the prospect of the process. His mere menacing physical presence a persuader *par excellence*.

At exactly 4 PM, the doorbell chimes. I open the door for my first but by no means last lascivious look at Ms Tara Takahashi. I am not disappointed. She's mid-forties, but has the agelessness of Japanese women, the perfect porcelain skin. She obviously is a *melange* of some other non-Asian gene pool. Uncharacteristically tall, in her black 2 inch heels almost 5'8”, but slender revealing small but full breasts gently protruding through a pricey white silk blouse, accented with a simple strand of white pearls, with the petite bone structure of an Asian woman. But it is her eyes that stir me, actually give me a chill. Just a hint of almond shaped eyes, but a brilliant sapphire, with thick long black lashes. Awakening *Monsieur* Wilson who has been in hibernation, *Vol-Cel*...voluntary celibacy for several years now.

Her nose is petite slightly upturned with a suggestion of maybe Western European length and straightness high above her generous wide mouth and sensual lips. Her makeup is understated and expertly applied. The long straight jet black hair gathers to form a thick shining shawl across her slender shoulders. She's in an elegant 'real' black suit, maybe DKNY, with slacks perfectly tailored, nicely, but tastefully accentuating her narrow hips. Very professional...and very distracting. *Pure class*.

I have a flashback of the male stirrings of my first meeting of Marla Dyson. *Jezus*, what is it with me and these Alpha *Shiksa* Chicks?

“Mr Kozlov, uh...*Mr Kozlov*?” she says waving her hand side to side to get my attention, interrupting my gaping-mouthed reverie.

“Uh...yes?” I cleverly quip.

“I'm Chief Investigator Tara Takahashi...from the NTSB. We had a 4 PM appointment?” she says perfunctorily holding up her photo ID credentials.

“Yes?” I say, by now she must be duly impressed with my clever reposte.

“This is my associate...Investigator Terrence Howard,” she says obviously feigning indifference at my *bons mots*.

Terrence Howard is a thirty-*ish* well-built Black man about 6'4”, with the body of an ex-jock, thick broad shoulders with a waist line maybe 20 pounds past his playing prime. His head is cleanly shaven, with a closely cropped meticulously-maintained goatee. He's wearing aviator glasses with a slight yellow tint, like shooting glasses. And a holstered semi-automatic side arm, looks like a standard government issue. *Say what?*

He's dressed more casually, wearing a zipped up windbreaker with N-T-S-B in large white block letters emblazoned across the front and blue denim jeans with ankle high combat-style boots, shined to

military perfection. Hanging from his shoulder is a very large black carrying case, presumably for a laptop and recording equipment for the interview.

He's got a disarming smile, a perfect row of pearls and affable ironic eyes, that same easy-going, but uncontrived self-confidence that many good college ex-jocks possess. Reminds me of my first encounter with Charles Washington at Berkeley. I get a momentary chill, but I fight it off. RIP Brother C-Wash.

"Uh...Mr Kozlov...may we come in?" Tara Takahashi says smiling for the first time. It's a beauty, fully engaging not just the mouth with perfect teeth, but also her lovely Quasi-Asian eyes. Authentic.

My momentary trance broken, I say, "I'm so sorry...sure, please come in," offering my right hand to her, which she demurely reciprocates, then to Terrence, who offers a firm, but not gratuitously so, very large powerful hand.

I open the door wide, "Let's go into my office...we can conduct our business downstairs where my associate Hawk Shapiro is waiting," I say leading them down the stairs to our production and post-production facility office on a totally dedicated floor below the main floor.

As we're going down the stairs, "Is Kibbles and Bits okay?" Tara Takahashi says with a barely perceptible playful giggle.

"Sorry?" I say

"For Mr Shapiro," she says.

"Ah...yea sure...of course. Rewarding good behavior with positive reinforcement...doggie treats, excellent strategy for enlisting his cooperation. He's an omnivore, but with strong carnivore tendencies," I say.

"Meaning he'd probably eat anything...and anyone. Hopin' he's not partial to dark meat. It's a Black thing...with dogs, Mr Kozlov." Terrence says with a wry grin.

"Yea...I get it, like Selma in '65. And by the way you can drop the formality...please call me Mick. Ad Hoc Shapiro goes by Hawk, okay?" I say.

"Where appropriate, uh...Mr Kozlov," she says seamlessly back in professional mode.

When we reach my office, Hawk is standing.

I make the introductions with Hawk offering his huge meaty hand. Tara Takahashi is obviously taken aback by his appearance leaving his empty hand dangling in mid-air, which Terrence Howard quickly grasps, shaking it effusively with a great toothy smile, slowly eying Hawk admiringly up and down, and up again.

"Ms Takahashi...I thought Mick here had sufficiently prepared you for the first sighting of *moi*." Hawk says grinning. By now, he's grown accustomed to the jaw-dropping first response on meeting him.

"Mere words fail," I say.

“I uh...I'm so very sorry Mr Shapiro. Well I must admit...Mr Shapiro is everything as advertised...and more.” she says with that same lovely authentic laugh, enthusiastically thrusting our her hand out which Hawk takes into his huge paw, raising it to his nose and slowly sniffing the back of her hand, then releasing it with a “woof-woof...” nodding his approval at me. Then he leans over to my left ear, my best ear after the explosion, so only I can hear, “Man...what a beauty. *Almost* makes me want to switch sides...by the way she ain't wearing no wedding band, *mon ami*.”

“Hey man, don't be such a *yenta*, I'm tryin'...desperately to stay on mission here, *mon ami*,” I say *sotto voce*.

“Just sayin'. By the way, the correct kosher term of art for matchmaker, is *shadchan*.” he finishes in a whisper with fraternal pat on my shoulder.

“Uh...allow me to translate. You're apparently *Oh-kay*, Ms Takahashi...in every respect. But I'd keep those Kibbles in close proximity...just in case you might ask some overly uh...probing penetrating questions,” I say.

The smile slowly dissolves until she realizes that I just being *Kozmickly* ironic, an acquired taste, like *Lutefisk*.

We all take a seat at the large conference table.

“Anyone care for something to drink...coffee...tea?” I graciously offer.

Everybody's fine for now.

“Okay if I call ya Terrence, Terrence? Just a guess, you play college football somewhere?” I say.

“Sure, Terrence is fine. Yea...UCLA, 'bout 13 years ago,” he says smiling.

“Lucky guess...offensive lineman?” I say.

“*Very*. And you? Looks like you coulda played,” he says smiling. Ah...the ex-jocks bonding ritual, like two ex-marines of any age, *Semper Fi*.

“Yea...UCB '64, B-ball...until my career was abruptly abbreviated by uh...*differences in political ideology*. And how about you, *Ms Takahashi*?” I say being deliberately unfamiliar showing proper professional deference.

“Nope...never played football. Couldn't get the uh...scrotum scratchin' and spittin' down,” she says with a wickedly wry smile, “so I played volleyball...a setter at UBC, University of British Columbia Vancouver.”

“And you studied?” Hawk says.

“Majored in Engineering...with a minor in Environmental Studies. Picked up a J-D along the way at U-Dub Law,” she says with casual modesty.

“So you're a Cannuck?” I say as it turns out prudently deciding to pass on the *eh* punctuation.

“Half...with dual citizenship, my mother's a Yank. Yeap born and raised in BC. My father's a professor at UBC...David Takahashi. And thanks for not appending the tired Yank cliché *eh*,” she says sighing with a bit of an edge.

“Dr David Takahashi...the renown environmental activist?” Hawk says.

“One and the same. Because I have knowledge and experience with Canadian law, I was assigned this case...as it involves some *possible* causation issues with a Canadian citizen and potential bi-lateral country sovereignty and jurisdictional issues of governing laws. Just to remind you...the *alleged* terrorist, Hassan Tehrani was a citizen of Canada, and a resident of Vancouver. We are coordinating our investigation with the FBI. A joint task force investigation with the RCMP...the Royal Canadian Mounted Police.” she says.

“Okay...so tell us what you want from us,” I say.

“As discussed on the phone...we want both of your very detailed statements about what you both observed...or discovered prior to, during and subsequent to, the explosion of the pipeline...recorded, and under oath. We would also like you to turn over *any* evidence, in any form, no matter how insignificant it may appear, including statements, written or recorded, including any notes of discussions from any parties even tangentially involved in your uh...*investigation*,” she says taking out a very thick folder from a zippered side panel of the large black computer case.

Terrence is now, placing a very high-end Tascam DR-680MKII professional 8 input digital field recorder, starting to set up the two lavalier microphones to plug into the XLR balanced inputs. Some serious audio gear.

Damn...she's good. She'd probably give AK-47, Jason Mahoney's brilliant and beautiful Asian Arm-piece Alexandra Kwan, a run for the smartest 'guy' in the room.

“What no urine or blood sample? So before moving forward, how about *telling our lucky contestant* here what he gets in return? I say.

“The undying appreciation from the American people for your patriotic cooperation, and civic...” she says interrupted by Hawk.

“Terrence,” Hawk says making eye contact with me, “you just might want to hold off setting up that D-R.”

“Tara...” I start out, “ please, you can call me *Ms Takahashi*,” she says smiling coolly. All business, obviously piqued at our apparent reluctance to proceed with the statements.

“As you wish. What I am about to tell you and Mr Howard here, has to be completely off the record, agreed *Ms Takahashi*? Or this interview is hereby terminated.”

With her face expressing ambivalence, after several seconds she reluctantly says “Okay...Agreed...for now.”

I look at Terrence Howard, “Agreed,” he says.

“Okay. Suppose I were to tell you, and I most emphatically am not admitting that it is the case....that we *may* be able to provide some *quasi-evidentiary* media that *eventually* if properly and diligently pursued might prove exculpatory as to the guilt of the primary suspect in this case, the late Hassan Tehrani? Which would expose this whole Islamic terrorist causation narrative currently...and vigorously being promulgated by the FBI et al...as a uh...steaming pile of equine excrement.” I say.

“Why do *you* think...the government would be *sooo* eager to advance this...terrorist narrative...even in the face of contravening evidence,” she says.

“Excellent question...here's what we think. Since 9-11, the so-called terrorist narrative suits the government's purposes to maintain an irrationally fearful climate of Islamic terrorist paranoia. By doing so...it can justify to the American people, why they should be willing, voluntarily to surrender their, up to now, constitutionally protected privacy rights, based on some overblown BS staw-man argument in the name of the so-called *war* on terror, a tactic...essentially a symptom. Sorta like declaring a war on alcohol addiction by Prohibition. Confusing the symptom with the underlying cause. So just how'd that workout?” I say.

“Are you saying there's a massive conspiracy of silence? That the government may not want the truth to come to light on this and other alleged incidents of Islamic terrorism, just to perpetuate the national paranoia to serve their clandestine surveillance agenda? *Oh pleeeeee!*” says Tara Takahashi patronizingly.

“Okay,” Hawk says, “then explain this. Having worked in upper management for Microsoft for many years, I can tell ya that the I-T community is surprisingly small, confiding...and *intimate*,” he says with a Hawkish smirk. “I have *personal* knowledge, that NSA approached the VPs of MS to provide a backdoor exclusively for the NSA, for direct access to the MS Server hardware...to monitor all the activity, including email servers...on the MS operating system servers that are running on the internet. I never heard that MS definitively declined,” Hawk says.

“Doesn't prove they complied with the request,” Tara Takahashi says.

“And it doesn't mean they didn't. But it does demonstrate intent,” I say.

Hawk continues, “We have it from a reliable insider source that William Binney, a former highly-placed intelligence official with the National Security Agency, recently resigned this October, after 30 years of faithful service...turned whistle-blower in protest of *the deliberate violation of the U.S. Constitution*.”

Immediately after 9-11, NSA began pervasive interception of significant amounts of communications, email, internet traffic etcetera, including phone conversations by *any and all means necessary*...including domestic communications of American citizens without probable cause or court order.

Binney's reasons for his resignation in opposition to the Bush Administration's draconian surveillance measures, are well-documented. Clearly, in retrospect...9-11 possibly could have been prevented had the CIA and NSA not had their *collective helmets on backwards*. They not only fumbled the ball...they kicked it into their own end zone. An easy *gimmie* TD for the bad guys. Beat by a bunch of rag-tag uh...*rughead* third string walk-ons," He says not without Hawkish edge.

"So now...to compensate, they've overreacted and legally overreached so they won't get caught with egg, more like a Denver omelet, on their mug...again. Bureaucratic C-Y-A...in part to justify and otherwise protect their exorbitant budgetary funding," I say.

"And that doesn't include the billions of bucks of off-budget dark money...for Black ops etcetera," Hawk adds.

"Don't *even* get me started on the new Surveillance State, of the now, Military Intelligence Corporate Complex...formerly known as the Military Industrial Complex. If you're truly interested...it's a matter of public record *if* you're willing to dig deep enough," I say.

"So help me out here. *If*...and it's a very big *if* at this point...that if what you say is true about your evidence, why would you even be willing to deliver such dispository evidence to us...a government agency?" she says.

"I got this one Mick," Hawk says. "An ongoing *very* independent investigation being conducted by us, has quite unexpectedly turned up facts that potentially connects the murders, ergo the perpetrators...of several people...including some people very dear to Mick many years ago, to the same players behind this pipeline explosion coverup. Mick and I, by fraternal extension, still got some *very personal unfinished bidness with those peeps*. Our business...*not* yours...*not* law enforcement and certainly *not* the government."

"*Tell it Hawk!*" I say, fist-bumping him deliberately missing his fist. Just a little levity to cut the growing tension, guess you had to be there.

"So it would be a trade-off. Data symbiosis...where we both win. But we would hope that the NTSB would indeed reveal the truth to the American people...whatever that may turnout to be," Hawk says.

"There are *extremely* powerful forces at play here...that could quite possibly attempt to thwart exposing the truth...by *any* means necessary," I say.

"Like?" Tara says with no small whiff of condescension.

“Not just limited to political intrigue. Sinister motives and resources, the magnitude of which you can't begin to quantify...or even imagine. The wrath of which I've *seen* and...*felt* first hand,” I say.

“We believe if we can fill-in a few crucial pieces of missing information that your investigation may have uncovered...like the identity of employees and manager's of Cascadia Pipeline...gain access to your statements so that we can follow-up on them. *Un*-constrained by uh...conventional boundaries and the legal orthodoxies of a government investigation,” says the Hawkster smiling at *moi*.

“By that you mean...*extra*-legal methods, like torture?” she says with alarm.

“*Not* your problem...*Mizzy*,” Hawk says smiling amiably “Just uh...*vigorously* shakin' the conspiracy tree...to see what...and *who* falls out. In the process maybe we flip one or more of 'em, then *aggressively* follow it up the food chain. Eventually it just may lead to identifying those involved in the massive cover-up conspiracy of the explosion...as the same perps who committed the murders...years ago. And in no *small by the way*...the murderer of the only known eye-witness to the explosion, Jenifer Rogers a beautiful young woman in the prime of her life...and her unborn child. She was the driver of the vehicle that fled the scene that horrific day,” Hawk says still feeling the sting of some measure of responsibility for the death of Jenifer.

“And the brutal assassination of Dr and Mrs Amir Tehrani, the parents of Hassan Tehrani,” I add.

“Are you alleging that the death of this Jenifer Rogers...and the Tehrani's is linked to a cover-up of the pipeline explosion. Murder perpetrated to silence them...and in the Tehrani's case...not a racially motivated hate crime!?” she says in a tone filled with incredulity.

“I can see you're *very* adept at reading between the lines...*Ms* Takahashi,” I say softening my sarcasm with a smile.

“*My God!* My father was a very close personal friend with the Doctor also a prof at UBC...and his lovely wife. He was devastated by their senseless murder. Honestly? Yea, that might make a *helluva* lot more sense than a hate crime...not a *Nucky* kinda thing, especially in very-left-leaning ethnically tolerant Vancouver anyway,” Tara says.

“And one shouldn't have to be reminded that the attack was on the *American* Homeland...so why such apparently US nationalistic outrage?” I say

“Yea...and way too professional. An execution...and *sooo* obvious with the convenient hate graffiti. Frankly, it has been bothering *me*,” she says with Terrence Howard just whistling out loud.

“Great minds work...” I start to say.

“*Exactly* what is it that you want in exchange for your so-called evidence?” she says impatiently.

“Still off the record here...we want full, complete and continued on-line access to the *all* the results of your investigation...thus far and in

the future, to all the files including the FBI and the RCMP that you possess,” I say.

“*Preposterous! Never* happen...forget it! And even if we, Terrence and I wanted to open our files to you...if the boss ever found out...*fired* in a New York second.”

“What you mean, we...*paleface*?” Terrence says smiling.

“Terry...you *can't* possibly be serious?” she says.

“Hey...with due deference to ya Tara. Doncha think it's 'bout time we leveled with Mick and Hawk here about our own reservations with this terrorist B-S? We're all after the same thing here...the truth, right?”

“The whole truth and nothing but. But...only *if* we can get there legally...to make a conviction stick,” Tara says.

“You're the lawyer, but if just half of what they say is true...these uh...sorry to have resort to ethnic stereotypes but *these paleface mutha-fuckin' suits need to go down. Period!*” he says with a startling vehemence, dripping with displaced anger from presumably past racial injustices by *da man*. “Man...all the death and destruction...innocent folks, we *cannot* allow it to stand! You're the lead investigator...so it's your call. But Tara, if I may...I'd say to Mick and Hawk here...off the record. Show us what you got...literally and figuratively. And if it's what they say it is, then we talk. If not...we walk. Sound righteous, gentlemen?” Terrence says turning to us.

“Works for me. Hawk? I say.

“Deal.” Hawk says.

“Tara?” Terrence says.

“Okay...I guess. Show us the *evidence*...” she says with air quotes, “*first*...then we'll see. That's the most I can promise you. But it's got to be able to withstand the highest appellate legal scrutiny...or they'll end up walkin'. I promise you they'll get the best legal team...and so-called justice, that money can buy,” she says, realizing that any conviction, with the defendants big money and unlimited legal resource, would be challenged probably all the way to the Supremes. One tough lady...seeing the whole chessboard, reserving all of her options.

“Okay...sounds like we can move forward,” I say.

“Gentlemen...meet Righteous *Sista* Tara Naomi Takahashi. You will soon discova why she be nicknamed...T-N-T,” Terrence says slipping seamlessly in and out of street Black Ebonics, as he fist-bumps her with a killer smile.

“Yeah...yeah...got a feeling I'm *really* going to regret this...a real potential for a C-E-E.” she says smiling sheepishly.

“Sorry?” I say”

“Bureaucracy-speak for *Career Ending Event*,” she says.

“Long term for you...that the bad news...or perhaps the good? And the *most* I can promise *you*...both, is that we'll do our best to give you plausible deniability and that we'll *never* reveal our source,” I say.

“Who was it that said...*an oral contract ain't worth the paper it's written on?*” she asks rhetorically.

“Hey...it's about five. Looks like were going to pull an all-nighter here for us to show you what we've got...and vice versa. I suggest we take a little break...call out for some Chinese?” I say.

Terry nods his approval. Tara just shrugs. Still...Ms Maybe.

“Hawk, why don't you take care of ordering the dinner while we adjourn to the Kozmick Cabaret and Lounge, uh...the living room upstairs. *It is Happy Hour,*” I say.

“Tis indeed,” Terrence says grinning wide.

“Happy Hour specialty of the house...two-for-one Burnt Bombay Martinis. Shall we?” I say.

“Lead the way *kemo sabe,*” Terry says.

“Ms Takahashi...vodka or gin?” I say.

Sighing, with grim resignation, “Okay. *Jesus,* uh...gin. Got any olives?”

“*Bien sur...madame.* A Martini without an olive is like a banana split...without the banana,” I say.

“*Merci...*I think,” she says.

“Terrence, I think this is the beginning of a beautiful uh...*friendship,*” says Hawk, smiling big-time.

“Tis indeed...Hawk, *ma man,*” Terrence says with a fist-bump, matching Hawk's big grin.

As Tara, Terry and I adjourn to the living room upstairs for cocktails, Hawk reaches under the table, and hits the *stop* button on the digital recorder, then gets on the phone and orders the whole left half of the Chinese Take-out menu. Looks like *T-How,* Hawk's newest candidate for Goy Boy Toy...could eat.

- Chapter 65 -

Half way into the second round of MAK's Magic Martini's, Ms Takahashi starting to loosen up, says, "So...since we're still off the record here uh...Mick, I guess you can call me Tara," she says facetiously batting her eyes giving me a very nice warm smile reminiscent of another heart-breaker beauty, Annie Trudeau.

Hmm. An encouraging, if momentary thawing of the icy veneer of professionalism.

After the delivery of a full mini-van of Chinese food, we adjourn to the conference table downstairs...each of carrying several bags of white fold-top cardboard containers...with plates, flatware, chopsticks...and Martinis. A working dinner. *Ever wonder how the Pre-Fold-top Ming Dynasty Chinese...did take-out?*

When we arrive downstairs, Hawk's already got a monitor and VCR cued up with the tape of the scene of the explosion from Moody Park Falls. He has also pressed the *record* button on the digital recorder set-up under the conference table, with three hidden mic's in different locations of the room for good coverage.

We take our seats around the table with food and drink.

"Should probably have our dinner before viewing the video clip...otherwise, I gotta strong suspicion, it just might uh...*suppress* your appetite," I say.

As we're eating, I give them background and our theory as to why we believe it was not an act of terrorism but rather an act of heroism by the young Hassan Tehrani in an attempt to save the two young boys, who died from horrific burns at ground zero.

I also update them on our contacts with Jenifer Rogers the only eyewitness, and the Tehrani's, both now deceased.

"At this point in time, we're not certain what the proximate cause of the explosion was, but we believe the most plausible explanation, for now at least, is from some internal failure of the pipeline system and gross negligence of the operators of the pipeline in responding to it. With *no* extreme, uh...efficient intervening external causes," I say.

"Except for *extreme stupidity* and incompetence," Hawk says.

"We have the original recording of Hassan's Tehrani's last words spoken to me, available for independent translation with the chain of custody preserved. And the written transcript of Dr Tehrani's translation from Persian of his sons' dying declaration," Hawk says.

“Hawk and I are convinced that Hassan Tehrani had no causal part in this tragedy...in which he himself, and ultimately, his lover, pregnant with his child, and later, his parents also were victims,” I say.

Hawk and I give them an oral summary accompanied by a detailed written narrative with a time-line of our investigation, including a PowerPoint presentation, everything to be on a DVD disk, if we get a commitment for reciprocity of info. After dinner and drinks are done, we clear the table and get down to some serious business.

“Warning...viewer discretion is advised. What you're about to see is frankly, horrific. It's only a few minutes long...but an eternity to watch. You will see the immediate aftermath of the explosion...just after we arrived on the scene with Hawk on camera. You will hear Hassan Tehrani last words...before he died a terrible death from multiple third degree burns. This footage has never been viewed before by anyone other than Hawk and I...no one, now after the murder of the Tehrani's, is even aware of its existence. Hit the play Hawk,” I say as I turn down the house lights.

As the video is playing Hawk and I are studying the reaction of both Tara and Terrence with the monitor screen casting an eerie flickering surrealistic glow on their faces.

On the video, Hawk zooms in for a close-up of Hassan, his desperate cries of pain and anguish pleading for help, his response in Persian to my question of what happened, then the secondary explosion with my double back lay-out dive onto the mid-stream boulder. Tara's face, filled with horror, places her hand to her mouth, and shrieks, “*my God!*” Tears are streaming down her face. Terrence, sitting impassively, is just shaking his head from side to side. I suspect that violence is no stranger in *T-How's* life, maybe from the military, maybe from inner-city mean streets, killing fields, of young Black men, which might account for his muted reaction.

It's over in less than two minutes. I turn up the lights.

Tara says, “Is there a bathroom nearby?” she says obviously shaken from the experience. I point down the hall, “Second door on the left...take as much time as you need,” I say.

She bolts for the bathroom. After Tara has left the room, Terrence says, “*Bad Mo Jo*, man...I thought I seen some pretty *bad shit* in '91...the Gulf War, but...” he says stopping to compose himself. We sit in silence for well over a minute.

“*Fuckin'* homicide. The very least involuntary...of the kids and all the other vics, including Hassan Tehrani. On Rogers and the Tehrani's...murder *one*, man...plain and simple,” he says. Turns out that the Big Fella has also studied some night-school law...which he modestly downplays.

“Yea. Sorry you and Tara had to see this,” I say.

Finally, he says, “Hey, man I could sure use a shot of something...”

“Yea, I think we all could,” I say getting up and inviting my old pal, Johnny Walker Black to join us, placing four glass tumblers on the table.

“Up or over, Terrence?” I say with bottle poised in my hand.

“Up...thanks, man,” he says slamming it down in one gulp pointing to his empty glass again. I pour another shot, he commences sipping it.

Hawk and I likewise take the Johnny neat, both of us taking a generous pull.

“Think Tara's okay...or should we check on her?” I say to Terrence.

“Hey, man not to worry...she *is one tough little broad*. Why ya think I call her T-N-T...a *very* powerful explosive in a *tiny* package. Been working together for over three years now. One of the brightest...most principled and tenacious peeps I ever met. *Period*. If this deal is dirty...and it's startin' to look that way, trust me. If you the bad guys, you *do not* want her linin' up on the other side of da ball. She ain't got *no* quit in her, man.

The good news and the bad. Because of that she ain't got no life...*nada*. She married to the company store. Guess what I'm sayin' man is I can see the way she lookin' at ya when you ain't lookin', Mick. First time I've seen it since we been partners...so I guess what I'm sayin' man is, the door is wide open,” Terrence says lapsing into his after-hours normal street dialect, which means he feels comfortable with us, with a beautiful benevolence in his smile when talking about his partner. With his smarts...he could be C-Wash's kid...if...

After about five minutes, Tara returns to the table seemingly having regained her composure. She's fixed her eye make-up, the black tracks down her cheeks from tear laden mascara are gone. *Look-ing Good. Damn Good.*

“Care for a drink?” I say.

“Thought you'd *never* ask, Big Boy. *Gimme a whiskey...and don't be stingy, baby...straight up.*” doing a dead on Garbo from the 1930 classic Anna Christie. I graciously comply pouring her a double shot plus a little extra of social lubricant. She takes a generous pull.

“So okay. Your reactions, comments on the “evidence,” I say with air quotes looking directly at Tara “and whether...or not you are willing to entertain our theory that this terrible tragedy was *not* the result of a terrorist attack? And...if not...then *why* not,” I say with a bit of an edge getting more than a little exasperated with all this cat and mouse exercise...including with my *son*.

“You present a very uh...*compelling* argument against the terrorist narrative, Mick. I would need some more time to study your detailed written narrative, etcetera, but on its face I would say we *may*

have sufficient probable cause to further investigate the elimination of terrorism as the proximate cause,” she says. *Sigh*. Lawyers. Why use 5 words...when you can use 10? It's like they get paid by the friggin' word. If she wasn't so damn bright and beautiful...

“Terrence. Your thoughts?” Hawk says.

“*You* definitely got my attention...time to talk,” he says smiling.

“Okay. So now it's time for you to reciprocate...show and tell, the quid pro quo,” I say

“Before we proceed, I want to most emphatically confirm that we are still off the record?” Tara says. I glance at Hawk making eye contact, then back to Tara and wordlessly nod affirmatively, which of course will not be recorded.

“We have taken recorded statements from about a dozen employees and managers, from lowly staff and admin, to State and Regional Managers of Cascadia Pipeline, which is a subsidiary of National Petroleum Inc., the parent corporation out of Houston Texas,” she says.

“Have you interviewed Howard Roland VP of Operations, at NPI corporate?” I say.

“Not yet. He's in Houston, so the logistics make it challenging. We feel that Mr Roland is attempting to uh...*delay* giving his statement. According to him...*he's a very busy man*. He is represented by counsel...very expensive counsel specializing in corporate criminal defense, and refuses to give a statement without having counsel present.

“Not surprised...*corporate criminal*, a tautology. Gee...wonder why he thinks he needs a *criminal* lawyer? So...when do you anticipate interviewing Roland?” I say.

“We are currently in uh...*negotiations* with NPI,” she says sheepishly.

“Would *not* be surprised if you have to file a lawsuit...in order to depose the weasel. When you do interview him, ask him about Ernest Porter, and SHOP's, a uh...private corporate 'security’” I say with air quotes ” company that is on constant retainer with NPI. In any case I'd record the whole *damn* interview, using a Certified Legal Video Specialist...he's a slippery M-F. Like to see the expression on his face at the mere mention of ol' Ernie, which a court reporter transcript, could not provide,” I say.

“Although legally it cannot be used to infer intent to evade investigation, from experience as an investigator at a visceral level at least, it naturally raises suspicion over the possibility of an intent to withhold or deceive. Each of the following subjects I will list later, are also invoking the right to the presence of counsel, retained by and of course paid for by NPI,” she says.

“I've done hundreds of these kinds of interviews. From body language, failure to make contact and other tell-tale evasive signs, my

gut says that they're all scared *shitless*...probably with good reason," says Terrence.

"After our extensive recorded interviews, due to some material inconsistencies between the interviewees versions, and again some visceral indications of intention to deceive, perhaps for reasons as simple as a fear of culpability, our interest, at this point in time is primarily focused on the following employees and managers of Cascadia Pipeline. They were all integrally and personally involved in the events leading up, during and after the event," she says

"Are you willing to provide us access to those recorded interviews and or the transcripts?" I ask.

"Mick, let's not get ahead of ourselves here. I'll have to hold that decision in abeyance until I have had a chance to very carefully scrutinize and substantiate the evidentiary material you have presented," she says.

"Come on, Tara...this is..." Hawk starts to say but I wave him off. I do not want to jeopardize her cooperation thus far by flying off the handle. Plenty of time for that. We'll want to extract as much info as we can in this meeting in case she declines to provide access. We'll deal with the issue of access to files later...maybe through an alternative source like Hawk's considerable hacking skills.

"Please proceed Tara," I say. Mr Reasonable.

"Thank you Mick. Okay, first, Tom Hyatt, a recent employee for only about a month, who had just completed his 30 days of O-J-T. He was on duty at the Fernwood monitoring station at the time of the disaster. Second, a Frank Gutowski who worked the shift just prior to the incident. And third, a George Gunderson, Supervisor and System Administrator for the Cascadia Pipeline, Washington State.

Tara Takahashi outlines her concerns with each specific interviewee in detail, along with the results of some intriguing forensic evidence. The metallurgy, the scrupulous examination of the metal fragments of the location of the rupture indicate the failure of the wall of the pipe was initially *internally* induced, which would challenge the proposition that the pipeline initially ruptured from an external charge of explosive material. There is also the matter of the computer network conveniently being down, and the printer out of paper, so *none* of the telemetry and anomalous events leading up to, and during the disaster were logged for later examination. Intentional or just incompetence? Hmm...*go figure*. But without that data...it's very difficult to definitively prove an internal system failure. Difficult, but not impossible. Our recording of the meeting will memorialize all of this so we don't have to take detailed notes.

"It's getting very late. I think we've gone about as far as we can for tonight," she says.

“Or, as far as *you're* willing to go. *When* can we get online access to those files, etcetera?” Hawk says. Mr Nuance.

“Terrence and I will discuss the matter over the next few days. We'll have your answer when we return to take your recorded statements...in no later than a week,” she says presuming it's a done deal.

“That's fine. Give us a call before, let us know your decision about the access...might save you a trip, for professional reasons anyway,” I say.

“Are you saying that you will *refuse* to give us a recorded statement unless we provide you with access to our files?” she says with a harsh edge.

“Like I said...very adept at reading subtext. But to answer your question with *your* level of directness...the answer is...*let's not get ahead ourselves*,” I say which draws a barely suppressed smile from Terrence Howard.

Tara's says, her tone now querulous, “We had a deal...now you're *re-nigin'*...” which causes a raised eyebrow from Terrence Howard. “Versus, uh...what...*nigin'?*” he says with a sardonic smile giving her a fist-bump.

“Uh sorry Terrence...poor choice of words...you're stonewalling us?” she says smiling wanly at Terrence, then glaring at me.

“You're right about one thing...it is quite late...in many respects *too late*. *Too late* for at least three innocent people who have been murdered, so far...not including an unborn fetus. During the course of this investigation, there's been a murderer...or murderers on the loose out there. They are *very good* at what they do...professional killers. We also think that we may be the target for further attempts to keep a lid on this thing. Sorry, but we do not share your sense of urgency...rather the lack thereof. Frankly, we do not have the luxury, Tara, of waiting around for you to plumb the depths of your innermost professional *ethical legal* conscience. People's lives...*real people...real lives*, not some bureaucratic abstraction, are at stake,” I say

“I'm well aware of what the stakes here...but...” she starts to say.

“Okay...let me be very direct...*and very clear*. I suggest you sleep on this, and give us your answer in twenty-four hours, or the deal is off the table and we move forward without providing you our statements...or any of our evidence. In any case, I want to thank you for coming today...and hearing us out. On a professional note, I think both of you are a credit to your profession and the NTSB. They're lucky to have both of you...as I know you could be making better money in the private sector...*much* better,” I say

“*Gee* thanks...” she says condescendingly.

“Okay Tara...I know you're disappointed...I get it. But on a personal note, we would hope that there will be no personal animus between us, however this thing shakes out.

Standing up, throwing the strap of the computer case over his shoulder, Terrence Howard says, “Thanks Mick, and you too Hawk. Tara and I will talk it over and get back to you. You’ve been square with us. In the meantime watch your back, man...if half of what you say is true, these are *very bad dudes* we’re dealing with here. I’m certified with this side arm...off the record and off the time-clock, let me know if you need some backup. Here’s my card with my personal cell phone number on the back. We should be in town for the next week or so,” he says handing the card to Hawk then exchanging a warm handshake with both of us...lingering in Hawk’s hand for just instant.

“Thanks for that, man...we’ll definitely be in uh...touch. Right Hawk?” I say.

“Indeed,” the Hawkster says with a grin.

“Okay...I think we’re done here,” Tara says, standing up, warmly offering her hand which Hawk accepts uh...graciously, for him.

“*Bonne nuit, a plus tard*, Tara?” I say giving her hand a little squeeze, which brings a beautiful full-bodied smile to her lovey *visage*.

“*Oui, a plus tard. Bonne nuit*, Mick...” she whispers giving my hand a firm squeeze before releasing it. *Yes, see you later. Good night indeed T-N-T, and sweet dream a vous.*

It’s about 11:30 PM by the time they leave.

“Your thoughts?” I say to Hawk.

“Frankly, I don’t see her going for the deal. Not so much out of fear, but more so out of professional ethic...which you gotta respect. Says a lot about her character. As an attorney, she *is* an officer of the court. But, I don’t believe that Terrence feels the same...T-B-D. In any case, I think we should start investigating...connecting with the three people...the names Tara gave us, like yesterday. See if we can get ahead of the curve. Up to now we’ve been just reacting...playin’ defense. Let’s go on offense and turn up some serious heat, then let the game come to us...on our terms,” Hawk says.

“Like dig it. Goin’ with the Greco-Roman military strategy thing, *mahn*...like let ‘em chase us...’til we like catch ‘em kinda deal. Like that whole Trojan Horse bait and switch thingy,” I say channeling the Big Lebowski.

“Kinda, uh...*Dude. Now*, we can locate them with...or without NTSB’s help,” he says.

“Agreed. Time to start shakin’ that tree, eh *mon ami*? I think I’ll wait for tomorrow morning to check my email. I’ve had enough drama for one day,” I say.

I let Oso in from the back deck where he’s got a little, make that *grandisimo*, authentic to scale sheep herder cabin with windows like something from Basque country, his origin, that I custom built for him. He jumps up on his hind legs putting his massive paws on my shoulders, his head almost even with mine, his tail wagging furiously, licking my mug with his great pink sandpaper tongue.

“Me too boy...missed ya all day. Let's head upstairs...and I'll tell ya all about my day,” I say sinking my hands into the thick fur coat around his neck and massive white head, shaking it side to side.

“Woof-woof” he says which some may misinterpret as just a random bark. Ha! But we know better don't we *boy*. Of course it means 'Oh-kay', just ask the Hawster.

“And so how was your day, Big Dawg?” I say.

“Woof-Woof” he *says*...see what'd I tell ya.

Right around midnight, the Black Suburban slowly pulls away after the NTSB investigators have left. It's been a long day for *El Negrito*, just sitting there waiting and watching Kozlov's house, from an undetectable distance, but since he's billing by the hour...

Well now...they've spent almost 8 hours in there. Kozlov and Mr Clean, that Jap...and the Nigger. Must be on to something. Not good. Don't know how much longer I can depend on “Guts” Gutowski to keep his *fuckin'* mouth shut...he's the only direct link to me and NPI. They sweated him pretty good when the NTSB took his statement, scared the *shit* out of him. He thinks they may smell something, maybe something bad...for him.

They get to him, maybe offer him a deal, immunity from prosecution in exchange for rattin' out...testifyin' against me...and NPI. Then all the wheels come off. Big Time.

Just to be safe, time to terminate that threat vector. But it'll have to wait 'til tomorrow night, to set it up so it looks like an accident, the specialty of the house. Like I always tell those whores...I do my best work in the dark.

Tomorrow after my daily ration of ham 'n eggs, coffee and sour dough toast, I'll plug all the variables into the decision matrix...come up with a plan, then *execute*...figuratively and literally. Like *Daddy* always said, 'fore going hunting for coon at dawn, ain't healthy to kill, or even plan to kill, on an empty stomach.

- Chapter 66 -

Hawk and I are sitting in my office over a mug of steaming Jet Fuel and fresh, hot *obscenely* tasty Apple Fritters from *Lafeen's Donuts, Ice Cream, Espresso* on Electric Ave not far from Moody Falls Park, Ground Zero.

We're rehashing yesterday's long and relative productive day, with me slowly working up the courage to check my email, to see if there's anything from @eagle...aka Junior.

Hawk takes Terrence's card out of his shirt pocket, with his mobile phone in hand, he says, "Puttin' Terrence's phone numbers etcetera in my phone contacts, in case I lose his card." manically fully engaging both of thumbs on his Blackberry.

"Don't want lose contact with your uh...*Goy Toy, eh mon ami?*"

I say

"Hey man, I think he's a pretty cool guy...like to get know to him. He's got a Seattle area code which makes things a little less GPS, uh...Geographical-Problematic-Situation," he says.

He flips it if over and says, "Koz...have a look at this!" he says handing it to me. On the back are four lines of block-letter handwriting:

206.659.5555 MP

T How1966

@6691_woH_T

7

"What do you make of that?" I say.

"His phone number...*M* obviously for mobile, *P* for personal. And probably, there's a user ID...and a password," he says.

"To what?" I say.

"Move over and let me get on that computer," he says.

I quickly slide out of the way.

Hawk hungrily starts pounding on the keyboard...his fingers a blur.

He enters the URL from Terrence's email address,

Terrence.Howard@http/www.nts.gov/

from the front of the card.

He's now at the NTSB website. After few minutes of mousing around he finds buried deep in the one of the obscure pages under "About" a login link. But it's a hidden link, he finds it by viewing the source code in the browser and doing a keyword search for "log", "sign" and gets a hit, finding the *HTML* line item that has a *h ref* link to a hidden login page <http://www.nts.gov/about/db/login.aspx>, hyperlinked

to a small innocuous logo image in the header, which you could only access by knowing the specific image...unless you're the Hawkster. He copies and pastes it into the address line of the browser and hits enter.

“Here it is...the login page. Showtime, baby. Just to be safe, I'm going to open a TOR browser so our IP can't be traced,” he says entering Terrence's user ID and password.

“*Voila*, we're in. The NTSB database server. All of Terrence's files assigned to him are displayed,” Hawk says barely able to contain his excitement. Doesn't take much to put these nerds in an *orgasmic state of pure ecstasy*...bonkers.

“All the files for his cases are listed and sortable by date, file number, name, and activity etcetera. Cascade Pipeline is right near the top. It's a hyperlink,” he says.

“So click it already...cyber-snoop,” I say, which he does.

“Man...it's all here. Everything...including mp3 files of the actual interviews, contact info, the transcripts, the forensics and investigator notes, including Tara's. Apparently their comments and notes etcetera are linked to be shared on common cases,” he says regaining his cool.

Looking at the back of the card, I say, “So whattya think the number 7 means?” I say.

“I'm thinkin' T-How's tellin' us we got no less...and maybe more than 7 days to download everything we can before he changes his password. Probably a mandatory routine automatic PW change every 14 days for security reasons...maybe 7 days or more days left before he has to change it. He's probably not sure so he gave us 7,” he says.

“Now what” I ask.

“Okay. T-How's stickin' his neck out a mile for us here, man. So we gotta be cool about how we download these files. We'll use TOR for just casual browsing so that our IP will be randomly relayed and spoofed so they can't trace our actual IP. Because TOR is so slow, we'll download the files from an unsecured Wi-Fi connection, with no authentication...at a coffee shop like a Starbucks. A different one each time, so it can't be traced *directly* back to us. But we'll want to go to another city like Seattle...maybe Redmond, home of Microsoft, just to have some fun with 'em. I've still got access to their network.

The Sys Admin will be alerted if the system detects massive single session downloads...like you'd see with a hacker. So we gotta go slow...do our download sessions over several days...at different times from different IP's so as not to attract any attention of the Sys Admin...so it looks random and natural. Otherwise, the Sys Admin will shut us down in a New York minute. And lock out T-How until he figures out what the hell's going on. Maybe even alerting the Director of a possible breach...which would *not* be good for Terrence,” Hawk says.

“Ya think?” I say.

“First order of business...look at the investigator's notes,” he says.

After about five minutes of reading, he says, “Okay...you'll *love* this one. Tara's notes on her phone conversation with the Koz the other day arranging last night's meeting and I quote.

Made phone contact today with witness Michaelangelo Kozlov re setting up a date for a statement from he and Ad Hoc Shapiro. Mr Kozlov impressed me as being rather arrogant and potentially difficult to deal with. Thinks he's a lot funnier than he really is. After much bantering back and forth agreed to meet with both he and Mr Shapiro tomorrow at 4 PM at his residence. Note to self. Bring Kibbles and Bits doggie treats :)

“In just a few short minutes of conversation apparently she was able to grasp the uh...*true* essence of your personality, eh? *Arrogant-Boy?* Man, she's good...*very* good,” Hawk says.

“Arrogant? *Moi?* Difficult? It's a gift. But the part that really cuts to the quick is the crack about my sense of humor. *Phew. Tough crowd* these bureaucrats,” I say.

“Okay, reading Terrence's notes re the interviews, looks like of the three subjects that Tara listed, one in particular raised uh...*grave suspicion* in both Terrence and Tara. A Frank Gutowski. Looks like they perceived *excessive and inappropriate nervousness, body language, including inordinate perspiration and failure to make eye contact consistent with evasive and deceptive behavior* during the interview. Might not be a bad place to start,” he says

“Any contact info?” I say.

“Yea, lives in Moody Seaport...an address off of Alabama Hill, Silver Beach area, near Cascadia Lake. There's a phone,” he says.

“Any personal info that might be useful?” I say.

“Okay, his bio summary. Uh...he's 36, married with one kid, a daughter 10 years old. Served in the military. Marines...interesting, Special Forces...1987 to 1995, Gulf War theater...a coupla Purple Hearts and a Bronze Star for Bravery...honorable discharge,” he says.

“After I check my email, let's go pay Frankie a little visit...a cold call,” I say.

“Okay. I'm going to load up some gear in the truck...video camcorder,” Hawk says

“And the digital audio recorder...just in case we get lucky and get something outta him,” I say.

I log on to my email account, and check my email. There's the usual inane spam for:

SURE CURE FOR ERECTILE DYSFUNCTION!!
All Natural...Just 9 pills a day...and you're on your way to being a REAL STUD!!

: : Michaelangelo's Renaissance — m.a.kominsky : :

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With my affinity for Alpha *Shiksa* Chicks...nice to know there's a backup out there for *performance anxiety*...

So even though I'm tempted to put the *FUN*, back in uh...*DYSFUNCTION*, since I'm *sans* wife or even an S-O...placed on waivers, free-agency status, I decide to pass...for now. *Delete*.

After deleting another 20 useless banal messages, there's one from @eagle received by my email server early this morning.

From: atsa_ee@hushmail.com
Date: Thursday October 26, 2001 6:43 AM
To: mak@kozmic.com
Subject: contact

after talking this over with grandfather he thinks we should talk>>>he says you're not a bad guy>>>for a paleface>>>LOL.

call ya tonight at about 11p ur time>>>maybe>>>LOL

@eagle aka mak_too

I reply.

From: mak@kozmic.com
Date: Thursday October 26, 2001 10:12 AM
To: atsa_ee@hushmail.com
Subject: RE: contact

Okay Michael. Looking forward to it...I think:)

~mak aka paleface paw

Well now. I'm frankly filled with ambivalence about the phone call tonight with my uh...*son*. I try to slow my accelerating heart rate and rapid shallow breathing by taking long, slow and rhythmic deep breaths. Yogic breathing...*Pranayama*, Sanskrit which means...*extension of the life force*. Within a few minutes, it works. I'll have to remember this for tonight, just before the kid calls.

Hawks noiselessly sashays into my office. For such a big man, from years of martial arts and ballet training he's surprisingly lithe and light on his feet.

"Ready to roll?" he says.

"Let's do it. Just in case, slip one of the 9 millimeters in the truck," I say.

"Already thought of that...*Allons-y mon ami*," he says, *Let's go, my friend.*

"*Bien sûr, vous avez. D'accord...Allons-y...*" I say, *Of course you have. Okay...Let's go.*

Within 15 minutes we arrive in front of Frank Gutowski house about two in the afternoon. It's unseasonably warm and muggy. We park across the street and survey the situation—an ordinary middle class neighborhood. Probably developed by the same builder back in the postwar go-go 50s. Of the 20 or so single story probably 3 bedroom houses in the subdivision, there's maybe 2 variations in design, all the same size, flipped to a mirror image to the house next to it with a futile attempt to disguise the repetitiousness of the design with minor token differences in trim and color scheme.

The exterior of the house is free of clutter, the paint looks recent, with the trim in good condition. The yard is well-maintained, the lawn recently mowed. In the driveway is a very large cabin cruiser boat with twin outboard motors on a trailer, with a late model Ford three-quarter ton pick-up truck hitched up to it.

"Hey Hawk...how about you pullout the camcorder and keep it at the ready out of sight on the front seat. I'm going to take the digital recorder, clip it to my belt under my shirt...turn it on then go knock on the door," I say.

"Okay...what's the pretense...ya know, why are you knocking on his door if he asks ya?" Hawk says.

"I know the thought never occurred to you, man, but I suppose I could uh...tell him the truth," I say.

"Hmm...clever And *very* original...diabolical even. I like it...let's go with it," the Hawkster says.

"Machiavellian...my peeps. So obvious...as to be *not* obvious," I say.

"Then what?"

"Haven't got that far...yet," I say.

"Easy plan to remember."

"*Zackly*...and execute. The elegant simplicity of it...until I can unleash my not-so-legendary improv skills," I say.

I walk up to the front door, which has a substantial aluminum door with screening on the upper half. My knock rattles the screen door frame. Immediately a dog starts barking on the other side, not very big by the sound of it.

The inside solid green door slowly opens revealing almost a totally darkened room except for the stroboscopic glow of a TV. Squinting, the cave dweller shields its eyes with its hand apparently, unaccustomed to sunlight...of any kind. It's a woman, I think, probably mid-thirties, maybe 5'5". But looks shorter as she's more than slightly obese. Her sandy hair is cut short...looks like a home-job bowl cut. No make-up in a man's t-shirt. Her arms are thick and fleshy with dark rings of underarm sweat. In the background is the unmistakable loud sound of a canned-laugh-track of some sitcom rerun on TV.

"Yea?" she yells says over of the barking dog.

"Is Frank Gutowski in?" I say mustering my most charming aluminum siding salesman smile.

"*Fraaaaank!* Somebody here to see ya," she yells...like gravel thrown on a tin roof, then recedes back into the black monotonous torpor of quotidian subsistence.

Within a few seconds, a man emerges out of the darkness to the mouth of the cave. He's close to 6 feet, well-built, erect and trim...not overweight. His face recently clean-shaven with the strong chin, high cheek bones and the clear deep-set blue eyes of a recruiting poster for the U.S. Military. America's finest—a warrior, a modern-day Centurion. He's wearing blue jeans, a Navy blue sweatshirt with the sleeves torn off at the shoulder with a blue baseball cap with a large *S*...a Seattle Mariners fan. *Poor guy*. His ample arm muscles are impressive and well-defined. He's tan and looks fit like he works out regularly.

Definitely still possessing a military bearing and the ethic of pride in his physical comportment.

"Yes?" he says.

"Are you Frank Gutowski?" I ask.

"Who wants to know?" he says.

"I'll take that *not* as a no. Mr Gutowski, my name is Mick Kozlov. I wonder if I could have a word with you?" I say like a benevolent door-to-door Evangelical Christian earnestly trying to initiate a dialogue as an entrée for salvation from certain Eternal Hell. In his case the man-made-hell of prison life...for a *very* long time.

"'Bout what?" he says now eying me up and down with suspicion.

"I wonder if I could come in...so we could chat..." I start to say.

"I can hear you just fine...right where you are. State your business...or hit the road pal," he says with a little more edge.

"Okay. Here's my card," I say gesturing for him to open the screen door, so I can hand him my business card from Kozmick Productions.

Leaving the screen door closed, he says, "Okay. One last time...state you business...or get off my property," he says, with hard edge now in his tone.

“Okay, uh...Frank, here's the deal,” I say as I'm tucking my card in the cross member of the screen door, the front facing him. I decide to go for it...to bluff him that I know a whole lot about his involvement in the blast.

“I know the NTSB has recently interviewed you. It did it not go well for ya, did it Frank? They're on to you, man...they know you're lying'...trying to conceal something. They know it's got something to do with NPI and their *dirty-trickster* uh...Porter, who is known to do their dirty work,” I say.

“Who the *hell are you*, man?” he yells.

“Frank...I'm here to *try* to help you, man. It's just a matter of time before the Feds put this whole thing together...that the blast was *not* an act of terrorism...was it Frank? The forensics are *screaming* cover-up, man,” I say.

“I don't know what the *hell* you're talking about and I don't know no Ernie Porter,” immediately he realizes he screwed up. I never mentioned Porter's first name. A stupid *rookie mistake*. Poor guy, now that this thing is unraveling at warp speed, he's so scared he can't even think straight. Just a matter of time before he cracks. *Gotta keep the heat turned up*.

“Frank...*Frank!*...com'mon, man. This is *fuck-ing* fut-ile. You could end up being hung out to dry...taking the fall for this deal. I know you gotta wife and kid, a young daughter. What about *them*? Unless you cooperate...they'll bust ya like a cheap pinata,” I say.

“You leave my family outta this...or I'll...”

“Or what Frank...you'll *kill* me? Like Jenifer Rogers, and her unborn child...and Dr Tehrani and his wife in Vancouver BC? Did you do that Frank?” Hasn't there already been *enough killing*,” I say trying to unnerve him.

“*Shit*, man...what the *hell* do you want?” he says now obviously rattled.

“I want ya to level with me, man. Who's behind this cover-up? Save yourself...and your family. We can talk to the DA...and the FBI...we'll get you into witness protection. All ya gotta do is start tellin' the truth, man. The FBI can protect you and your family,” I say feeling confident Tara and Terrence would advocate my offer to him, to the Feds if it means putting some major corporate suits in jail for a long time, which wouldn't look too shabby on any Federal Prosecutor's resume.

“*Pregnant?* Jesus. Hey...I didn't have *nothin'* to do with the murder of that poor girl, man...or those people in BC. It was...” his voice trails off, then “*Shit!*” as his attention is diverted by something he sees in the street. I turn around to see a Black Suburban slowly cruise by. All the windows are tinted so I can't see the driver. I turn around to face Frank Gutowski just in time to see him slam the inner door shut. I face the street again to see Hawk still sitting in the driver seat leaning out the

window. He's shouldered the camcorder, panning with the Black Suburban as it turns right at the next corner.

Gawd...I luuv working with professionals.

In one last futile attempt, I turn to face the front door. Over the barking dog, I hear loud cursing coming from inside. I realize that for now, mission accomplished. He's scared...*big time*, and that my business card is gone.

The Black Sub. *Jesus!* Like da *Kingfish* like ta say...*the plot be thickenin'!*

Realizing, that for the first time, I've almost been within touching distance of the murderer of Marla Dyson...and most probably Sora Eagle Feather, I walk back to the truck on rubbery legs. Hawk is pulling the DV tape out of the camcorder, and labeling it with a felt pen and setting the cassette so it can't be recorded over inadvertently. My hand is shaking as I open the passenger side door. I climb in, reach down, remove the digital recorder from my belt and hit the *stop* button.

"Mickey, you okay, man?...you look pretty shook up," Hawk says studying his pal who is ashen, his hands trembling.

"Not really...I'll tell ya later, man. Uh...were you able to get a clear shot of the driver of the Black Sub when it drove by?" I say.

"Nope...by the time I had the tape rollin' he was almost past me...all the windows were tinted. Think it was our, uh...*friend*?" he says.

"With a THULE roof box?" I say.

"*Oye vey*...as my peeps say," he grunts.

"*No shit!* Uh...*Shylock*," I say with an edge still scared and angry from being that close to the murderer.

"You must be really stressed, man. Ya mean Sherlock?" he says.

"Nope. Shylock, as in a Yiddish Sherlock," I say.

"A riot Alice, regular riot. So...what'd Gutowski have to say?" Hawk says with a wisp of smile.

"*Man*, Terrence is right...he *is* scared *shitless*. He all but admitted that Jenifer Rogers and the Tehrani's were murdered...that he was part of a cover-up. He clammed up as soon as he saw the Black Sub. But I got it all on the D-R. He's ready to fold like a cheap leisure suit...*if* we can keep the heat turned up. With your connections...can you run the plate on the Sub?" I say.

"Yea...but it's out of state, California. Five 'ill get ya ten *yen*...it's bogus. But I'll check it out anyway," Hawk says.

"Hey man...I could sure use a drink...a cold beer would *not* be a bad idea. Let's head over to the ol' Horseshoe Cafe downtown, where it's *always* Happy Hour. I'm buyin'. I want to give Terrence and Tara a call...give 'em a heads-up on this latest development," I say.

"You're buyin? Happy Hour at the *Horseshoe*? Lucky me," Hawk says.

El Negrito pulls into the parking lot of the hotel, the Lakeway Inn, where he's staying under one of his many assumed ID's, so he can keep close tabs on Kozlov and the NTSB people. He replays the latest developments in his head.

Not good...but I've been in tighter spots...compared to an ambush-gone-bad firefight with the *Sandinista* rebels in the jungles of Nicaragua...this ain't shit. Most important thing to remember when takin' heavy enemy fire...be cool...keep your head...or you're dead meat.

Time to step it up...big time, if I'm goin' to keep a lid on this thing. Just like I figured. That bastard Kozlov's on to something. New rules. First order of business. Terminate with Extreme Prejudice...and alacrity the immediate threat vector of Frankie boy. Second, I've had enough of those two major pains in the ass...Kozlov and that Jew bastard Shapiro...*ka-boom*...you're dead. Won't be any pieces left, big enough to identify...after an RPG.

Frank's reaction to the drive-by had to cause suspicion...they know my wheels now. Don't think Kozlov had enough time to get enough outta Gutowski to cause a major problem before he slammed the door shut in Kozlov's face...yet, before my well-timed drive-by. Dammit! No other options...risky...but was forced to expose myself...only way to try to cut it short. Long term, won't make a bit of fuckin' difference. Frankie boy can't testify from the bottom of the Bay. He's a dead man walking...or sinkin'.

Laughing out loud, Hot damn...I'm one fuckin' funny dude...when I wanna be. See there Daddy? I can still bring funny...even after all your shit...you mutha fucka!

Kozlov and his pet gorilla are smarter...and movin' faster than I thought...damn near got to Gutowski. I won't underestimate them again. Since Mr Clean got some video of me drivin' by...gotta change license plates...like now. No way they coulda got a shot of my mug...so I still got that element of surprise on my side. Probably wise to change vehicles now...instead of renting a car, I'll buy one, so it can't be traced...pay cash from a private party. Just put it on your tab, Howie...chump change if I don't keep a lid on this thing.

His reverie is interrupted by his *vibrating* mobile phone. The phone number flashing on caller ID is an all too familiar one. Charleston South Carolina. He breaks into an instantaneous copious sweat.

“Hel-lo?”

“*Ernest...this is your fatha.*” says the deep voice, the thick South Carolina drawl still reeking with an imperious military bearing even at the age of 77.

“Yes-sir, Major *sir*...” *El Negrito* says.

“*You have not called ya motha for ova two weeks. Do ya'll have a valid EX-cuse?*” the retired Marine Major barks.

“*Daddy...really sorry. Been kinda busy here...on business, ya know...*” Little Ernie says obsequiously, reverting back to his childhood

role of a late-in-life only child of a domineering autocratic career military...a *lifer*.

“Not acceptable! Call your motha...today! That's a direct orda. Do not make me call ya again...or you know the consequences, don't ya Ernest. Are we clear on that?” he says with the all too familiar menacing malevolent tone of his childhood.

Know the consequences, don't ya Ernest. The constant emotional and physical abuse heaped upon him, and because of it, the humiliation of the bed wetting on sleep-overs at his pals...and even now after over 40 years at the mere sound of the Major's domineering bark, the Pavlovian response of the barely controllable urge to urinate. As a kid, to piss his pants. Like some poor abused dog pissing all over himself at the mere sight of the raised hand of his abuser.

“Yes-sir! I promise...I'll call...” he starts to say.

Click.

One of these days Daddy...one of these FUCKIN' days...

Time to replace the wheels. He parks the Black Sub way in the back in an obscure part of the Lakeway Inn Hotel parking lot where he changes the plates to Illinois, and removes the THULE roof rack placing it inside the Sururban. *El Negrito* measures the custom made THULE roof box, made to order to for the tools of his trade, a Bushmaster Custom Sniper Rifle, BC SR with a Scope, and an RPG-7, a portable, unguided, shoulder-launched, anti-tank rocket-propelled grenade launcher. *A skilled craftsman is only as good as his tools.* He'll want to make sure the case will fit into the back of the replacement SUV, for quick access.

On Craigslist, a classified advertisement website started in 1995, from a private party, he finds and pays cash for a 1997 White Ford Explorer. Large enough in the rear cargo area to accommodate the roof box. Perfect, to throw 'em off the scent—they'll still be looking for a Black Sub with roof box. He puts on a bogus set of Colorado plates.

Good to go. Tonight he'll set up the unfortunate mishap for Frankie Boy. He noticed that Frank's C-Dory cabin cruiser, was already hitched up to his pick-up truck. Knowing Frank's passion for fishing and solitude, especially when he's under stress, uh...*ya think?* He'll probably launch the *Alicia May*, named after his sickly, defective daughter, early tomorrow morning. *Yeap...pretty hard to testify...underwater.*

- Chapter 67 -

We take a booth way in the back of the bar at the Horseshoe Cafe, the oldest continuously operating cafe and cocktail lounge in Washington, a part of the community since 1886. By the looks of it, the original carpet and paint...and help. I call over to the bartender for two bottles of Alaskan Stout...a chewy dark beer. He nods. Hawk gets on his Blackberry and calls Terrence Howard on his personal mobile number.

“T-How here...speak...” he says.

“Woof-woof.” Hawk says.

“Ha...Oh-kay. And woof-woof backatcha Hawk, ma man. S’up?” he says.

“T-How, Mick and I paid a little visit to Frank Gutowski this afternoon. I’m going to put Mick on...let him bring you up to speed,” he says handing his phone to me.

“Terrence, some major developments since yesterday. Looks like Gutowski’s ready to flip...like a flapjack on a hot griddle. We’re at the ol’ Horseshoe Cafe on East Holly at Railroad Ave. Probably be better if you came down here...than do this over the phone. Bring Tara if she’s available, she’ll want to hear this,” I say.

“Hold on a sec...” he says, then a few seconds later comes back on, “We’re on our way, man.” he says.

“We’re in a booth in the back...in the bar,” I say.

“What a surprise,” he says.

Click.

In the meantime the bartender sets the beers with glasses on the table.

“Start a tab?” he says.

“Sure...keep ‘em comin’...fast and cold,” I say.

“You need anything else...*call your server*,” he says with a bit of attitude. Even though the bar’s totally empty, guess I pulled him away from some serious slicin’ and dicin’ of lime and lemon rinds. Probably just doing this, until his big book deal or Spielberg picks up the option.

“We both push the glasses to one side and take a long pull out of the bottle. It’s icy cold. After a long day of all this *vestigatin’* nothing could be *finah*. I immediately call uh...our server to be P-C, with a name tag Roxy, *I kid you not*. A classic old-school, tough don’t-give-me-no-lip, middle-age black gal...with hi-mileage and a bottle blond wig. A career uh...*waitress*, which suits the decor *mo betta*. She looks like she came with the place. I order another round.

“While were waiting, I'm going online with the Blackberry...the Dark Web...see if we can get more info about our friend Porter,” Hawk says.

About five minutes later, Hawk hands me the Blackberry, “Have a look at this...man Junior wasn't exaggeratin'. This Porter's a *very* heavy hitter, *shit*...man, this guy gets around...Mexico, South and more recently Central America...big time. Scary dude, man...way over our punchin' weight.”

“Yea...now that he knows that we know that he's behind this coverup...he'll probably be makin' a move on us. Just in case...best start packin' those nines...full-time,” I say

About two rounds of Alaskan Stout later, Terrence and Tara come walking back toward our booth. Terrence slides in next to Hawk. With a nice warm smile, Tara slides in on the other side, next to me, nesting her cute little tushy, now touching mine. Hmm...*excellent seating arrangement*.

“Whattcha drinkin'?” I say.

“Beer looks good,” T-How says.

“Make it two...with a glass for me, please,” Tara says always the lady.

“Hey, Roxy,” I yell. Roxy ambles over with a nice side to side *mo-tation*.

“Hay's for horses...or horse's asses. Watchya want sweetcakes?” she says with a sparkling smile and wink. Yeap...she still got game.

After a weak ersatz horse nicker, and stomping my foot on the floor a few times, “Alaskan Stout...with a glass for the lady and....” but before I can finish...

“Sure...how 'bout the Black Stallion there,” she nods smiling at Terrence with another wink, already throwin' me over in a heart beat...for a *brutha*? Man, ain't that uh...*sexual discrimination*? I *tellya*...can't get *no respect*.

“He'll have what I'm havin',” Hawk says, returning a wink at the bemused Roxy. Which draws a big grin from Terrence and a loud laugh from Tara.

We make small talk, until the drinks show up, then when Roxie's out of earshot, we get down to business.

I summarize the encounter with Frank Gutowski, leaving out the part about how we got his address and other info etcetera. I tell them that the whole conversation was recorded surreptitiously on a digital recorder.

“*Excellent* work, Mick!” Tara says.

“Tsk...tsk, S-O-P for us trained investigators,” I say air drumming my fingers. “So, I'm talking through the screen door to Frank...he's starting to uh...grasp the gravity of his situation...” I say.

“What was his demeanor?” Terrence says.

“You were dead on...he's scared to death. Poor guy...hard to watch, man. Apparently he was highly decorated during his service...so he saw some serious in-country *shit*. From his anxious and agitated state, I wouldn't be surprised to find out he's got some serious psychological residuals, like PTSD.”

“Yea, my impression too. But I felt that he wasn't a bad guy...just caught in a bad situation. Being a fellow vet I couldn't help but have empathy for his situation,” Terrence says his street Ebonics now in suppress mode.

“Agreed. I think although he may not be the sharpest knife in the drawer, he's basically a decent man, with a wife and a kid...that he's very protective of,” I say.

“So what were you able to get out of him that would *change the course of the investigation*?” Tara says impatiently cutting to the chase with her laser-logical mind.

“Not dancin' fast enough for ya, babe?” I say with smile causing her to blush which I find very sweet, for the first time sensing a vulnerability.

“Sorry...hard-wired in my Nipponese DNA...please go on, Mick,” she says.

“*Pas de probleme...belle dame.*” I say patting her knee under the table. “He denies having killed Jenifer Rogers and the Tehrani's, which I believe, but through a personal denial...and a tacit non-denial he unwittingly confirms that they were in fact murdered, just that he had no part in it. Same deal with the cause of the explosion...not being a terrorist act. He seems to have genuine grave remorse about the death of the pregnant Jenifer.”

“Did he say he knows who *did* commit the murders?” Tara ask.

“Never got to it...just as he was about to spill, a Black Suburban cruised by. The poor guy almost pissed his pants, clammed up and literally and figuratively slammed the door shut,” I say

“Your take on the significance of the Black Suburban?” Tara says.

“I won't go into too much detail now, but through our investigation into the murders of two victims...years ago.” I say starting to tear up...*victims*, for *Chrissakes* two of the most important women in my life, “uh...sorry...yea, the *victims*, both eye witnesses agree that they observed the presence of the same kind of vehicle at the crime scene...a Black Suburban, with a THULE roof box...too much of a coincidence,” I say.

“I got the vehicle on video tape...no clear image of the driver. The license plate will probably turn out to be a phoney. It had a THULE roof box,” Hawk says.

“How do you make the connection between the two?” Tara says.

“Three murders actually, but who's countin'. We think that the common denominator that links the crimes is the involvement of a

corporate *security* “ I say with air quotes “company that does dirty tricks, covert kinda stuff. They are on permanent retainer with NPI. One of the murders, years ago, involves a proposed pipeline in New Mexico...by...wait for it...” I say.

“NPI,” Tara says.

“Bingo, babe. So in all the crimes, including this one...the same M-O...the same type of vehicle...just like to today. They stay below the radar but the president and CEO, whom I've personally met many years ago, is a piece of work...a real reptile,” I say using Marla's perfect metaphor for him.

“Gotta name?” Terrence says.

“Ernest Porter...fifty-ish, goes by the nickname *El Negrito, en espanol*...The Black One. An ex-Marine...with as I recall a Force Recon tattoo.”

“He a brutha?” T-How says.

“Nah...lily white...with a distinct cracker Southern drawl...drippin' with James Crow attitude to match. KKK recruiting poster material,” I say.

“Any idea of dates of military service?” Terrence says.

“Not sure...but from his Vietnam campaign tattoo...he saw action in Nam,” I say continuing on, “his company is SHOPS...Silent Hand OPs...or operations LLC. The home office of operations is in Southern California...Chula Vista, just South of San Diego near the Mexican Border...and Central and South America.”

Hawk continues, “Went on to the Deep Web...to some of my Darknet sources...sort of like a Dark Wikipedia...an info-central of a who's-who, of the dark underbelly of hackers and nefarious characters. Sort of a Craigslist of classifieds for bad guys. Checking around, word on the web...many of their clients are Drug Cartels...large sophisticated criminal enterprises that operate in Mexico, and Central and South America with the same managerial hierarchy and financial efficiency as a large multinational corporation, only with more asset...and more scruples.”

“They both prey on the most vulnerable, the underclass...at least the Cartels make no pretense about their predatory obscene profit motives. With Gross Sales rivaling many Fortune 500s...with *Net Profits* that make GM look like a start-up.” I say as Terrence is taking notes in his little spiral note pad.

“So where do *you* think we should go from here, uh Dick Tracy?” Tara says with a whiff of sarcasm.

“That be me, Dick Tracy. Private Dick for Hire...at your service ma'am.” I say with a casual tip of my imaginary Fedora, which causes her face to redden big time. Like I said...a charming vulnerability.

“Time to turn up the griddle...and *flip the flapjack*.”

“And just what do *you* think, uh...Sam *Spade*...fearless NTSB investigator? Tara says to Terrence with an insider wry grin.

“Well...me bein' a seasoned, trained *inves-tigata*, if it be up to me...I say flip da Frank...soona din layta,” the good-natured Terrence says, back in Ebonics Rapper mode.

“Hawk?” Tara says.

“I vote with my esteemed colleagues...time to *Shake 'n Bake* Frank Gutowski,” Hawk says.

“So...Tara, do you think you could work out a deal for Gutowski to get immunity or at the very least a highly reduced sentence in exchange for his testimony implicating the perps and corporate pimps? Oh, I uh...probably should mention I *kinda* already promised him *that*...if he'd cooperate.” I say grinning.

“I could try. Having the recording with Gutowski...won't hurt. The first step would be to deal with the local jurisdiction, that would be Cascadia County. I'd have to run this by the local DA...a John Allison. If they're willing to sign off...then we work our way up, in this case down the food chain to the FBI...probably your fav, Charles Cunningham,” she says with a smirk.

“Probably better if the Hawkster goes uh...*fishin'* on that day,” I say when the Hawk cuts in.

“Ah...tis true indeed. A fisher of men...*ahem*...non-Biblically speaking,” the Hawkster says winking at Terrence.

I continue, “*Very*. So best that the Hawkster sits out the negotiations with the Chuckster. And oh...by the way, I *kinda sorta* promised Frankie uh...witness protection...and a relocation *kinda* deal,” I say sheepishly.

“Any other...*oh by the ways*, we need to know about, Mick?” Tara says smiling with an arched eyebrow.

“Nope...other than the FBI would protect he and his family in the interim. We should have some degree of confirmation of the framework for a deal, before we approach Gutowski and uh...his attorney, which I uh...also *kinda* promised the Feds would pay for. Frankly, pun intended I think he's concerned about an attempt being made on his life...or perhaps trying to silence him with threat of harm...or worse to his family. We don't have much time here...gotta move now or he might rabbit before we can flip him,” I say.

“What? No all-expense paid Caribbean Cruise to Club Med?” Tara says.

“With this psycho killing machine Porter still out there, was thinkin' more like maybe Alaska, someplace with a bustling population of 500...North of the Arctic Circle. Tara, I'd like to sit in on that meeting. I have a personal connection with John Allison...he visited me in the hospital after the explosion. He lost his wife and kids in the blast. Understandably, it totally devastated him. I suspect he's out for blood...as much...and any place, he can reasonably or unreasonably, find it. As a fellow victim, I think I might be able to help convince him of the wisdom of this deal,” I say.

“Yeah, I heard about that. Tough one. I'll set it up and get back with ya. If there's nothing else?” Tara says. Hearing nothing from anybody, “Okay...I best get started, like yesterday. I'll make contact with DA Allison ASAP.”

“When and where...I'll be there,” I say

“Talk later, Mick.” Tara says sliding out of the booth, giving my right knee a nice squeeze under the table.

“Keep in touch. And watch your back. Gonna see if I can find out more about this Porter cat in the Fed database,” T-How says as he slides out the booth. Hawk and I both nod. End of meeting. Time to head back to Chez MAK. *Got an important appointment tonight...with my past.*

- Chapter 68 -

At almost midnight, the phone rings. The caller ID says it's blocked.

“Mick Kozlov here...”

Nothing...just silence on the other end.

“Michael? If it's you...let's talk.”

Still nothing.

“Come on, Michael...talk to me, man.”

Just the sound of breathing on the other end.

“Okay...either somebody's got a wrong number...or the more tantalizing prospect of an obscene phone call.” I say with a tone of exasperation. The kid's probably feeling a little awkward... *ya think?* Or maybe he's just messing with me...a little payback? Or a little of both. He probably doesn't even know himself. I decide not to pressure him. If he wants to connect with his old man, the puck's on his ice.

After several more seconds of silence, then...

“*Kab-o-om...*” the voice says with a creepy laugh.

Click.

The Black One disconnects from one of his many throw-away prepaid mobiles, then crushes it under his boot, tossing it in the trash. *Hey...I'm human...gotta have some fun.* One down, two more to go, then I'm outta here. Time to pull out the RPG launcher and give it a good thorough check out.”

Well now...with my amazing powers of deduction, I doubt it's my kid. That bastard Porter's *fuckin'* with us, like some predator playing with its food before devouring it. Okay, game on you piece of human excrement.

The next morning about 9:30, I get a call from Tara.

“*Mick, I've set up a meeting with DA John Allison, at 2 PM this afternoon at his office. Can you make it?*” she says.

“I'll be there. I'll bring the digital recorder. Hawk will bring the camcorder with video so Allison can watch it through the view finder,” I say.

“*Good.*” Tara says.

“Tara...how'd he sound about the reason for the meeting” I say.

“*Interested...very interested. See ya then,*” Tara says.

Click

At about 10 minutes to two, Hawk and I walk into the reception area of the DA's office, where Tara is seated with her briefcase on her lap. Hawk and I take a seat on either side of her.

"How's my favorite fearless detective duo?" Tara says with a warm smile.

"Not bad...how's Tess Trueheart? Dick Tracy's main squeeze? I say.

"Just dandy. And Sam Catchem?" Tara says to Hawk.

"A little drained today...all this crime stoppin' and collaboratin' with T-How last night...sure tires a private Dick out," Hawk says, causing raised eyebrows then a smile from Tara.

Just about then, the half-frosted glass door with black painted letters, *John Allison District Attorney Cascade County* opens. Standing there, I hardly recognize John Allison. He's haggard and drawn, like he's lost at least 20 pounds the four weeks since the death of his wife and children.

"Good afternoon, please come on in," the DA says, his pants and suit jacket hanging on him like a coat hanger.

He gestures to the two seats in front of his desk, "Please...have a seat...and..." he says.

"I'm fine standing...thanks counselor," Hawk says.

Tara and I take a seat.

"Mr Allison, this is Mick Kozlov...he was a witness to the direct aftermath of the explosion and we believe that he and his associate Mr Shapiro here have developed some probative grounds which may significantly alter the course of this investigation of the pipeline explosion," Tara says.

"Mr Allison...first let me express our most profound condolences on the loss of your wife and children. Do you recall meeting me and Mr Shapiro that night you visited me in the hospital?" I say.

"Thank you...yes of course I remember. I'm in a little better shape now. I've decided to come back to work...in an attempt...albeit futile at times to distract me from..." his voice trailing off.

"Mr Allison, as Ms Takahashi has already informed you by phone, our recent encounter with one Frank Gutowski, in which we have documentary evidence in the form of audio and video, would indicate that he has personal knowledge of a cover-up of the true causation of the explosion on October 10th...that the proximate cause was not an act of Islamic Terrorism, but..." I say when I am interrupted

"Had...Mr Kozlov. I'm afraid your...witness and his evidence have now become moot. Unfortunately the Cascadia Sheriff's have had a report of, what witness from homes on the shore recount as a tremendous explosion...of a cabin cruiser, about 6:30 AM this morning on Cascadia Lake less than a mile from the boat launch ramp at Bloedel Donovan Park...about a half mile from shore. A pick-up truck with a

boat trailer registered to one Frank Gutowski was parked in the lot. The boat was indeed registered to a Frank Gutowski...the missing and presumed deceased victim. The Sheriff's patrol boat has been dispatched. All they've found so far was remnants of the boat which was totally disintegrated by the blast. After a long and methodical search...no body...or bodies have been discovered...yet. We have dispatched a team of divers to search the Lake for the body...or bodies of any victims and also to attempt to discover the cause of the blast," Allison says.

"*Jezsus! Unbelievable!*" I yell.

I look at Tara, dumbstruck. Her face is ashen.

After about a minute of silence, reflecting on the situation, I compose myself enough to say, "Uh...Mr Allison...with all due respect, even though the presumed death of our witness does uh *hinder*...the progress of the investigation...it does not render the evidence moot. Do you have a preliminary cause for the explosion?" I say.

"In the absence of any compelling evidence to the contrary it is being treated an accidental explosion. The detective assigned to the case believes the explosion *probably resulted from the operator not properly ventilating the bilges and purging accumulated gasoline vapors with a bilge blower, before starting the engine. A common cause of such explosions...*" he says reading from a piece of paper now in his hand.

"Mr Allison...I find that explanation inconsistent with the facts. The C-Dory which Mr Gutowski owned was a twin outboard motor craft. It is highly unlikely that gasoline fumes would accumulate in the bilges, and even if that was the case, there would be no source of ignition as would be the case with an inboard motor craft. And even given the remote possibility it did...it would have ignited immediately upon engaging the ignition switch....not one mile from the launch point," I say.

"Accidental my *tuches*...that explosion was about as accidental as the death of Jenifer Rogers was a suicide," Hawk mutters out loud.

"Mr Shapiro is it? That is a *very* serious accusation. What proof, if any, have you that would support that assertion?" the DA says.

Hawk starts to answer but is waved off by Tara holding up her hand, "Mr Allison...Mr Shapiro's...and Mr Kozlov's assertion is consistent with the forensics as to the causation of the blast. After conferring with, and the results of their investigation...and ours, we now believe that the more likely plausible explanation for the explosion is that it was caused by an internal structural failure of the pipe. Further that the operator negligently allowed the gasoline to continue to flow, undetected, unabated....and more importantly unmitigated for perhaps an hour...because of gross non-feasance slash malfeasance. And it was this delay of the necessary remedial...and *appropriate* action that caused the fuel from a 16-inch-diameter steel pipeline to release as far as we can estimate so far, of almost 250,000 gallons of gasoline to accumulate into the creek. Eventually, igniting a fireball through Moody Falls Park and

ultimately downstream into downtown Moody Seaport. And further, that Cascadia Pipeline is engaged in a massive coverup to conceal the true cause of the explosion,” Tara says.

“And that but for this failure to react and intervene, the unchecked flow of fuel, the resultant fire that incinerated that overpass...could have been prevented. And in addition to the tragic deaths of your wife and children, and many others...the perpetrators of the conspiracy are also responsible and complicit in the murders of Jenifer Rogers and Dr and Mrs Tehrani, the parents of the alleged terrorist Hassan Tehrani. An attempt at a massive cover-up,” I say.

“These are outrageous accusations! Are you now saying that somehow the death of my family was *not* from an act of terrorism...but *just* through...*ordinary* negligence?” he says abruptly leaping up from behind his desk his eyes fierce with emotion, his whole body trembling with anger.

“Sadly...yes. That's *exactly* what we're saying here, the resultant death and destruction of course, anything but *ordinary*,” I say.

“Then I'd suggest you bring me the evidence...and if it in fact does support your accusation...then I promise you on the graves of my wife and children that I will *not* rest until I have prosecuted them to the fullest extent of the law and seek the strongest penalty possible, including capital punishment,” he screams loudly, tears streaming down his cheeks collapsing back down into his swivel office chair, emotionally drained, his arms dangling limply from his shoulders.

Negrato's appetite for killing temporarily satiated with the termination of Frank Gutowski, he now turns his attention to disposing of Kozlov and Shapiro. During the early morning hours, it was easy to climb into the trailered boat undetected...to rig up an explosive device on a ten minute timer that would detonate after the ignition switch for the motor and electric fuel pump was turned on. Since Gutowski was the last threat that could have *directly* testified against him and VP Roland...and NPI, he's feeling pretty good about himself. *Damn I'm good.*

The local paper and radio news are reporting that the explosion of Gutowski's boat, according to the Sheriff's Department spokesperson, was deemed an accident.

The only serious threat that remains is Kozlov and Shapiro. Then I'm home free. So now it's showtime for those two amateurs. I fucked up once not getting Kozlov in Tahoe. I terminated his girlfriend...and one for two, .500 ain't a bad battin' average. But this time I'll make sure personally that he's very dead...and that albino gorilla with him.

- Chapter 69 -

The only sound is the loud snoring of Big Dawg Oso, who's completely spread out occupying most of the other side of my King-size bed and half of mine. As I'm laying in bed staring at the ceiling for the past 2 hours, replaying the astonishing events of the day where once again, like @eagle said, the perps always seem to be at least one step ahead of us. The only witness left who could have directly connected the dots, now he too is dead. *Goddammit!*

My mobile phone which I keep next to the bed begins to sound. I glance at the phone...the caller ID again says *blocked*, the red letters on the digital clock flashing *12:05*. Who'd be calling me at this midnight hour other than Michael, my son. I must admit that this whole exercise of trying to connect with him is becoming tiresome, and I am growing very weary of it.

I answer it with, "Michael...why don't you grow up? I'm tired of your childish little games. If you truly want to connect...then I suggest you cut the *shit*...and start acting like a man starting right now! Or as far I'm concerned *fogitaboutit*. Period. Am I making myself clear, here?" I say.

"*Is this uh...Mr Kozlov?*" the voice says full of uncertainty.

"Well who *the hell* else could it be for *Chrissakes?*" I say having worked myself up into a lather.

"*This is uh...Frank...Gutowski. We talked just the other day in front of my house?*" he says very tentatively.

"Frank Gutowski...*un-huh*. Not in the mood for some *fuckin'* prank, you moron. Who *the hell* is this?" I say getting ready to hang up full of displaced anger about my situation with my son.

"*No wait...Mr Kozlov. Really...this is Frank,*" the voice says plaintively.

"Okay. Prove it...tell me how you got my number and make it quick or I hang up," I say.

"*Okay...okay. Uh...you were standing on my front porch. You put your card in the screen door...then the Black Suburban came along that's when I grabbed your card and slammed the door shut,*" he says.

"So Frank...I take it you're *not* dead?" I say.

"*Yes-sir. Uh...no...I'm not dead, I don't think...yet,*" he says his breathing, rapid and shallow. Know the feeling.

"Where are you calling from...and are you in any danger?" I say.

"*I'm in somebody's private boat house...on Cascadia Lake. I swam ashore...been here since I escaped the explosion early this morning. Nobody, not even my wife knows I'm here...or that I'm alive. I*

was afraid to tell her for fear that murdering asshole Porter is monitoring the house. I didn't know who else to call Mr Kozlov. I don't know what to do. I'm kinda scared...ya know?" he says obviously distraught.

"Okay Frank...stay calm, man. Give me explicit directions and I'll come and get ya," I say.

"Okay...okay. I guess I'm going to have to trust you. I don't have any other options. The boathouse is at the end of a wharf...right off Lake Cascadia Boulevard...at Morgan Street. It has a red door. Knock on the door once...then three times...then once again," he says regaining his composure somewhat.

"Okay. I know the spot. Hang on...I'll be there in five minutes," I say as it is near where I often launch my kayak on the lake.

Click.

After I hang up I realize, that this could of course, be an elaborate set-up, like a tethered sacrificial lamb to lure me out in the open, maybe for an ambush. Because of something I heard in his voice, the authentic desperation, and because I kinda feel sorry for the kid...anyway, I decide to go for it. I jump out of bed, get dressed and pull out my Taurus 9 millimeter from my headboard, check the clip to make sure it's a full stick, slide it in my belt, grab my mobile and with Oso in tow, jump into the truck and head over to the boathouse.

As I get close to the boathouse on a deserted residential section of Lake Cascadia Boulevard with residences on one side of the street, and lakefront on the other, I turn off my headlights and drive by very slowly. I make one pass by the boathouse without stopping, then go around the block wait a few minutes then come back around stopping maybe 100 yards from the wharf, with the boathouse at the end. I just sit there for almost 5 minutes waiting for my eyes to get acclimated to the darkness. It's a moonless night, very still. All my senses are aroused to peak capacity. I look over at Oso, who's sitting in his customary place, the passenger seat, panting with his immense pink lolling tongue, also hyper-aware, seemingly scanning the scene, his ears pricking back and forth for alien sounds. Seeing or hearing nothing that would seem suspicious, I decide to go for it. I reach up and take the bulb out of the interior light fixture of the truck, and place it in one of the drink receptacles on the console. I put the electric windows down on both sides of the truck.

"Stay here boy. I'll be right back...*hopefully*. Don't move unless I call ya with our code. Then come a runnin'...understand *big boy*?" I whisper sinking my hands behind his furry ears playfully shaking his huge head side to side.

A low barely audible "woof-woof"...still rapidly panting, seemingly understanding everything I've said. "That's my smart booy..."

I grab a heavy mag-light flashlight out of the console...the kind the cops carry which can double as a baton. I quietly open the door and slide out putting the mag-light under my left arm, then I remove the gun from my belt and quietly chamber a round. With the flashlight off in my left hand, the gun in my right I crouch down low and slowly make my way toward the wharf, stopping every 10 yards or so, standing perfectly motionless. My eyes and ears straining for any telltale suspicious sounds or movement.

After 5 minutes of this, I'm drenched in sweat from the stress. I'm trying desperately to control my breathing and heart rate that's kicked way up. Finally, I get to the wooden gate to the wharf. I slowly push on it, but it's old. The rusty hinges start to squeak. I stop. It sounds very loud, in actuality, it's not, it's just that every noise in this state of hyper-vigilance seems excruciatingly loud. I slowly push through the gate crouching low, now walking on the wharf toward the red door of the boathouse. The creaking of the planks of the decking is deafening.

I get to the door. I stand there motionless, just listening for any sounds that might reveal the presence of any sensory anomalies for a full minute. Finally, I decide it's now or never.

Standing 3 feet to the left side of the door, "*Knock...knock-knock-knock...knock*" very lightly on the red door. I wait a full minute. Nothing. Again, the same routine only harder with the knock, like some laughable stupid "B" spy movie. I don't know why but sometimes in times of major stress, my mind behaves in ways that I can't control. Probably due to my sometimes not-so-sub-clinical A.D.D. I start thinking of *knock...knock...who's there jokes*...and almost start to laugh out loud, when the red door slowly creaks open a few inches.

"Who's there?" the thin voice says. *Perfect*. Because it sounds so pathetic...so vulnerable, it dissipates my fear...lowering my threat assessment.

"Now this is where I'm supposed to say Koz. Then you say Koz who? Then I say...Koz it's late and I'm getting tired of this bullshit," I say.

"Mr Kozlov...is that *you*?"

"It ain't the Domino's pizza delivery guy. Yea...it's the Koz."

Then the door slowly opens about half way and a head peers around it. I turn on the mag-light and shine it on his face. His eyes flutter shut from the brightness. I turn off the light. It's Gutowski alright. I slide the gun back into my belt. The door now is wide open.

"Man, am I glad to see you, I was beginning to worry you weren't comin'...it's been almost 45 minutes since we talked on the phone. You said 5 minutes," Frank says.

"Sorry Frank...no offense but I had to make sure this wasn't a set-up. That *son-of-a-bitch* Porter has been one step ahead of us...all the way. Okay. Ready to get the hell outta here?" I say.

“Yea. Speaking of pizza I could sure use something to eat...it's been over 16 hours since I've had something. Now what?” he says.

“We'll take care of that when I get you over to my place...hide you out until we can figure out where to go from here. Follow me back to the truck then get in the back camper shell of the truck and lock it from the inside. Be very quiet until you hear the password, uh...*knock-knock*. Otherwise, don't open it. Got it?”

“Yes *sir*...and thanks,” he says shaking my hand with both of his trembling hands. Probably due in no small part from lack of food.

I drive back to *Chez MAK* and back the truck up, right to the garage door and hit the auto-opener, then Oso and I get out. I rap on the rear glass of the camper and whisper, “*knock-knock*”. The tailgate springs open and he quickly and with a great natural agility climbs out into the garage. I close the tailgate.

Once we're inside the garage, I close the garage door. We go through the interior door into the kitchen, where I turn on the lights and get my first look at Frank Gutowski in some decent light. He's wearing a camo fisherman's vest and jeans...with no shoes. He's got a crew cut. Musta shed the Seattle M's cap when he swam ashore. No loss. He actually looks pretty good, considering what he must have gone through. Tough kid.

“Whatta want to eat, man?” I say.

“Anything's good. Something quick though I'm running on fumes,” he says.

“How about the old standby...peanut butter and jelly, fast and filling,” I say.

“That sounds great *sir*...thank you. Got anything to drink?”

“Want a beer? I think I could use one myself,” I say.

“Yes-*sir*,” he says.

Seeing him in the light, his demeanor, I'm suddenly struck with the realization that here's a kid who went to war for this country having served with honor and distinction, putting his life on the line. A decent kid, polite and appreciative. I get the old tennis ball in my throat, sad that he's having to go through such *shit*. Like T-How said...*a good guy...in a bad situation*. It awakens some deep paternal instinct in me to try to protect him from the *what's coming...whatever it is*. It ain't going to be pretty, no matter how it shakes out. His life, and that of his wife and child are about to drastically change along with any sense of normalcy from his prior life. I hand him a beer which he chugs, then another which he commences sipping, while I get busy making P-B 'n J's. As fast as I can make them, they're disappearing. Finally, after four of those he shakes his head. “Enough. That really hit the spot. Thanks.”

“Okay, Frank. Let's go upstairs...you can bed down in the guest bedroom. Tomorrow over breakfast we can talk more about where we go from here. But first I'll want hear your story about your involvement and what you know about the cover-up...every last detail,” I say.

“Sounds good Mr Kozlov. Sorry sir, after I get a little rest, I'll be in better shape tomorrow morning...for a debriefing. And again, thank you *sir*.” he says again shaking my hand effusively.

Debriefing. They trained our warriors well. In the case of Ernest Porter a little *too* well. I show him to his room. “You can call me Koz. And you're welcome...son. *Son?* There's a guest bathroom with a shower down the hall, with towels and guest toothbrush etcetera in the med-cabinet. Good night.”

“Good night, *sir*,” he says.

Then Oso and I retire to my room. I look at the digital red LED clock, it's now almost 2:30 AM, and there ain't no way I am going to go to sleep. Oso jumps up on the bed and is fast asleep in less than five minutes...*dulces sueños, mi amigo*...sweet dreams my friend...*los dos de ustedes*...the both of you.

My attention is captured by the red LED on my answering machine frantically flashing, indicating a message. It must have come in after I left...just past midnight.

I hit the play message button. For about 5 seconds there is nothing. Then when a voice begins to speak—the machine automatically truncates the recording process when it doesn't detect voice.

“Hey, it's *mak-too*. I uh...feel a little awk...” It's a nice voice, *his* voice. Eerily it has my same timbre, like a recording of my *own* voice.

Yikes. That's the voice of my kid...Jesus Christ. Has this been one helluva a day, and night? Yes indeed. I go back downstairs to the living room, and flop in my reading rocking chair, comfortable like an old friend. I lay my Taurus 9 next to me just in case. Rocking back and forth, gazing out at the mesmerizing dancing reflections from the lights of the houses across the lake.

I let my mind just wander where it wants to go, trying to empty it of the depressing darkness of all the unnecessary death and destruction caused by the pipeline explosion, and the murders of innocent folks, caused essentially by the ancient verity *root of all evil...the love of money*.

Although I'm no serious reader of the Bible, truth is truth, no matter where or how you find it. Man innately knows *real truth* when he sees...and hears it—most especially the distillation of the Gospel...or the Bible 2.0, the so-called New Testament. *Do not do unto others as you would not have them do on to you*.

Hmm...over two millenia, and not much has changed. Self-interest, sadly, when given the choice, usually prevails. So just how much hope realistically, can one muster that the considerable human sacrifice necessary to deal with the existential crisis of climate change and the aberrant, corrupt politics that precipitated it? Lotto odds. But it is that slender sliver of hope that somehow always compels one to buy a ticket.

To live without hope is to cease to live. A rare ray of sunlight from the melancholic Slavic author, my peeps, of the dark parable of greed, Crime and Punishment. Having gambled away much of his fortune, unable to pay his bills or afford proper meals he commits murder. In the process, he slays his own soul with guilt.

The darkness of my spirit slowly begins to lift as the warm light of sunrise slowly starts to illuminate my consciousness...bathing the shore across the lake. Ah...the cycle of life in all its mundane majesty and beauty. The certainty of sunrise comforts me. Fading up from black, the slashes of color, the reds, oranges and yellows. The Fall colors of the Cottonwoods, Alders and Maples never seemed more beautiful, more alive. Once again I'm filled with an overwhelming sense of gratitude—the awe and wonderment of the cycle of life and the beauty of *my* cathedral, my sacred place of worship, nature.

Having fallen asleep, still in my rocking chair, I am awakened by some noise coming from the kitchen. I reflexively grab the 9 millimeter immediately hyper aware from the massive injection of adrenalin. But the smell of brewing coffee wafting up my nostrils starts to lower my flight-or-flight response as I start to come down, relaxing my death-grip on the nine.

I turn to face the kitchen and find Frank Gutowski bustling about. He's clean-shaven, fully dressed almost comically so, wearing some clothes of mine that I laid out for him at his bedroom door. The tee-shirt and the pants are floating on him with pant legs rolled up, but at least they're dry and clean. I had also set out a pair of Hawk's old runners which should be big enough, since he had jettisoned his heavy boots just before diving into the icy cold lake water, to save himself from the certain death of the ensuing explosion concocted by Ernest Porter.

The kitchen clock says it's already 8:13 AM. Now what?

Hawk wanders into the kitchen with his Starbuck's coffee bucket grafted to his left hand, walks up to Frank Gutowski, extends his massive paw and says, "Hawk Shapiro."

"Frank Gutowski," he says meeting his gaze extending his hand shaking Hawk's vigorously.

"Frank, aren't you supposed to be uh...*dead*?" Hawk says.

I stand up. Throwing my arms high above me, getting a good stretch, and with a classic Twain-ism. "Uh...the rumors of his death are greatly exaggerated, Hawk," I say.

"My mistake. By the way, uh...Koz, just curious..." he says nodding at Frank.

"Hawkster...it's a *l-o-o-ng st-o-o-ry*. Which we intend to explore in exhaustive detail...after we've had some breakfast," I say.

"Of course...the most important meal of the day. So...have you called Tara or T-How yet and informed them of this uh...miraculous Lazarus redux?" Hawk says.

“Nope...just woke myself. Was kind of a long night, wasn't it Frank? By the way did you sleep okay?” I say.

“Yes-*sir*...thank you. Slept the best I have in over 4 weeks. And it was a *very* long night. One of the longest days...and nights of my life, since my combat days,” Frank says.

“So far,” the Hawkster adds ominously.

“Okay. Frank, you any good in the kitchen?” I say.

Yes-*sir*. I do most of the cooking at home. Cindy my wife is not uh...very domestic. She mostly takes care of our dear daughter who's disabled...it's a 24-7 job,” he says matter-of-factly without a trace of self-pity.

“Okay, then why don't you throw some breakfast together for us...everything you need is in the fridge. Eggs and bacon etcetera,” I say.

“Done, *sir*. But before I make breakfast, do you think I could call my wife? She must be going absolutely crazy...and my dear little girl...thinking I've been killed,” Frank says.

I look at Hawk, he shakes his head, “Frank...sorry, but unless we can be sure that your home phone is still not being monitored by Porter, I'd have to say it's not a good idea. Does she have a mobile phone so you could call or text her?” I say.

“Nope...she's pretty lame with technology,” Frank says.

“Then I'd suggest this. Write out a letter in your own handwriting...we'll help you compose it. Do not disclose your location...and make *damn* sure that she tells no-one and I mean no-one...not even her family that you're *not* dead. Then we'll have it delivered FEDEX to your door. If you...or she tells anyone that you're alive...you, her and your daughter could be in extreme jeopardy. *Do you understand Frank?*” I say.

“Yes-*sir*. After breakfast, I'll write something out. How long will I have to remain in hiding, *sir*?” Frank says.

“Frank...until we can get confirmation from the DA...and the Feds that they are going to give you and your family protection, and relocation, as long as this Porter is at large, you'll need to stay hidden. That's what the video will attempt to do. To demonstrate your cooperation and value to the Feds, to take down the bad guys, including the suits, behind the cover-up. Also, we need to get you a good criminal defense attorney to represent you in the negotiations with the DA and the Feds,” I say.

“Sir, I can't afford a high-priced attorney like that,” Frank says.

“We'll push very hard to get the Feds to pay for it. In the meantime I'll help you out until that gets resolved. Hawk, ya think your Daddy S. G. would enjoy an all expense paid trip to the Pacific Northwest to see the beautiful Fall colors?” I say.

“I could ask. Knowing Pop's appetite for a good legal fight, I wouldn't be surprised. He's always in search for a little fresh meat.”

“On rye?” I say

“Lean...very lean, with a dill pickle and a side of slaw. I'm sure he'd *just* love having an Uncle Sammy sandwich for lunch. I'll call him later today,” Hawk says.

“In the meantime...I'm going to have my first of many, cups of Joe. Then I'm going to call Tara and Terrence and give 'em a heads up and invite them over for our little morning debriefin' session with Frank here,” I say.

“Sir, uh...Koz and Hawk, how do you like your eggs?” Frank says.

“Cooked,” Hawk says

“In keeping with the theme of the day...scrambled of course. Hawk, lets setup two camcorders...both on tripod with a few portable lights for Frank's TV debut. We'll do a fixed two cam shoot...medium...and close-up, while Tara and I are doing the interview with Frank.

You'll run the switcher from Cam 1 to Cam 2 real time, recording on a DV tape deck. Switch to close-up for emphasis on the money shots, on my hand cue. But we'll shoot *iso*...so lock the time codes...recording both audio and video on both camcorders for back-up and in case we want to post the cuts from one cam to the other later on.

And oh, *Monsieur réalisateur*...superimpose the date and time of day continuously on the bottom of the screen to make it legal...for admissibility in a court trial,” I say.

“Got it, *mon capitaine*,” Hawk says disappearing down the stairs to set up everything in our mini-TV studio downstairs.

- Chapter 70 -

By 10 AM, we've finished with breakfast, had our fill of coffee, and have the kitchen put back in order when Tara and Terrence show up. I briefly update them about Frank and our intent to create a video to take to the Feds to negotiate a deal for the kid. They're shocked but relieved that the kid's okay. They agree to help...under certain conditions.

We all go downstairs to the studio, and take a seat at the conference table.

Frank remembers Terrence from his first recorded interview. Terrence is very affable and gracious toward Frank, a fellow vet offering words of encouragement. No guarantees but if he's willing to cooperate...

Tara says, "Mr Gutowski...are you willing to state for the record under oath in front of a camera your involvement in the coverup...and are you further willing without reservation to specifically implicate anyone...and everyone who you may have reason to believe was involved or had knowledge of the cover-up?" she says.

"Yes, ma'am...I am. Honestly, I'm glad this is finally coming to head. I don't care what happens to me...I just want to make sure my family is taken care. My dear daughter, especially who is physically and emotionally challenged and will require care for the rest of her life," Frank says.

Jezus...the poor kid...and the hapless parents.

"Frank do you need any time to review the events...names, dates etcetera?" I say.

"No sir...I think I can remember pretty much everything. When I was in the military...behind enemy lines in Iraq we were trained to commit everything to memory so if we were captured they would not have access to any info about us...or what we had done," Frank says.

"Okay...it's showtime Frankie boy. Here's how it will work. We're going to mic you and put you in front of two cameras. Do not look at either of the cameras. Maintain eye contact with me or Ms Takahashi at all times. She will swear you in...and your statement will then be under oath and for the record," I say.

Frank is seated in a chair, mic'd with a black backdrop, like a Charlie Rose interview with low key lighting.

"Ready, Frank?" I say.

"Yes-sir, I am," Frank says.

Frank, Tara and I do a...*testing 1...2...3...* mic test for levels and we're good to go.

“Okay Hawk...*action*,” I say.

“Tape is rolling...*speed*,” Hawk says from the control room. I slate it with a clack to synch the audio on multiple cams, with the time and date, subject's name, and we're off and rolling, with Hawk switching from Cam 1 medium, to Cam 2 closeup to be able to gauge his eyes for veracity and emphasis during crucial parts of his statement.

The video interview lasts almost two hours. Frank's recall is impressive, times, dates...and names. With his natural presence in front of the camera he is a very credible witness. Relaxed, authentic and with a charming military deference...*yes-sir...no-sir and ma'am*. His answers to both Tara's and my questions are in complete sentences, unambiguous and in no way self-serving or evasive.

He starts out by giving all his vitals, full name, age, date of birth etcetera. Then describing his dates of military service, history and his background in pyrotechnics. He then goes on to describe that day when he was working at the Fernwood pipeline monitoring station, in great detail, that he had forgotten to reconnect the Ethernet cable to the VAX computer...everything. That it was an internal failure of the system, that the low pressure sensor shut-off valve had malfunctioned, and that the redundancy had failed to prevent the continued leak, partly because of the inability of the staff to manage the crisis due to inadequate training of the personnel. He absolves Tom Hyatt, the technician on duty at the time of any fault for the malfeasance leading up to the event. And even though he was not present in the monitoring station, during the actual escape event, Frank takes full responsibility for his role in the incident.

He then describes in detail how Porter hired him, and that he received \$5,000 in cash to make it look like an external charge caused the rupture and how he actually accomplished it. He describes the condition of the 16 inch pipeline before he attached the charge...that it had failed from internal forces, as the pipe metal was flayed out.

He names, Ernest Porter, Howard Roland, Corporate VP of NPI, and George Gunderson, the Regional System Administrator, all as having participated or having knowledge of the coverup. He also states that when Ernest Porter paid him the cash for his part in the coverup, that he bragged to him about how it was *so* easy to 'terminate' Jenifer Rogers and the Dr and Mrs Tehrani in Vancouver BC.

He then goes on to describe the attempt on his life by Ernest Porter to silence him with a bomb planted on his 22 foot outboard C-Dory fishing boat:

Friday and Saturday are my normal days off. I usually go fishing early in the morning...sometimes in the Bay...or on Cascadia Lake. On the 26th of October yesterday morning, uh...Friday...about 6 AM, I launched my boat, the Alicia May named after my daughter, from the Bloedel Donovan Park boat

launch. By about 6:30 AM, I was on my way out, on the lake to go fishing.

As is my normal procedure, I opened the hatch to the bilge area, to make sure the bilge pump was operating, and that there was no excessive water in the bilge. Immediately I noticed a suspicious object lashed to the gas tank in the bilge. There was a red LED digital readout connected to it.

I can still remember the numbers...as it was counting down from 1:27 seconds down to zero. From my past experience I immediately recognized that it was a bomb...probably attached to the ignition circuit, with a programmed delay of several minutes from the time it sensed voltage from the ignition. I was about a half-mile from shore at the time. I had just enough time to pull off of my heavy fishing boots and dive into the water...just before the bomb blasted the boat to smithereens. I knew immediately that it was Ernest Porter's M-O. I swam ashore, terrified. I broke into a boathouse not far from where I landed on shore. I hid there, not knowing what to do...or who to call...for almost 16 hours. I finally remembered Mr Kozlov's card in my wallet. I called him about midnight and he came and picked me up.

“Francis Adam Gutowski, has this statement been given voluntarily, and have you understood all the questions you have been asked and have all your answers been true and correct to the best of your knowledge, under penalty of perjury?” I say.

“Yes-sir...they have,” Frank says.

“Have you in any way been forced or coerced...to give this statement under any conditions of duress, or have you been promised any special treatment, such as non-prosecution, or reduction in your sentence, protection or relocation, in exchange for giving this statement under oath?” Tara says.

“No ma'am, I have not,” he says.

“That concludes this statement with Francis Adam Gutowski on Saturday, October 27, 2001 at 12:37 PM.” I say.

It's Saturday night, so *Negrito* has decided to take the night off...all killin' and no playin' makes for a dull Ernie-boy. He's been out at the Royal Bar and Nightclub on Holly Ave, drinking beer and playing pool all night. He's won a lot of money, hustling the local rubes, so about 10:30 he gets bored and decides to return to his hotel room and watch some pay-per-view porn with his winnings.

At about 11 PM, Ernie Porter pulls into the parking lot of the Lakeway Inn, and parks the '97 Ford Explorer right next to the Black

Suburban. Parked close by it is an old beat-up Ford Van, rusty with primer spots all over. *Probably some homeless guy, Lot Camping.*

As Porter gets out of the Explorer, and starts walking toward his hotel room, the side door of the old Van silently slides open. Two very large men, wearing ski masks, and gloves, dressed in all black, get out and start walking behind Porter. With great stealth, noiselessly they quickly catch up to him from behind, one of the men puts a Taser on Porter's neck and zaps him. He falls like a stone without making a sound. As he's laying on the ground face down, the man keeps the Taser on his neck, zapping him every 30 seconds to insure the deadly Black Mamba is incapacitated. The other man, removes his gun, tucked in the back of his belt under Porter's three quarter length windbreaker and the car keys to the Explorer from the pocket of his jacket.

The men move with quiet calm, purpose and economy of movement, communicating wordlessly with military precision, using hand signals.

Realizing that there's probably video surveillance on the parking lot 24/7 a third man slowly, with headlights off, inconspicuously drives up to the other men. They place Porter, totally incapacitated by the Taser, inside the van. One of the men ties Porter up, while the other man, quickly wraps duct tape around his head covering his mouth. The man with keys, then gets into the Explorer and follows the van as it slowly drives off heading West on Holly Avenue until eventually they get to the parking lot at Zuanich Point at the marina, where there are lot of old beat-up vehicles that the commercial fishermen leave there for sometimes weeks on end while out fishing. They then park the stolen, hot-wired Van near one of the warehouses for the commercial fisherman storage area from where they had 'borrowed' it, next to some other old beaters. They walk over to the waiting Explorer, idling nearby.

They throw the rear door up, and move Porter from the Van, to the rear cargo compartment of the Explorer, beside the THULE roof box. One of the men locks the Van doors from the outside. The one with the gun climbs in back with Porter...the other one gets behind the wheel, with the third man in the front passenger seat. The whole extraction takes less than 30 minutes.

The man in the passenger seat, takes out his mobile phone, punches in a text message...*paleface geronimo*

Almost immediately a reply text, *geronimo >>>*

Click.

They drive off into the night, to the Lumish Indian Reservation to deliver their cargo...and await further instructions.

Part Ten - Rebirth -

- Chapter 71 -

The following night at about 11:30, the phone rings. Again the caller ID shows *blocked*.

“Hel-lo...” I say impatiently.

“Father?” the voice says...my heart just melts, my eyes fill with tears.

“*Michael?*” I say.

“What...you've got more than one *illegitimate* son?” the voice says.

Jezus...who knew the kid was *Jewish*? That voice, with that attitude...that edge, that definitely confirms...he's my kid. *Great*...an Indian Don Rickles I got for a son. And mit da the Hawkster? *Oy ve*.

“What...*you* were expecting the Lone Ranger uh...*Tonto*?” I say which gets a nice chortle. Yeah...the ol' man can *still kill*.

“Okay Paw. You're pretty funny...for a *paleface*,” Michael says with a nice out loud laugh identical to mine.

“It has been many moons, my son,” I say doing a lame Jay Silverheels, “...about 396, but who's counting.”

“Yes, Great *Very White* Father...the Sun has set on many distant horizons...about uh...12,045, but who's counting,” Michael says.

“Did you do *actually do that in your head?*” I ask *very* impressed.

“One of the many skills required for Indian Brave's right of passage into modern manhood is learn calculator app on phone,” he says followed with a grunt.

So we talk for over 2 hours. It's very natural and surprisingly with no awkward silences. He tells me about his childhood and his life on the reservation growing up with his mother and grandfather Leonard Eagle Feather.

When he starts to tell me about his mother, his tone becomes more somber, reverential. I sense the deep bond that he had with his mother, as I still do with mine. *Wait 'til Pia finds out she has a grandson!* I tell him how much I loved his Mother, and how sorry I was to hear of her passing.

“You mean her murder. Even after all these years...neither Grandfather nor I have ever gotten over it. It is a deep wound that refuses to heal...until...” he says.

Finally, he tells me about his work and that with his resources at his job, the whole time he has been able to actually hack our network computers, and to track the whereabouts of Ernest Porter down to his GPS coordinates. He says he hacked our network because he became

aware of the intrusion by the bad guys and needed to know what they might know. How? He won't tell me. He also tells me that he thinks that Hawk and I—that our lives may be in grave danger. That this Porter is a *very bad dude* and to be *very careful*. He gives me the number to his personal mobile phone. And promises to send some photos when he can get around to it.

“Are you going to be in town for the next few weeks? I want you to have some of mother's things...that are very personal about you and her,” he says.

“Well that would be wonderful...here's my address...” I start to say.

“Already got it,” he says. *Jesuz...is there anybody who doesn't have my address?*

“Thanks, J-R. Nope...not going anywhere for a while. Your uh...Uncle Hawk and I have some work to finish up on this investigation of the pipeline blast,” I say.

We sign off with a promise to connect at least weekly by phone. I am in a state of ecstasy. *Gee...what a swell son I've got*, I say out loud, already bursting with cliché fatherly pride. I can hardly wait to get the pictures so I can *bore the hell* out of Hawk proudly talking about my...*son*.

Meanwhile, S.G. Shapiro flies in from NYC. He's staying with Hawk and I and Frank Gutowski, who has made contact with his wife and daughter as arranged, so they now know that he is still alive.

Simon Gabriel Shapiro, is now in his early 80s although he won't cop to it. He's everything as advertised. Bombastic and brilliant, and absolutely charming with everyone but Hawk—some lingering *baggage* still there. He still has an eye for the ladies. Hawk has not *come out* with S.G....yet, so there's that. But I sense that S.G. suspects it. Maybe the reason for his estrangement. Old school...no *bubbelahs*...no grand-kids to dote over, or carry on the venerable and August Shapiro Legal Brand.

S.G. is about 5'6” balding with an enormous, ostrich egg cranium...probably with a brain to match. Runs in da family. His chin is strong and pugnacious, his clear blue penetrating eyes are huge behind his bifocals, like large blue exotic fish swimming in an aquarium. His shirt is a little *100% pure wrinkle-free polyester* heliotrope number with wide black vertical stripes *to give him a little more length*. He still wears *Sans-a-belt* double-knit slacks almost up to his armpits, which went out of style in the late 70s so he must have standing purchase order at the local Value Village for any new arrivals. Finishing up this ensemble of sartorial chaos, is a pair of hot pink Nike trainers...*the price was slashed to half...so unh? I can live mit da color*.

He meets young Frank Gutowski, and immediately they connect. Turns out that Frank's peeps a few generations ago, are from the Bronx. S.G. views the video interview, and agrees to represent him

pro bono in negotiating with the Feds for some kind of deal to testify. I feel kinda sorry for the Fed attorneys assigned to the case, blithely walking into The Yiddish Legal Buzz-saw.

Tara and Terrence are just wrapping up their investigation, and scheduled to leave in the next few days to return to NTSB Western Headquarters in Federal Way, about an hour South of Seattle, about a 3 hour drive away. Hmm. *Very doable*.

More on that...later.

Things seem to be settling back to normal. *Ha!*

A week later, one morning about nine, there's a knock on the door. Oso starts barking and whining...very uncharacteristic for him. He senses something.

With Porter still in free-range mode, I unholster my Taurus which both Hawk and I are now packing, chamber a round, and let hang down by my right leg. I slowly, warily open the door to see an older gentleman. In the background parked on the street, is a newer white Ford Panel Van, with the words *Navajo Nation - Santa Fe New Mexico* on the passenger door. My *gawd*, it's Leonard Eagle Feather standing there, almost 30 years older but still powerfully built, standing erect, with an aura of dignity befitting a Chief. With his now completely white hair pulled back into pony tail—pure male potency.

Next to him is a tall slender young man, with jet black thick hair, in a traditional Brave cut, with a black laptop computer case hanging from his shoulder. The paradox of that image does not escape me. The omnipresent technology seems to seep, permeate and yes, insinuate itself, even into the most resistant of ancient cultures. Sadly, it's inescapable.

The young Brave is holding beautiful hand carved wooden box, almost reverently with both hands.

“We were just in the neighborhood on some business...and decided to stop by and pay you our regards,” Leonard Eagle Feather says, still possessing that ironic twinkle in his eyes that I remember from long ago. Oso immediately runs up to the young man, and starts licking his hand. Hmm...*old pals? My Gawd...is this my son?*

“Michael?” I say in disbelief.

“Hi Paw. I said I'd get these things from mother to you...so here you are,” he says handing the box to me.

“Hamma...hamma...” I say which brings Hawk out from the living room where's he been sitting with S. G. incessantly wrangling about some inane thing.

“What's the matter Ralphie?” he says, then seeing Michael, he just smiles.

I hand the box to Hawk and reach out a grab my son. I give him a big bear hug, with Oso barking and cavorting back and forth. *Gawd he*

feels good. He returns the hug. With tears streaming down my cheeks, I look over to see Leonard with a big wide grin on his face. Then to Hawk who's beaming like the proud Uncle.

Hawk says, "Com'mon in. Mick here, is a little dumbstruck. Enjoy it while you can," he says swinging the door wide. Michael and I walk inside with my arm over his shoulder. He's slender but well-built with wide shoulders and narrow hips, maybe 6'4". He's wearing moccasins. He moves with the smooth rhythmic motion of a cougar. He's got his mother's beautiful features, her mouth and lips, my green eyes, chin, and...*honker*, poor kid. And that lanky body, not a bad lookin' combo if I do say so myself...and I do.

The commotion brings S.G. out from the living room. Hawk makes the introductions. "Daddy...this is Leonard Eagle Feather...and Mick's son, Michael," he says.

S.G.'s face lights up, "*The Leonard Eagle Feather, Chief of the Navajo from Santa Fe New Mexico?*" S.G. says.

"Why yes...did our people massacre one of your wagon trains?" Leonard says with that ever-present twinkle in his eyes.

"Not likely...my people, the Shapiro's of da Bronx, couldn't...*no...wouldn't*, be *caught dead* on the prairie. No, we didn't ride the wagons...we just sold them...twice. After a few massacres, thank you very much, one here...one there, pretty soon the pilgrims came back with their tail between their legs. Practically gave 'em away. Conestoga Wagon Resales...an LLC of course," S.G. says.

"*Of course.* And you sir, are *The Simon Gabriel Shapiro...champion of the downtrodden?* Your illustrious reputation precedes you. We Humble Savages salute you *sir.*" Leonard says head bowed in exaggerated deference.

"Tisk tisk. But seriously, uh...Chief, I have heard of your courageous fight against the government land grab over that pipeline...and I salute *you more...sir!* The plight of the Noble Savage battling the Juggernaut Uncle Sammy...armed only mit bows and arrows, yet. Absolutely exalting, *sir!*" S.G. says, holding up his hands like Spielberg framing a shot for an epic cinematic saga of the Old West.

This has got the potential of turning into a real cheesy Borscht Belt comedy act. The Rabbi and the Indian Chief. *So a Rabbi walks into a bar...*

We go into the living room, and everybody takes a seat, with me sitting next to Michael on the sofa.

Hawk brings out a tray with a coffee pot, cups and pastries. He can be so domestic when he wants to. Someday, he'll make somebody a good wifey.

"Seriously Leonard...what business have you here?" I say, for the occasion, seamlessly falling into Native American syntax.

“Well...we have some business to conduct with our Native American Brothers...the Lumish Tribe. We are here to pick up something that they are holding for us. And I thought it might be nice if we dropped in...so you could spend some time with your son, Michael. You know, uh...how do you white folks say it...*to bond?*” he says.

“Sure...bonding's good. Works for me. Great...so how long can you stay Michael?” I say.

“I've got a week's vacation. Gotta be back to work in about 5 days...took 2 days to drive here,” he says.

“Great...stay here. We'll transport you back in time for your work...not a problem. We definitely got some serious make-up time...about 30 years worth,” I say.

“Thanks Paw. I hear there are these new fangled things called *airplanes*...that can actually *fly*,” he says.

“Yes, my son...the White-man's Great Silver Bird in the Sky,” I say.

“How about you Leonard?”

“We drove here...so I could personally take delivery. I have to pick up my cargo early tomorrow morning from the Lumish on their reservation, then got to be back to Santa Fe in 3 days...for a big *heapum* uh...*pow wow*,” he says again with the ironic twinkle in his eyes.

“Alright then. Tonight we'll have dinner here...of course everyone can stay here, there's plenty of room for you, Leonard. What does everyone want for dinner? Leonard?”

“Ordinarily I'd have my usual Chicken Cordon Bleu with a luscious cream sauce...but tonight on this rather special occasion, I'm feelin' rather adventurous...how about some barbequed spare ribs...pork baby backs?” Leonard says grinning wryly at S.G.

“S.G.?” I say.

“Chief, what...no Buffalo meat? *Oy ve*...pork spare ribs? Okay, I'll call your bluff Chiefy. Sure...I can put any man unda da table eatin' corned beef brisket, *very* lean of course, *or* spare ribs,” says S.G. the obsessively competitive Great Legal Lion, which is probably why he is such an effective and staunch advocate and formidable adversary.

“I'll grill some beef steaks...in case ya change your mind S.G.” I say.

“New Yoks?” S.G. says.

“Of *co-orse*. Okay. Steaks work for everyone then?” I say.

“Oso?” I say since he eats what I eat, only more.

“*woof-woof*” he says.

“The motion is carried unanimously. Done,” I say.

After dinner, Hawk, S.G., Leonard, Michael, Frank Gutowski and I...and of course Oso, are discussing the investigation and Frank's difficult situation.

Because Ernest Porter is still at large, Frank's still staying with me for almost a week, while S.G. is negotiating with the Feds to get him the best deal he can in exchange for his testimony, which could blow the whole cover-up and send some suits to some serious slam time. They're close to a deal.

"So S.G., how are the negotiations going with the Feds?" I say

"After they saw the video uh...*deposition*," he says with air quotes "everything is a go...in exchange for Frank's testimony. No jail, plead to criminal negligence and conspiracy, sentence suspended. Protection up to and including the trial, but the stickler is relocation, which we want just in case they don't catch this psycho Porter," S.G. says.

"How long do you think this is going to have to go on. I miss my daughter terribly," Frank says his eyes tearing up.

"I know kid...it's a toughie for ya. Be patient...we're close. Maybe another few days," S.G. says.

"What about the DA?" Hawk asks.

"The local DA Allison will sign off on the deal with Frank...reluctantly, clearing the Jenifer Rogers homicide in the process. But he wants to throw the book, apparently the Old Testament, at the rest. He wants blood...*murder one* for everybody, includin' the receptionist who answers the phone at NPI. The Federal Prosecutor, Chadwick H. Burrows a career politician, is a little more realistic. But his mouth is waterin'. Taking down some Armani's would *not* hurt his considerable political aspirations," S.G. says.

"Koz, in the meantime, do you think we could find a way for me to visit my daughter? She must feel terribly confused and frightened without me there," Frank says.

"Frank...as you well know, this Porter is very desperate and ruthless...and resourceful. If he should find out that you're alive...if your wife has somehow allowed that to become known to him...he could be lying in wait. You're really the only threat left. Without your direct testimony, the Feds really have no case...not one they can win just on circumstantial evidence anyway, even with the recorded deposition."

"Hey Paw...I've got some things of mother's I wanted to give you. Think we could do that now?" Michael says.

"Yea...sure...okay, if you think this is a good time," I say quizzically.

"Can we go someplace kinda private?" he says.

"Sure...my office downstairs...let's go," I say.

Michael walks over to the coffee table in the living room, picks up the wooden box, and we go downstairs. We sit down at the conference table.

"Before we get started with mother's mementos...there's something we need to talk about. That poor guy, Frank's living in constant fear for his family and himself that this psycho Porter is on the

loose. What I'm about to tell you of course is in strict confidence, okay Paw?" he says which I like the sound of...Paw.

"Okay Michael...of course," I say

"The *threat vector*...as Ernest Porter aka *El Negrito* refers to anyone he perceives as a danger to him or his operation...has been *neutralized*," Michael says.

"I don't understand Michael. How could you possibly know this...and how can you be so sure?" I say.

"I'll get to that a little later, Paw. As I told you on the phone. Grandfather and I have never forgotten that mother was murdered on that dark deserted desert highway...it was a terrible death. As we drove up...as we tried desperately to rescue her from the flaming wreckage. The last words that left her lips as she was dying...was your name...*Mickey*... *Mickey*...she yelled," he says.

"*My gawd!* Michael..." I say absolutely overwhelmed with emotion, tears pouring down my cheeks.

"Yes...she loved you deeply. *Only you*...as far as I know she never was with another man," he says.

I immediately break-down and begin sobbing uncontrollably. Michael comes over to me, stands me up and wraps his long strong arms around me, hugging me tightly, comforting me with, "It's okay Paw...it's okay. Let it out. We all miss her terribly...the void, the unfathomable pain, has never left...it never will. But for Grandfather, me...and now you, the first step toward healing is to seek, and render justice for mother. That's why Grandfather is here. To pick up *not* something...but *someone*. To bring the murderer, Ernest Porter to justice...in accordance with our tribal customs," he says, now the comforting adult in the relationship.

"Are you saying that you have located Porter?" I say pulling back.

"Yes...he's been more than located. An *Injun extradition*. And that is all I think you should know. But just know that after all these years, justice is finally being served for mother...for Grandfather, me and now...you," he says smiling benignly. *An old soul...such wisdom for his years.*

"What are you going to do with Porter?" I say.

"He will be returned to Santa Fe...to stand trial, a tribal trial, with the sentence being carried out in accordance with tribal custom. Like punishment for the crime. *Fire*. Again...that's all I think I should I tell you," he says.

"Mikey, if your Grandfather or you are implicated in his uh...extradition and or Porter's death...you could be facing serious criminal charges, son," I say worried sick.

"We know that Paw. But what you don't know is how much I know about Porter...from the work I do. He has no one...that loves or even cares about him...not really. No wife or children. He's a poster

psychopath. His disappearance would be like taking your hand out of pail of water...that is the impression he will have left when he's gone. He's like a vicious animal with rabies...that must be *put-down*." he says with an almost disquieting ferocity, from his warrior gene pool?

"Okay, son. I can see that you...and Leonard have given this a lot of thought. I won't try to talk you out of it. I guess deep down inside I feel the same way about justice for your dear mother. But frankly, I doubt that I would have had the courage to do what you're doing. Closed subject. Done deal," I say giving Michael a hug.

"Okay...one last thing on Porter. Frank Gutowski and I have kinda connected...and we're going to stay in touch. He's good guy, Paw. In light of this information, I think it may be safe now for Frank to be reunited with his family...with his little girl whom he obviously loves very much," he says.

"Agreed. Okay...I'll set it up. Thank you, son for your kindness in thinking about Frank's situation. You got that from your dear mother...always thinking of others first," I say.

"And from *you* I got what? My smart mouth? *Thanks a lot*," he says grinning, playfully punching my arm.

"*Coulda* done worse..." I say.

"Yea. Much...*much* worse. So...I'm going to leave you alone with these mementos from mother. They will be very personal for you. I read them right after her death...I cried for days. Here Paw," he says handing me the box.

"Okay, son. Thanks. I think I'd like to spend some time alone...with this. We'll talk later," I say.

"Sure...anytime. *Anytime at all*," he says getting up leaving me alone with the box giving me a reassuring pat on my shoulder.

I pry open the lid of the box to reveal maybe 10 letters wrapped with pink ribbon neatly tied with a bow, still in their original tear-stained envelopes, addressed but never mailed to me at my old address in L.A. I carefully, reverentially untie the pink ribbon...then open the first letter dated almost 30 years ago, and begin reading with my teardrops adding to the already tear-stained letter.

Dearest Mickey...we have a son...

- Chapter 72 -

Well...the Feds finally reach agreement on the disposition of Frank Gutowski's case. In exchange for his testimony, no jail, and at S.G.'s urging, an Alford guilty plea is entered, where he proclaims he is innocent of the crime, but admits that the prosecution has enough evidence to convict, for criminal negligence and conspiracy with a suspended sentence, for his part in the disaster. After I confide in S.G. about Porter's *extradition*, he removes the demand for FBI relocation and the deal flies through the Byzantine Bureaucracy. As Frank Gutowski embarks on a new chapter in his life, he knows that we'll always be there for him...Uncle Koz and Uncle Hawk.

The first order of business is to get Frank into treatment at the VA for his PTSD, to give him at least a shot at some semblance of a normal life. He's an articulate kid...kind and caring. And he's expressed an interest in returning to teaching, maybe working with physically and emotionally challenged children like his daughter. If he can get the PTSD under control, he could become a very talented, effective educator.

On November 6th, in a major national media event, the Federal Prosecutor Chadwick H. Burrows, calls a press conference. Carefully choreographed and scheduled to maximize national viewing, standing beside him is the now erect DA John Allison in a newly purchased well-tailored suit. It is carried by CNN and all the major broadcast affiliates, with video cutaways of the perps in handcuffs being ignominiously frog-marched into the gyrating blue and red flashing lights of waiting police cars. Behind a podium on the steps of the Federal Building with the iconic Space Needle of Seattle in the background, in front of a gaggle of microphones and TV cameras and the constant cacophony of clacking and flashes of cameras:

Good morning. My name is Chadwick H. Burrows, I am the Federal Prosecutor for the Northwest Region.

Pausing dramatically, impeccably sartorial in *Brooks Brothers*, hair perfectly coiffed posing for the cameras, allowing his name to seep into the deep dark crevices of the *machina ex politica* punctuated by *Clack-flash clack-flash*.

On October 10, 2001 at approximately 3 PM local time, the City of Moody Seaport was rocked by the explosion of a

gasoline pipeline. Resulting in the death of 26 people, with many serious, some critical injuries and many millions of dollars in property damage.

The cause of the horrific explosion of the pipeline was initially thought to be from an Islamist Terrorist attack on the American Homeland. The revelation of certain subsequent substantive facts coming to light have proved that initial assumption to be an incorrect one.

Due to an exhaustive investigation by the NTSB, and others, it was revealed that the actual cause of the explosion was due to systemic failure of the pipeline exclusively from internal causes. The resultant loss of life, bodily injury and massive property damage, was primarily caused by gross negligence by the pipeline operator for failure to properly mitigate the flow of the deadly accelerant in a timely fashion after the rupture.

Also uncovered by the FBI at the direction of Special Agent Charles Cunningham of the Seattle office, working in concert with local law enforcement and Cascadia County District Attorney John Allison, was an elaborate conspiracy of a cover-up by employees, and agents acting at the direction of certain individuals in management of the parent company, National Petroleum Incorporated, and its subsidiary Cascadia Pipeline, that operate the pipeline.

This morning I am announcing the indictment of the following individuals.

Mr Howard Roland Vice President of Operations NPI, on the charge of criminal conspiracy, and conspiracy to commit murder, who is currently in custody in Houston Texas.

Mr George Gunderson Regional System Manager of Cascadia Pipeline, on a charge of criminal conspiracy. Mr Gunderson is currently in custody in Cascadia County jail. He is cooperating completely with authorities in the continuing investigation. Further indictments are expected as this conspiracy is further unraveled.

Mr Ernest Porter, who is the owner and operator of Silent Hand Ops, a contract corporate security company, the charge of criminal conspiracy has been filed. Mr Porter also been indicted for murder in the first degree of a Ms Jenifer Rogers, and her unborn fetus, of Moody Seaport. And, Mr Porter has

: : Michaelangelo's Renaissance — m.a.kominsky : :

also been charged in absentia by British Columbia law enforcement in the premeditated murders of Dr and Mrs Tehrani of Vancouver BC.

Ernest Porter remains at large. He is considered armed and extremely dangerous. There is a substantial reward being offered for information leading to the apprehension of Mr Porter.

Additionally, the case has been referred to the Department of Justice, the Environmental Protection Agency and various other, local, state and federal agencies for review for possible civil prosecution for environmental damage, remediation, and the imposition of substantial fines and penalties.

We would anticipate many, many civil suits to be filed on behalf the victims and their surviving family members and spouses, for willful, wanton and reckless negligence demanding special, general and punitive damages, from National Petroleum Incorporated, its corporate officers and managers, and its various subsidiaries.

And finally, let me be clear. This was not a terrorist event...but that fact should not allow us to become complacent. We, all of us, must remain constantly vigilant to the constant threat posed by Islamic terrorists that would seek to do the American people great harm. I urge you to report to the FBI or local law enforcement, any suspicious activity of anyone whom you might suspect of doing the United States of America harm.

After District Attorney John Allison makes a brief statement, we would be happy to take your questions...

As the Hawkster and I are watching this obscene, political burlesque unfold on TV, a farcical caricature of itself, we both realize that this is just more business as usual. Stage managed by the media for maximum prurient appeal...and ratings.

Looks like the bereaved DA John Allison has recovered sufficiently to resume pursuit of his considerable political ambitions. And maybe after a tasteful interval, even going shopping on Match.com for a suitable arm-piece spouse—a politically correct replacement.

“Overcoming great personal tragedy and loss...demonstrating his tremendous, commitment, dedication and personal sacrifice to serve the people of the great State of Washington,” says Jake Rossitor, Executive Director of the Washington State Republican Caucus shortly

thereafter, “*I am proud to announce the support of the Republican Caucus of John “Jack” Allison...as candidate for State Senator.*”

Hmm...*never, ever...let a serious crisis to go to waste.* If Lawyers are the second oldest profession...gotta be at least a tie for Prostitution and Politicians for the oldest profession?

With the planet facing a 6th Mass Extinction, the political system that precipitated it, irreparably broken, the one thing that immediately comes to mind at such a depressin' moment...

“Hey Hawkster...it's Happy Hour *somewhere*. Care for the specialty of the house? Burnt Bombay Martini, *mon ami?*”

“Thought you'd never ask, Koz...with two olives, *sil vous plait, mon frère.*”

So the bad guys are headed to the slammer. *El Negrito* Porter is well, uh...*toast*. But for me, there is still one piece of unfinished business. As long as one, now US Senator, J. Murdock Mahoney, rumored to be secretly seeking and positioning himself for the Republican nomination for President of the United States, is still roaming and foraging the planet, Captain Ahab and I have a date with destiny...*some-time...some-where...some-day*, for my Marla. *Count on it, Jace...*

Contemplating my recent moral transfiguration, I vow to seek redemption for my own reckless, wanton disregard for the planet and its life forms. I even start to recycle my trash.

And in my rebirth, indeed *Michaelangelo's Renaissance*, how Koz...and now *secondary* Koz, will in some small measure, seek redress for the centuries of injustice visited upon innocent victims of abject greed and avarice by the oligarchical Corpocracy—including the profound injustice against the First Nations peoples.

Every Revolution starts with the first Rebel.

Still haunting me are the words of the powerful, anthemic speech given at UCB in 1964, today, never more relevant, of my dear friend and Great American Patriot, Mario Savio...

There's a time when the operation of the machine becomes so odious, makes you so sick at heart, that you can't take part! You can't even passively take part! And you've got to put your bodies upon the gears and upon the wheels...upon the levers, upon all the apparatus, and you've got to make it stop! And you've got to indicate to the people who run it, to the people who own it, that unless you're free, the machine will be prevented from working at all!

Jesus! Miraculously, only Hawk, Ivan and I have somehow managed to survive 1960s Berkeley, so far...

So RIP:

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Mario Savio 1942-1996...53, Sebastopol, California
Charles Washington 1940-1965...25, Selma, Alabama
Byron Brawley 1942-1967...24, Kontum Province, Vietnam

And Trey Mahoney at age 16, Denver, Colorado
You shall not have died for...*nuthin'*...

But as Ruth and Joe Tarnowski had so eloquently defined, it must first be a *Revolution of Consciousness*, through *peaceful non-violent civil disobedience*, based on compassion...and love. I am reminded of the iconic Argentine Marxist revolutionary, Che Guevara.

At the risk of seeming ridiculous, let me say that the true revolutionary is guided by a great feeling of love. It is impossible to think of a genuine revolutionary lacking this quality.

Even though the deaths of Sora Eagle Feather and Marla Dyson, to a degree, have been avenged, I'm left with a hollow sense of justice. My profound sense of loss still, stubbornly lingers. I have accepted that at some level, it will always be there. It is a bittersweet kind of sorrow—one that I do not want to ever completely go away.

But my sorrow is somewhat tempered by the fact that I now have Michael...*my son*, in my life. I am filled with gratitude for that revelation, and for my deep friendship and love for my brother, *mon frere*, whom I have picked and who has picked me for his best pal, one Ad Hoc Shapiro, now *Uncle Hawk*.

Will I ever be able to love a woman so completely so unconditional as Sora Eagle Feather...as Marla Dyson, and even Annie Trudeau? I honestly don't know. But I realize I'll never really *ever* find out unless I'm willing to risk the pain of loss. Maybe I *am* ready...maybe not—only one way to find out.

So maybe...I *will* give Ms Tara Naomi Takahashi aka TNT, a call tonight. Maybe not. Hmm, only 3 hours away...*very doable*.

After a great visit with Michael in which we have some very long and very emotional talks, a real father son bond is created. He's a great kid, confident, funny and incredibly bright. He promises to keep in touch, with me starting to sound like the long-suffering expectant parent waiting breathlessly by the phone, just for the sound of their kid's voice. *Yikes*.

Hawk and Michael bond immediately. They are fast pals, and it's a gratifying sight to see Hawk behaving so, uh...avuncular. Michael is fascinated with Hawk's martial arts and Yoga regimen.

“Sure, Mikie, when you return I'd be happy to share with you my passion for martial arts...and ballet.”

Hawk and I drive Michael down to Seattle SeaTac for his flight back to Washington DC, where he is *works*. Exactly where, I know not—probably never will.

As we're waiting for his plane to board, I realize that Michael's presence is causing quite a stir with some of the ladies in the boarding area, gawking at him approvingly. He's totally oblivious to the obviously smitten women, except for one little *squaw* that catches his attention, that he graces with a smile and a wink, bringing a blushing smile to her face. He's got the *gift of the Koz*, alright...more of a curse, the poor kid.

"My son...as you prepare to embark on your journey on the Whiteman's Great Silver Bird, always remember, *We are all one child spinning through Mother Sky*. And don't be a stranger...*Tonto*," I say trying to put on a stoic cool-breeze exterior. It's failing miserably.

"And as my people say, the moon is not shamed by the barking of the uh...coyote," Michael says.

"Meaning?" Hawk says.

"I have absolutely no clue. But ya gotta admit, it does sound very uh...original aboriginal," Michael says with that impish grin that he has already adopted from Uncle Hawk. Quick study.

"*Jezus!* Hawk's bad enough...now I got two of ya? What next, a rimshot? Travel safe, son," I say giving him a fist bump.

"Sure...*kemo sabe*. Hey, Uncle Hawk, keep on eye this *big paleface* for me will ya? Take care of each other...you're my family now, ya know. *Jezus!* Talk about the Odd Couple?" he says.

Then suddenly he grabs me, giving me a big hug. He gives me a kiss on the cheek, then whispers in my ear, "I love ya, Paw."

"I love you, son," I whisper back, returning the kiss on his cheek, patting the back of his head, fighting back the tears, then paternally patting him on his behind as we release.

Then he gives Uncle Hawk a big hug who's also fighting the tears. *Jezus!* What a coupla sentimental old fools.

Michael A. Kozlov, another MAK-a-saurus, turns and saunters down the boarding cave, with his glistening raven hair, in his moccasins with that silent easy, big cat grace. And with one last look back, he waves and flashes that killer smile, then disappears into the belly of the Whiteman's Great Silver Bird in the Sky.

To be continued in...

Secondary Koz...featuring one Michael Ahiga Kozlov aka Koz-too.

"*Hey Paw...it's been over 4 days. And Grandfather with his uh...cargo, hasn't arrived in Santa Fe yet. He hasn't called, he doesn't answer his mobile, it goes right to voice mail...*" Michael says on the phone.

- Epilogue: Some Final Thoughts -

All that is necessary for the triumph of evil is that good men do nothing.

- Edmund Burke

I have no illusions that my meager literary talents even belong in reference with the literary giants listed in the Preamble.

I have attempted to deliver my humble oeuvre at weaving an entertaining, hopefully leaven with some humor, allegory. Even though it is, perhaps an overly ambitious epic time frame, I wanted to give the reader a broad historical perspective from the Great Depression, and through literary sequels, to the Great Recession and beyond. Through a wide angle lens.

Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it.

- George Santayana

It is important to remember that even though this is a work of fiction, and strives to entertain, it's primary intent, frankly is to inform. The overarching purpose of it is to leave the reader with a macro-understanding of the fundamental issues surrounding anthropogenic climate change including a vision for radical reformation of the irreparably broken political system that precipitated it.

As such, it should be viewed more, as a philosophical dialectic, rather than on its dubious technical merits. Even though I have tried not to overburden the reader with gratuitous technical jargon/nomenclature including acronyms, unfortunately the inherent complexity of the subject necessitates the use of much technical terminology.

While I have attempted to mitigate technical errors through conscientious research, because I am not from academia, nor do I represent myself as any kind of an expert on climate science, nor am I an economist or political scientist or any kind of expert on the Internet and cyberspace, I hope the reader can transcend any technical insufficiencies. The technical elements presented in many cases are a distillation/simplification for dramatic purposes. As such I take full responsibility for any technical inaccuracies, omissions or deficiencies.

With unabashed passion, I have endeavored to proffer the scientific, legal and pragmatic portent of the lethal consequences of the

coming 6th Massive Extinction of life form on the planet from climate change...unless, and that's where you come in.

The most problematic and difficult, yet imperative component of all—the politics of a massive shift in the *collective consciousness* of humanity. Simply stated—from the *ME* to the *WE*.

To survive this unprecedented global threat to our very existence will require a radical reordering of civilization's deeply devolved, perverse priorities:

- our connectedness with our one, and only planet,
- our sense of social justice and community in the brotherhood of man; and
- our compassion for one another.

In the process I hope that you've found this parable an entertaining read. Despite the gravity of the topic, I have tried to at times introduce a playful and whimsical take on this collective global suicide—sorta redefines oxymoronic.

Sadly, the highly developed, virulent strain of Capitalism particularly prevalent in America over the past century has evolved into a Sociopathology. Through Globalism, it has now metastasized all over the world, indeed *tout le monde*, with the disparity of wealth rivaling even the excesses of the mythical ostensibly unregulated Gilded Age of the late nineteenth century.

We can have democracy in this country or we can have great wealth concentrated in the hands of the few. But we can't have both.

- Louis Brandeis - Associate Justice on the Supreme Court of the United States from 1916 to 1939.

The notion that the solution to climate change is through more Capitalism is a naive myth promulgated through the slick dissembling of the euphemism *marketing* by corporate mainstream media—the sycophantic handmaidens of the Corporacy. Even the well-meaning mainstream environmentalist have failed to grasp that the current mutation of Capitalism is incapable of self-reform through traditional conventional democratic means—it is the problem, not the solution.

Modern-day Capitalism's sole mandate is the creation, accumulation and retention of wealth, a positive feedback loop of self-interest and self-reinforcement based on the exploitation of the productivity of the working class. It is this exchange of excessive unequal values that creates surplus, exorbitant profit, predominately percolating up to the obscenely asset rich plutocracy: Neo-Feudalism.

Since 1978, adjusted for inflation, workers wages have essentially remained stagnant while worker productivity has almost

doubled, with most of the exponentially growing surplus accruing to the Corporacy, and eventually the richest one percent.

Through the systematic attack and successful de-certification of collective bargaining units by the Corpocracy along with the tacit ever-present threat of automation, and of cheap unregulated labor of Globalism, workers have been coerced into a perpetual state of fear and anxiety—petrified to take action, for fear of short-term tangible loss in exchange for some conjectural long-term gain in the abstract.

The great tragedy is that the American working class for the most part is ignorant of the fact that they are essentially slaves to a rigged system where our democracy, or what's left of it, like a defective gene run amok through incest, has mutated into the obsequious, antithetical servant of Capitalism.

I freed thousands of slaves, but I could have freed thousands more...if only they had known they were slaves.

-Harriet Tubman - African-American abolitionist, humanitarian

My exhortation is particularly directed at the exploited working class, the dispossessed working poor, college graduates laden with heavy student loans many of whom are unemployed/under employed, journalists, artists, poets, writers, the clergy and teachers, anyone who gets it, irrespective of age, political or religious stripe and is willing to engage. To take it to the streets. For as history has tragically, repeatedly demonstrated time and again, meaningful social change can only come from the bottom up. Usually out of the muck and mud of the trenches of the status quo, requiring one to be willing to get dirty...very dirty. And in the process, often bloodied.

History does not repeat itself, but it does rhyme.

- Mark Twain

You will form the nucleus for leadership of the movement to deal with the most daunting human existential crisis in the history of the planet—to rise up, to resist the hegemonic Corporate forces that are causing the essentially irreversible devastation of the ecosystem through unbridled release of carbon dioxide into the atmosphere.

Starting with you, then through geometric progression like a benign virus, multiplying exponentially until the tipping point of critical mass of public outrage is reached. It will not be easy—the oligarchs will not go quietly into the night:

The most important dilemma facing us is not ideological. It is logistical. The security and surveillance state has made its highest priority the breaking of any infrastructure that might spark widespread revolt.

The state knows the tinder is there.

It knows that the continued unraveling of the economy and the effects of climate change make popular unrest inevitable. It knows that as underemployment and unemployment doom at least a quarter of the U.S. population, perhaps more, to perpetual poverty, and as unemployment benefits are scaled back, as schools close, as the middle class withers away, as pension funds are looted by hedge fund thieves, and as the government continues to let the fossil fuel industry ravage the planet, the future will increasingly be one of open conflict. This battle against the corporate state, right now, is primarily about infrastructure.

We need an infrastructure to build revolt. The corporate state is determined to deny us one...

- Chris Hedges - author and essayist; excerpted from:
The Myth of Human Progress and the Collapse of Complex Societies: January 26, 2014 - Truthdig.com.

So, I'd like to leave you with this great anthem of hope, several, but not all, of the profoundly inspiring lyrics of the illustrious Canadian poet and songwriter, Leonard Cohen:

"Democracy"
by Leonard Cohen

*It's coming through a hole in the air,
from those nights in Tiananmen Square.
It's coming from the feel
that this ain't exactly real,
or it's real, but it ain't exactly there.
From the wars against disorder,
from the sirens night and day,
from the fires of the homeless,
from the ashes of the gay:
Democracy is coming to the U.S.A.*

*It's coming through a crack in the wall;
on a visionary flood of alcohol;
from the staggering account
of the Sermon on the Mount
which I don't pretend to understand at all.*

: : Michaelangelo's Renaissance — m.a.kominsky : :

*It's coming from the silence
on the dock of the bay,
from the brave, the bold, the battered
heart of Chevrolet:
Democracy is coming to the U.S.A.*

*It's coming from the sorrow in the street,
the holy places where the races meet;
from the homicidal bitchin'
that goes down in every kitchen
to determine who will serve and who will eat.
From the wells of disappointment
where the women kneel to pray
for the grace of God in the desert here
and the desert far away:
Democracy is coming to the U.S.A.*

*Sail on, sail on
O mighty Ship of State!
To the Shores of Need
Past the Reefs of Greed
Through the Squalls of Hate*

Sail on, sail on, sail on, sail on.

*It's coming to America first,
the cradle of the best and of the worst.
It's here they got the range
and the machinery for change
and it's here they got the spiritual thirst.
It's here the family's broken
and it's here the lonely say
that the heart has got to open
in a fundamental way:
Democracy is coming to the U.S.A.*

Indeed, with *your* committed involvement...maybe, just maybe
Democracy *will be coming* to the U.S.A., playing on the Main
Streets of America for a long awaited, *unlimited* engagement.

Hope to see you there...

~mak

- Plaudits: A Shout Out -

Particular thanks to Richard Wolff, and to Robert Scheer and Chris Hedges of Truthdig.com. And to Bill McKibben of 350.org

And as of the writing of this, most recently Edward Snowden, Laura Poitras and Glenn Greenwald in heroically exposing the massive clandestine surveillance of Americans by their own government, Big Brother, and the Corpocracy, Little Brother—an unequivocal usurpation and yes, betrayal of the Constitutional rights of American citizens.

And, RIP Aaron Schwartz - *you can kill the messenger...but not the truth.*

And on a personal note, for:

My Mother, Nancy Kominsky, the accidental proto-feminist, who the character Maria Caravaggio Kozlov does not begin to do justice for her courage, creativity, charisma and crazy escapades. *Sempre con amore mama mia...sogni'd oro bellissmia*—or *with love always...sweet dreams most beautiful one.*

Her memoir, This Is How I Did It: Nancy Kominsky, is available on Amazon.com.

My Father, Michael C. Kominsky who was anything but *il bastardo* Nicky Kozlov.

A brilliant, essentially good and decent man who did his best under great personal emotional adversity, to provide for and raise his family, whose beautifully written, poignant memoir of enduring the despair and privation of the Great Depression, Black Horse Alley, may someday be published by Kozmick Press.

Special Thanks to Wikipedia (wikipedia.org)

The History of Wikipedia formally began with the launch of Wikipedia on Monday 15 January 2001 by Jimmy Wales and Larry Sanger. However, its technological and conceptual underpinnings predate this.

All the information, more importantly knowledge, domiciled there is easily accessible online, freely distributable with relatively few intellectual property restrictions. It is publicly subsidized solely through donations with no advertising, maintained and curated by volunteers, without compensation.

: : Michaelangelo's Renaissance — m.a.kominsky : :

Commerce is fine. Advertising is not evil. But it doesn't belong here. Not in Wikipedia.

Wikipedia is something special. It is like a library or a public park. It is like a temple for the mind. It is a place we can all go to think, to learn, to share our knowledge with others.

- Jimmy Wales – Wikipedia Founder

As of July 2015, Wikipedia includes over 35 million freely usable articles in 291 languages that have been written by over 56 million registered users and numerous anonymous contributors worldwide. According to Alexa Internet, Wikipedia is the world's seventh-most-popular website in terms of overall visitor traffic. Wikipedia's total worldwide monthly readership is approximately 495 million; according to comScore. Wikipedia receives over 117 million monthly unique visitors from the United States alone.

Please contribute to help support this invaluable repository of knowledge, and resource for research, without which this book would never have been possible.

TO CONTRIBUTE TO WIKIPEDIA.ORG

Special thanks to Bill “Pop” Fly - spellchecker in-chief.

The first book of the trilogy sequel, *Secondary Koz*, is due to be released by the Spring of 2017.

- Now What? -

Be ashamed to die until you have scored some victory for humanity.
-Horace Mann

The four primary elements, or *The 4Rs* for the Great Re-Awakening—the Neo-Renaissance of Humanity:

RESIST! - Peaceful non-violent resistance, protest and demonstration

REMOVE! -The Big Money paid by Corporations/PACs from elections and the politicians who accept it. Repeal the Citizens United decision!

REGULATE! -The financial and banking mega-complex and protect the planet

REBEL! -Take it to the Streets! See you there!

michael a. kominsky
mak@kozmicpress.com

[Kozmick Press](#), a subsidiary of [MetaMEDIA Communications](#), is a publisher of social justice and environmental conscience media.

This literary effort was never undertaken or motivated for commercial or remunerative reasons. My primary purpose therefore is to hopefully spread the message of it, to create awareness, inform, and motivate *you and others*, to take proactive action.

While the book is being offered for sale on Amazon.com, in an effort to expand the reach of it, until further notice, I offer download of the eBook free of charge at my website kozmicpress.com to everyone and anyone. Click the DOWNLOAD EBOOK icon. You will be taken to the product page where you can select your particular desired format, including Kindle (.mobi), Nook/Kobo (.epub) and Adobe Reader (.pdf)

Donations are strictly voluntary and can be made via secure PayPal. Any amount is appreciated to help defray costs and expenses. Until further notice, please feel free to refer and extend this offer to anyone and everyone.

- Sources: with a Merci Beaucoup! -

The author wishes to gratefully acknowledge just a few of the more notable sources, far too many to completely enumerate here, used as reference material for this work of fiction (in no particular order):

Freedom's Orator: Mario Savio and the Radical Legacy of the 1960s

- Robert Cohen

To capture and convey the verisimilitude of the powerful revolutionary zeitgeist of the Sixties, certain passages from this text were quoted in the section of this novel in reference to Mario Savio, including the full text of his iconic speech given December 2, 1964 on the steps of Sproul Hall. The author is deeply indebted to Robert Cohen for his comprehensive and compelling biography of this Great American Patriot. It chronicles the emergence of student activism as a courageous and powerful voice in confronting the status quo “establishment”. While we were contemporaries at UCB, I personally never knew Mario Savio. After reading the book I felt as if we had become good friends—fellow travelers. I highly recommend it. It is available in both print and eBook at Amazon.com.

Climate Wars: The Fight for Survival as the World Overheats

- Gwynne Dyer

Fight Global Warming Now: The Handbook for Taking Action in Your Community

- Bill McKibben (350.org)

The Myth of Human Progress and the Collapse of Complex Societies

and

Death of the Liberal Class

- Chris Hedges

Democracy at Work: A Cure for Capitalism

- Richard D. Wolff

Technopoly

: : *Michaelangelo's Renaissance* — *m.a.kominsky* : :

and

Amusing Ourselves to Death

- Neil Postman

Manufacturing Consent: The Political Economy of the Mass Media

- Edward S. Herman and Noam Chomsky

The Unreality Industry: The Deliberate Manufacturing of Falsehood and What It Is Doing to Our Lives

- Ian I Mitroff and Warren Bennis

A People's History of the United States

- Howard Zinn

Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man

- Marshall McLuhan

Sand County Almanac

- Aldo Leopold

Silent Spring

- Rachel Carson

Shock Doctrine

and

This Changes Everything: Capitalism vs. The Climate

- Naomi Klein, a brilliant and incisive young Canadian writer and social activist.

Crashing the Party: Taking on the Corporate Government in an Age of Surrender

- Ralph Nader

Brave New World

Eerily prescient - published 1932

- Aldous Huxley

Common Sense

The primogenitor of political commentary - The Gold Standard

- Thomas Paine

- Author's Note: Some Legal Stuff -

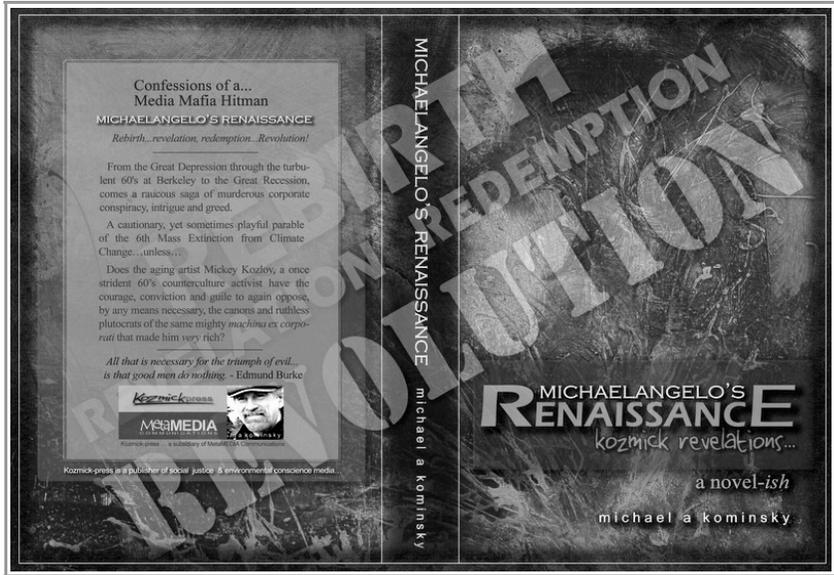
Even though certain elements of this literary work are fictionalized, the primary and predominant intent and function, is for “purposes of criticism, commentary, parody, reporting and teaching”.

It is based on an actual historical event with certain places, dates and characters, fictionalized for dramatic effect and emphasis to principally inform and educate the reader through the use of “criticism, commentary and parody”.

Under the doctrine of “fair use”, that “permits limited use of copyrighted material without acquiring permission from the rights holders” the utilization of lyrics from songs, literary quotes, quotes from film, radio and TV, published works and/or other potentially copyrighted material are enlisted as a literary device, in some cases to lend verisimilitude, solely intended to optimize, propel and otherwise drive the narrative, with the ultimate goal to teach/inform/ameliorate the reader's understanding of the complex scientific, political and social issues surrounding global climate change.

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- The Cover -



Cover and book layout by MetaMEDIA Communications

- Fragile - Status Quo (June 1999) -



A painting depicting the horrific tragedy—the explosion of the Olympia pipeline blast of June 10, 1999

Whatcom Falls Park, Bellingham WA