

# THE MIND CHANGERS

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# CHAPTER ONE

There was a sharp rap of the door knocker, John looked up at Karen and their unspoken words indicated, 'Who the hell could that be?'

The third movement of Mozart's Concerto for Flute and Orchestra in D major filled the air. Karen said, "Turn down the music before getting that!"

As John reached for the remote, there was another insistent hammering at the door. John yelled, "Yeah we hear you. Wait a second! Shit!"

John stood, straightened his pants and ran his hand through his curly hair. He glanced in the mirror, it looked terrible. John had not expected company at this hour, never mind in this weather. He decided that he looked as good as he was going to look so he walked to the door. He glanced back at Karen, she too had primped a bit to make her long dark-blonde hair fall better. Neither had showered, it was Saturday and they were off work, and relaxing. They rolled their eyes at each other, John turned his attention back to the task at hand.

John opened the door. There stood a man who must have been six foot five; he wore a gray non-descript suit under a well-worn overcoat. Even though John stood a step above him, they faced eye-to-eye. Well almost, thought John. The man was in his mid to late forties. Graying hair and small sags under his eyes were all that indicated his age. This man was in good physical shape, even through his suit and overcoat, John could see a muscular physique. John realized he was staring and asked, "Yes?"

The man, somewhat used to that kind of reception replied in a formal tone, "Hello, I'm Tim Jones. Are you John Parker?"

John instinctively reacted, "Yeah."

"John, I'm from the Jones detective agency. It's important that I speak with you," Jones continued.

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John looked at Tim Jones and he wondered what he could possibly want with him. John paused a long moment before saying anything. "Mr. Jones, what's so important that you have to disturb me on a Saturday morning?"

The huge man went to speak again, water was running down his face and caused him to sputter a little as he spoke. "I have a package for you."

"What kind of package?" John was not going to be kind to this man. He did not like being interrupted on a weekend by salesmen or in this case, private detectives. Both John and Karen were kind people, and they had been taken advantage of by quick thinking salesmen in the past. Since then they have been careful, overly so in some cases, but they had avoided being cheated again.

Jones looked at John, his hair was soaked, the rain poured off his overcoat in sheets. Although clearly stressed by the environment, he spoke calmly. "May I come in? The weather is awful."

John didn't want this man in his house. Once in, John felt he would be difficult to get him to leave. Even though he was concerned John said, "Sure..." as he stepped back and gestured with his arm swinging inside to indicate where Jones was to go.

Jones stepped inside. He quickly surveyed the room. His pale-blue, almost gray, eyes darted left and right. There were books and antiques. Comfortable looking chairs and pictures lined the walls. He had heard the music, but saw no speakers. For that matter, he didn't see a stereo system. Odd he thought. The music had been very clear and the voices were both just inside the front door. He wondered how the music played and was stopped without there being any visible system.

He continued to look around. He found the speakers, small in-wall units. As he looked further he saw a remote control. At that point he started looking for the other voice. He knew the other was

female, then he saw Karen. Jones asked John, "Is this your wife?" All that transpired in a moment, Jones' training in field investigation allowed him to survey an environment quickly.

"Yes, Mr. Jones, this is Karen Parker, Karen, Mr. Tim Jones, a private detective. That is correct, isn't it Mr. Jones?"

"Yes, yes it is." He paused before continuing. The Parkers wore concerned faces. "Look Mr. Parker, my being here is not ominous. I've worked on this case for seven years. It was quite an effort to find you." He had stretched the truth, he had not worked on the case but for a few days. The search, however, had taken years. Cizzano had had many men on the case before him.

Karen Parker interrupted, "Where are our manners? Mr. Jones, may I take your coat?"

"Yes, thank you. It's really pouring out there." Jones smiled briefly.

Karen took the coat and hung it in the closet. The inside of the closet was passively warmed by the hot water pipes for the radiator upstairs. Nice for times like this, wet articles got warm and dry quite quickly. She left the room for a moment and returned with a towel. "Here you go Mr. Jones. Please, continue we are curious to hear about why you are visiting us. I've never met a detective before, never mind had one in my home."

Tim Jones took the towel, and stared blankly at it. He realized he was dripping wet and thanked Karen as he dried his hair. When he was through, he handed the towel to Karen. She made the towel vanish as quickly as it had appeared.

At Karen's request, Jones continued with the fabricated story, "My search is on behalf of an old friend of yours. He died twelve years ago, and had in his will a request that you be found and given this package. Apparently it was important to both of you."

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John thought about his reply. "Wait a minute, what's this about it being important to both of us? I don't remember this friend who, by the way, died twelve years ago, so I can hardly imagine it being important to me."

"Well John, the details are sketchy, but it was clear in Mr. Wilson's will that you be given this package without delay."

"And you've been working on this for seven years?" John continued.

"That's correct," Jones answered.

"So, I'm no mathematician, but if you subtract the two, that's five years. Why did it take five years to begin looking for me?" John was confused by the story Tim Jones was telling. It was both odd and out of nowhere. Since he also didn't see a package, John was beginning to suspect Tim Jones of some sort of elaborate sales process. Jones had to be working a tricky angle to get a sale.

"The cause of death was suspicious, so it was investigated as murder. As such the reading of the will was held up in court." Jones answered matter-of-factly.

At the mention of murder, Karen's eyes widened. John saw her reaction and chose to ignore it for now. He couldn't see how he was a suspect. He didn't even think Jones was a detective. Karen fidgeted with her hair, twirling it around her right index finger, untwirling it and repeating--over and over again. John glared at her and her hand snapped down to her side. She pouted a response indicating she was 'bad' and had been caught. The look promised she would not do so again.

John went on, "Okay, let's suppose that was the case. I'll give you that. So why did it take seven years to find me? It doesn't sound like you took it nearly as seriously as you suggest."

"John, your name is not a very unusual, and you moved without a forwarding address once or twice in those twelve years!"

"Yeah, I guess you're right there." John softened a bit. "Anyway, sit down and tell us who left me a package in their will." John motioned to a chair and sat down in the chair he previously vacated to answer the door.

Jones retrieved a comb from his rear pocket and swept his hair back into place. He checked himself over before sitting. Ever conscious of the wet weather and how soaked he had become. Once seated, he began, "The man was Todd Wilson."

"Who's Todd Wilson?" John interrupted.

"That's your old friend who died twelve years ago."

"I don't remember a Todd Wilson. You must have the wrong John Parker?" With that statement, John started to stand from his chair.

Karen felt John was being unduly argumentative, she didn't say a word, rather she shot John a glance. John settled back into his seat. She wanted to see what this was about. She knew the two men would find their balance.

Jones squirmed in his seat. It was a tight fit, the chair he sat in was quite old and built for the smaller people of bygone days. He took a deep breath. He was not comfortable with the task he was given, he was a field operative, not an actor. He thought, 'Keep it straight, don't panic, relax, everything will work out fine.'

Karen decided a bit of kindness was in order. She asked, "Is everything alright, Mr. Jones? Would you like some coffee? You must be chilled to the bone." Karen knew this was all a silly mistake and would be cleared up shortly. Mr. Jones seemed sincere enough to her so she decided to help him along in the process. Coffee on a cold rainy day seemed appropriate.



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"Coffee would be very nice, thank you Mrs. Parker."

"Please, call me Karen, Mrs. Parker is his mother." She stood and left the room.

"Good," said Jones, "Now I can speak freely." "WHAT!" exclaimed John. "You can say anything in front of Karen, we have..."

"No secrets from each other," finished Jones. "Oh, yes you do, yes you do. This secret is so secret, you didn't even trust yourself with it."

John started to fidget.

"Shall I go on?" Jones asked.

John nodded his head upwards in a subtle signal of go on. With Karen out of the room John had a strong desire to ask Jones to leave, but the story was interesting and he couldn't resist. After all, he was clear it wasn't his life they were discussing.

"Your friend Todd Wilson was a maverick psychologist with advanced work in psychopharmaceuticals."

John stopped him, saying, "What are psycho..."

"LSD is the most famous of this group of drugs John." Jones interrupted John to continue. "It was his belief that the use of LSD and several other similar drugs, administered in a 'guided trip' setting, allowed individuals to experience advanced inner learning and growth. That aside, he constantly strove to perfect the drugs. One such drug lead to your ten day coma, thirteen years ago."

John jumped to his feet, he was ready to throw Jones out. Thought better of it, and yelled, "My coma was never explained! I was

tested for every form of drug known, and then some. Nothing was ever found to explain it."

"That's right John, nothing...until now. I have no authority to press this, for that matter, no one has any authority, the case is passed the statutes of limitations. There was no proof of wrongful death, suicide it seems. However, you were the prime suspect. Murder, of course, has no statutes of limitations." Jones added to make the whole process as clear to John as he could. Most people outside of law enforcement don't know much about legal statutes, nonetheless the one for murder.

John responded, "How do you know so much about this?" John felt panic building inside. A man he never knew has been dead thirteen years, he was the suspect and was left a package in a will. Too strange to be true.

"There are other papers. Papers that belong to the estate of Todd Wilson. Since they involve you, I'm sure you can request copies. I couldn't do that, it is not my job," Jones explained.

"So, is that why you know so much about this? You read the other papers?" John asked.

"Right. This sealed envelope was all you were to receive from Todd Wilson's estate. Nothing else was mentioned in the will. Except the urgency of getting it to you. Which is why I was hired."

"Urgency!" John exclaimed. "Twelve years hardly exhibits any thought about urgency. Don't you think Mr. Jones?" John complained.

"As I said before, you were not easy to find. I started years after the last time the two of you had been in contact. The trail was cold, as it's often said," Jones said with little conviction.

"Mr. Jones. All that you say here sounds oddly fictitious. I find this quite hard to believe," John said, unconsciously stroking his beard.

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He had just trimmed it the previous morning and it was not quite even. As he stroked and pulled at the individual hairs he noticed that the left side was shorter than the right side. The area near his neck was longer than he liked it and the mustache-to-beard area around his mouth was also too long.

"John, it is not my job to make you believe this, it was my job to find you and deliver this envelope. With that completed, you will excuse me?"

As Jones stood to leave, Karen brought the coffee into the room. She carried the coffee on a strange wood and mirror tray. None of the cups matched, nor did the milk and sugar bowl.

Jones looked at Karen and said, "I'll stay for a cup."

She poured each of them a cup and handed the first to Jones. He took it from her with a smile. Then, to John, and she took her own. She paused as Jones filled his coffee with five or six spoons of sugar, but left it black. She knew John wanted just milk. So she added milk to his and her own cup.

The three sat in silence sipping their coffee.

"So, what did you two men discuss while I was out of the room?" Karen almost demanded.

"Nothing much," John lied.

"Only a little about the will and John's friend's desire for John to have this envelope," Jones said, as he pointed to the envelope.

Karen was unconvinced. She had heard animated conversation while she was fixing things. There were raised voices, but she could not make out the words. Their house was almost soundproof from one room to another. Voices just didn't carry.

Suddenly, without warning Jones stood. "I'm sorry, I have to leave. Thank you both for your hospitality. John, good luck."

John and Karen both stood and looked at Jones.

Jones said, "My coat?"

"Oh, right, I'm sorry!" Karen said, almost running to get his coat from the closet. The coat was still a bit wet, but at least it was warm.

Jones left without another word. Karen and John stood staring at the closed door, John thought about what Jones had said.

Finally Karen turned to John and said, "What happened while I was out of the room?"

John responded with a shrug of his shoulders.

Karen more insistent, "Come on John, something happened. You look like you've seen a ghost."

"I think I did, and now we have to find out who it is!"

\* \* \* \*

After a few moments, they both looked down at the coffee table. Karen had put the coffee and fixings down next to a battered envelope. She picked up the envelope, handed it to John and said, "Okay, let's go ghost hunting."

John cautiously took the envelope from her hand. "How can a little envelope like this cause so much concern? I'll just open it and read the contents." He sat perfectly still, reached down, grabbed the remote...without missing a note, Mozart returned to finish the third and final movement.

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"Turn it down!" Karen shouted over the music. John had forgotten about making it louder rather than lowering the volume.

"Shit, there are too many buttons on this damn thing. Why can't anyone design one of these things to be easy to use?"

"Just turn it off again."

"Oh yeah, good idea." Silence. He gripped the envelope and tore it open. A key hit the floor with a gentle ring and fell quiet. John looked down at the key, picked it up and then turned his attention to the enclosed letter.

"What's it say?"

"Wait a minute Karen, it's handwritten and in a handwriting I'm having some trouble with."

"Then give it to me, you never were any good at reading other people's handwriting." He handed it over. She was stunned to see it was written on his letterhead. "John, it's your letterhead!"

"Yeah, actually I hadn't gotten past that." It read:

John T. Parker

Computer Consulting

123 Main Street

Teaneck, NJ 07666

"John, isn't that where you were born?"

"Yeah, but I never lived there, and certainly never ran a business. I've never run a business!"

"John, this is weird."

"That's an understatement," John said.

"Do you think this could be a fake?" Karen asked while she scrutinized the paper.

"That thought did cross my mind the moment I saw the letterhead. It's got to be faked, but then I thought about it a little more. Why would it be faked?" John expressed his thoughts.

"To get you to do something you would not normally do," Karen said.

"Who would want me to do something? And even if someone or some organization wanted me to do something, why me?" John said. He was frustrated and confused, his voice was raised and he sounded angry.

"John, don't be mean. I'm just trying to understand this, just like you are."

"Sorry, I'm frustrated by that visit. That guy seemed to believe what he was telling us, but I don't remember a thing about the guy. Who's Todd Wilson?" John said.

"I don't know, I don't remember you ever mentioning Todd. The reason for this may be that you know someone they want to get to," Karen speculated.

"And just who are 'They'?" John asked.

"I don't mean the 'They' as in some overseeing, omnipotent 'They', I mean it in the manner of not knowing who it is that wants something from you. Since I don't know who this is, I call them 'They'. Alright?" It was Karen's turn to be snippy.

"Okay, okay, let's read the letter, maybe that'll tip us off."

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Karen began to read.

"John, you are going to read this after you have forgotten your past. It was the intention of the final step of this experiment to cause the thought implantation to replace your real identity with the identity you believe is you. You are reading this now because the 90 day test is over."

"Oh, oh."

Karen looked up at John and said, "Does that trigger some sort of memory for you? God John, did you do something?"

"I don't remember anything. This has not triggered any memories. But 90 days, that was up more than twelve years ago. If this is real, I've been living a lie for a third of my life!"

Karen calmly said "Let me go on..."

"Take this key and follow the plans outlined in the cover of your copy of The Mystic Transformation Process."

That book had been one of John's favorites. He read it years ago and had felt inspired to try harder. It had helped him through some hard times. He lent his copy to many friends to share what he felt was a valuable insight into human nature and the purpose in being.

"Ho boy, now I'm in trouble!" he exclaimed.

"Nah" says Karen "The MTP is right here."

"That's your copy. Mine, I loaned to Miller. Damn, he promised to return it to me. That Irish oaf!"

"Don't be that way. Miller's a good guy. Let's give him a call and see if he's got it."

"I've asked him for it a dozen times. Each time it's either packed away, or loaned to a friend or he's not sure where it is. Miller's a great guy, but I'll never loan him a book again!" John said, beginning to rant.

Karen had the phone in her hand, she just looked at him. Her eyebrows were raised and she asked, "What's his number?"

"Karen, let's not call him. It's been a long time since we've seen them. Shit, we should have visited this summer like they asked. Let's think about this a bit longer," John argued.

"How much longer is a 'bit' John? How long do we wait? What if this is true? What if you did do some experiment that included mind changes? Don't you want to know who you really are? What about me? Don't you think I want to know who you really are?" Karen asked a series of unanswerable questions.

John looked at her with his head cocked to one side. He thought for a while before he answered. "I don't yet believe this is real. Before I go and make an ass of myself with one of our best friends, I want to investigate a bit more. We don't know anything about this Jones character. How do we know he's for real? I thought he was a tricky salesman there for a while."

"Wait a minute John, Miller is one of your best friends, so don't you think he'll give you some slack while you investigate this letter?" Karen asked.

"Oh, yeah, Miller would, but what about Doreen?" John reminded Karen.

"Right..." Karen said and let the word drift around the room before continuing. "Doreen does love to sink her teeth into strange goings on. She's the only person I know who has a subscription to the National Express."



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"Sinking her teeth only enough to cause damage, then it's on to something else. She has such an active imagination. Remember the story in the Express on aliens? She became convinced that aliens lived next door to them," John commented on his friend's wife.

"Sometimes I think she's an alien. Fairly close to a human, but they didn't do a perfect job."

Both Karen and John laughed at the thought of Doreen being an alien. Not a well-wrought imitation of a human, just close. It brought Karen close to tears, she laughed so hard. They regained themselves. Racking in little laugh tremors every so often, they continued their discussion.

"So, what do you want to do?" Karen asked.

"I think we have to call Miller, see if he has the book. If he does, I think we need to go get it. Doreen's curiosity can be controlled by Miller," John said, not really believing.

"That would be a first." Karen agreed with John's sentiment, if not his words.

"Yeah. But we don't really have a choice. It's off to Miller's if he has the book." John was resigned to that.

"So," Karen asked as she picked up the phone, "what's Miller's number?"

John gave it to her.

She punched it on the phone. "It's ringing."

They waited in silence. John wished the music were playing, but decided not to test Karen's patience with his remote control acumen. As John waited, he stood and began to pace.

"Sit down!" ordered Karen, then her face brightened. "Hi Miller! It's Karen." There was a pause as she listened to him speak. "Look, the reason I called is to find out if you still have John's copy of Mystic Transformation." Another pause as she listened. "You think so! Could you look please? Yes, it is that important!" There was a long pause as Miller searched for the book. Karen covered the receiver and said, "He's looking." Nodding her head. Her lips were pursed and her eyes were wide with anticipation.

John said, "I hope he finds it this time!"

"So do I John, so do I!"

The pause continued. The wait was making them both fidget. John looked at his watch, and began timing the wait.

"It's been ten minutes!"

"John, I don't know what to say. We'll just have to wait." Waiting in silence never suited John, he seemed to have a passion for filling empty conversational space with his own voice. He withheld that talent that morning as he and Karen waited the remaining six minutes for Miller to return. Karen heard the phone move and told John so. He sat up in his chair and waited impatiently.

"You have it! Great, we'll be right over." Karen paused, said goodbye and hung up the phone.

"We'll be right over? Karen, Miller lives a hundred miles from here!"

"So, do you want the book or not?" Karen almost shouted. "I didn't think we'd do it right now," John complained.

"When, when do you want to do it? You never want to deal with things. Procrastination 101." Karen jeered. Using one of their pet phrase additions; 101. If the house was sloppy, it was Messy House

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Keeping 101, or if the checkbook didn't balance it was Accounting 101. And on down the line.

John laughed at the line. That's why they use it. It breaks the ice of a tense moment. "I guess you are right. We need to go and just deal with it."

"Thank you. I'll get our coats." Karen said as she walked to the closet. The door closed a bit loud, but neither one cared.

"Let's go discover my past," John said with false enthusiasm and a hint of sarcasm. Nothing added up to a sensible explanation of the past events being reality. John could not imagine having lost what should be a vivid, important piece of his life. There was the coma, but other memories were as clear as those that occurred afterwards, but not Todd Wilson, and certainly not an experiment with drugs.

CHAPTER

TWO

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They hopped into John's car. It was the car of choice when they were going out, having fun. John asked himself, 'are we having fun? Never mind,' he thought. He pointed the car to Rt. 95 south, they'd be there in two hours. "Maybe a little Mozart?" John taunted Karen.

"Maybe a little quiet Mozart," retorted Karen.

They drove in silence, both lost in their own version of what just happened to their lives. Although they had decided the information Jones had brought them was undoubtedly false, they both knew they had to pursue it to a conclusion. The conclusion, John hoped, was getting the book from Miller and finding nothing in it.

The car was a bright red sports coupe, low to the ground and very fast. The body of the car was a high-tech polymer layered on a Fiberglas form. This car had forced the development of a new type of speed detection radar system, it didn't reflect microwaves, it redirected them. That was not a design feature, rather, a simple matter of physics.

The engine in the car purred with an occasional rattle of mistiming. John could never get the timing right, the computer controlling the timing, had long since been discontinued. When this car's computer broke, John was forced to replace it with a general purpose version. The GP computer, as John called it, was not as integrated into the engine as the original, it performed well, but not good enough for John. Secretly John hoped to find an original from a wrecked model. Two years of searching had not proven fruitful.

Karen had the letter in her lap. In their haste and the heat of the moment, they left without reading to the end of the letter. She looked down at it; it possibly held a fearful future for her. She did not know why, but it seemed so ominous, she thought, as they drove to Miller's, the life they planned might not be the life they lived. Everything might have just changed, leaving the future uncertain.

John was speeding down Rt. 95. The tachometer barely reached 2000, the car was in sixth gear. His thoughts were far away. For as long as he had that book, he couldn't remember seeing anything written in it but his name. He searched his memory for a hint, any clue that would remind him of something written in the book. Time slipped by and he could remember nothing. He would just have to wait until Miller handed him the book, then he'd have the chance to determine if this letter was genuine.

That portion of the interstate had been rather visually bland. Sometime since their last trip down this way, the state had decided to plant wildflowers. Even this late in the season it was still producing some beautiful flowers.

Karen noticed them and mumbled softly, "Echinacea, California Poppies, Yarrow, Monarda, Columbine, Queen Ann's Lace, Veronica, Daisies, Coreopsis, Gaillardia, and of course Black-eyed Susies."

"What the hell are you mumbling about?" John asked Karen abruptly.

"The flowers. Don't you see all the beautiful flowers growing in the divider?" Karen admonished.

"Yeah, of course I see them. But it sounded like you were talking about our gardens. Are all of those out there? I don't see any Coreopsis," John said, citing an example.

"Yeah, right there. It's not the kind we grow in our back yard though," Karen responded. She was pointing to a short, yellow, profusely flowering bush, "see?"

"Oh yeah, but we're blazing past at 75 miles an hour. How can you distinguish them so well?" John asked.

"Hey, slow down, I didn't know you were going that fast," Karen yelled at him, "slow down now!"

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"Okay." John slowed to about 65 mph. He noticed that he could distinguish a few more of the flowers also. "But that wasn't my point. My point was that I'm amazed that you can tell them apart so well when mostly all I could see was a blur of color."

"Thanks." Karen was proud of her gardens and her increasing knowledge of flowers.

The car fell silent as John drove and Karen looked out at the wonder of the wildflowers. She noticed how, since the car was moving slower, she could distinguish even more species.

Karen continued to view the seemingly endless flow of flowers. She thought to herself about the amazing task it must have been to plant such an array of flowers. The flowers did not end. Mile after mile there were flowers. Most of the flowers stood tall and proud. Many of them reached almost four feet. As they drove, she noticed that the flowers were arranged according to height. The tallest of the groupings were in the center of the divider, while ground cover was planted almost to the edge.

"John, someone took a lot of time planting these flowers," Karen said.

"Why do you say that?" John asked.

"Just look," she pointed to the flowers. She thought herself foolish since John could not take his eyes from the road and said, "Because they are arranged so carefully by height and color."

John turned his head, faced Karen and said, "Why do you think this was done? Who paid for it?"

Karen thought about that and said, "We paid for it. Every one of us paying taxes in this state paid for it." She was very happy at that thought. Finally, something was done in the state that made sense to her.

After Karen's dissertation on wildflowers ended, they drove a while longer in thoughtful silence. John broke the silence, no surprise to either of them. "Karen, could you finish reading the letter?"

"Oh, yeah, sure. There's not much left though, I stopped reading just before the end, there are some smeared words, not much else."

"Can you make them out?" John asked anxiously.

"I think so. Give me a minute." Karen studied the words. She retrieved a pen from her purse and a pad from the glove box. Slowly, as she figured out the words, she wrote them on the pad. After some time and several miles, she said, "Here's my guess at what it says."

"How good a guess?" John asked with concerned.

"Very good," Karen said. Then proceeded to read her interpretation of the note.

"Go to the locker in Newark's Penn Station number C-909 and retrieve the contents of the locker."

"That's it John. Except it's signed by you and Todd."

"Huh, I wonder if that locker is still there?"

Karen laughed, "Don't you think Mr. Jones already checked?"

"But the envelope hadn't been opened."

She laughed harder. "John, how do you think he knew about your coma, and that this might be the cause? Sometimes for such a bright man, you are naive." She folded the letter as John took the car off 95. "Hey, where are you going?"



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"To Hell with the book! Let's go see what the locker has in it. The book can wait."

Rt. 95 was never completed in New Jersey, it was Rt. 1 or the Turnpike, or rather, a little of both. "Karen, could you get the map? I think there's a better way to get to Newark."

"The train," Karen said joking.

"Hey, that's a good idea! It'll even drop us off right where we need to be."

"John, I was just kidding." But it was too late, John was aiming the car toward the train station in New Brunswick.

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"All Aboard," shouted a conductor. They boarded the Amtrak train bound for New York City. It was not a nice day, it was not rush hour. In fact, it was not even a work day, yet the train was crowded almost to capacity.

Karen complained about the cost. "I can't believe it costs three times as much on this train as the transit train."

"Yeah, but this one doesn't stop forty times before Newark either!"

"Look at all the people getting on the train. What do you think is going on?" Karen asked.

"On weekends they don't run as many trains as during the week. Guess everyone is on this train," John answered.

Karen insisted on the window seat going up and said John could have it on the way back. "Hey John, isn't that Mr. Jones?"

John looked back. "It sure is Karen. That bastard is following us!" John got up, he was rushing down the aisle toward the rear of the

train. He looked out each window. He disturbed each passenger as he did so. Some told him and others just cringed. His activity made him visible to Jones.

On the platform, Jones moved into the crowd. He tried to hide his huge bulk. He was not very successful, his shiny gray hair stood high above most of the other heads. Jones was easy to follow as he pushed through the crowd.

John was pushing and shoving people out of his way. He was frantic. He had made his way, almost to the very end of the train. A conductor grabbed his arm.

"Sir, you must take a seat! You are disturbing everyone on the train. If you continue with this activity, I'll have you removed at the next stop," the conductor said to John.

"I'm sorry. My wife is up a few cars. I'll go join her," John said.

"That's fine. Do so with more care than you used coming back here. Okay?" The conductor admonished.

"Yes sir. I'm really sorry to have disturbed everyone. I saw my friend outside. He missed the train," John lied.

"Oh, there is a transit train in about half an hour. He can catch that one," the conductor informed.

"Good," lied John.

He walked back to where Karen was sitting. She had not moved, though she had watched his frantic journey. As he walked forward, John yielded to others in contrast to the panic run to the back of the train. Many people glared at his passing. When he reached Karen, he sat without a word.

"Why did you do that?" Karen asked.

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"I wanted to be sure it was Jones," John explained.

"Well you sure let him know you saw him, and he knows you are going north on the train," Karen said.

"So?" John responded.

"John! We don't know what that guy's plans are. It clearly isn't what he said. If it was, he'd have left us alone," Karen spoke firm but quiet.

They rode the remainder of the trip to Newark in silence.

The train stopped at Pennsylvania Station, Newark. They got off. There were thousands of people getting off various trains. Nothing like a weekday rush hour, but there was still a crushing mass. "Where is the main lobby?" Karen asked John.

"How the hell should I know?" John asked.

"Well you left the stuff in the locker," Karen stated.

"No I didn't. I don't know who did, but I didn't. At least I don't remember doing that," John answered sharply.

"John, don't get all uptight. I'm just teasing. Let's look for a sign." Karen started looking around. "I don't see any signs," Karen said in a panicked voice.

"Then let's just follow the crowd. All these people can't be lost," John said.

"That makes sense," Karen agreed.

The mass was walking toward an escalator. The escalator was not moving. Everyone was walking up the steps as if it was just a standard staircase. Some people went other directions, but the

majority of the crowd went up the escalator. John and Karen followed.

There was a hallway, tight and jammed with people. Most continued down that hallway. To their right were a series of turnstiles. Must be the 'Tubes' to New York, thought John. Karen and John continued with the majority. John frantically looked around, he missed what was coming up in front of them.

The narrow hallway turned into a giant hall. John heard the change. Conversations that were muffled, changed to clearly audible, all voices joining in a cacophony of echoes within the great hall. John almost stopped dead in his tracks. He could not believe the size of the main lobby.

"Now we have signs," Karen said.

John looked around. "Yeah, and people that look like they work here. Maybe they will help us."

They walked through a crowd of commuters and women with bags of god knows what, shopping carts filled with dubious treasures. The women wore layers of clothing, presumably to stay warm. It was an effort to stay together.

"Look at those poor women," Karen said in a sad voice.

"I can't Karen. We need to find the lockers," John said to avoid discussing the poor.

"John, you can look at the people and find the lockers at the same time. We don't get to any city very often and I like experiencing as much as I can," Karen remarked pointedly.

"Then you look at the sights, I'll look for the lockers," John said in a tense voice.

## 29 – The Mind Changers

"Fine," Karen said. Her anger at John started to rise. "But don't be a jerk about it." She knew he could be impatient and reckless when excited.

They continued to make their way toward a man who looked like some sort of transit cop. When they reached him, he looked concerned.

"Excuse me," John said.

Karen was still watching all the action. She watched a women with children, pulling them by the arm. A man sat in an alcove, playing a violin. People tossed change into the case. A small child, who wasn't more than ten was yelling out today's top story trying to hawk his papers.

"Yes?" the officer responded.

"Could you tell me which way to the lockers?" John asked. The officer looked at John. He noticed he didn't have anything to put in a locker. He looked at Karen, neither did she.

John quickly assessed him and said, "We put something in locker C-909 before we went to Chicago and we can't remember how to get to the lockers."

"Oh, oh, yeah it can be hard to find things in this place. All the exits look the same." The cop softened. "The C and D sections are together right over there." He pointed almost exactly across the hall.

"Thanks." John said, "Let's go Karen."

Karen looked at him as if she didn't know him. Then she remembered what they were there for and joined him. She looked at the cop and said, "Thank you, thanks a lot!"

The cop nodded and tipped his cap. He walked away to investigate a disturbance in the violin alcove.

Karen and John quickly crossed the hall, entered the alcove that said 'Lockers C & D Sections' and began their search.

"Here's C-101 John and C-121 and C-151 and..."

"I got the picture Karen, let's move down a ways and see if we can find C-909."

Karen continued to mumble the locker numbers. Her voice fell into the sing-song pattern of a child's song. John didn't recognize the song, but it was familiar.

John's heart fell to his stomach as he said, "Karen, here's C-891."

Karen found C-909. It was closed and locked.

John took out the key, placed it in the lock and said a silent prayer.

"Turn the damn key John!"

John turned the key. They both looked inside, "It looks like the inside of one of those lady's bags." Karen mis-assessed the contents.

They started to rummage through.

John began pulling the paper out of the locker. He used almost no care. He wanted to be finished with the process. He continued with no regard and all at once his face changed. He responded to Karen's comment, "No, these are notes."

Karen looked at John with her jaw dropped. "Do you remember something?"

## 31 – The Mind Changers

"No, but I think I'm in trouble."

"What are you in trouble for?" Asked Karen, as she began to get concerned.

John responded slowly, "Murder."

"Murder!" Karen shouted.

"Shush, Karen keep it down! Let's get this stuff and catch the next train back."

"Why do you think you're in trouble for murder?" she asked really quietly.

"Do you remember what Jones said about the investigation?" John asked.

"Yeah, but what does that have to do with you being in trouble for murder? He said it was presumed suicide," Karen responded.

"Right, nice trick. Then they give me these notes. They want the notes to trigger some memory...something that will help me remember killing Todd," John said with little emotion.

"John, that's silly," Karen said. "You're not a murderer."

"After all this, I'm not sure if I know who I really am," John said with a very sad face.

They worked a little longer at the task. The locker was quite literally stuffed to its limit with the papers.

John continued his commentary on why he thought he was suspected of murder. "Why would Jones follow me? I don't understand that. The only explanation is that I'm a suspect. Remember, he said that the statutes of limitations ran out and how they never run out on murder," John said.

Karen stopped what she was doing and said, "John, can we get this done? We can talk about this once we are safely at home."

They continued to pull the papers out of the locker. The pile began to grow. It was growing beyond what they felt they could handle. Neither one of them had thought to bring anything in which to carry the contents of the locker.

Karen looked at John. "What are we going to put it in?" Karen asked.

"I don't know, let's see how much stuff is still in there." They continued with their shoveling of the papers out of the locker. All sorts of paper, some handwritten, some printed on either a typewriter or laser printer. The paper by and large was standard tablet size. Also most of it was white, though there was the occasional green-bar computer paper that seemed huge by comparison.

"There's a lot of paper here, John."

John kept shoveling, then saw he was almost at the end. "I think I'm almost done," he said.

Karen began to make sense of the pile. "John, I'm going to break this big pile up so we can figure out how to handle it," Karen said. She started to make smaller piles out of the one big mass on the floor. Just as she was going to give up hope and suggest they push it all back in...

John said, "That's it! Except for the bags. I guess I thought ahead."

Karen looked at him in disbelief. "John, are you beginning to believe this nonsense?"

"Worse, I'm beginning to remember bits and pieces. Nothing specific, vaguer than a dream even." John got dreamy eyed.



### 33 – The Mind Changers

Karen looked at John and realized that she was going to be responsible for making the papers fit into the bags. She started taking the already organized pages and placed them in bags. She continued in what seemed an endless task.

John sat on the floor. He was rummaging through the pages, stopped once in a while to read a passage, then continued. Occasionally both he and Karen reached for the same page. John never yielded to Karen, even though she was doing all the work. John had a page in his hand, that he was reading.

"John." Karen tried to jog him out of his trance-like state, "John, can I have that page?" Karen asked.

"Huh?" John asked.

"I'm done packing these piles into bags. That's the last page. Can I have it please?" Karen repeated herself. "Ah, yeah I guess..." John said without conviction.

"Well, no thanks to you..." Karen said.

John was still sitting on the floor. In this place he fit right in. People just walked around him. They actually gave him a wide berth. John shook his head, but still sat.

"You coming?" Karen asked. She was getting upset.

"Sure," John said as he went to stand.

They each grabbed the handles of two of the handy shopping bags and headed off to the train. They looked like street people.

Karen observed, "Maybe if we get some neat clothes like these women, we can fool Mr. Jones back in New Brunswick."

"Right, but they won't let us on the train looking like that! Either way, I don't think Mr. Jones is going to bother us for a while."

"Why do you say that John?"

John paused before answering. "Because, I need to be the real John Parker before he can press charges."

They got on the train, silently. Karen reflected on the silence. John was already different she thought. He was never so quiet.

John closed his eyes and plunged his hand into one of the bags by his feet. He pulled out a note and began to read. Karen moved the armrest between them into an upright position and leaned in close. She read over his shoulder.

"December 6. Day 46 of the reprogramming project. Good day to try something really difficult. Tomorrow is the anniversary of Pearl Harbor. My hatred of the way Japan is treating this country should prove a worthy test. I will think kindly of the Japanese, they are a fine race, proud, honest and worthy allies. They make fine cars, stereo equipment and cameras."

"John, this sounds silly. What does reprogramming have to do with how you feel about the Japanese?" John shook his head and continued reading.

"My father fought in the Korean War not World War II, his war memorabilia collection does not exist. That sword I desired as a child is a relic he picked up in a store. That is what will be required to change my mind on this subject."

"I changed my mind."

Karen looked at John "What did you say?"

John repeated it slowly with emphasis on each word. "I Changed My Mind."

"So what is that suppose to mean? You changed your mind. So big deal, people change their minds every day."

Joseph A. Sabin Jr.

## 35 – The Mind Changers

John laughed. "No Karen, I altered what I knew was real and gave myself a false memory in it's place."

They sat silent for a moment.

John spoke. "Or..." He paused. "Or, my mind was changed. My thoughts and my way of thinking. Maybe I didn't control the mind changes. If Jones was right about the LSD and all, maybe Todd was forcing something on me."

"Why would Todd force something on you?" Karen asked.

"I don't know yet. But that makes a bit more sense. I've had my thoughts altered, and I caught Todd and killed him," John speculated.

"That doesn't work," Karen chided. "It doesn't fit the history of the issue the way Jones explained it."

"Well, nothing fits right now. We need the book. Maybe that will shed some light," John said.

"Newww Brrunswickkk," shouted the conductor.

John wondered if they went to school to learn how to drag out the sound of the train station names. He put the paper back into the bag, making sure it was the first one. His thought being that he didn't want to read each one more than he had to.

"John."

"Huh?"

"Are you remembering this stuff?"

"Yes, yes I am. I don't have any details yet, but I remember. I think I have also dreamt about it."

"I don't remember any recurring dreams," Karen said.

John's reply was simple. "That's because they didn't recur."

"John, let's get off and get to Miller's house before he loses that book again!"

"Really!"

They hopped into their car, John paid the attendant and they were off again in search of South Rt. 95.

"How much did that cost?" Karen worried.

"Too much," John responded.

On the way to the 'real 95' and were able to speed a little. John hooked up the radar detector and proceeded to accelerate.

"Not too fast," Karen reminded him. Last time he got a speeding ticket he had the detector, it warned him, but slowing down from 105 to 55 was not easy. He got a ticket for going 85 MPH in a 55 MPH zone. It cost them plenty the next three years in increased insurance premiums.

Silence filled the car. John ached with desire to end it, but could not think of anything to say. His mind swirled with this disruptive news.

Karen broke the silence. "John, why did you call Miller stupid?"

"Because of the book. You know I don't really think he's stupid. In fact he's the brightest man I've ever met," John admitted.

"Oh," was all Karen could think to say.

## 37 – The Mind Changers

The car with its semi-careless driver were careening along a service road when Karen exclaimed, "John, that's the entrance to 95!"

John looked at the sign. "Yeah, in half a mile. Better slow down and get over."

Silence.

As they got onto the super highway, John accelerated to about 80 MPH. Karen didn't say a word. The radar detector quietly beeped, checking for the police. The sun was shining a red, late afternoon glow on Karen's hair. It was accentuating the beautiful highlights and made her hair seem strawberry-blonde. She was relaxed and sensuously reclined in the bucket seat. The car and sun were warm. She had unbuttoned her jacket, the sweater she wore clung to her breasts.

John's attention was taken away from the road by the small darkness of her nipples showing through the thin sweater. They bumped slightly through the knit and made John feel very sexy. He could feel himself getting excited. He shook his head and glanced at the speedometer, 94 MPH, "Oops," John said.

Karen's quiet repose was disturbed by that statement, "What's up?" she asked.

"Going too fast, I've slowed down," John answered.

"How fast?" Karen asked.

"Almost 95," John admitted.

"What the hell were you thinking about?"

"Sex! Your tits look really nice in that sweater. The sun shining on your hair and...well, I didn't pay any attention to speed."

Karen laughed, lifted her sweater to expose herself completely to John.

"Put your sweater down!" John yelled.

"Why? Don't you want the truckers to see?" Karen teased.

John hit the accelerator hard and caused the car to jump. The car went from 70 to 80 MPH in about a second and John didn't let go of the pedal. Karen's sweater was down and John eased off the gas.

Both were laughing. The remainder of the trip was uneventful and without interference from the police. Because of that, they made excellent time and arrived only an hour later than the earliest Miller and Doreen could have expected them.

"Karen, would you get the directions Miller sent us?" John requested.

Karen dug into her purse. She was glad she remembered that last Christmas Doreen had sent clear directions to their house. It wasn't Miller, but Doreen. Karen decided not to argue.

"Okay, we take the exit right up there..."

"Right, what's next?" John said cutting her off and in a snotty argumentative voice.

"...at the 'Y', take the right hand side. Travel through three traffic lights, at the road on the right, directly after the third traffic light, turn right onto 'Black Horse Drive'. The third road on your left is 'St. Georges Way'. Turn left on that. Our house is the sixth house on the left. It's blue with yellow trim."

Karen read the directions and John implemented them. When she reached the description of the house, John looked at her.

## 39 – The Mind Changers

"Yuch, blue with yellow trim?" John made a face. Both he and Karen were very opinionated and frequently voiced them inappropriately.

"Well, depends on the shades of those colors John. It could be quite pretty." Karen defended.

"Yeah, but it also might need to be painted. I don't think Miller would have chosen those colors."

They came to the house. It was pretty as Karen had suggested. The yellow trim was not very yellow, and the blue was almost gray. Someone had an imagination, and it produced a very striking effect.

They turned into Miller's driveway. Miller was outside quicker than either of them could believe. He was a red haired man in his mid-forties. Slight wisps of gray flowed through both his beard and hair. He wore his mustache long, it almost obscured his mouth. His horned-rimmed glasses gave him a professorial aura.

His button-down blue Oxford cloth shirt was partially tucked into his khaki pants. He wore white tennis shoes with no socks. He ran to the car to greet his friends.

"What the hell is so important about this damn book that you drove all the way down here?" Miller exclaimed.

John grabbed the book out of his hands. Karen looked over his shoulder. There was nothing in the front cover. Nothing in the back cover. There was nothing but the text and pictures of the book.

John looked at Miller with fire in his eyes. "Miller is this really my book!" To John his old books were like old friends and he treasured them.

Miller looked at him and retorted, "of course it's your book, look at the paper cover, you wrote something on it. I always wondered

where that complex formula came from, but it is your handwriting!"

Karen had the book in her hands, tore the dust jacket off and there it was.



# CHAPTER

# THREE

Miller looked at the two of them sitting there in the car, the engine was still running. The car was still in gear.

He said, "come on in, turn the engine off first though."

They sat and stared at the writing on the dust cover. Neither of them knew what it meant. Both of them knew it meant more than they wanted to deal with.

Miller repeated himself, "Turn off the engine and come inside. Doreen has dinner ready for us."

They sat staring.

Miller reached inside the car, turned the key. The engine faded with a slight sputter. "Hey John you never were any good at keeping a car running," Miller teased. Miller went to Karen's side of the car and opened the door. He gestured for her to exit. Inviting her out, Miller said, "Come on Karen, let's go inside. It's raining and I'm getting soaked."

Karen broke the car's silence, "John, let's go inside. We don't want to be insensitive guests," Karen said, realizing how happy she was to see Miller and Doreen. They were good friends and Karen looked forward to their company and one of Doreen's wonderful meals.

John moved to open the door, noticed the keys and stopped. He thought a moment, shook his head, removed the keys from the ignition switch and got out. He walked like a man who had been in a car too long. His legs were stiff, his back ached and his head was pounding.

Miller walked over to John and gave him a hug. John's arms hung to his side. John was exhausted, and a bit embarrassed by Miller's hug. The support felt reassuring and he began to realize it was all his tension that caused the apprehension about visiting Miller and Doreen. With that thought, John started to relax. He threw his arm

around Miller's ample waist and said, "It's good to see you, old buddy!" Although it was somewhat forced, the feelings were genuine.

In the meantime, Karen noticed Doreen standing at the door. She yelled, "Hi Doreen!"

The three of them walked up to the house as if someone had died. John and Karen's rising level of hope didn't influence their gait. Doreen was smiling, happy to have guests. She felt alone since Miller took his job down there. Karen tried to pull herself together to greet Doreen, but was feeling close to collapse. This is not the first time John and Karen have gone into a project full force, forgetting everything in its wake. They were both tired and hungry, having not stopped since the visit by Jones.

Miller broke the ice. "Want a beer, old buddy?"

John looked up and for the first time since Jones' visit got a genuine smile on his face. "Oh yeah, Miller! Make it one of your finest, I really need it!"

"How about something to eat?" Doreen added.

"F-O-O-D!" exclaimed Karen. "John and I have not eaten in hours, God that sounds wonderful. Smells good too, what is it?"

"Just pasta and garlic bread. A salad if you want one," Doreen answered.

"Your sauce?" John asked hoping.

"Uh-huh, and Miller's sour beer and chives dressing on the salad, if you want it," Doreen stated.

Miller brewed his own beer. He had disappeared to the cellar and returned with two six packs of bottles. "Karen? Do you want a beer or some Meade?"

Karen's eyes lit. "I'll have some Meade! Thanks Miller, you're a great guy."

Doreen and Karen had a split of meade while Miller and John each had a glass of bock. The sharp contrast of the two beverages was obvious to all. This bock beer was a dopple-bock; the strongest of the naturally fermented traditional German beers. The beer was fairly dark, though still crystal clear. It was like looking through a black diamond.

The meade, also crystal clear, was the color of white wine or champagne. It had a fine series of bubbling beads rising to the top of the glass. The bubbles made a sharp, pleasant snapping sound as they popped at the surface.

The beer had bubbles rising, but you could barely see them. Instead they made themselves visible through a solid, dark, creamy head of foam.

"To good friends!" Miller offered a toast.

"To health and wealth," continued Doreen.

"To resolving my newest mystery!" moaned John.

"To good sex!" cheered Karen.

Laughter, clinking glasses, more laughter and above all, drinking.

"Wow! This is better than I remember it," Karen said of Miller's meade.

"Yeah Miller, this is the kind of beer I could get spoiled by," John added.

"Hey, I told you man, it's easy to do, you could make your own!" Miller told John.

"Don't get him started," warned Karen, "but, John, you could make meade."

Karen had a love affair with meade. Miller introduced her to it when John and she first met. He introduced it as 'The Nectar of the Gods. There is so much history,' he had continued, 'that I can only begin to tell you about it. It is the most ancient of all alcoholic beverages; probably made by mistake when water got into the honey and it fermented.'

Karen remembered saying 'Oh what a lovely mistake!'

Back to the present, Karen, with her glass in hand, turned to Miller and said, "Please tell us more about Meade! Please. I just love hearing about it."

Miller hesitated, they sat around the table in the porch near which Miller had placed a small heater to make it more comfortable. It was raining and the fresh brew, wonderful pasta and bread made Karen and John forget their problems for the moment.

"Okay, just a bit," Miller said. "Meade, as you all know, is made from honey, water and yeast. My meade has a few more ingredients. Plus I make it sparkling so it's like a champagne. It's legend that a newly married couple would spend a full phase of the moon drinking meade. After which the woman was inevitably pregnant."

"This was called their honey moon," John added. "Ah yes, an aphrodisiac, I remember some of those nights!"

Karen hit him on the arm before he could continue. "Enough stories, let's catch up on the past year."

They talked for a bit, John wanted to see Miller's brewhouse. So the men vanished with their beer leaving Doreen and Karen.

Doreen asked, "Karen, what is going on? We haven't seen you guys since we moved. Why now?"

The question she knew Doreen would inevitably ask. Karen took a deep breath and said, "Something happened, something odd and I'm still not sure what it means."

Doreen pressed, "So, what happened?"

Karen replied, "That's for John to explain, I don't understand. A guy came to visit, a guy neither of us knew. Gave John a package and left."

"What was in the package?"

"A letter and a key."

"A key to what?"

"A locker in Penn Station, Newark."

"Come on Karen, let's not play twenty questions. What is going on?"

John and Miller were laughing in the background, Karen looked at Doreen, dropped her guard and told the story. All the story, not the details, not the part about murder. She didn't understand it all yet and did not feel it appropriate to discuss this with her husband's friend's wife. She liked Doreen, but Doreen's history of blowing things out of proportion caused Karen to leave the details fuzzy.

The two men returned. Each had a new beer. Karen wondered if it was their second. John was laughing easily, so she suspected it was not. She smiled, relieved that John had relaxed.

Doreen cut in, "I've fixed the guest room up. It's getting late and you shouldn't drive home after so many beers." She glared at Miller, he laughed.

"It's gotten cold out here, let's go inside, I've got a fire going, let's go enjoy it." They retired to the living room.

Miller cracked some more beer and meade. The women were giddy by then from the meade. The men were slouching in their seats. Everyone had had too much, except John. John still remembered. After a few more hours, the Parkers excused themselves and made their way to the guest room.

They flopped down onto the bed. "Whoa, what a day!"

"Yeah, what a day," John agreed.

They both fell asleep, on top of the covers, with their shoes on.

In the master bedroom the conversation lasted a bit longer. Doreen looked at her husband and asked, "What is going on?" That was the question she had been asking all night. Even she felt like a broken record.

Her husband, turning, replied, "I think John is in trouble for something he did before I met him. He and this Todd guy were working on something. John only remembers a few parts of it."

Doreen snorted, "how can he remember only some of it and know he's in trouble? This does not make any sense."

Her husband replied, "he used a mind altering drug, and some advanced programming techniques to change his mind. He actually succeeded, apparently, in turning his conscious perception of himself into a different form."

Doreen sat up in bed, this was what she was looking for all night. "Miller, just what did John tell you?"

Miller slumped, he had said too much, Doreen had her teeth into the story. He didn't answer.

"Come on Miller, tell me."

"No, not until I understand it better."

"Miller, I want to know, he's my friend too," Doreen pleaded.

Her husband declined to fight that thought. "Good night Doreen, I'm too tired to discuss this."

She was furious for being teased by such an intriguing subject and not being given any details. Still, the meade was having an effect on her and she, uncharacteristically, gave in and dropped off to sleep.



# CHAPTER

# FOUR

Miller and John snuck out before their wives woke. They planned that the night before. Miller worked in a government complex. He knew someone there that could help. While they were away from the women, they had called him and made the plans.

John spoke first. "Miller, I feel rotten sneaking out on Karen."

"Well, John, either that or we'd have to bring Doreen too."

"I thought of that too, I left Karen a note. So let's get going!"

"What did you note say?" Miller asked concerned.

"Nothing much, just that you had a friend that might know what the formula meant. I told her to explain something to Doreen in a way that made it sound less mysterious," John answered.

"Good," Miller said.

They drove for a few minutes without speaking. Miller had stopped at a convenience store to get them some coffee. They couldn't make it back at the house. Both of their wives had highly sensitive noses for coffee. It would have woken them both. Back on the road, sipping hot coffee through little tear-out parts of the plastic lids.

"So where does this guy live?" John asked as he almost choked on the coffee.

Miller was laughing at his gagging, coughing, gurgling kind of speech, but he understood what he asked.

"He lives in the next town over. Where all the rich people live," Miller answered pointedly.

"So he's rich?" John asked.

"Yeah, made his money off of the poor. This guy has done a little of everything. He's quite old, really smart and devious," Miller answered.

"Can we trust him?" John asked, worried.

"Sure, this, whatever it is, is small potatoes to him. He's not going to care. He'll tell us what we want to know and we'll leave," Miller reassured.

John was not so sure. He didn't even know what was going on, so if this guy started asking questions, he felt he'd be in trouble.

"What's his name?" John asked, realizing he didn't know.

"Doctor Peterson," Miller responded.

"What's he a doctor of?" John asked.

"I think he's a medical doctor, but he also has a couple dozen diplomas and degrees. He's studied everything about biology, human make-up and stuff," Miller answered.

John found it humorous that his 'well educated' friend used such uninformed language to describe the doctor.

"Okay, so do you think he'll know about this?" John asked holding up the book.

"John, why do you think I suggested seeing him? Of course he'll know something about it." Miller defended his decision to meet with Doctor Peterson.

"Fine, I'll wait and see," John said.

"John, don't insult Doctor Peterson when we begin discussing this. He may not know right away. But I bet he can figure it out." Miller had gotten upset with his friend's nervous questioning.

John didn't respond. He thought he had pressed it as far as he dared. Miller was annoyed, and he better just sit tight he thought.

"Here's our turn off," Miller announced.

They turned into a rather old community. The homes were large, impressive and had well-manicured lawns and shrubs. The trees, lining the road, were huge. They had a mottled bark that looked like it was shedding. John had seen trees like this before. He was thinking about them, he remembered where.

"Hey Miller, this looks like a road in Princeton!" John said.

Miller smiled and said. "Yeah, I bet it does! These are sycamores, impressive trees when their mature like these."

"Oh yeah, I remember seeing a huge one that doesn't shed its bark any more. There are also some sycamores near the market in my town. Those trees must be almost 200 years old, they're four feet around," John added.

"Just a fancy maple, that's all," Miller said, effectively finishing their discussion on sycamore trees.

They drove a little further. Miller looked at his notes and turned left. The houses got a little less impressive. The trees were stately maples, rather than the gigantic sycamores a block back. Miller drove a little further and turned left. They drove past two houses.

They pulled into Dr. Fred T. Peterson's driveway. Miller stopped the car and they got out. The pathway that lead to the porch was old brick, well-worn and the seams were filled with a beautiful moss. They went to the front door. The door had stained glass windows and heavy forged brass braces holding the oak panels

together. There was a door knocker. Miller grabbed the knocker and banged it too hard.

"Shit Miller, that was loud enough to wake the dead," admonished John.

"Let's hope they were fairly far away," Miller said.

Mrs. Peterson answered the door after about a minute's wait. Miller's hopes and prayers had been answered.

"Hello, are you Mr. O'Miller and Mr. Parker?" Mrs. Peterson asked.

"Yes we are," Miller answered.

"Well come in, come in." Mrs. Peterson invited them in.

"Thank you Ma'am," John responded.

"Come into the parlor, I've fixed us some tea." Mrs. Peterson welcomed them to her home.

John thought that was odd.

Miller graciously accepted and said, "Mrs. Peterson, we met before, but I'd like to introduce myself I'm Miller, and this is my friend John. John Parker."

"Miller?" Mrs. Peterson asked.

"Yes, my real name is Jamison O'Miller, but everyone calls me Miller."

"Oh, yes, I see. Nice to meet you Miller and you ... John, I'm Mabel Peterson."

"Mrs. Peterson..." John and Miller said in unison. John nodded in a gesture as if he was tipping his hat. That pleased Mrs. Peterson and a smile flashed across her face.

With introductions out of the way, the three walked through a large, arching entranceway, the stairs to the second floor gracefully rose and turned right overhead. Oak stairs covered partially with an oriental carpet runner. Each stair had a brass bar running across the fold of the carpet. John remembered seeing something like that in a magazine. He didn't know what they were called. The floor of the entranceway was marble. But not just plain marble, it was a marble tile, set in a complex pattern. The most beautiful tiles were the black marble pieces with gold feathered swirling stripes.

They entered a smaller room, toward the center of the house. It had heavy brocade curtains. Cast around them were things. All sorts of things. Womanly type stuff. This was clearly not a man's study. This, thought John, was the parlor. John looked around in amazement. He and Karen had nice things, but they all seemed like antique shop leftover items compared to what he saw in that room.

He turned his head and there sat a man. He was a man so old that John could not imagine this to be the man they came to visit.

"Doctor Peterson," Miller said.

Yup, this was the man they had come to see, thought John.

"This is my friend John Parker," continued Miller. "It's a pleasure to meet you Doctor Peterson," John said as he walked over to shake the elderly man's hand.

Peterson did not stand. He sat in his chair, but raised his hand to meet John's.

"It is my pleasure young man," Dr. Peterson responded.

"Please, take a seat," Mrs. Peterson said. She gestured toward a pair of wingback chairs. The chairs were obviously old. They were very old, yet in perfect repair. John appreciated the aging pieces, worn, but intact. The seats, seat backs and arm cushions were a fine petit point Fleurs-de-lis pattern. Classics, pure classics. He wished Karen were there to see them.

The two men sat a moment after Mrs. Peterson.

Doctor Peterson noticed that. Gentlemen, he thought. That was certainly refreshing.

Mrs. Peterson had poured tea. She passed the cups and saucers around.

The four sat around a small table sipping tea and eating cinnamon toast. The toast brought back happy memories for John, then he shook with the thought. What if those memories are a fabrication of this sick experiment. When are we going to be done this 'tea'?

The conversation moved from what the two men do, through antiques, a little about politics and to Mrs. Peterson's garden.

"You have beautiful flowers," said John.

"Oh thank you John. Most men don't notice," Mrs. Peterson responded.

"My wife and I are gardeners," John explained.

"Fred, dug all the gardens in the yard," Mrs. Peterson announced proudly. "He was quite a gardener in his day."

"Still am," defended Peterson, "I just can't work quite as fast. I'm not dead yet."

"Oh no dear, no, you are quite alive." Mrs. Peterson said with a small tear in her eye. "But we don't need to do that kind of digging anymore. You did such a fine job when we moved in."

"We have over five hundred types of flowering plants in our gardens," Peterson announced proudly.

"Wow, we have about two hundred in ours," John responded. "And we thought that was a lot."

"It is." Peterson counseled. "When you're as old as me, you'll probably have six hundred. It takes years to build up a good garden. When did you buy your house?"

"About two years ago," John answered. "The week we moved in we planted more than a thousand bulbs!"

"A thousand bulbs. My, my," exclaimed Mrs. Peterson.

"And that's nothing now, we have about ten times that! Every year we have to thin the tulips and daffodils. Would you like some bulbs?" John asked.

"Yes we would. That is very kind of you," Peterson responded.

They continued talking about gardening. Miller had little to say about it. He let Doreen handle most of the garden work. He would help turn the soil, but he knew little about flowers. He felt left out.

John could see that so he changed the subject. "Did you know Miller makes his own beer and wine?" John asked. "Yes, I had heard that," Peterson said. "That must be very interesting."

The conversation successfully turned to Miller. John rested and observed the Peterson's. He felt he could trust this man. \* \* \* \*

Theresa was sitting in the kitchen sipping coffee and quietly reading the Sunday paper. She heard a noise and looked up.



"Did they come home last night?" Ted asked.

"No."

"Huh, do you know where this Miller guy lives?"

"I've asked for verification, but it seems to me they were going to a suburb of Baltimore," Theresa answered.

"Ah, that makes sense, about a hundred miles south."

\* \* \* \*

Karen woke first, she noticed that John was not in bed next to her. She almost jumped out of bed, tripping on a small stool. "Shit!" Karen almost yelled. She sat on the bed and rubbed her foot, especially the toe she jammed on the stool. At some point she noticed John's note to her. She grabbed it and began to read.

In the other room Doreen stirred. She had been disturbed by Karen's yell, but not bothered by it. Doreen was glad to know her guest was up. She hurried to dress and ran downstairs to fix some coffee.

Karen put her shoe back on and smelled the coffee brewing downstairs. She went to the bathroom and fixed her hair. Not much she could do with her clothes, she had slept in them and didn't have anything else to put on. She smoothed her clothes as best she could and prepared to go down and deal with Doreen. As she approached the door she heard Doreen calling Miller's name. Doreen must have thought Miller was in the yard or something.

Downstairs, Doreen had coffee ready and Karen joined her in the kitchen. "Good morning," Karen said.

"Good morning Karen," Doreen replied, "is John still in bed?"

"No, he and Miller headed out first thing this morning. Miller didn't want to wake you," Karen lied.

"Oh," Doreen said, "where'd they go?"

"To a friend of Miller's, it's about the stuff written in the book. Miller told us he had that idea. Don't you remember?"

Doreen and the rest had gotten quite happy with the meade and beer; Karen figured suggesting Doreen's possible forgetfulness was a good ploy.

"No, I don't remember," Doreen said, Karen could see the look on her face change from pensive, to thoughtful to who gives a shit. "Not at all, I just can't remember. Doesn't matter. Have some coffee and we'll go get some doughnuts after our first cup."

"Sound good," Karen replied.

\* \* \* \*

Doctor Peterson was very kind, friendly and forthright. John was very happy to sit and listen to the stories of wine tasting and beer halls in Germany. Then suddenly Dr. Peterson rose. "You'll excuse us dear. These gentlemen are here on business."

Mrs. Peterson smiled and said. "Of course honey, nice to have met you two fine boys."

The two other men stood, John and Miller followed Dr. Peterson to his lab.

Peterson sat, turned to the younger men and asked. "So what's so important that we meet on Sunday morning?"

John pulled the book from his jacket.

Peterson snorted, "Oh that silly thing? A poor excuse for a metaphysical essay!"

John had gotten used to that kind of remark from people a generation older and ignored it.

"No, Dr. There is something written on the dust jacket. Miller thought you could tell us about it." John pulled off the dust jacket and handed it to Peterson.

The Doctor accepted the dust jacket, looked at the writing, removed his glasses and thought a moment. It came back to him in a thunderous bolt of a memory flash. Fear washed across his face. He recovered and began looking for a book on the bookcase. Shelf after shelf he looked.

John had noticed a look on Peterson's face that looked like panic, but it was gone. He thought nothing of it and waited for the doctor to find what he was looking for. It seemed like an excessively long search when...

"Ah, here it is," Peterson said. He sat, put his glasses back on and flipped through pages. Page after page. He was reading, or so it seemed. The two other men waited. "As I suspected. This is an odd combination. It is not a controlled substance, however," Peterson said.

"What's a controlled substance?" John asked.

"That's a drug that must either be used only by prescription or is illegal entirely," Peterson answered. "This one, however is not. It's like a rat poison."

"What? Rat poison?" John asked.

"No, not rat poison. Like rat poison. So it is not controlled. That was a trick used by some of the 'designers' of that kind of drug," Peterson went on.

Miller and John looked at each other. Neither one knew what to say. They said nothing.

Peterson was proud of his story, he went on and said to the two men, "You must never attempt to produce this."

John looked at Miller then spoke. "We don't even know what it is. If it is not rat poison like you just said, Dr. Peterson, will you tell us what it is?"

Peterson hesitated, then began. "It is a poison and a fairly simple derivative of LSD, mixed in an unstable manner. When taken orally, I think it would break down and become toxic."

John pressed for more. "What would the toxic effect be?"

The doctor thought and responded, "Most probably, if a non-lethal dose was taken, it would yield unconsciousness for a prolonged period. Lowered blood pressure and heart rate would follow leading to death."

"That sounds lethal to me Dr. Peterson."

"Yes, but this is a poison and should kill instantly. But since it is mixed as a psychopharmaceutical it would be taken in a very small quantity. That would cause the body to shut down slowly."

John framed his next question carefully. "Would a small dose be measurable?"

The doctor considered that question for a long moment and replied, "I can't tell you that. Do you plan to kill someone?"

Miller replied, "No doctor, my friend feels he was given that substance years ago. He believes it caused a coma like state."

The doctor hesitated. "Yes, it would look like a coma if a doctor didn't know about the drug and poison. Also, if the patient came into the hospital while still under the influence of the drug, blood tests would reveal the drug. The poison would look like something with which the drug was 'cut'."

John asked, "So doctor, in your opinion, if I took this mixture would I have seemed to be in a coma following an unfortunate LSD trip?"

"Yes, that is how that would look to a hospital. Their testing procedures could never have detected the difference between this drug and LSD or rat poison. And there are many toxic substances that make their way into street drugs. So the very low level of toxin would not have caused anyone to think it was the cause of the coma."

"Thank you doctor." John stood to leave. Miller repeated John's thank yous and rose to leave.

The doctor's final warning was, "Don't try this mixture gentlemen. I should report it to the authorities. I will not. If I hear about anyone using it, I will report it. Good day." He left the room and showed them the door.

John and Miller said goodbye to Mrs. Peterson and let themselves out the door. They walked down the porch steps toward John's car. At the car John said, "Miller, you drive. I'm really shaken by what Dr. Peterson just told us."

"Okay," Miller answered. Miller looked at John's car, what a joy it must be to drive. Now he finally got his chance.

Silence. John was getting sick of silence. But he couldn't open his mouth, his heart was in his stomach and his brain was onto something else. "Miller, slow down!"

"Up yours!"

Silence once more.

Back at Miller's home, neither man knew what to expect when they walked into the house. Miller followed John into the kitchen. To both of their surprise the ladies had coffee and doughnuts sitting on the kitchen table. John and Miller each poured a cup of coffee and grabbed for the same doughnut. They laughed and offered it to the other, and grabbed for it again. All four broke into a nervous laughter as John and Miller ripped the doughnut in half and stuffed it down their throats in a mock macho act. John nearly choked on his half and Karen laughed even harder.

"So?" Karen asked, once John had stopped choking.

Silence. The two men just looked at each other. Neither one wanted to go first.

"John?" Karen prompted.

John took a deep breath and answered the question so directly that all were shocked.

Silence again.

"We should go," John said to the three others. "I have a lot of work in front of me and I might need a lawyer."

They said their goodbyes, promised not to be such strangers and hopped into John's car and drove north. Back to New Jersey. Back to searching for a past, of which John had almost no recollection. The trip was silent, except for the occasional beep of the radar detector.

# CHAPTER

# FIVE

They dragged their loot into the house under the cover of darkness. Once inside, they hung up their coats, moved into the office and surveyed the packages.

"Well Karen, how do we proceed?"

"Don't know. I do want to know more about your visit with Miller's friend. I know you couldn't discuss it with Doreen there and it was hard while driving, but let's talk about what you found out," Karen said.

"That's right. I didn't tell you much about it. Well, it looks as if this formula in the book could have caused my coma and had me knocked out for a while," John answered.

"That's a start. Actually, I think that makes what Jones was telling us about the LSD stuff make more sense," Karen added.

"Right. The stuff that this would be like is rat poison. But it would have a similar effect as LSD," John told her.

"Rat poison? How can that have a similar effect to LSD?" Karen questioned.

"I don't think I explained that right. The formula makes something that is like rat poison. It isn't rat poison. That keeps it from being a 'controlled substance'," John explained. "So it could be distributed without criminal charges if the distributor was caught."

"Do you think you were a dealer?" Karen posed.

"No, I don't. I think Todd was and he might have been into it big time. I think we worked on some of this together, but I don't know what my part was."

"Maybe these notes will tell us," Karen offered.



"They just might. So, how do you want to approach this task?" John asked, looking for an easy out.

"How about if we dump all these papers onto the floor and begin to sort them by date?" was Karen's suggestion.

John frowned and said, "That sounds like a task for a computer, not a human."

"How else do you expect these papers to get sorted? They are not going to sort themselves. Let's just do it!"

Unenthusiastically John agreed to that approach, being the only one that made sense. He took a bag and tipped it toward the floor. Papers poured out. An endless supply he thought.

They both knelt down and began rooting through the papers. They discovered that there was only a year's worth of notes. Or so they assumed. There was no year indicator on any of them, only month and day. So the sorting was done into twelve piles. There was one additional pile for pages not dated, or date not readable. Thankfully only a few fell into that pile.

John stopped at a note and read it out loud to Karen.

"Todd is having second thoughts about the experiment. I can't believe it. Not at this late date. He won't share the drug formula with me. I've got to have that drug, I've gone too far to turn back. My past is too painful to keep. Much too painful to keep."

"There's more, but that's the part that made my blood go cold." John looked to Karen for comfort. Karen's response was a question mark. John moved closer to Karen.

Karen reached out and gave him a quick hug. "We need to keep moving on this. We need to have this make sense, to find out who

the real you is. I need to know that, I married John Parker a man who is a figment of his own imagination."

John looked scared and felt almost sick. He said in a shaky voice. "I...I know Karen...I fear finding the truth. That note makes me sound dangerous, as if I was soon to be able to do something radical to Todd." They were about half done.

"On to bag three," Karen said in a mock cheerful voice.

Silence filled the room. Halfway through the bag John exclaimed, "Here it is!"

"What?" said Karen.

"The premise for the whole experiment. It's not note one, but a multi-page explanation."

"Read it," ordered Karen.

"I'm about to begin the biggest programming experiment of my life. One full year of synaptic alteration. If successful, I will change my mind. Alter the past to suit my choice for the future.

My theory that the human mind is as programmable as any computer system hasn't won me any prizes yet. The mind, merely a series of on and off switches in a very complex setting, the same as a computer. I did not like what my life has been, so I set out to change my perception of the life I have already lived. By altering the past, I feel I can begin living my future the way I desire.

Those that are familiar with computer programming are often confused by mind programming. Mind programming has little physically in common with computer programming, at least on the surface. The mind deals with vastly more complex objects than computer programmers can construct. We call them memories. An object can be anything. What we 'mind programmers' deal with are

memories, complex thoughts. Memories of mother, father, sisters, brothers, or the lack of these significant family members.

Take a hole in life. Think about how you would like to fill it. Imagine everything being as it could be... perfect, just, happy, whole. Hold the thought in mind. Give it color. Give it dimension. Give it sound. Hold the image. Give it feeling. Hold the image. Give it love. Hold the image. Does it fill a gap in life? Give it words. Give it substance. Give it a name. Does it still feel right? Give it reality.

Sounds simple. It's not. Old thoughts, memories, and old realities come and replace that wonderful image. The reason? Simple really, we have several types of memories, short term, long term, sweet dreams, and permanent storage. These are my words for the types of memories we have. Most people think only in terms of short and long term memory. I don't care about either of these. I only care about permanent storage. This is the place we put images that create all the pain for the things we wanted and never got. The place for everything with which we cannot deal. The place we want to program.

Think of a day when everything is going wrong, or everything is going right. Either way, doesn't matter. What happens? You think of something from your remote past, near past or another life that has some connection with the feeling you have from the day. Where does that come from? It comes from a place in your mind I call permanent storage. Very long term, part of the make-up that make you you, and me me. Some of which we could do very well without. Some of which is important for our make-up, and personality. But if you want to program your mind, you need to know about what's in this place in your mind.

Is the person that is me, John, the same as the John I am going to be?

Thus the odyssey begins."

"Wow, John that really sounds exciting!"

"KAREN! Wake up! We are talking about an experiment I did on my mind. I might have changed every memory I have. Maybe I'm not estranged from my parents, which might be a convenient excuse for not being in contact with them for the duration of the 90 day experiment. Not to mention it's no small thing that a suspicious death might have occurred because of substance abuse."

"Wait a minute," said Karen. "Nothing in that said 90 days. It talked about a yearlong experiment."

"You know you are right! I wonder why the contradiction?"

"Well, October 21st should be day one. What's the date on that note?" Karen thought she was on to something.

John looked for a date. "Here it is, it says October 10."

"I guess you thought about it for a while before starting."

"Yeah, that makes sense. But let's think about the contradiction."

"Actually John, I don't think there is a contradiction. I think the experiment didn't even intend to use drugs. Not at first. I mean, I don't think you intended to use drugs for your programming experiment."

John thought about that for a minute. "That makes sense because in one note, where is it now? It was a late August note." He shuffled papers around.

Karen watched John make a mess. "John, easy, take it easy. We put a lot of effort to make those neat. Don't screw them all up and mix them up!"

"Sorry. Here it is!"

"It's been more than ten months. I keep having relapses of memory. Todd came back from the West, somewhere in California. He has some new ideas about learning and growing. He's claiming an LSD derivative he's been working with, can help. I'm getting a bit nervous about having him involved in this. I wish I never told him about it. He slipped the yesterday and mentioned how the government could use this idea. He wouldn't tell me why."

Karen and John looked at each other for some time. Amazing how silence has entered their life. Just a few days ago they were watching movies, listening to music and having a great time.

"Damn that Tim Jones!" John had exploded off the floor with such a jolt that Karen flinched.

"John, if you really did this, it's not Jones' fault."

"Whose is it, mine?" "No. It's no one's fault. It resulted in our being together, our life is based upon the past you remember. You and I are married and our life is now. Let's not try to blame anyone, let's try to figure this out. Okay?"

"Yeah, let's," John agreed.

\* \* \* \*

"Do you think it's going okay?" Ted asked.

"Who knows? Cizzano just wants us to listen for now. So let's listen," Theresa answered.

CHAPTER

SIX

"Sir, Colonel Jones reports."

"At ease Jones. This is not the Army," Cizzano replied.

"Yes, sir."

The Assistant Director looked Jones up and down. He let his gaze move to the window. Since his last promotion he's had a wonderful office, a view of the Potomac and, if he craned his neck, some of the monuments as well.

Jones was a colonel in the green beret, he was court marshaled for killing a superior officer. Although acquitted of the charge, Cizzano was mindful of it and Jones' explosive temper. Cizzano realized his thoughts had wandered, he faced Jones and began the debriefing.

"You met with Parker?"

"Yes, sir."

"How did he react to the news?"

"Confused and argumentative, yet he followed the instructions in the letter."

"Good," the Assistant Director, Andre Cizzano said with a smile.  
"Very good. Are Ted and Theresa still observing?"

"Yes sir, I feel my cover may be questioned if Parker sees me again too soon. Ted and Theresa are effectively invisible to the Parkers."

Cizzano contemplated that statement as he watched the morning rush begin.

The two men stood in the office of the Assistant Director for a few minutes without speaking a word. The city began to sound like

most of America's cities on a work day, car horns, trucks; the murmur of the heart of American politics.

Cizzano's attention once again focused on Jones. "How the hell did you let yourself be spotted following those two?" An angry, forceful statement which was followed by a thoughtful moment. Cizzano looked at the man standing in his office. Next to Cizzano he was a giant. How could he possibly disappear into a crowd?

Jones went to answer the accusation, "I was following..."

But Cizzano cut him off with a wave of his hand. "Fine Jones, it's okay. This eliminates part of our observations, but doesn't stop them. I should never have allowed you to make first contact."

Jones folded his arms in front of his chest. Cizzano laughed to himself at the image, thank god for civilization this man could very nearly kill him with one blow. However, he still felt intimidated. But that's what Jones intended.

Cizzano parried, "Have a seat Jones."

"No thank you sir, I'd like to stand."

"Sit." He pointed to a chair with his eyes, Jones moved to the chair and sat. Cizzano marveled at how he sat without unfolding his arms.

Cizzano began with Jones' new orders he knew would not make Jones a happy man. He had no choice, he had orders of his own.

"Jones, you are being reassigned."

"What?" Jones stood, towering over Cizzano's seated body.

Cizzano gulped and continued. "The agency needs Parker, we need you to stay away."



Jones began to pace.

Cizzano relaxed a bit, relieved to have him at a distance. The .45 automatic in his desk drawer would do him no good. He had not yet unlocked his desk. Don't worry he's telling himself. Hah!, don't worry indeed, there's almost no staff in yet. His aid was not at his station when they began this meeting. He is alone and must proceed. "Jones! Take your seat!"

Jones turned, his square jaw set, his steel blue/gray eyes were blazing.

Cizzano repeated himself, "Take your seat Colonel!"

The juxtaposition of the Army order took effect. Jones face remained stone, but he placed himself in a chair. Actually it was a small sofa, but Jones very nearly filled the space.

Good, thought Cizzano. "Tim." Cizzano used people's first names whenever there was bad news. He used it to get personal, and distance himself from the agency. "It is not up to me what assignment you get." he lied. "I am very pleased with the progress you made on the Parker case. We both know how many years I've worked on it."

Jones went to speak.

Cizzano cut him off. "You are actually being promoted to work on this case full-time. Congratulations!" Cizzano stood and walked over to Jones.

Jones' steely eyes frowned, he stood to greet Cizzano.

Cizzano motioned that he should sit at the conference table in the meeting area. Both men walked to the alcove and sat. \* \* \* \*

"John, Johnnie. Wake up." Karen had woken with a start. She remembered not setting the alarm clock.

It was late.

"Humph." John rolled over and covered his head with the pillow.

Karen was awake and felt hung over from the drink yesterday. She realized she had nothing yesterday, that what she felt was the result of a poor night's sleep.

"Come on John, we'll both be late for work. I'm getting up and if you don't get up right now and get a shower I'll only make enough coffee for me!"

John knew this threat was just that, but it always worked. He fell out of bed, caught himself, and staggered to the bathroom. The shower sound filled the bedroom. Karen rose, and as promised, made coffee.

When the coffee was ready, Karen poured them both a cup. She walked into the bathroom where John, wrapped in a towel, was shaving. "Here's your coffee," she said as cheerfully as she could muster. She set it down on the back of the toilet.

"Nothing like coffee and shaving cream to wake you up," snorted John.

"I put it out of the way! Don't be like that."

"I didn't sleep well," John complained.

"I was there too..." Karen reminded him.

That conversation continued until they ended up laughing at themselves.

John grabbed Karen, put her over his shoulder and carried her back to the bed. Tossed her on the bed and hopped in himself.

"Whoa," Karen said as John began to remove her robe, "we're already late for work."

John undaunted, continued.

Karen put up mock resistance.

"We might as well have a good reason then, don't you think?"

Her robe was wide open, John's towel was on the floor.

"Okay," Karen said.

John won, but so did Karen, she closed her eyes and kissed him deeply, feeling ever so warm. They did not hurry, their movements were slow and deliberate. Karen caressed John's back, moved her hands to his firm rear and down his leg. She felt one of the scars he acquired on the job, rubbed it lovingly before moving on.

Work was forgotten for the moment. Deep in each others arms, passion filled their minds and souls. Karen felt John slide inside of her and gasped, trembled slightly and felt a rush of joy and tension. They soon began moving wildly, still kissing, kissing with a frenzy, and breathing each other's air till they could kiss no longer.

John lifted his head and shoulders, then buried his head deep into Karen's neck. His mouth found her ear, he kissed it as Karen hugged him tighter. He released his hand from under her and moved to caress her breast. He found her erect nipple and squeezed it gently. Karen gasped again at the intense feelings that created. She was moving her hips and almost screamed as she wracked in sensation. John relaxed on top of her; they finished together.

They laid in bed in each other's embrace. Minutes passed and neither one moved. Karen recovered, realized what time it was, sighed and tried to move. John held her even tighter. Karen hugged him real tight, then released. That was a signal to let her go.

"John, let me go." Karen was frustrated at the thought of being late.

"Fine." John let go.

Karen rose, left her robe behind.

John watched as Karen walked out the bedroom door. He got up and began to dress. He just threw on clothes and ran down to the kitchen for more coffee.

Karen yelled out of the shower. "John don't you drink all that coffee while I'm in here."

John poured himself the last of the coffee. "I think you already had more than half the pot," John yelled back in self defense. "Do you want me to make more?"

Karen had shampoo in her hair and could hardly hear what he said. "What?"

"Do You Want Me To Make More?" he yelled that time.

Having rinsed her hair, Karen heard him all too well. "You don't have to get angry, and yell."

John laughed at this all to familiar banter. "Okay." In a quiet voice. "Do you want me to make more?" he asked for the final time.

"No, I'll get some at work." Karen ended the debate.

"I'll see you tonight," John called out as he left.

"Bye John," Karen replied, not to be heard. The door closed a moment before her reply. Her spirits dropped. "What am I going to do?" she asked no one.

\* \* \* \*

Jamison O'Miller stirred in bed.

His wife had been up half the night.

Miller reached over to his wife and found she was not there. He moved to the edge of the bed, slowly slid his legs over the side. Tried to sit and flopped back into bed; his legs dangled out of the covers.

It was about seven in the morning. The sun had broken through the cloud cover that had made the past few days so dreary.

Doreen sat looking at their bird feeder, a little bird was prancing under it. It jumped forward, then would drag both feet back across the seed shells, look down for a good seed; either found one or would repeat the jig.

Miller and Doreen had several names for that little guy. Their favorite was 'Worker'. He would sing a whistling song that made him sound like he was 'whistling while he worked'.

She heard groaning coming from the bedroom. Turned her attention in that direction momentarily. She decided Miller was not getting up just then and settled back to watch the little song sparrow do his dance. A bigger bird landed almost on top of him. A blue jay, 'Worker' raced away to cover. He turned to look, saw it was a jay and scampered back. Doreen laughed at the antics. Miller walked in with a cup of coffee. She warned him about the birds, so he sat very quietly. They both watched in silence.

Doreen broke the silence, "So, what do we do?"

"Do about what?" Miller asked.

"About our friends in trouble. They are in trouble aren't they?"

Miller sipped his coffee, thought about an answer and said nothing.

Silence seemed to be the effect this mystery was having on its participants. Miller and Doreen continued, in the early morning quiet of their backyard bird sanctuary, to sip coffee. Miller stood to go refill his cup. Doreen caught his eye and held up her cup. Miller took it from her and left for the kitchen.

When he returned he had the whole coffee pot, pastry from the day before, a container of milk. He set the pot down, plugged it in and settled in for a long morning of birding. Doreen broke the silence once more. "Miller, don't you have to go to work?"

Miller nodded. "I'll call in in a few minutes to let them know I'll be late."

Miller held an important position within the company and could take the liberty of going in late. No one ever asked why, just, when he would be in. Occasionally they would ask if everything was all right.

"When do you have to be to the school?" Miller asked.

Doreen shook her head and replied, "I always go in at noon on Mondays."

"I know that, but when do you leave?"

"Are you rushing me?"

"No, just don't want to have a slow, comfortable Monday morning end up with us rushing each other out of the shower."

"I'll get one in a few minutes. Then we can relax," Doreen compromised.

"Okay, that's when I'll call in."

\* \* \* \*

Jones slammed his fist down on the table. "I won't stand for this."

The speaker on Cizzano's phone clicked and a voice penetrated the brief silence of the office. "Sir, I'm sorry I'm late, can I get you anything?"

They both looked up, startled by the new voice.

Cizzano excused himself from the conference table and moved to his desk. He picked up the phone from the client side of his desk. "I'm in conference, no calls, no interruptions. Am I understood?"

That was code for, 'watch my back'. He hung up the phone. Pressed a button that put the speaker phone into monitor mode. Cizzano was not going to take any chances with this man.

Cizzano moved back to the conference table to continue the meeting. The interruption helped Jones regain himself. He clearly wanted to continue.

"I do not want a promotion that removes me from the field." Jones argued. "I am a field operative, have been for nearly twenty years. That is what I know, and what I do best."

Cizzano took a slow breath and began to explain the agency's reasons. Jones continued to argue, though now he was beginning to see the light. Argue all he wanted, he was not going to change what was about to happen. Cizzano was going to assign him to office duty and remove him from the field.

"I'll accept this position on one condition," Jones offered.

"No conditions," Cizzano feigned.

"Then I will turn in my resignation." Jones countered.

"Let's discuss your first assignment before you take such a drastic action, Okay?"

Jones sat and mulled that statement, nodded his head and waited.

Cizzano continued, "You will be in charge of the continued investigation of the Parker/Winston affair. No longer a field operative."

Jones smiled inside. That was his condition. He prodded Cizzano to continue. The two men continued at length.

After a rather complete, though confusing explanation, Jones asked, "So that means I report to you? Ted and Theresa report to me?"

"Right, functionally though. You also can request the assistance of other operatives. For them you will also be in a functional supervisory position," Cizzano answered.

"What's the difference between supervisory and functional supervisory?" Jones asked.

"That is a good question. Nothing really. But the supervisory position lasts only as long as the project lasts. Once this is finished, any member of staff reporting to you, will no longer report to you. You will only have temporary staff," Cizzano explained.

"Does anyone report to me?" Jones asked, somewhat dejected.



Cizzano thought about that for a moment. He was not sure that he wanted anyone to report to Jones. At least he didn't want that immediately.

"Yes, you will have an assistant. He will report to you and you alone. Regardless of project." Cizzano finally replied.

"Oh."

"Hey, the whole agency runs that way. Not until you have a department will you have a staff. We build teams on an 'as needed' basis. If you had a full team, we'd be overstaffed." Cizzano continued to explain.

"What do you mean by that?" Jones asked.

"Well, you may never need Ted, Theresa and 'Mom' again. Yet if they were your staff, you would have to figure out what to do with them. This way, department heads have a staff report to them, then they assign the correct operative to a given project. That keeps everyone busy and sharp." Cizzano liked that explanation and decided he should write it down, but not then, later.

"So I can request further operatives if I need them?" Jones was beginning to understand.

"Yes. If I feel you need them, I will approve the request and it will be forwarded to the correct department head for assignment." Cizzano was growing tired of this discussion. Cizzano stood. Looked at Jones. Jones stood. They shook hands. Both men were reasonably happy with the outcome.

"Let me show you to your new office."

The two men walked to the door. Jones followed his supervisor out the door.

CHAPTER

SEVEN

"Those two have sex more often than mink. Too bad we don't have video, it would make this job more fun." Ted poked Theresa's upper arm with his elbow.

Theresa shot him a look. "Don't get any ideas, your my 'brother' don't forget."

"Well you know the saying...'Vice is nice, but...'"

Theresa cut him off. "Shush, their talking again."

Ted and Theresa moved into a three bedroom house two houses down from the Parkers. They brought their elderly 'mother' and settled in. That was about eight months ago.

First contact with the Parkers was held up for years, waiting for them to settle down into a house. The Parkers bought their house almost two years ago. Ted 'works' with John in a large contracting firm as a carpenter. Theresa is a speech therapist 'working' as a local day school as a teacher's aide. Both had been accepted into the community. Then their real job began.

Ted asked, "Do you think John thinks he killed Todd?"

Theresa asked him to be quiet. They listened to the conversation. Karen was muffled by the shower, but John came across loud and clear.

"They're talking about coffee," Ted asserted.

"No they are not, but they might as well be, as far as we're concerned."

The recording equipment and receiver was ingeniously contained in the audio & video equipment Ted was so proud of. Ted had actually shown the equipment to John and helped John pick out similar equipment for his home.

The mention of being late made Ted look at the clock. "Shit, I can't be late too. I have to go. I'll catch up from tape. I'm out of here."

Theresa heard the door slam as Ted raced out of the house.

'Mom' stirred in the kitchen making breakfast. She called out to Theresa. "Do you want breakfast?"

Theresa replied. "No thank you."

'Mom' spoke under her breath. "Bitch, I'm doing my part, why can't you eat this food at least once in a while."

Theresa appeared in the kitchen doorway, and spoke, "I am hungry after all, what'cha got?"

'Mom' smiled. Although she isn't either of their mothers, feeding them gave her a distinct pleasure. Theresa and 'Mom' sat down to waffles and bacon with strawberry preserves and apple butter.

"'Mom' you're going to make me fat if I eat these breakfasts."

'Mom' replied, "You're all skin and bones, no wonder you are still a single girl. No man wants a skinny thing like you."

Theresa gave her that look. She thought about it and shook her head. 'Mom' really had gotten into the part. No one could doubt this woman was her mother. She was beginning to wonder if she was adopted and this woman really WAS her mother! Nah.

They finished up and Theresa asked if she could help clean up. 'Mom' told her that she had it and that Theresa should be going off to work. Theresa looked at her watch, cursed and ran to her bedroom to dress.

"Ted, you're late," John and Ted's foreman said to Ted.

Ted looked at his watch and said, "So I am, I'll work through part of my lunch to make it up to you."

"Don't worry about it, you're the first one here, stupid shits. Well, it's Monday morning, guess that'll be the excuse d'jour."

d'jour, thought Ted, what an ass, didn't even say it right. "Yup, brain-dead after a long weekend of drinking no doubt," Ted finally responded.

"Well, make yourself useful, start packing the truck with the tools and supplies from shed four." The foreman walked away after having told Ted what to do.

Ted shook his head, that guy runs a hell of a team. If no one showed up, he'd do as much as he could and then call it a day, hoping they'd show tomorrow! "Got it. Where's the site?" Nothing. "Hey, dude, where do I bring this shit?"

The foreman turned and said, "Wait for the other guys."

Right, thought Ted, 'til when, Christmas?

Ten minutes passed, John arrived. Greetings from Ted, the foreman nowhere in sight. "What are we doing today?" John asked Ted.

Ted looked at him, shook his head and turned back to his coffee.

"So, where's the dude?"

The dude, that was the name the guys gave their foreman. Ted started after the other guys, and really didn't know the foreman's real name. He thought it was Fred, but couldn't be sure.

"The dude went that way" Ted said pointing in the direction of the office. "Haven't heard from him since I got here."

John shook his head, and looked down at the ground.

"Hey John, something wrong?" Ted asked in mock concern, knowing right well what was wrong.

"Yeah, my life eats shit, that's what's wrong."

"Want some coffee?"

"Thanks, that'd be great. I've had quite a bit, but it doesn't seem like enough."

Ted poured John a cup of coffee out of his thermos. Ted always had a half gallon of coffee in the morning. No one else in the crew brought coffee since Ted started. Why bother. His was better anyway.

"Want to tell me about it?" Ted probed.

"Ted, if I told you what is going on, you would call the men in the white coats."

Ted withheld a snicker and thought, if he only knew.

John looked up at him, frowned and looked into his cup of coffee. "I had a visitor Saturday morning. A really big guy, German I think. He said he was a private detective."

Ted feigned interest, "What did he want?"

John continued, "He had a package from a dead friend. A package that contained a letter."

Ted knew better, so he pressed. "That's all? Just a letter?"

John looked up at him. "Yeah, just a letter. A weird one at that. Karen and I have been trying to figure it out."

Ted waited. John was silent for a minute or two, they sipped their coffee. John looked up, saw the dude, and slammed the coffee down his throat. He looked like a man who just gulped a shot of whiskey.

"John, wasn't that awfully hot?"

John coughed, "Yeah, let's go to work."

They both walked over to the dude and asked him what they should do. He told them the address and lot number of a house that they had worked on just after it had its foundation pored. They both went to their cars, got their tool belts and headed to the truck. The truck was one of those huge panel trucks. It held nearly everything. That one had several centerfold pictures. John had always been attracted and repulsed by seeing nude women hanging inside the truck. Oh, well he was in a macho profession, so he had to accept the macho guys he worked with.

They drove off. Ted asked John, "Do you know where this place is?"

John replied, "Yeah, it's just off Rt. 29, take 95 south then 29 North. I'm going to close my eyes and rest. Wake me when we turn onto 29, I'll help you from there."

John closed his eyes, Ted drove them to their work site.

\* \* \* \*

Karen arrived at work. She was greeted by two dozen children and a weary teacher.

"Want a break?" Karen asked the teacher. The answer was raised eyebrows and a nod of the head. The teacher turned to the class. "Mrs. Parker will be working with you this afternoon. Class, you all remember Mrs. Parker."

"HELLO MRS. PARKER!" Nearly thirty, three to five year old children said in unison.

The children were seated, hands folded and looking at Karen. They were waiting. Karen thought about how strange it was, the kids were so good. When a new teacher came into the room the children changed to angels, but for a moment.

"Okay, class, what do you think about doing some drawings?"

"YEAH!!!"

The two teachers shook their heads and smiled.

"Good luck Karen." The teacher left the room.

Karen worked as a teacher's aide in a day care center. Everyone is a teacher's aide really, but those with seniority are called 'Teachers'. Karen just received her Ph.D. in Special Education, and was looking for a permanent position in the township school system. But for a while, the aid job helped pay the bills.

Her undergraduate work was in Art Therapy, and she still adored seeing the work of children. Often disturbing, however most usually enlightened and happy.

She enlisted the aid of several of the older children. They passed out the paper, pencils and brightly colored markers. Karen had recently purchased several sets of markers that smelled like fruit. Yellow was banana, green was lime, red was strawberry, and on they went. The children learned and had fun at the same time.

"Don't eat that!" Karen rushed to the aid of a two year old about to eat one of the markers. "Yes is smells good, but it tastes like 'Yuch'."

"Yuch," said the little boy.



"YUCH," said the whole class.

Karen laughed. Wow, it felt good to laugh. Kids!

She walked around the room supervising the drawing activities. As she walked by them, some of the children stopped drawing. They would continue when she left the area around their desks. Others would show off as she neared. Remarkable differences in personality, she thought, and so young. That was the reason she got her degree. She walked up to a child who looked like he finished his drawing.

"What's that a drawing of?" Karen has learned not to interpret the child's drawing, but to ask. If it is sufficiently abstract, you will always guess wrong.

The little boy said. "This is my little sister, my mommy loves her."

Karen looked at the little boy and asked. "And do you love your little sister?"

"Yes."

"What else is in the picture?"

The little boy pointed to each object and described it. "This is my mommy holding my sister. There is my daddy reading the paper. This is me, playing with my toys."

Karen noticed the little boy is on one side of the paper, while the remainder of the family is on the other. This little boy felt left out. Whoa Karen, she thought, don't jump to conclusions.

That sure was what it looked like. She smiled and thanked the little boy, and continued on to the next child. Each one, in turn got a chance to tell her about their drawing. That consumed almost the remainder of the day.

"Misthis Partker?" a little boy said to Karen.

"Yes Jimmy?" Karen responded.

"I need to go potty," Jimmy said.

"Okay, do you need help?" Karen asked. Jimmy was old enough to use the bathroom himself, but many of the children felt unsure. Jimmy had just joined the program a few weeks earlier.

"No, mommy says I can do by myself," Jimmy answered.

"All right," Karen said, she walked him to the classroom door.

All the classrooms formed a piece of a circle with the doors leading into a common center. The boy's and girl's bathrooms were off this central area. No child had to go more than ten or twenty of their little steps. This made it no easier for Karen. She could feel the fear inside Jimmy. Jimmy bravely headed out the door to the girl's room.

"No, Jimmy, the other door," Karen called out to him.

Jimmy turned back, almost ready to cry. "I have to go potty!" He yelled back as he entered the girl's bathroom.

The door closed behind him. Karen thought a moment and let it go. He was three, it would make no difference to any of the girls either. None of them were older than five. It only mattered to the state, and to some of the parents. Karen went back to the class.

After a few minutes Jimmy re-entered the class. The cuffs of his sleeves were wet. The legs of his pants were wet. His shoes were wet. He had washed his hands and dried them on his pants. But how did he get his shoes wet? Karen thought, she smiled and turned her attention back to the classroom activities.

She looked at her watch. "Class, it's time to clean up. Your mommies and daddies will be here to pick you up soon," Karen announced.

There were sounds of joy and scraping chairs. The children in this program were, for the most part, quite bright. The program was expensive, and had an admission test. It was, without question, the finest day care program in the area. Karen was proud to be a part of it.

A few of the children needed help putting up their things. Karen aided several. Some children wanted to take their paintings and drawings home. Karen helped them. Some wanted to throw theirs away. Karen showed them the recycling box.

Everything was in its place, or, as close as it needed to be.

The parents began to arrive to pick up their children. Karen waited to see about the little lonely boy. His mother arrived. She had the baby in her arms. The little boy reached up to her, she leaned down, gave him a kiss and took him by the hand. She led him out to the car, put him in the back seat and fastened his seat belt. The baby got put into a baby chair and fastened into her seat. The mother drove off. Karen's heart broke for the little boy, he wanted so much to be his mommie's little baby.

"Come on Karen," she said to herself, "that's life, he has a baby sister." Karen continued thinking about the drawing and how the little boy felt left out, yet his mother seemed so loving. She would have to pursue that another day.

"What a day!" Karen exclaimed to no one in particular.

Theresa looked up from her desk. "You can say that again!"

Karen got an evil grin and said. "What a day!" Just a bit louder.

Theresa laughed and stopped what she was doing. "Want to talk?"

"No," Karen replied, "I want to go out and drink."

Theresa nodded her head and said, "On a Monday night? Sounds wonderfully decadent, let's grab Joan and get out of here."

The three women piled into Theresa's car and headed off to a local pub. This pub was a local hangout for women. Not that men were not allowed, it had just become a 'woman's' bar by default. It was quiet, ferns hung from the rafters and they had wine on tap, rather than beer. The men went to 'Billy's Bar & Grill' three blocks away.

In mock machismo, the three women bucked up to the bar and said, "Three drafts, and keep 'em coming."

They got their wine and sat down at a table, they were laughing.

Karen thought, this is just what she needed. Also thought about how she was going to have to be careful not to get drunk and start spilling her guts to these women.

Theresa was aiming for just that. Raising her glass she said, "Let the drinking begin."

Clinking of glasses, and drinking of wine. Quiet laughter...for now.

\* \* \* \*

Ted said to John, "Let's go to Billy-Bob's."

Ted was from someplace down south. Or so he claimed. He added some silly second name to almost everybody's name. He was referring to Billy's Bar & Grill.

"I don't know Ted, it's Monday and I'm beat."

Ted frowned, looked at him and said, "So who gives a shit what day it is, we're done work, Billy-Bob's has cold beer. Let's go have a round."

Somehow, John ended up at Billy's. He was holding his second beer. He was thinking about Karen. "I better call Karen and let her know I'm okay."

Rude comments flew around about his masculinity. Three other men took flight to the men's room. John met them at the pay phone.

He said, "So, I'm a wimp?"

False shame, and mock arm wrestling for the right to use the phone first. John won because he didn't participate.

No answer.

John went back to the bar room, and rejoined his friends. "I have to leave after this one," he announced.

More remarks about how his wife had him trained. "Assholes," he spewed.

A chorus of laughter of half-drunk men. John finished his beer. Dropped a tip onto the bar and said his farewells. He left, hopped into his car and drove home.

\* \* \* \*

After her second glass of wine, Karen announced, "I'm going home."

The other women started to moan and complain. Neither of them were ready to go and because Karen wanted to go, meant all of them had to go.

"Don't you want to talk about it?" Theresa asked.

"Talk about what?" Karen countered.

"Whatever it is that's on your mind," Theresa said.

"Nothing really," Karen lied.

"Ease up," Joan said to Theresa, "if she wants to talk about something she will. I think it's just Monday blahs myself."

"Right, the weekend was too short, John and I visited friends and got home late last night," Karen said.

"You guys getting along?" Joan changed the subject a little.

"Oh, yeah," Karen said remembering this morning, "very well."

The three women giggle at the thought. Karen made it clear just how well by her enunciation. Thinking back to the morning made her feel better.

"That good?" Joan asked, "How long have you guys been married?"

"We've been together for almost nine years. Married for about six of them."

"And it's still hot?" Joan pressed.

"Oh yeah," Karen said in a sultry voice.

The women laughed, Theresa ordered another round.

"Oh, no Theresa, I've got to go. John's going to be waiting for me," Karen almost whined.

"Just this one, then we'll go," Theresa promised.

The remainder of the early evening was spent drinking the last glass of wine and talking about men and sex. Theresa was unsuccessful in changing the subject back to the weekend.

The three women finished their wine, left a moderate tip and hopped into Theresa's car. Theresa dropped them both at the day care center. Joan and Karen spent a moment talking before heading their separate ways.

\* \* \* \*

Karen's car was in the driveway when he arrived. Odd, why didn't she answer the phone?

He opened the door.

Karen called out, "Hey John, is that you?"

"No, it's a rapist, anyone interested?"

"No," Karen screamed.

"Okay, I'll leave then," John yelled.

Karen entered the room. Looked at John and said, "I guess we both went out huh?"

"Yeah, I called and there was no answer."

"So did I, figured if you went out you'd be home soon, so I left," Karen agreed.

"Want a drink?" John asked Karen.

"Do we have wine?"

"Of course we do, what kind?"

Karen asked for white. John returned with a glass of wine and a bottle of beer.

"Do you want to attack the paper pile?" Karen asked as he entered and sat down.

"Yes I do, I want to get the the bottom of this. They both kicked off their shoes and relaxed before doing battle.



CHAPTER

EIGHT

John and Karen had been working on the piles for a couple of minutes. They had been quiet, occasionally interrupting the other one to show them something, get an opinion, or just stretch.

"This is a hell of a task." John said.

"You can say that again. Leaning over these piles and trying to make sense out of it is not easy." Karen responded.

They looked back at the piles and continued.

"Hey, listen to this!" Karen said.

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"I remember yesterday's project plan. It didn't work. I'm going to have to work harder on this project if I'm going to succeed.

Today I am to change my thoughts on beer. I don't like the smell or taste of beer. It's an acquired taste I've heard. I'll think about how I'd like to do this change.

I'm back, I have spent a couple of hours asking people what they like about beer. The answers have been odd. But I think I have enough to go on.

1. I smell the hops by breathing deeply from the glass. I don't like drinking beer from the bottle, that inhibits the hops.
2. The head of the beer indicates it was brewed well and with quality ingredients. It also discharges a portion of the carbon dioxide, leaving the beer properly carbonated.
3. The taste of malty sweetness, hoppy bitterness blend together to form a perfect balance. Like sweet and sour sauce.
4. It is very thirst quenching when consumed in moderate quantities.

Joseph A. Sabin Jr.

"Do you think that means I didn't like beer?" John said in amazement.

"That's what it sounds like to me. I can't believe that could be true, it's your favorite drink," Karen responded.

"If that is correct, mind changes are possible. I know I can never convince anyone to try beer if they don't like it. Even Miller can't get people to try one of his beers. They almost spit it out!" John said laughing.

"Remember how long it took you to get me to even try the meade?" Karen said.

John thought about that. They had met at a party Miller and Doreen had. The party broke up and several people stayed the night. They were either too drunk to leave, or had been previously invited to stay. John slept on the floor in a sleeping bag. Karen had been given better quarters. In the middle of the night, Karen had gotten up to get a glass of water, tripped and fell right on top of John. The fates had been kind to them. The next day, John was going to leave. Miller, somehow seeing the attraction, convinced him to stay for dinner. It was at dinner that John chided Karen into trying Miller's meade. She didn't like the smell. Karen thought they were trying to force beer on her. She had smelled the hops. Though the smell was faint, it was present.

"You thought it smelled like beer," John said.

"Well, it did," Karen defended.

"No it didn't, it smelled a little of hops, that's all," John said as he shook his head.

"So. That's what I thought beer smelled like. So I thought it was beer. But I'm glad you two pushed me as hard as you did," Karen said smiling.

"Speaking of drinks. Do you want some more?" John asked as he headed out of the office door.

"No, do we have any sparkling water?"

"Sure, I had some last night, there's more than half left. Is that what you want?" John was almost in the kitchen and had to yell a bit to be heard.

"Yes, please," Karen yelled back.

John re-entered the office with two glasses of sparkling water with a twist of lime. As he handed Karen a glass, his eyes looked glazed, he was deep in thought. "I'm calling in tomorrow," John said to Karen. "I've got to work on this. That stupid shit I work for won't care. Hell, only Ted and I showed up today!"

Karen was sorting July. She looked up and said, "John, that sounds like a good idea. The confusion from this is affecting everything we do. The sooner we understand it, the better."

\* \* \* \*

"Ted!" Theresa yelled. "Ted!" she said again.

"What, what's happening?"

"John is going to call in sick. He's going to work on the notes."

Ted gave a thumbs up to Theresa, "All right! That-a-boy John!"

\* \* \* \*

He picked up the phone, dialed Cizzano and waited for an answer.

"Cizzano," he said.

"I saw the formula, it won't work any better than what we are now using."

"I don't believe that. I know it's more effective, Todd swears it's better."

"It's not."

"I want it anyway," Cizzano almost shouted.

"You won't get it from me," he hung up and there was silence from his end of the phone.

Cizzano slammed the phone down and cursed, "You son-of-a-bitch, then you won't have anything!"

\* \* \* \*

The phone rang, Karen ran to answer it. "Hello?"

"Hi Karen, it's Miller. John there?"

"Yeah Miller, hold on." Karen cupped the phone mouthpiece in her hand and yelled, "Hey John, Miller's on the phone for you."

John got up, and yelled back, "I'll get it in the kitchen."

Karen put the phone back to her mouth and said, "Hold on Miller, John's gonna grab a phone."

Next they both heard. "Hey Miller! What's up?"

Karen slowly moved the phone back onto the cradle and hung up the extension.

John came back into the room.

Karen looked up surprised. "Miller hang up already?"

"Yeah, got a call waiting from the office, he'll call back in a bit."

"Oh, okay."

They sat in silence and sorted piles. John was working on May, Karen on June. Karen was getting more done than John. John kept stopping to read, Karen kept after him to sort now, read later. But alas, they would be done when they finished their respective piles. Karen did seven John did five. The other pile couldn't be sorted, yet. Maybe it'll fit into context, once there is a context.

John sat up, put his arms up in a V shape and yelled. "VICTORY! We are finished sorting this mess!"

Karen looked at him and stuck out her tongue. "Maybe you're done, but I've still got 40 pages to sort."

John assessed the piles. "Yeah, but we've just finished forty million."

Karen just shook her head and went back to work.

Karen finished as John cooked dinner. John was in a great mood. He was stir-frying vegetables in the wok.

Karen walked up to him, wrapped her arms around him and up almost over his shoulders. She leaned on him and moaned.

"Been a long one, but we have some order now. Are you hungry?" John asked.

Karen responded by biting him on the back.

John burned his wrist on the wok trying to get out of the 'death-bite', "Cut it out Karen!"

"Growl," said Karen.

"I guess that means yes?" asked John.

Karen released John and began setting the table. She looked over he had a beer bottle. He was pouring the contents into the wok.

"Shit John, why do you do that?"

John ignored her. She said that every time he made stir fry. She always liked it and so he ignored the complaint.

"Soups on!" John exclaimed.

"Beer soup," Karen mock complained.

"Yes, but beer and seven vegetables," John countered. They sat and ate. Karen had three servings. John watched her eat with pleasure, then his face dropped. "You're not pregnant are you?"

Karen looked up and said, "Maybe."

"Maybe, what do you mean by maybe?"

Karen was amused by this game. "I mean I might be pregnant. How do I know?"

John fumed, "Well shouldn't you know?"

"We'll know in two weeks, either I'll get my period or I won't."

John walked out of the room. He hated that game. Made sex feel like Russian roulette.

Karen followed him. "Come on John, you know I'm probably not pregnant. Haven't been yet."

John turned. "So why do you have to play on my nerves?"

Karen poked him and said, "'cause I love the reaction I get when I say, 'maybe'."

"Well cut it out for a while would you?" John nearly spit out of his mouth, "I'm under a lot of pressure with this mind shit, I don't need to worry about having a baby."

Karen assessed and said. "Fine. How about no sex? That'll keep me unpregnant."

John turned stared and said, "Fuck you!"

Karen simply replied, "No thanks, don't want me pregnant now, do we?"

John flopped down on the bed.

Karen headed to the kitchen. Karen knew she was not pregnant. Karen also knew this little game has never had such a major effect on their relationship. She picked up her glass and sat down in a chair and cried.

\* \* \* \*

Ted looked at Theresa and asked, "What the hell was that all about?"

Theresa looked at Ted as if he was a dolt. "Just like this morning, it's not about coffee, and it's not about having babies. These guys are not dealing with the pressure of this very well."

Ted said, "What should we do?"

"I don't know Ted, but we are going to have to report this. We need John to investigate his past. We need to know if he can remember. This whole thing could end up being a huge waste of time."

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"Yeah, but those guys had drinks tonight. Maybe it's from the alcohol," Ted thought out loud.

"Could be. Should we panic?" Theresa asked.

"No, we don't need to panic. But I do think we need to inform Jones. It's up to him to decide what to do."

"Good thought. That way we don't get crapped on if these two start freaking out." Theresa nodded and handed Ted the phone.

Ted took the phone from Theresa and dialed Jones' number. "Jones, we need to meet. The Parkers might be flaking on us."

"Ted, how do you mean flaking?" Jones asked.

"Well, they are arguing about babies and coffee and it just doesn't make sense. Oddly tense arguments that indicate to both Theresa and me that they are stressing," Ted answered.

"Anything else you can tell me?" Jones asked.

Ted proceeded to tell Jones most of what happened with the coffee episode and the baby/pregnancy thing. Ted also mentioned the drinking.

"Ted, the reactions you are describing are close to what we want to see. I understand your concern, but it seems that this is going along properly. However, I would like to hear some tapes."

"Okay, when?" Ted asked. Jones thought, then responded, "Be here tomorrow, six a.m. sharp, my office."

Ted hung up the phone, "Shit, he thinks it's okay, but he wants to see us at six tomorrow morning!"

"You said it, Ted!" Theresa said. Irritated by reporting a problem just to have it received as normal. Yet, they still have to meet with Jones. That meant either driving to D.C. or catching a train. "Ted, what time does the commuter flight from Mercer reach D.C.?"

"Too late, we have to go tonight."

# CHAPTER

# NINE

The three sat down at a conference table.

Jones' office wasn't as nicely appointed as Cizzano's, but it was every bit as large. He didn't have the two sofas with coffee table, in their place was a pair of chairs and a magazine rack. The conference table was oak rather than mahogany, and the chairs, though they had arms, did not swivel or lean back.

No one complained, rather Theresa commented, "hey, Jonesey, who'd you kill to get these digs?"

"Let's stick with the issue at hand. My office is one that has been furnished to agency standards as per my position."

Theresa made mock talk with her tongue out. Similar to how little girls do when at play.

Ted looked at her and shook his head. He spoke. "So Jones, you screwed up and got a promotion eh?"

Jones scowled at him. "Yeah, and now I'm your boss, problems?"

With that Theresa and Ted both buckled down and prepared to face the issue they had come to discuss. They both knew that a supervisor held promotions, raises and opportunities in their hand. Neither one had a problem with Jones' capabilities as a field operative. His abilities were almost legendary.

Jones indicated the conference table. Ted and Theresa looked at him.

"Please, have a seat at the conference table." Jones again indicated the conference table. That time with some aggravation in his gesture.

Ted followed both Jones and Theresa to the table. Theresa picked her chair. Ted remained standing. Jones chose his chair and

motioned with his head that Ted was to sit. Both men sat and the meeting commenced.

Ted had the tape and player. He put the first extract in and played it for Jones. Followed it with another, then another.

Jones looked at him and said, "so, they bicker."

Ted replied, "yeah, but that was the normal. That's what we've heard for over six months. Now listen to yesterday."

Jones listened to the coffee and baby fights. He nodded his head and offered. "How much of a chance do you think these two will just give it up and trash the notes?"

Theresa and Ted conferred on this prior to the meeting, so Theresa answered almost immediately. Her response surprised Jones.

"I would say there is almost 100% chance that over the next week, if things continue the way they are, this couple will trash the notes."

Jones sat back in his chair. As far back as one can in a chair that does not lean. They waited in silence.

"Parker said he was calling in sick 'tomorrow', that's today, right?" Jones asked for confirmation.

"That's right. It's too early to know if he did or not. We'll know in about two hours." Theresa responded.

"Okay. If he does and he works on the notes and he makes progress. Do you think that'll help their state of mind?" Jones asked.

"I don't think either one of them knows how to face this issue of mind changing. Karen has been fairly good about it. John doesn't know." Ted said.

"Yeah, imagine marrying a man and finding out that he was somewhat different in the past." Theresa added.

"Aren't we all?" Jones asked.

The three sat quietly for a moment. Mulled over that statement.

"Right you are." Ted responded first.

"Everybody changes, but this is different. The drugs. That's the big problem for Karen, I think. The rest is like hypnotism, hokey." Theresa said.

"All right." Jones said with authority.

Ted and Theresa just looked at him. They waited for the proclamation. None came. They sat and waited.

Jones spoke. "What if Parker got laid off? How would they deal with that?"

Theresa spoke first. "What introduce another trauma? That's suppose to fix the problem?"

Ted thought and then said, "no Jones, that will not help. But, a reduced work week would. Give him whole days without Karen to work this through."

Jones agreed. "Okay, let's fix it. John will work Tuesday through Thursday with Monday and Friday off. The work day will be longer so his pay remains almost constant."

The three nodded in agreement and began planning how to make this happen. Ted noted the wimpyness of the foreman. Jones decided to pay him a visit.

Jones said his planned closing statement and showed the two the door.

He picked up the phone and called Cizzano. "C, I've got to meet with you ASAP."

"Where the hell are you? The office?" Cizzano asked.

"Yeah, I'm at the office."

"I'm still at home. I should be in at about seven. How's that sound?"

"How did I reach you on your office number?" Jones asked.

"It's forwarded to my home office line and I picked up," Cizzano answered.

"How's seven?" he asked again.

"Fine, seven in your office. Okay."

He hung up and set to work on his proposal. Writing a proposal, what a strange thing. Well, he's no longer an operative, he's an Internal Agent Director I. That means paper work.

\* \* \* \*

John woke, reached over to touch Cheryl, ran his hands through her hair. Slid his hand down over her shoulders to her back. Rubbed her back, she moaned softly and moved over toward him. They hugged, and kissed.

John woke with his pillow tight to his face.

"Shit," he said.

Karen looked up, "what's the matter John?"

John looked at Karen, it was if it was the first time he had seen her. He focused on her face, realized who she was.

"Shit," he said again.

"Okay John, I'm awake, what is going on?" Karen complained.

John sat up in bed. Faced Karen and said.

"I had my first lucid clear dream about my past. It was so real I thought I was there. I need to find out if there was a woman named Cheryl."

"Oh great, now I'm going to have to help you find your old girl friends am I?" Karen teased.

John looked at her and said, "either way, Karen, I have to discover what is real and what is not."

Karen replied kindly, "yes John, I know that. I am here to help, I love you and I know this is a terrible thing you are going through. I will try not to make it worse."

\* \* \* \*

"Shit. We jumped the gun!" Ted said to Theresa.

"I'm not so sure," Theresa responded.

"Listen to them. You're not sure?" Ted thundered.



"Look. All I'm saying is that they have come down from the tension of yesterday. It's first thing in the morning and they feel loving toward each other. That doesn't change what we reported," Theresa replied calmly.

"So, are you saying we don't tell Jones?" Ted asked.

She responded, "no, I'm not saying that at all."

"He's going to do something. Try to get John time off. We need to respond to that," Ted said.

"We better call Jones before too much gets done," Theresa agreed.

Ted ran to the phone, dialed and got Jones. "Hey, Jones!"

Jones said, "yes?"

"Put a hold the problem. These two are back on track this morning. I think Theresa and I jumped the gun a bit on the problem. We'll keep really close tabs on it though."

Jones listened to the explanation then responded, "okay, keep me informed. We'll keep this plan on hold for now. But if they start to fall apart again, I expect a phone call immediately, if not sooner."

"Yes, sir," Ted responded and hung up the phone.

Theresa looked at him and asked, "are we okay?"

Ted said, "yeah, but we're really on the rack if we screw up."

Theresa nodded. "Yeah, but it's sort of going as planned."

\* \* \* \*

John picked up a piece of paper, it was one of his notes. .lm5

"October 21st, Day ONE, The Odyssey Begins."

"It's six thirty a.m. I'm about to start the first day of my year long experiment. The plan is mapped, I have cards for each day telling me what the plan is for the day. The cards are destroyed after each day, the papers are stored in a fire proof, pick proof safe. It's a safe like the convenience stores have; the ones the staff shove twenties into."

"John! Miller's on the phone," Karen called out.

John shook his head as if he was in another world. "Okay, I'll grab it in the kitchen."

John always liked the kitchen phone the best. It's a phone he has carried with him since his first apartment.

"Hey Miller, call right back huh!" John chided.

Miller responded, "yeah, right. Look John, the guy we spoke to from work..."

"Yeah," John responded.

"Well, that phone call I got and interrupted us last night?"

"Yeah, so," John prompted Miller.

Miller continued, "he's dead."

"What? Dead!" John sat straight up.

Miller said, "that's right, he was shot, gangland style. John, this guy is not a gangster. What the hell is going on?"

John put his head on the table. "Miller, when I know I'll let you know. Man, this is weird."

Miller attacked. "John, this is not weird, this is dangerous. What the hell is going on?"

John retreated. "Miller, I said I will let you know the minute I know."

"That's not good enough. Why do you think this guy was killed right after we met with him?" Miller pressed.

"Miller, I don't know. You said yourself that this guy was a money grubber. Maybe he pissed someone off. Maybe it's not related, just coincidence." John was trying anything.

"Yeah, he was a nice old man, but a fiend in the business world. Several people thought he had mob connections. Maybe I'm not being fair," Miller calmed.

"Well, I have to admit, it set me back when you told me. I started to feel guilty," John continued.

John heard a click on the phone. The line went dead.

John dialed Miller's number.

Miller answered, "hello?"

John responded, "man I thought someone cut the line."

Miller said, "no John, I hung up by mistake. This phone has a button right under your chin. You know the kind. Bad design. You really called back fast. I didn't even have time to try."

"This whole thing makes me feel freaked out. I'm sure we will hear something about this, right?" John asked.

"I don't know. Mrs. Peterson is still alive, I don't imagine her saying anything to lead to us. I'm not sure why I thought it was you." Miller answered.

"I don't know why either. Mine is a personal problem. It has nothing to do with anything illegal. You were there, Dr. Peterson said that the drug was not a controlled substance," John defended.

"Okay, John, I've got to go to work. Let's not talk about this for a while, Okay?" Miller asked.

"Okay. I'll let you know anything I hear about the Peterson murder. Will you do the same?" John almost pleaded.

"Oh yeah. I'll let you know," Miller answered.

"Thanks."

"You're welcome, bye now." Miller said.

"Bye Miller," John said.

The line went dead again.

John hung up the phone.

John said out loud, "Johnny, you're going this one alone."

He grabbed himself a beer, then reminded himself it was only eight a.m. put it back and grabbed a soda in its place. Walked out of the kitchen and back to the world of yesterday.

\* \* \* \*

John sat down to work on the notes. Before he started he realized that his oldest friend almost flipped out on him. Miller is really

freaked out. I've freaked Miller out. But I didn't kill his coworker, even he realized that. Wow, what a mess.

He thought more about his friends. He has no friend that predates the twelve year period. He met Karen nine or ten years ago. Miller eleven years ago.

John spoke out loud again. "I remember a guy by the name of Rich, a guy I shared a house with while I was in college. Paul was my high school buddy. But no other names come to mind."

He looked at the pile. "Time to work."

Karen yelled in from the other room. "Hey nut case, you talking to yourself?"

John yelled back. "Yes. I should be ready for the basket you're weaving in about a week."

Karen laughed and thought how good it was to see John in his sarcastic form again.

"John, what did Miller want?" Karen asked.

John hesitated.

Karen repeated her question. "Hey, earth to John. What did Miller want?"

John sat quietly. Karen came to the office, looked at John and said, "hey, you turn deaf?"

John looked up, his face a question mark.

Karen repeated her question and waited for a reply.

John formed his answer carefully. "Miller's friend, the guy we went to visit was shot and killed."

Karen sat down next to John. Looked at him and asked, "does that have anything to do with this?" she said gesturing at the piles of notes.

John nodded and shook his head. "I don't think so, but then I think it might."

Karen freaked. Jumped up and ran out of the room. John stood to follow. She came back into the room, just to leave again. John moved to the door, Karen came flying back through with tear filled eyes.

"Damn this stuff!"

John looked down at the notes then back to Karen.

"Karen, I'm sorry for this mess."

Karen looked at John, sobbing. "How come this man was killed? Huh John, how come?"

John said, slowly. "Karen, I don't know."

"What did he tell you?" Karen demanded.

John told her the whole story. He even repeated some of what he had already told her, about the poison, coma, and the LSD. Karen sat quietly as he told the story, didn't interrupt and waited until he was finished.

Then she spoke, "John, I think there is more to this than you trying to change your memories. I think there is a lot more to it than that."

John replied, "yes, Karen, I agree."

Karen stood to leave. She was dressed for work. She exited the room, turned and spoke.

"John, do the best you can today. I love you and I'm right behind you through this." She left crying.

John sat again. Looked down at the papers and...

"It's a safe like the convenience stores have; the ones the staff shove twenties into."

Yeah, he thinks, that's where I was.

\* \* \* \*

Ted looked at Theresa. "That was close. This couple is under some pressure with this."

Theresa spoke. "Who killed that guy? Who the hell is that guy? We need to find out."

"I'll call Jones and have him start a check. It's probably not related. No one would jeopardize this mission to waste a friend of a friend of John's. That's absurd."

\* \* \* \*

"Cizzano," he answered the phone.

A voice said, "Peterson's out of the way."

"Nice job! Was it clean?" Cizzano asked.

"No prints, no witness," said the voice.

"Good," Cizzano said. He hung up the phone without another word.

\* \* \* \*

Ted had left the room to use the phone.

"Jones, this is Ted. We have a strange occurrence."

Ted proceeded to explain what had happened. Jones listened and asked for additional details. Some of which Ted did not yet have.

"It was Parker's friend, Miller's coworker," Ted said.

"You mean the guy they went to see about the formula?" asked Jones.

"Yeah, right. He and Parker went to see a friend of Miller's."

"So that friend ended up dead?" asked Jones.

"Ended up Dead? He was killed gangland style," Ted replied.

"It wasn't one of our guys. That would be stupid. I'll track it down though. Keep up the good work," Jones said.

"Thanks," Ted was relieved.

Hey, aren't you suppose to be at work?"

Ted fumbled. "Yeah, but I thought I was, silly me." He hung up.

"Asshole."

"Who is?" Theresa asked.



"Jones. I'm outta here, gotta go to 'work'," Ted said sarcastically as he walked out the door.

\* \* \* \*

John was reading and taking notes, he stopped for a moment and wondered how strange it was to take notes on his notes. He shook his head and continued. Nothing earth shattering yet. This synaptic programming seems pretty simple, clear and well planned. Most of the trials have been really simple tests, like memorization. Not easy stuff but like this.

"October 24th, Day 4."

"I'm going to remember a list of unrelated items. These items will be my Christmas list of when I was ten."

"Bicycle, Airplane model, Erector set, GI Joe, Writing Paper, and an Electronics set."

"I will think about these things all day today. Not do a list memorization trick, but think about them, as if I really wanted this for Christmas when I was ten. On Day 11, I will be asked to recall the list. The paper will be destroyed, this will be in the safe. So I'll have to wait a year to find out how I did."

Note 1:

"On day eleven, all items from day 4 were recalled, in order with the odd capitalization. I'm not sure what this means."

"John, I'm home."

John looked at his watch. 4:36

"Did you eat?" Karen continued her one sided conversation.

John stood, he was barely able to move his legs, groaned and said, "no, I didn't eat, I didn't even realize how late it had become."

Karen didn't miss a beat. "Should I order pizza?" "Great!"

Karen knew John would like that idea. He loved pizza, told Karen that once he ate it almost everyday for a year.

Karen picked up the phone, dialed the pizza place and ordered a pie with extra cheese, pepperoni on half and onions and peppers on the other half.

She called out. "Numba Ten, Fiftena Minets"

John responded, "racist!"

Karen laughed, took off her coat and went up stairs to change out of her work clothes.

She climbed the steps thinking how important it was to do things like have pizza every once in a while. When they first bought the house, they felt so broke they stopped spending any money. That lead to a depressed feeling of failure. Now with this, Karen felt it was important to hold their heads up high and have pizza!

John came clodding in behind her, whistled as she pulled her sweater over her head. Karen covered her breasts in mock embarrassment.

John laughed.

She pulled her hands away and said, "hey baby, whata ya think about these?"

John lunged for her, Karen screamed and ran into the bathroom. Slammed the door behind her, laughing behind the closed door.

John shook his head, checked his watch and said, "I betta leava now, I only gotta five a minets to getta to the pizza place."

"Racist!"

John heard from behind the closed bathroom door.

"So. I'm outta here!"

John got in his car and aimed it toward the pizza place. His mouth watered thinking about it.

CHAPTER

TEN

They sat on the floor eating pizza. Both John and Karen were careful with the notes.

"Don't want pizza grease to smear the words." Karen admonished John a couple of times as he got sloppy.

John responded each time by picking up his napkin, wiping his hands and mouth; then stuck his tongue out at Karen. "They're my notes, I'll do as I please."

Karen's laughter made John feel better about the process.

"So," Karen said, "what about Cheryl?"

"Cheryl?" John inquired.

"Yes, John, Cheryl. Remember the girl you woke up kissing your pillow about?"

John choked on a piece of pizza.

Convenient thought Karen.

John swallowed some of his drink and looked at Karen. "I did find a note about Cheryl, want me to read it to you?"

"Yeah, let's take a look," Karen prodded.

"It's day 23 I think, let me find my notes." John rifled through his notes.

Note 4:

"Found a comment about the girl I am remembering in my dreams, Cheryl. I assume I'll find more, but for now day 22 is the only one."

"Good, what day is day 22?" Karen asked.

"That's November 11th," John answered.

Karen shuffled the November pile. John is amazed at how deftly she worked with the pile, found the correct note and retained order in November.

"Got it!"

"November 11 Day 22"

"My task for today is simple but difficult to imagine. I am to remove the memory of Cheryl's exboyfriend's name. The only way I can think to do so is to alter our meeting. Recreate the day we met; change the situation slightly. I was with a date, I met Cheryl at a mutual friend's house. Cheryl was with her date. That was the only time I ever met him.

OK, so my thought is that I went to the party alone, met Cheryl, who was also alone. We hit it off, and went home together. Cheryl's such a slut, that won't be hard to make it fit.

Maybe there will be a point I should ask myself to forget Cheryl. I've only gotten through March for my cards. Maybe 'April fools day' will be a good day to forget Cheryl. She's really against this project, and is beginning to be a pain in the ass about it.

She keeps telling me I'm changing. No shit Sherlock, that's the plan."

"John, the notes don't have much detail do they?" Karen asked.

"No, they don't. But that one detail should make you happy, huh Karen?"

John poked her, as he grabbed for another slice of rapidly cooling pizza.

"So, what's your definition of a slut? Am I a slut because I like sex? Huh John?" Karen was pulling his chain, John knew that. Will he take the plunge or continue in the investigation with her? John thought long before he answered. Karen had her hands on her hips, pouting.

"I'm not sure how I defined slut then, but now I don't think there is such a valid concept. I must have had a low opinion of myself. Most men who call a woman a slut do so because they'd sleep with them. So what's that make them?"

Karen tried to think of the male equivalent.

"Hey, there is no term for a male slut. That's not fair." Karen looked to be in even deeper thought.

John remarked. "That's a societal issue, men are aggressive and women are demure. Don't act demure and you're a slut."

"Bullshit John! I'm not demure."

"Slut!" John teased.

Karen grabbed a hold of it and ran. "Fine, I'm now going to act demure. Headaches will occur nightly at bedtime and most weekends."

John looked at her, she was doing a good job and he was not sure she was kidding. Thought better of it and continued describing his findings.

"So, do you want to hear about the rest of what I found?" he asked.

Karen looked at him, realized that he was not going to bite on her bait and dropped it. She really didn't like the subject anyway. Thought a bit more and felt sorry for Cheryl. But then agreed to go on.

"Remember the statement about Pearl Harbor Day?"

"Yeah," responded Karen.

This time John shuffled through the December pile. Not nearly as neatly as Karen had been, but nonetheless kept order.

He found it and said, "well, listen to December 7th."

"December 7 Day 48"

"Went to work today. Tired of work and trying to do this project. How the hell am I going to make it another ten months?"

The guys are arguing about something as I walk in, late as usual. They don't even look up. Red's saying that we should have dropped another bomb on them when we had the chance. Sam's arguing that they suffered enough and we ended the war by killing a quarter of a million people, what more did these idiots want.

"There's a newspaper who's headline shouts about it being the anniversary of the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, some decades ago. Front page news. I'm thinking, why don't we just drop this and live and let live.

Red starts yelling about the Jap cars, the Jap TVs the Jap this the Jap that. I look up at him and decide to put my two cents in. 'Hey Red, shut up man. The Japanese make good cars, good TVs and good stereos, so what's the big deal?'

Mouths drop all around. Everyone looks at me and Sam says. 'Since when have you fallen in love with the Japs?' Everyone laughs. The tension falls.

I never did hate them, they just don't play fair. So what's the big deal? I thought. Anyway, too late to continue. My supervisor came in whining about a program, I'm working on, being late. Time for excuses."



Karen listened in awe. "You got good at this! In one day you had changed your mind about the Japanese. Just by thinking a different thought?"

John thought about what he just read. "Yeah, sort of. It seems that it's more complex than that. I jumped ahead because that was such a good example. Let's go back to earlier stuff."

Karen agreed.

John looked to his other notes on the notes. Thought he should come up with a better term for them, but can't yet, so he said, "hey Karen, how about if we call the notes we found 'The Diary' and my comments on them 'The Notes'?"

Karen nodded, grabbed a cold slice of pizza took a bite and said, "yuch, John, should I heat this up?"

"Yeah, I'm still hungry," John acknowledged.

Karen took the remaining pizza to the kitchen, put it into the electronic oven and set it to warm.

"Hmm, let's see, maybe 250 degrees is about right," Karen said to herself.

Within a minute the pizza was once again hot and ready to eat. Karen brought it and a couple of new sodas with her to continue on the 'notes'...'diary' she corrected herself.

John was looking at his notes.

He looked at Karen and said, "most of the early stuff isn't too interesting, but I did find this:"

Note 2:

"Found some more detail on how I was going to make this all work. The synaptic alteration plan didn't detail very carefully the complete process. I guess I thought I'd remember. Day 26 contains an interesting insight."

"November 16, Day 26."

"I woke this morning, not wanting to play this game any longer. Not knowing how I'm doing in the process is frustrating. I know it is important not to know what I am changing in myself as I progress; doing so would compromise the alteration."

The theory I have is that the longer I hold a thought as the real thought, genuine past and reality, the closer it becomes to being my reality. Our memories of past things get altered by how we think about them. As an example, when I think back to my grandparents, I can't really remember them. Although I have a memory of them. All four were dead before I was born. My parents and older siblings gave me their memory of these people.

It was this thought that lead me to my theory. I reflect on this today because I am to alter my memory of my grandparents. I will have met my two grandmothers and one of my grandfathers. The grandfather is my choice, either paternal or maternal. The notecard says it will not matter.

To do this, I will alter my memory of what my parents said about their parents and make it what I experienced about their parents, my grandparents."

John spoke, "not only is that amazing, but I remember meeting my grandparents. Like the time I spent with them, visiting their houses. My mother's father had died before I met him, but I have images of the three others."

Karen looked at John, she was close to tears. "John, what about your parents? Is the estrangement a figment of the experiment? Have you found that yet?"

Joseph A. Sabin Jr.

John stood, clearly angry.

Karen stayed seated while John spoke.

"Karen I will not make excuses for my parents. It's silly to think that this experiment included me making them estranged!"

Karen stood. "No it is not! You made up your grandparents. Why not the estrangement?"

John calmed. "You may be right, but let's leave that alone until we find it."

Karen got stern. "John, promise me you won't destroy that diary page if you find it!"

John looked Karen in the eyes and said, "I promise."

John looked at his watch. "Karen, I've been at this for ten hours, I'm going to stop for now."

Karen looked saddened by that statement, but agreed. "OK, is it all right if I look at a few diary pages?"

John thought no, then said, "okay, as long as you don't go past December 9th the 50th diary page."

Karen agreed.

John left the room, went to the living room, picked up a book to read. He thought better of it and turned on the TV.

It blasted out. "Round the World in 30 Minutes this is..."

John hit the mute button on the remote. He shook his head and muttered, "whoa that was loud" and settled in for a few 'round the world cycles.

# CHAPTER

# ELEVEN

Miller got up from his chair on the porch to answer the door. He was thinking, who could that be at dinner time?

He opened the door. There stood two men. One in the unmistakable uniform of a police officer, the other in a rumpled blue jacket, loosened tie, and an equally rumpled white shirt. His trousers were gray, his shoes were penny loafers. He stood there with a leather wallet next to his face. In the wallet there was a badge, very fancy with a number on it.

Miller made a note of the number. D-1137.

The rumpled man began to speak, "are you Jamison O'Miller?"

Miller hadn't heard his full name for years. All his friends called him 'Miller' he had added the O' some years ago. It was his way of honoring his ancestry from Ireland. So deep in thought he almost forgot to answer, "yes. Who..."

"I'm Detective O'Brian, this is Officer Hobson."

Miller looked at them.

"Mr. O'Miller?"

"Yes?"

"May we come in?"

Miller actually stepped forward, out the door and closed it behind him.

Detective O'Brian looked at him.

Miller spoke. "What is this about?"

Officer Hobson was looking irritated. Hobson was a much younger man, very neat, sharp fresh haircut, highly polished shoes and pressed uniform.

The detective responded. "We are investigating the murder of Dr. Fred T. Peterson."

Miller nodded and the detective went on, "you visited him the day before his murder, we'd like to ask you a few questions."

Miller became defensive. He looked the detective straight in the eye and said, "am I a suspect in this murder investigation?"

The detective answered simply. "No."

Miller did not accept that. "Then why are you here to speak to me?"

"You were one of the last people to see him alive. We hoped to gain some information about what your meeting was about."

Miller opened the front door, stepped inside and welcomed the detective and officer into his home.

"Miller, who's at the door?" Doreen entered the room, saw the police and backed out. She thought better of that, she came back into the room fixing her hair and looking like she was embarrassed being caught 'looking a muss'. Though Doreen was not that kind of woman, but it seemed to work. Neither of the two officers seemed to give it a thought.

She looked the older man directly in the eyes and said, "gentleman, would you care for some coffee?"

The detective responded, "tea, if it's not too much trouble. Hobson?"

The officer nodded. "Coffee would be nice ma'am."

Doreen slipped back into the kitchen and started the water in the kettle, grabbed some coffee and got that going. She was moving too fast, calm down Doreen, calm down. She told herself.

She got out cups and put them on a tray. Got milk, sugar. Took a deep breath and entered the living room.

The conversation was under way.

She saw the officer was standing, the detective was seated, but as she walked into the room he stood, offered her his hand.

"I'm Detective O'Brian, this is Officer Hobson."

Doreen said, "I'm Doreen O'Miller."

"Yes, we know, your husband introduced you while you were out. It's a pleasure."

The officer waited until Doreen had seated herself, found himself one and sat stiffly.

Doreen saw the gun and bullets the officer was wearing. She felt a chill run up and down her spine.

She interrupted. "What is this about?"

The three men looked at her, the detective responded. "I am sorry Mrs. O'Miller. I should have explained, how rude of me. We are investigating the murder of Dr. Peterson. Your husband met with him a day before his death."

Doreen turned white.

Miller saw his wife was in stress and said calmly. "Hon, I'm not a suspect."



Doreen looked at him as if she did not hear.

"I'm Not a suspect."

She relaxed a bit.

O'Brian smiled. "Mrs. O'Miller, I'm sorry to barge in on you folks like this. We won't be long. How's that coffee coming?" O'Brian asked that to give her a focus again. He had found in the past that people would relax better if they have something familiar to do.

Doreen stood and said, "let me check." She almost ran out of the room.

"Mister O'Miller," the detective began.

Miller noted how it sounded almost too formal.

"Miller, most people call me Miller," he decided to say.

"OK, most people call me Bill. If that's easier for you we'll go by first names..."

O'Brian suddenly felt stupid. Miller is not his first name, but it really isn't his last name. How the hell do you refer to a name like that?

"Nicknames I guess, my real name is William." He tried to recover. Miller found that amusing, but stayed quiet.

"Miller, I won't keep you long. I have a few simple questions for you."

Miller said, "okay, shoot," then he looked at the officer.

The officer caught his glance and smiled for the first time.

"Figuratively, that is."

"Fine, fine. Why did you pay Dr. Peterson a visit?" O'Brian asked.

Miller was stunned by this question. He didn't know how to answer. So he told the truth.

"My friend had found a chemical formula written in the paper cover of a book. He wanted to know what it was. I knew Dr. Peterson could tell him."

"And what was that formula?"

Miller gulped. "Dr. Peterson wouldn't really tell us. He said it was sort of like rat poison, sort of like LSD. But would not tell us anymore. Oh yeah, he told us not to try to make it."

"May I see that formula?" O'Brian asked.

Miller answered quickly. "No, I don't have it. It's back in Jersey with my friend."

"Why did he keep it?"

Miller looked at O'Brian and said "Look Bill, it was the paper cover to one of his favorite books. He put it back on and took it with him."

O'Brian let that go and went on.

"How did Dr. Peterson look when you left him Sunday?"

Miller remembered his last words admonishing them not to make the drug. How worried he was. Strange.

"He was agitated, worried we might make the drug. Yelled at us not to make it. Then showed us the door."

Doreen entered the room with the coffee and tea. Miller relaxed as she poured three cups of coffee and placed the teapot next to O'Brian.

O'Brian noticed the teapot and exclaimed, "oh Mrs. O'Miller you didn't have to make a pot. A little old teabag in a cup of hot water would have been just fine!"

Doreen said. "No trouble Detective O'Brian, it's nothing really."

The four sat a moment and fixed their drinks. Hobson stood, grabbed a small handful of cookies and a napkin.

O'Brian shot him a nasty look.

Doreen laughed. "Oh detective, young men love sweets. Leave him alone, he's made me happy!"

O'Brian felt that he was losing control. He sipped his tea and thought.

"Mrs. O'Miller?"

Doreen spilled her coffee a little when she looked up. "Yes?"

"Did you know where your husband and friend were going Sunday morning?"

"No."

"Why would you not know?"

"They got up early and headed out, I thought nothing of it. Still don't." Doreen acted nonchalant. Hell she cared, but only about why they hadn't trusted her.

Good answer. Now what? The detective decided to scare Miller.

"Miller, ever take LSD?"

Miller stood. "Detective, Officer. I'm afraid I have to ask you to leave."

Detective O'Brian didn't move. He looked up at Miller and asked, "why? This is just an informal interview."

Miller stared him down and said, "you are insinuating something here Detective O'Brian and I want a lawyer present."

Officer Hobson stood.

He addressed the detective. "Sir, I have to advise you that we should leave."

O'Brian shook his head. "I could come back with a warrant."

Miller was unphased. "You would have to have probable cause."

Hobson repeated himself and accentuated it with, "NOW Sir!"

O'Brian stood. "Can we set up a time to speak, with your lawyer present?"

The O'Millers looked at each other. Miller went to respond and stopped.

O'Brian took out his wallet, pulled a battered business card out and handed it to Miller. "Have your lawyer call me. If I don't hear in a week, I'll be back with a warrant; and probable cause."

The two men turned to leave. Miller started to move with them to show them the door.

"Don't bother, we know the way out," O'Brian said.

Miller showed them out anyway. He was mighty suspicious of O'Brian and didn't want to give him a chance to peek.

With the door closed and the two police officers out of his house, Miller returned to where Doreen had remained. He thought he heard her crying. But when he got to the room, she was not. Her eyes looked red.

"Are you ok?" Miller asked his wife.

"Yeah, are you?" Doreen responded.

"Sure. They can't pin this on us. We had nothing to do with it." Miller said with little conviction.

"But they can make our lives a living hell." Doreen said with a slightly broken voice.

"I'm going to call our lawyer." Miller said.

"Who, the jerk who did our closing? He's not our lawyer. I think you need to get a criminal lawyer Miller, not a real estate lawyer." Doreen chided him.

"Maybe you're right. I'm going to call John and let him know. These guys will probably visit him next." Miller started to pace the room.

"They can't," Doreen said.

"Why the hell not?" Miller shouted.

"They are local cops. John and Karen live in another district. Hell, they live in another state!" Doreen shouted back at her husband.

"Right." Miller whispered.

"Maybe you should call him anyway. Just to let him know." Doreen knew Miller needed to talk about this and John was the right guy to talk to.

"Yeah, it'll be good to talk to John. I said I'd call if I found out anything."

Miller left the room. He walked up to the phone and dialed.

Busy.

He went back to where Doreen had been sitting. She was fussing with the dishes in the kitchen. Miller decided to leave her alone. Doing cleaning things was what she did when she was nervous.

Miller picked up the phone and punched in John's number.

This time it rang.

# CHAPTER TWELVE

Jones' phone rang. He looked at it, thinking why would someone call him at the office at this hour? "Jones."

It was Cizzano. "I found out what's going on with the Peterson murder. Come by my office right now."

The phone went dead.

Jones left his office and went upstairs to Cizzano's office. The door was open, he entered.

"Close the door," Cizzano ordered. "Come in and have a seat."

Jones walked in, sat on one of the sofas and made himself comfortable.

Cizzano said he'd join him in a moment.

Jones looked around. Strange how a few different furnishings could make an office look better. I've got to get some pictures for my walls thought Jones. That's what I'm missing. He continued to let his eyes wander and missed that Cizzano had joined him.

"So. Shall we begin?"

Jones almost jumped off the sofa.

Cizzano laughed at him and said. "Relax man, you're not in the field anymore."

Jones tried to relax back into the sofa.

Cizzano began. "The case is being investigated by a detective, William O'Brian. This jerk fancies himself to be 'Columbo'. Imagine that, he's not even Italian."

Jones said nothing to that statement.



"They plan to visit a guy by the name of Jamison O'Miller, and our friend John Parker."

Jones spoke. "Do we want to stop them before they get to Parker?"

"Of course we do. It's in the works. They don't have any jurisdiction over Parker, he's from out of town. The FBI would have to get involved. I think O'Brian is a big enough egotist to not want that to happen. I'm betting he leaves Parker alone long enough for us solve his case."

Jones asked. "Do we have any leads?"

"No, not yet. Not substantial at least," he lied. He stopped to think a moment. "Let Theresa know that I want to know immediately if anything happens that looks like a police investigation of our two sex fiends."

"Yes, sir. Will that be all?"

"In a hurry Jones?"

"No, sir."

"Okay, just checking. That'll be all. Have a nice night." Cizzano stood and returned to his desk.

Jones looked at him. Cizzano was back, busy with his work. Jones couldn't believe he was dismissed with such detachment. He felt he would never treat his people so poorly.

Jones stood and said, "good night."

There was no reply.

Jones left. He closed the door behind him, it locked.

He stopped in his tracks. Then he turned and looked at the door. He thought about how strange the man was that he worked under. He stood there for an inordinate period of time.

"Is there something wrong?"

Jones jumped at the sound.

"No, no, everything is just fine." Jones replied.

He hurried off.

\* \* \* \*

"Hello," John said.

"John! This is Miller. Shit, the cops were just here."

John's heart fluttered. "What did they want?"

Miller almost yelled. "They're investigating the murder of Dr. Peterson. They know we went there, they know. God what the hell happened?"

John tried to regain his composure. "Wait Miller, wait a minute. We had nothing to do with this guys murder. Nothing. It was pure coincidence that we went to his house the day before he was killed."

He heard Miller's breathing. But Miller doesn't answer.

"Hey buddy, you still there?" John asked.

Miller said, "yeah, I'm still here. I'm going to call a lawyer and meet with this guy again."

"Sounds like a good plan."

Miller agreed. "Yeah, I'm going to use the guy who helped us buy the house."

John laughed. "Wait there, Miller, don't get a real estate lawyer to help you on a murder case. Get a criminal lawyer. Ask the guy who did your closing, he'll recommend someone."

"That's what Doreen said," Miller answered.

"So you didn't think she was right?" John asked.

"Well, I thought I could trust that guy and I thought I'd run it past you, see what you thought," Miller mumbled.

"I think it's a stupid idea. Ask him for a recommendation if you trust him."

"Okay," Miller said.

"If he's worth anything, he wouldn't have taken the job anyway. Real estate lawyers don't deal with criminal problems. Just like criminal lawyers don't deal with civil problems. The laws are just too different." John said without knowing where he learned that.

"Okay, I'll do that," Miller agreed again.

They spoke about the meeting for some time on the phone. John felt he may be visited next.

Miller said, "no, John, they can't come up and visit you. You're a hundred miles away, in a different state, never mind a different county. For now, you are safe. You better destroy that paper cover with the formula, though."

John thought about that. "Okay, that sounds like good advice."

\* \* \* \*

"Shit."

Ted said to Theresa. "I knew we should have gotten our hands on that cover before now."

Theresa said. "Call Jones, call him right now!"

\* \* \* \*

"John..." Miller said. "Be careful man." John answered. "Thanks, I will!"

"Good night buddy."

John smiled. "Good night Miller."

They hung up their phones.

Karen was in the room. "Sounds like you and Miller are back on barking terms, huh?"

John shot her an evil glare. "Yeah, Miller's freaked and he realized I had nothing to do with the murder."

Karen looked concerned. "Do they think Miller had anything to do with it?"

"Not really, but they started asking leading questions, so Miller said he would only speak with them if he had a lawyer. They gave him a week to do so and set up a meeting."

The news was now on its forth or fifth cycle. Karen looked at John and said, "maybe we can try channel ten news?"

John looked absently at the TV. "Oh, yeah, this is going over and over again isn't it? But you have to admit, they catch you up on the news really quickly."

Karen said, "right, Russian people are cold. No shit it's the dead of winter in that place. Of course they're cold."

They bickered about the news for a few more minutes. The channel ten news began and Karen complained that the sound is muted.

John grabbed the remote.

Karen muttered, "here we go again."

The sound came on without them missing a word.

John looked at Karen and gave her a little shoulder wag as if to say, 'see I can do it all right'.

Karen was unimpressed.

The dust jacket was forgotten.

\* \* \* \*

"Okay, looks like these guys forgot about the dust jacket for the moment." Ted said to Theresa. "Do you know where they put the book?"

Theresa said, "when John got back, he put the book down on the kitchen table. Karen picked it up and put it on the shelf."

Ted slumped a little in his chair. "On the shelf?"

"Yes. On the shelf."

Ted said, "can't you be a little more specific?"

"Well, the dialogue was picked up by the mic in the front hall closet. So I think it must be in the front of the house."

"No shit."

Theresa got upset. "Hey, don't get mad at me, listen to the fucking tapes yourself if you want to know!" She stormed out of the room.

"Women." Ted, grabbed the tapes and began listening. As he listened he looked at the diagram showing the layout of the house. There was one shelf unit that made sense. That'll be the one he looks in.

"Theresa!" Ted yelled up the stairs.

"What!" Theresa yelled back.

"You were right. There is just one shelf unit by that mic. I'll go copy the formula tonight. We have to monitor the mics until they are asleep."

Silence. Then footsteps. "So what do you want me to do?"

Ted looked at her and said, "we have to monitor all the mics. That will take all three of us. Go get 'Mom' and tell her she's going to earn her keep."

"'Mom' Theresa yelled up the stairs."

Ted said. "I could have done that!"

Theresa looked back at him. "So why didn't you?"

'Mom' came down the steps and had a look of anticipation on her face. She said, "do you need me?"

Ted said reluctantly, "yes."

\* \* \* \*

As Karen and John crawled into bed, Ted and Theresa were planning to sneak into their house. Miller and Doreen were looking lawyers names up in the yellow pages because the guy who did their closing moved. Mrs. Peterson was speaking to Detective O'Brian. Cizzano was running his own 'investigation' into the murder. Max was busy covering his tracks and honing his alibi.

\* \* \* \*

O'Brian noticed the fine things that filled the home of Mrs. Peterson and the late Dr. Peterson. He knew that Dr. Peterson was a successful commercial biochemist, but he did not expect anything like what he was seeing.

Mrs. Peterson had come from a modest family background. She had brought nothing but some simple family heirlooms. Dr. Peterson came from a middle class family from the midwest. Neither had any family money to speak of. This, thought O'Brian, came as a direct result of Dr. Peterson's work.

O'Brian opened his notebook, and addressed Mrs. Peterson.

"Ma'am, I know this is very disturbing to you, but the more information I have to go on, the sooner I can apprehend the persons responsible."

Mrs. Peterson sat in her chair weeping. She was shaking her head saying. "Why would anyone want to kill my sweet Freddy, why?"

She didn't expect an answer.

O'Brian decided to ask his first question.

"Mrs. Peterson." He began.

She looked up at him in anticipation. Sadness filled her eyes. O'Brian knew he had to continue.

"This is a very fine house you have. When did you move here?"

"Freddy and I moved in when he was offered his job at the complex. They paid all our moving expenses." She offered.

"Did they pay for anything else?" O'Brian asked.

"Yes, they paid the difference between our old house and this one," she answered.

"Do you know how much money that was?"

"It was almost a million dollars." Mrs. Peterson answered matter of factly.

"What? A million dollars? That seems extreme." O'Brian could not contain that statement.

"No, not really. We had a very nice house. They wanted Freddy to join their company," she said.

"And..." O'Brian prompted.

"So when we said we would not live in a house smaller than our current house, they found us this one," she said.

"Where were you living?" O'Brian asked.

"Central Illinois, in a nice town called Centerstead."

O'Brian was writing frantically.

"Oh, don't bother looking that up. It's never on the maps. It was about thirty miles south of Chicago." She added.

"That doesn't sound like central Illinois," countered O'Brian. He was shaking his head.



"Oh, yes. Very close to the center, that you can look at the map and see," Mrs. Peterson said, clearly and firmly.

"Okay, I'll look. Now. Mrs. Peterson, are you saying that the complex gave Dr. Peterson almost a million dollar bonus to join them." O'Brian continued.

"Yes. He had to work for them for ten years. After that the house was ours, regardless of who Freddy worked for."

"Amazing," O'Brian said under his breath, although it was out loud.

"What was that?" Mrs. Peterson asked.

"Oh, nothing. I was just amazed," O'Brian covered.

"And so was I. And very happy once we moved in." Mrs. Peterson offered.

"Okay. Mrs. Peterson. What do you remember about the men who visited you and your husband Sunday morning?"

Mrs. Peterson answered. "They were nice boys, they had tea with the doctor and me, some cookies and then they went to Freddy's lab."

He continued. "How was Dr. Peterson after the meeting in the lab?"

"Oh, he was quite upset."

O'Brian felt he was on to something.

He continued. "What was he upset about?"

"Well, Detective O'Brian, I'm not sure. He was muttering about how he should call the authorities. And about how those young men were playing with fire. But you see, I don't pretend to understand what my husband does..." Mrs. Peterson broke down and began to cry.

O'Brian looked to Officer Mary Stein.

Stein, leaned over Mrs. Peterson and handed her a tissue.

Stein was only a little less rigid than Hobson, thought O'Brian. At least Hobson ate cookies!

Mrs. Peterson contained herself for the moment and continued.

"... what he did. But I do know that those young men brought something to his attention that upset him a might."

"Mrs. Peterson, had you met either of the two men before Sunday morning?"

"No. Well, why yes I think I did. The big bearded man. Yes, that's it."

"Go on Mrs. Peterson."

"I met him at the complex picnic last year. Not this summer, the one before. Seems this year there wasn't a picnic. Those G-Men are up to something really secret now, and everybody just doesn't get together like they did."

O'Brian made a note of the G-Men working on secret stuff. That could have more to do with this than anything else. He wondered if Miller was in danger. Probably not. Miller's a technical person, not of the caliber of Dr. Peterson.

O'Brian looked up, Mrs. Peterson was staring at him. A vacant stare. She was not even looking at him, she was looking right past him.

"Mrs. Peterson, is everything all right?"

She broke the stare and said, "yes dear, everything is fine. Do you have anymore questions?"

O'Brian looked back in his notes. "Yes, yes I do. Are you up for it?"

Mrs. Peterson nodded.

O'Brian asked. "Did your husband have any enemies?"

"Oh, why yes he did. He was in a very competitive field. Those men were always fighting over patents and discoveries and who owned what new little bug they were working on."

O'Brian felt he just fell off the planet earth. What the hell was Mrs. Peterson talking about? What kind of little bug? What patents. Wait he thought, I'll just ask.

"Mrs. Peterson, what were these little bugs they fought over?"

"Oh, you know, the kind they make in the laboratory. They look in their fancy microscopes, cut one little thing apart, put a piece from that one into this one. And back again."

Jeeze-O-Man, this old guy was doing recombinant DNA research! That lab was not set up for that kind of work. It was a level two lab from what he remembered. I'll have to look it up, but I think DNA research required a level four lab to effectively protect the environment.

"Mrs. Peterson, did your husband speak about his work with the bugs to people?" Here's the motive if he did, wammo, someone wanted him out.

"Well, Detective O'Brian..."

Why does she keep using the whole 'Detective O'Brian?'

"...I know when we had close friends over he would discuss some of his work. He would get so upset. I would have to calm him down. High blood pressure, you know."

No I didn't know, thought O'Brian. But he's got no blood pressure right now. Keep clear O'Brian.

"So. Do you have any of the names of the men who would have liked to see..."

Wait a minute don't scare her again, use less intense words.

"...who would argue with your husband?"

"Oh, my yes. There was Dr. Hubble and his wife. Dr. Johanson, and a man, the director... oh, what was his name...OH yes, Mr. Thomlinson. Yes that's it, Thomlinson."

O'Brian was writing like a fiend. He had to get this down without asking this lady to repeat things. He wanted her to stay clear of getting into personalities of the people involved, rather, just give him the names.

"Can you tell me about the arguments?"

"These were gentlemen, so they always argued in a polite way. They rarely raised their voices."

"Can you tell me a little more of the details of one of the arguments?"

"No." "Why not?"

"I didn't listen in."

"What did you do while these men argued?"

"I visited with their wives."

O'Brian decided this was getting no where.

"Thank you, Mrs. Peterson. Thanks for the coffee and fine cookies. And thank you very much for talking with me at such a difficult time."

O'Brian stood to leave. Mrs. Peterson asked her niece to show them out. O'Brian assured Mrs. Peterson that they could find their own way out.

"Okay, then, good night."

On their way out the two looked around. Carefully observing everything. O'Brian took a few notes. All the lights were on, so observation was simple.

"Too much money," Mary Stein said.

"You can say that, and it looked like he was going to make a whole lot more," O'Brian answered.

"Do you still think those guys had anything to do with it?" Mary Stein asked.

"I'm not sure. I think they may have triggered the problem. But I don't think they caused it.

"Oh," Mary Stein said thoughtfully.

"Let's get out before they get suspicious," O'Brian said.

They were in the hallway leading to the front door. They walked briskly to the door, opened it and felt the coolness of the outdoors.

"I forgot it was getting cold," Mary Stein said.

"Yeah, winter is just around the corner." Said O'Brian.

The heavy oak door closed with a thud behind them. Both officers looked back for a moment and then proceeded to their car.

# CHAPTER THIRTEEN

John and Karen lay in bed. John's mind was flying from one thought to another. He was thinking about whether he was actually sane. Imagine that, after all he did to himself, he was sane, or so it seemed.

He said, "hey! Karen, get this. I'm not crazy."

Karen turned, looked him straight in the eyes and said, "no?"

She turned away and tried to suppress her laughter. It shook the bed.

John countered, "are you crying?" In a very concerned voice.

Karen turned back and said, "no, do you see tears in these eyes?"

John said, "no, just wondering."

She rolled so her back faced him. He laughed at her child-like behavior. It had always amused him. He had looked at other women her age, middle aged frumps. Ready to die or something. Not Karen, she was as alive as the day he had met her. Some couples amaze people when they stay together, others when they break apart. Karen and John, well, most people that knew them said they have the perfect marriage. John agreed, usually that is.

Karen hadn't moved much in the last few moments. John thought she was asleep. He reached over, picked up his book off the night stand and began to read. He heard the slow restful sound of her breathing. He relaxed, and began reading.

"YYYYYHHHHHAAAAAAHHHHHHH!!!" Karen yelled into John's face.

He fell out of bed, flopping like a fish out of water. "SHIT, Karen! What the hell are you doing?"



The bed was shaking with her laughter. She couldn't talk. She was just looking over the bed at him lying on the floor, his book across the room, halfway down the stairs.

John began to laugh. Karen always could scare him. They had a rule, no yelling after scary movies. Otherwise, it seemed like it was open season on John.

John got up, got into bed. "You'll pay for this Karen, you'll pay."

She lay on her back, spread her legs and said. "Take me, take me. I'll pay my lord. Oh let me pay!"

John ignored her. Figured his heart was pounding so hard he'd die of a heart attack. He got up, retrieved his book and got back in bed.

He read.

Karen flipped over and went to sleep.

Really to sleep. John looked over, shook his head and thought how easy that was for her. He would be up another hour or so reading before he could fall asleep.

He read for a while, closed his book, turned out the light. He lay there. Thinking. Not sleeping. Thinking.

"They're asleep," Theresa reported to Ted.

"Good. Let's give them an hour. Then I'll go get the book."

An hour passed, John still lay on his back, not moving. Thinking. Thinking. Not sleeping. He thought if he stopped thinking and especially stopped thinking about not sleeping maybe he'd fall asleep.

"Nah," he said to himself, "I'll be asleep soon enough." Patience. Yeah that's what it took.

Ted had a key to the house. So he let himself in. Went to the bookcase in question and began to look for the book. He did a little research before he went over. The cover was blue and the book was really thin. About a half an inch.

"There it is," Ted whispered into his mic. He pulled it out of the shelf. Took off the dust cover and saw the formula. Ted pulled out his 'spy' camera and took a dozen exposures. "Got the pictures," he reported.

"Good," Theresa responded.

"Am I still OK?"

"Yes, fine. Get back here!"

Ted nodded. Thought himself stupid, for nodding as he put the book back and left the room.

BANG!

His head hit an object. It did not fall, but it made a lot of noise.

"What the hell was that?" Theresa asked.

"I hit my head. I'm coming out."

John heard the noise. he got out of bed and headed down the stairs.

"There's movement in the bedroom. Get the hell out of there Ted!"

Ted was out the front door as John got into the room. John saw the door close and bolted for it. The door was closed and the dead bolt was locked!

"How the hell?" John said out loud. He opened the dead bolt and ran outside. Too late, whoever it was had gotten away. John wandered around outside a bit, realized the person may have a gun or something. He went back inside. Back upstairs and he woke Karen.

"Huh, John, what's up?"

John waited for her to wake up.

She looked at him, "I'm awake. What's up?"

John told her, "someone broke into the house."

"What?"

"Yeah, someone broke in, but what really bothers me is, they locked the front door when they left."

"Maybe it was locked and they just left it that way."

John was shaking his head no. "No, Karen this is weird, really weird. The dead bolt was locked, not the handle. You can't close a door with the dead bolt locked. This guy has a key!"

"What! How'd he get a key?"

"I don't know Karen, I don't know. But tomorrow morning those locks are getting changed."

\* \* \* \*

"You asshole!" Theresa yelled at Ted, "you are a total ass wipe. How could you screw up like that!" "Easy, I couldn't see where I was going. I banged my head."

"Not that. You locked the dead bolt! John's no fool. He already figured out you must have a key!"

"Oops."

"Yeah, OOPS. Now we have to go through the trouble of getting new keys made."

Ted thought a moment and asked, "are you going to report this to Jones?"

"No, Ted. I'm going to hire a local locksmith to come down and make a set of keys for me. Of course we have to report it to Jones."

Ted started to shake. "Hey, but I got the pictures."

Theresa countered. "Well, we'll see about that Ted. Go to the darkroom and develop and print them before being so proud."

\* \* \* \*

Karen was wide awake. She and John were sitting in bed. Neither one spoke for a long period of time.

"John, how would someone have gotten a set of keys for our house?" Karen asked.

"I don't know. Maybe from the former owners. Maybe it was one of the former owners." John answered.

"John, those people were old. They wouldn't have been able to out run you." Karen said.

"Well, I don't know how anyone could have gotten keys. But I do know this. Tomorrow morning they are getting changed," John said with conviction.

"Did you put the chain on?" Karen asked.

"No."

"Would you please?" Karen asked in a quiet little girl voice.

"Sure. That'll make me feel better too," John said.

John got up, put on his robe. His robe was a full length double sided terry robe. Red with a brocade-like pattern. It was really warm. However, John still shook as if cold, but it was with fear from what just happened.

He walked down the stairs. As he reached the bottom of the steps he turned on a light. When he reached the end of the living room he turned on yet another light. He walked into the entrance way of the house and turned on the light there. He put the chain on the door. He paused.

John was standing quietly, waiting to see if he heard anything.

"Shit, imagine if they came back and I now locked them in, instead of out!" John said to himself.

He continued to look around. Nothing. He was convinced that there was no one in the house besides him and Karen. He turned off the entrance way light and returned to the living room. He turned off that light and walked to the stairs.

He did not go up the stairs. Rather he turned around and went to the kitchen. He turned on the kitchen light and looked around.

Nothing.

"John you're being paranoid. No, I'm being safe," he said to himself.

He turned the kitchen light out and went to the base of the stairs. He stood there for a minute in silence. He thought about something and went to the living room light switch, turned on the light. That illuminated his way to the office.

In the office he turned on another light. "John you're getting obsessed with lights. And talking to yourself," he said as he laughed at himself, nervously.

He looked at the files of the Diary. Everything seemed in place. Nothing was touched on his desk. The bookcase was the same as before.

"No it's not," he exclaimed.

"KAREN!" John yelled.

"WHAT!" Karen yelled back.

"COME HERE!" yelling again.

Karen got out of bed. She grabbed her robe. Her robe had an oriental design on the back. She realized it was cold. Put that robe back and got her pink terry robe. Her robe was also full length and equally as warm as John's.

"That's better," she said to herself.

"KAREN!" John yelled impatiently.

"I'm coming," Karen said, not quite as loud as before.

Since all the lights were on in the house, Karen had no trouble finding her way. Except she didn't know where John was.

"Hey John, where the hell are you?" Karen half yelled.

"I'm in the office. Come-on!" John said in an increasingly impatient tone.

Karen made her way to the office. Looking at everything as she passed. She did not see anything out of place. At least not until she walked into the office.

"What?" Karen asked, also impatient.

"Look at the lamp," John said.

Karen looked where John had pointed. The floor lamp was leaning against the wall. Its shade was knocked to the floor.

"That bastard was in here," John spat.

"The Diary!" Karen exhaled.

"It's fine," John said to calm her.

"But look at the shelf," he continued.

Karen looked at the shelf. She studied the shelf. She could see nothing wrong. "What's up with the shelf? I don't see anything," she told John.

"Look at the third shelf. All the books are pushed in just left of the center," John said pointing.

"Maybe he did that when he banged his head on the lamp." Karen interjected.

"Yeah, I could buy that, but..." John said.

John was touching a book and nodding his head toward it.

Karen looked closer.

"Shit!" she exclaimed.

"Shit is right," John responded.

In the center of the bookshelf depression was John's copy of Jonathan Livingston Seagull.



CHAPTER

FOURTEEN

Cizzano spent the day on the phone, calling contacts he had not spoken to in quite some time. All the government law enforcement agencies had to be informed. They must not aid in the investigation to the detriment of the work Jones' team was on, but more important to him, they needed to stay out of his way.

A gangland slaying was a convenient excuse. One of his operatives was trying to get access to the body. These small town police departments have very little experience with 'gangland' killings. This guy might have been shot in the head, and they call it gangland. He knew the real answer and he would just have to wait.

The phone rang.

"Cizzano." He said into the phone in such a way it almost sounded like "Chitzano."

The man on the other end hesitated as he deciphered the name. "Mr. Cizzano, it's Max. It was a hit. They guy was a pro, hollow point mercury filled .357 magnum. Nasty, real nasty."

Cizzano thought about that and asked, "what do you mean, nasty?"

"The guy's got no face left. I don't even know how they knew who it was when they found him." Max shot back.

Cizzano snorted. "His finger prints, he still has hands, right?"

"Yeah, just no face."

There was silence for a moment. Max felt really uncomfortable with the lack of response. Max felt uncomfortable working on a case in which a guy's face was blown off. Even if his boss didn't want it to be a gangland style killing; it was.

Cizzano inquired, "how many shots?"

Max seemed like he was counting. "Five."

Joseph A. Sabin Jr.

"What did the coroners list as the cause of death?"

Max laughed. "Gun shot."

Cizzano retorted. "Which shot?"

"Oh..." Max shuffled some papers.

Cizzano was getting impatient, but stayed quiet.

"The coroner states that the Doctor was dead before the shot to the head. But does not list which of the other four shots was cause of death."

"Where were the other shots?"

"Right lung, both knees, and left shoulder."

"Well, I think we can eliminate the shots to the knees."

Max was shaking his head when he responded. "I don't think so. Don't forget the shells used. He's a mess sir. This was intended to show that they're not playing around."

Cizzano took a deep breath. Stay cool he told himself, stay cool. Give this guy what he wants.

Max waited. Max was really beginning to hate this assignment. Max was not generally used in that type of case. Max felt his stomach heave, it took a deep gulp. Max remembered a joke. 'What is downchuck?' 'I don't know' 'The opposite of upchuck.' Max started to laugh at himself.

"What the fuck is so funny?" Cizzano asked.

"Stupid joke I just remembered from my childhood. Sorry," Max responded suppressing his stomach's natural response to the situation.

"Max, this is unrelated to the Parker visit, right?"

Max agreed, "no way could this be related. Something big here, big bucks, drugs or something."

"That's what they brought to show the doctor, a drug formula." Cizzano wanted to cover his tracks. If Max bought that statement, Cizzano knew it would be clear sailing.

Max refuted that as a possible motive, "but sir, no one does this for a refusal to give up a formula. This was to show the living, not to kill the doctor."

"Right, leave him no face, the mourners have to settle for a closed casket. Any leads?"

"Not yet, will report as soon as I know more."

Cizzano went to hang up. He thought about that. His wife always told him that was rude. He was rude the way he handled his people. He heard her in the back of his mind.

'Andre, say thank you when someone does a good job!'

"Thanks Max, good work," He barely got out.

"Sure, sure, no problem," Max offered in return.

"Bye."

"Bye."

Cizzano hung up the phone and considered his next step. He needs to let Jones know. He has to get some information to the local police so they let up on the O'Millers and don't bother the Parkers.

He picked up the phone, called down to the 'Theater Group', known as 'Theatrics' or 'Flamers' depending on who you asked.

"Broadway!" The phone was answered.

"This is Cizzano."

"Yes, what can we do for you sir?" Came the reply.

"Hey you guys have a convincing stoolie for me?"

"For what type of work?"

"Don't know, but it's big, really big. Lots of money, or major drugs. But it's scientific, so the stoolie's got to be clean and an intellect."

"We just need to get Tyrone a haircut and a shave. The guys got an IQ of 145 and a degree in chemistry. How's that?"

Cizzano sat with that thought.

"Is Tyrone a black man?"

"Yeah, why?"

Cizzano was a racist, not of the purest kind, but he was realistic.

"Guys, I need a white guy. He's suppose to be from WASP city USA and no way would a guy by the name of Tyrone be privy to this kind of info."

"Okay, then you'll get a less intelligent white male, maybe even less educated," he shot back sarcastically.

"Fuck you," Cizzano tossed back, "you want to get Tyrone killed?"

No response.

"Didn't think so. Look, this is hot, big and someone has been killed. Killed with a vendetta, so let's get it right!"

"How about Jose?"

Cizzano almost laughed. "What the hell did I just say? I need a white guy."

"Just jerking your chain, I'll have to check the files. The best trained guy would be Tyrone, maybe he can give another agent enough training to pull this off. Not a big deal right?"

Cizzano thinks, not a big deal? What the fuck did I just tell this asshole. He thought a moment before his reply. Oh, his role, Cizzano caught the meaning of the last statement.

"Yeah, all he has to do is point them in the direction of a possible hitman and get the detective off our people."

"I'll get you a nice white man."

"Gee, thanks. Imagine me getting what I asked for!" Cizzano said sarcastically. He hung up the phone. "Asshole. I hate dealing with those people." He hit the intercom button, "get Jones in here." Cizzano barked at his assistant.

Two or three minutes passed. There was a buzz at the intercom.

"Send him in," Cizzano knew it was Jones.

Jones entered Cizzano's office.

"Sit."

Jones sat.

"What's up?" Cizzano asked.

A phrase thought Jones, nothing more than just a form of greeting.

"Theresa and Ted are fucking up sir."

"Glad to hear it. What are you doing about it?"

Jones stood, raised his voice and almost yelled, "there's not a damn thing I can do about it! I'm stuck in that fucking office!"

"Are you?" Came Cizzano's calm reply.

"Do you mean I'm not?" a shocked Jones asked.

"No Jones, you are not. Not being a field operative means, just that. It does not mean you are stuck in your office."

"What should I do?"

"Go out, meet Ted in a bar and beat the shit out of him." Cizzano suggested.

"What will that do?" Cizzano looked at him square in the eye.

"That will remind him that you care about what happens. And, there is penalty for stupidity."

"What about Theresa?"

"She hasn't fucked up, has she?"

"No, but how did you know?"

"Jones, come now, you know what we do, I have my ways," Cizzano teased.

Jones smiled, stood and turned saying.

"Thanks."

"Don't get hurt," Cizzano said. He knew that Jones could not get hurt with Ted. Ted was a half foot shorter, and almost a hundred pounds lighter. Jones, however shouldn't do the dirty work himself.

"How?" Jones asked.

"Any way. Don't do it alone," Cizzano said. "Why not?" Jones asked. His face curled up quizzically.

"Because, I said so," Cizzano moved to dismiss him.

"What are you my mom?" Jones shot back.

"Yes, in a way. Don't do it alone. Not good for your image," Cizzano explained.

"Okay," Jones said. "But can I at least hit him?"

"Oh yeah. Hit him a few times. Hit him once for me too," Cizzano laughed.

Jones' sort of liked that idea. He liked the idea of kicking him. Making him hurt. He didn't like Ted. He didn't know why, it might be because Cizzano didn't like Ted. All the stories he'd heard, all suggested Ted was a fuck-up. So, he therefore assumed Ted needed this.



Cizzano could see Jones was beginning to enjoy the thought of kicking the shit out of Ted. Cizzano knew Jones was a little sadistic, what green beret wasn't just a little. That training alone changes a man. "No damage, just pain," counseled Cizzano.

"Okay. Only pain." Agreed Jones.

"Get out of here." Cizzano said. "I've got work to do."

Jones turned toward the door. He tilted his head back toward Cizzano to say something, but stopped himself, Cizzano was already back on the phone. He opened the door and left.

CHAPTER

FIFTEEN

There was a full moon. John and Cheryl lay under a big oak tree. John had never felt so happy in his life. Everything was going well, he felt good, and his experiment was progressing well. Life just felt great.

Cheryl turned to him and said. "John, I don't want to see you anymore."

John's heart fell to his knees. The sky seems to turn cloudy. He turned to Cheryl. And began to speak. "Cheryl I..."

Karen looked at him and said. "John, I'm not Cheryl, I'm Karen, remember? I'm real, I'm alive and you and I are married."

John looked at the sky, it was midday, the sun was shining, the big puffy cotton ball clouds were blowing in a gentle breeze. He looked back at Karen, saw Cheryl's face smiling at him.

"AHHH!" John shouted as he woke from his dream. He was shaking, soaked, and very cold.

Karen turned to him and said, "is everything Okay?"

John said, "no, well, yes, well, I'm fine now. Shit, what a bizarre dream!"

Karen remained quiet and stroked his hair.

John spoke again, "interesting transformation."

"What was John?"

John sat and tried to figure out what he meant. "I mean, I was sitting on a dark, clear night with a moon in the sky. I leaned over and Cheryl was there. Then clouds came and covered the moon. I went to speak and the woman was you. I turned away and it was sunny and big fluffy clouds moved in a soft breeze."

"Sounds good to me," Karen said, somewhat sarcastic, somewhat pleased with the imagery.

John continued. "But...but...I then see Cheryl again. I went to scream..."

Karen interrupted, "good choice of reaction!"

"Wait a minute Karen! ... I felt so odd, I feel odd. I must be joining the past with the present. I'm not even sure who I am."

Karen looked at him. Love is present in her eyes, but so is a deep fear. A fear of the unknown. Yet there is also a joy in seeing John work on this. He was even working on it in his sleep. After all the years she had known him, only now was she getting to see what happened inside those hideous dreams.

John continued, "I am convinced through all of this, that I want to stay with you. I love you deeply. I can think of no other person I have ever met that cares as much for me as you. I know that the investigation into the past hurts, but remember, it is my past."

Karen looked at John, loving him even more. She could not think of anything to add. She loved him deeper with each moment. The investigation into his past made her love for him grow. She was getting to know him, she knew him but now ever so much more.

"Just think about it Karen, you knew people before me. But the difference is, you can remember them. You know their face, what they were like, and why you are no longer are with them. Cheryl will haunt me until I know why. What happened. It's such an open question for me."

"I know John, I do know, I understand, and...and I'm excited by the investigation. I look forward to each thing we learn. I feel like a detective looking for clues."

John nodded. "Yeah, that is neat."

Karen continued, "I'm even getting to see a part of you that few women get to see about their men. I am seeing your feelings."

They continued talking this way for a few more hours. Neither one remembered when they fell asleep again. The alarm clock rang and dragged them both back to the world of TODAY!

John jumped out of bed, as if ready to take on the world. Karen stumbled out of bed, to the shower. John grabbed his robe and almost ran down the stairs. He reached the kitchen grabbed a cup and poured, "shit," John said really loud, "we didn't put any coffee in the basket." He discovered that as he poured milk into the hot water in his coffee cup and got a cloudy white mixture.

"Turn it off," shouted Karen from the shower.

John turned off the coffee pot. He knew he had to let it all cool down before making more coffee. He poured the hot water down the drain. He turned the cold water on the kitchen faucet just enough to trickle into the pot, that way he wouldn't screw up Karen's shower. The pot was almost full of cold water, John turned off the faucet and got a filter and put coffee grounds into the basket and started the process all over again.

As Karen descended the stairs, the coffee was about through the machine. John stuck a cup under the basket and poured himself a cup, put his under and poured one for Karen. He put milk in each cup and handed Karen her cup.

"Thanks."

They both sipped their blazingly hot coffee as they walked into the living room to relax for a while.

"Welcome to Wednesday," John said to Karen.

"I'll have to go to work today. Can't blow off two days in a row."

Karen asked, "why not?"

"There's a thing called money. Something we continue to need."

"Don't get sarcastic John."

John sipped his coffee. "Yeah, but we do need the money. I can't skip another day. Besides, it's beautiful outside and I've got some outside work to do. We are nearly done the siding, I can work indoors on the plaster and moulding if I get this done while it's nice. That's great work for a rainy day."

"I was hoping you'd have some rainy days off so you could work on the notes...ah diary."

"Karen, I've got to continue working, I can't drop everything for this thing. How else can we live? Neither one of us makes enough money to live on. Think of the mortgage."

"I try not to think about the mortgage."

John laughed. He knew how much Karen hated paying those buttheads in the mortgage company. Their mortgage was sold, to a stupid mid-western company that consisted of a computer network and thirty or forty people. To speak to anyone, you have to play telephone games with the computer to finally get through. They had their mortgage with a small home-town bank, and it was sold. They both took it personally.

John spoke again. "Look, instead of doing anything else, let's come home tonight and jump right into the diary. If we work together, you can read diary pages, and make notes, I can read them and we can show each other the interesting ones. How's that sound?"

Karen smiled at that. "Yes John, I'd like that. When I get home should I order Chinese?"

"Wow, Chinese, that sounds great! I look forward to that."

They agreed, John went upstairs to the bathroom to shower and shave. He referred to it as the three S's. Karen always wanted to leave the third to the recipient of that phases' imagination.

After a long time, the shower began to run and Karen could hear John moaning as he let the water run over his head. Whenever John was off, he didn't do any grooming. When he finally showered, the second day after, John always felt dirty. Regardless of whether he really was or not, he felt that way.

John began singing a song. "Do, do, da, so, la, vi."

Well, at least that was what it sounded like in the kitchen.

Karen poured herself a second cup of coffee and went up to the bedroom to dress for work. The shower stopped, the singing didn't.

Karen recognized the song and hummed along with John. she smiled and heard it continue, somewhat in the correct key.

John can almost carry a tune. Sometimes he does. This morning he was not, but it was one of the most beautiful sounds Karen had heard in a long time.

\* \* \* \*

"Ted, it's Jones on the phone for you."

Ted looked up, he was thinking he was in trouble now. Every project he has ever been assigned, he's ended up taking the fall for the failures. Ted knew he was a fuck up, he didn't like the work he did and it showed. He walked over to the phone, picked it up and said, "yes Jones?"

Jones responded. "Ted, can you meet me at the corner bar at 5th and Market?"

Ted shook his head. "Jones you mean in Philly?"

There was a pause. During that pause Ted looked at Theresa. The look he received in return was one of a worried friend. Ted felt good that Theresa was worried for him.

Then Jones responded. "Yes, in Philly. Is that a problem?"

"No, Jones, what time."

They agreed on a time. It left Ted enough time to work and get to Philly and not make it seem like a big deal.

They both hung up.

Ted looked at Theresa and said. "I may not be back."

Theresa said, "why do you say that?"

Ted lowered his gaze, he was looking at her feet. "I screwed up, I think I'm a dead man."

"Bullshit, Ted. They're not going to kill you for locking a dead bolt. You didn't blow your cover. Nothing really happened."

"So I should go?" "Yes, of course you should go. But bring your gun. Philly at night can be a dangerous place. I don't think Jones will hurt you, but the city might."

"Theresa, you're such a pussy! Philly is as safe a city as there is on the east."

"Ted."

"Yes?"

"Fuck you. And take your gun!"



\* \* \* \*

John walked toward the house. He took a deep breath. He thought he smelled a smell he hadn't experienced in a long time.

Chinese food.

He walked in. Karen was sitting on the floor reading diary pages, she had a notepad and several notes.

John thought she looked as if she had been crying. She was reading a diary page as he walked in. He made some noise with his feet so he wouldn't scare her. She looked up.

"Hi sweetie, want some dinner?" John's wife said.

John looked at her with a look, 'No, I'll starve.' "Yeah, that sounds and smells great! What'cha get?"

Karen said, "two vegi dishes and a chicken and peanut."

"Great. Any egg rolls?"

"Just one for you. You know I don't like them."

"Let me wash my hands, I'll be right there. Where are we eating?"

Karen pointed to the living room, John looked down.

The living room was set up for a special dinner. It looked wonderful. John could hardly contain himself. There were candles, a hot stone to keep the food warm with a little sterno burning under it. Gone were the little boxes. Everything was in beautiful bowls.

"Wow, sorry I didn't get home sooner!"

Karen said, "I'm glad you didn't, I just got it ready!"

John ran upstairs, was changed faster than Karen ever remembered and he was back downstairs.

"Ready?" he said to Karen.

Karen got up and joined him in the living room. They ate as if they have have not eaten for days. Never before had Chinese food tasted so good.

John used a fork to shovel it down faster. Karen used the traditional chopsticks with a fork to clean up.

"Ready to plunge into the past?" John asked Karen.

Karen said, "yup, I've got a head start on you."

They sat down on the office floor and began reading diary pages.

John noted, "have you noticed that a lot of the diary pages really don't have any valuable info on them?"

Karen answered. "Yeah, I've noticed that too. It's as if you knew you had to write something each day. But sometimes had nothing to say."

John reflected on that. "Right, but at least there is something from each day. Otherwise we might think we were missing pages."

"John, I also noticed that some of the experiments were...ah...how can I say this..." Karen stumbled on her words. "Say it Karen." John prompted.

"To you, wouldn't you say some of the experiments were childish?" Karen forced out.

"Childish?" John said while still prompting for Karen to go on.

"Yeah," Karen responded.

"Like what?" John asked.

"The time you changed your nickname," Karen answered.

"That wasn't childish. That required a serious amount of concentration." John defended his past self.

"Yeah, but the name was childish."

"Tick. You think Tick was childish." John laughed.

"Sure is," Karen said laughing.

"I don't remember that one either." John continued.

"Good thing. I would never call you Tick. Scaredi-cat maybe, but not Tick." Karen poked fun at John.

"So, I guess I agree with what you are saying. These diary pages contain almost no useful information," John stated.

"Right. I want to divide them up," Karen said.

"Oh, man Karen, that's going to be a lot of work," John whined.

"So. I said I'd do it."

"Oh, yeah, when?" John shot back.

"Soon. I think I can do it soon," Karen responded.

"You have some sort of plan I'm not aware of?" John looked at Karen. He was concerned by that comment.

"I might. I'm not sure it'll work. I'm going to try to get time off from work," Karen said.

"No, Karen. Don't do that. This is my problem." John almost ordered.

"It's our problem," Karen retorted.

"Let's get back to the diary." John was somewhat resigned to Karen trying something. He just hoped it worked.

They went back to reading, writing notes and reading, writing notes and reading. Odd number notes they agreed would be John's, the even Karen's.

They had thought about one arcane system after another. Prefixing the note with a J or a K. But the simplest was just odds and evens. They did a shoot the fingers, once, twice, thrice, shoot..., to determine who got odds and evens. It took the best out of nine million but they finally had it.

Karen took a diary page and it dropped to her lap, aided by her right hand.

John looked up, it was a signal after all.

"What's it?" He said.

Karen read.

"January 2, Day 74"

"I had a new year resolution. Today I have forgotten what it was. It was so important, so good, and yet I don't know what it was. ..."

"That's pretty cool, listen to this." Karen continued.

"January 1, Day 73"

"Today's task is to forget my new year's resolution. I have not made one, but nonetheless, I am now to forget it.

I am to make my new year's resolution an important, significant one. One that anyone would be proud to have thought of. Yet since there isn't one, I can't remember it.

The challenge here is to plant a thought of having had a thought, remembering features of the thought, but not being able to recall the actual thought. R.D. Lange stand back."

"Who's R.D. Lange?" John asked.

Karen absently remarked. "He wrote a book called 'Knots'. It contained a whole series of lines like the last one I read. You know like. 'He knows that she knows that he knows, but she doesn't know that he knows that he knows she knows.' Or something like that. The book is on the shelf somewhere if you want to check."

"Nah." John replied. Then thought. "Hey, how would I have known that?"

Karen stopped. Thought. Then said, "beats me, that's a good question."

They both continued reading.

John was on February and sort of flipping pages.

He got to diary day 131 and read.

"February 28, Day 131"

"Since this is leap year, I've decided to have some fun with myself. I'm going to make tomorrow my birthday. I'm going to have a birthday that only occurs once every four years.

The plan is to think about leap year, think about being 24 and how I'm really only six. I'm really only six because my birthday only comes once every four years. Leap year, birthday once every four years.

I make it a chant, chant to myself, once every four years, it's my birthday it's leap year, only once every four years it's my birthday, it's leap year. Over and over. We'll see tomorrow."

Karen looked at John. "So."

John looked back. "So, what?"

Karen gets annoyed. "What happens? Did it work?"

John picked up the next page and read.

"February 29, Day 132"

"As I opened my eyes, I realized it was my birthday. My real birthday. February 29th, not the ordinary March 1st fake. By my accounting I'm six, by the world's count I'm twenty four. Don't like to think of myself as that old. Being born on leap year day, I get to be forever young."

"John this is eerie, day after day, you simply changed thoughts," Karen remarked.

John looked at her and reminded her. "Yeah, but remember the one I read when we first got the diary?"

Karen doesn't and says. "No John, I'm not sure what you mean."

"It talked about how I was remembering things, having memory relapses. Remembering things, getting Todd involved and regretting his input."

John had said that a bit too loud. He regretted the annoyance he had felt. Too late, he'll have to face the music.

Karen stood. "John, I've had enough for tonight. Let's go watch TV."

She left the room.

Oh good, John thought, now we get to fight.

John followed her into the other room. "Karen, let's not fight." He pleaded.

Karen ignored him, turned on tv and began to watch some mindless show.

John sat down. They sat in the dark room, lit by the eerie bluish glow of the tv. The only sound was a slight whistle of the tv warming and the sound of a man talking about rich people in a shouting voice.

Karen reached for the remote. Her arm touched John's leg. They both jumped as if there was a an electric shock caused by their touching. They settled back into their respective corners of the couch. Far apart, yet thinking the same thoughts. Neither one was willing to give in, at least not yet.

I'll go first, thought John. Let's break the ice and get over this. He spoke. "Karen, why don't we just forget about these silly papers, burn them and get on with our lives."

Karen turned her head, her eyes could have almost burned right through him. "No way. That's a stupid idea." She turned back to

the maniac on tv. The picture showed a Southern California home, set upon the cliffs. It looked as if a breeze could blow it off into the ocean.

The announcer yelled about it costing "TWENTY-THREE M-I-L-L-I-O-N DOLLARS."

John thought, who cares. "Shit, it looks like it could fall into the ocean."

Karen heard, pretended she didn't and turned the sound up a little louder.

John took that as a hint to stay quiet.

They continued watching that silly show. The tv wandered through one room after another. Each was large enough to contain their house. John wondered how anyone could live in such a house. It's so stuffy, so clean, so neat -- there's nothing out of place. No dog foot prints, no dirty dishes, nothing. It looks as if no one lived there, a place where an interior decorator would go once a season to change the decor. That is just in case the owners decide to occupy the house for an evening.

Robin yells. "...AND this is just one of the SEVEN homes owned by 'The Sheik'"

"That's it, that's IT!" John stood up and walked into the kitchen.

Karen followed him with her eyes.

He opened the refrigerator and looked in. He stood there staring in the 'fridge. For what neither he nor Karen knew. He felt the cold air flow across his feet. Strange how cold air reached the floor so quickly, he thought. He didn't feel it on his face.



A commercial came on louder than the show's announcer was. Karen was shocked, went to mute the sound. The TV shut off abruptly.

Karen was no better with the remote than I am, John thought.

The TV never turned back on.

Karen appeared behind John and spoke. "Sorry. I'm feeling all weird and out of my mind. But reading the diary is good, I feel better every day."

John took one of Miller's beers out of the 'fridge and handed it to Karen. "Do you want one?"

Karen shook her head and continued. "John, the diary shows me that the person you are, IS, the person you were. I needed to know that."

John was pouring the beer into a glass. He was careful to leave the yeast sediment in the bottle, yet pour as much of the beer as possible into the glass. It's a trick that takes some practice. Miller showed him every time he had the chance. After pouring the beer, John put some water into the bottle, put his thumb on the opening. He shook it and poured out the yeasty water. Filled the bottle again and repeated that process. He then slowed the water so he could fill it right to the brim.

He set the bottle by the sink and grabbed his glass.

Karen watched the whole event. She knew Miller wanted the bottles back and wanted them back clean. She had been lectured on the difficulty of cleaning dried yeast off the bottle bottom. Not to mention mold if you leave any beer inside to dry out and form a culture medium. Karen grabbed a bottle of 'low-test' commercial beer and joined John in their parlor.

The parlor was the original living room of the house. It was small, but very inviting and warm. They agreed that it was the prettiest in the house thought Karen. They sat and drank in silence.

\* \* \* \*

Ted walked into the bar room. It was thick with smoke and had the smell of a men's room. He wondered why he was asked to meet Jones in such a disgusting place. He realized he dressed too well for this 'joint'.

As he looked around, Ted removed his tie and unbuttoned his top two buttons. Once more fittingly dressed he began looking around for his boss. People looked back at him as he surveyed the room. He was still feeling conspicuous, so he removed his jacket and hung it over his right shoulder and held it with his index finger of the same hand.

He felt a tap on his other shoulder. He thought it was Jones. He turned around, directly into a left hook.

The punch staggered him. He dropped his jacket and prepared to retaliate. A man he had never met stood in front of him in a boxer's stance. He was gesturing a 'come on, let's see your stuff' kind of way.

Ted took a quick look around the bar. Things had changed since he had walked in. People had moved out of the way.

"Shit," Ted said out loud.

People were not only getting out of the way, they were moving tables and chairs out of the way. Making a boxing ring out of the bar.

His opponent swung, this time Ted avoided the punch. He was calming himself down, preparing for the fight. Still no one else joined the fight. Ted looked for Jones, he was nowhere in sight.

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That's odd, Ted thought.

"Hey man, what have I done to you?" Ted asked his assailant.

The man just looked at him and snorted.

"Look, it's easy, I'll just leave," Ted said.

"No way," snorted the boxer.

"Well fuck you then!" Ted went after him.

Ted leveled a series of quick punches to the man's midsection. The boxer reeled a little, recovered and attacked. He struck Ted with a solid, yet ineffective shot to the ribs. Followed that with a hook. Ted blocked the hook and countered with a right uppercut. That punch landed with a grinding of the boxer's teeth.

"Back off!" Ted yelled.

The boxer showed no sign of backing off. Instead he started after Ted once more. Ted thought he must have been set up for this. He also thought that this guy is either not alone, or a lot better than he seemed. Neither thought made him feel very safe. Theresa was right, should have brought my gun.

Crack. Ted felt a shattering effect across his back and a sharp pain. This guy's not alone. Ted turned, tried to retaliate with a flying sissor kick. He missed. Ted came down on the floor. He landed almost flat on his back.

As he got up. The boxer landed a solid punch to his midsection, followed by three or four quick jabs to the jaw.

Ted was staggered, he turned, and saw a familiar face. "Jones? What the fuck is going on?"

He received four or five rapid punches to his kidneys, he went to react and Jones leveled the bat and plunged the end into his solar plexus.

Ted went down to his knees. As he dropped, he received a final blow, a punting-like kick to the chest. He fell to his back, with his feet underneath him. He looked up at Jones, went to speak but couldn't.

Jones asked, "want a beer?" As he offered Ted his hand in aid.

Ted reached up toward Jones with as much strength as he could muster. He was barely able to raise his hand. But he had to. He had to save his honor. Jones pulled Ted up.

Ted was not a small man, but Jones still towered over him and easily picked him up. Jones pulled Ted's arm over his own shoulder and half carried him to the bar.

"Two drafts," ordered Jones.

Ted was beginning to feel lucky. That wasn't so bad he thought; less than ten good shots and they left me conscious. He swiveled on his bar stool and surveyed the bar room. It was almost back in order. People were drinking at the bar as if nothing at all had happened.

"Fuck, this is a helluva nice place you picked," Ted said scowling at Jones.

"That's why we're here Ted. This is the only place to have this kind of conversation," Jones said smiling.

"What conversation?" Ted complained.

"Don't be so stupid next time. I hear Alaska is beautiful in the summer and a bitch in the winter," Jones warned.

Ted nodded and sipped his beer, it burned his lips. Ted wiped his mouth with his hand. Blood, though not much. He sipped the beer again, the burning was a welcome feeling of being alive. "Who was the boxer?" Ted asked.

"Just a guy from a local gym," Jones answered.

"Not very good," Ted said grinning a bloody smile. His grin had cracked his lips again. "Shit!" He wiped his mouth.

"That's what you look like, yes indeed." Jones pointed out to Ted, as if he didn't already know.

"Right. If you didn't hit me with the bat, I could have taken that asshole," Ted said after another sip of beer.

"Actually, you surprised me Ted, I thought that guy was going to be able to handle you. I'm glad I brought the bat." Jones told him.

Ted looked at Jones. Jones didn't need a bat to beat the crap out of him. He wondered why he used it.

"Why'd you use a bat?" Ted asked, "you don't hardly need it." "I don't need it at all. I was told not to get hurt. That was how I avoided getting hurt," Jones responded.

"Yeah, I bet you didn't feel a thing," Ted said in disgust.

"Didn't feel a thing," Jones agreed.

They finished their beers. Ted couldn't move. He was beginning to feel the effects of his beating. Jones knew.

"Another round," Jones ordered.

"Thanks."

"No problem, then we have to get you home," Jones said.

# CHAPTER SIXTEEN

The alarm clock rang its electronic ring. John reached over for it. It continued, he reached around knocked, something off the night stand. He kept looking for the clock, found it pressed snooze and rolled back into bed. It rang again.

"Shit!"

This time he turned it off. Reached over to slowly wake Karen. She was not in bed. John decided to get up, he grabbed his robe and staggered downstairs to coffee.

Karen was sitting, reading a book.

John and she make eye contact. John continued his trek to the kitchen. There sat a cup of coffee, poured and fixed to his liking. He sipped it. It was hot, but just right for drinking. Karen must have heard him get up and made it for him. He carried the cup into the living room and sat down.

Karen put the book down, picked up a small pile of the diary and began to read.

"February 2, Day 105"

"My ideal woman. I woke this morning thinking about my ideal woman. Don't know why. It's an odd feeling, I feel I have met her, I feel I know her. The image is clear in my mind, a picture of her. I know her body I see her face. Yet it is not a woman I have ever met. I will look for her today."

"That's it?" John asked.

"Yes," responded Karen.

They sat for a moment. John's mind was not yet clear. He just woke and the effects of the coffee were not yet evident. They both sat, sipping coffee.



"What happened the day before? Do you have the diary page for the plan? There must have been a plan." John was very insistent.

Karen looked up with a smile and just read.

"February 1, Day 104"

"In my hand I hold a newspaper. There is a photo of a woman. She is very pretty. She is being honored for her achievements in college.

The card for today has me finding an idealistic image of a woman. Form that as an opinion. Give it a form without a reference.

I look at this woman. My ideal woman would be intelligent, pretty, about five foot and a few, kind to the needy and, well about just what this woman is. Yes, my ideal woman is Karen Smith.

However, the task requires an idealistic image of a woman without reference to any particular person. So, I must not include her name or her face, just her characteristics.

I will remember the contents of the article referencing her abilities. I will remember her beauty, those eyes, her hair. I will forget her face. I will forget her name. Rather, I will only remember that which I am to remember. I may not be able to do that. I may fail this task ."

"And fail you did John. That's me in that newspaper."

John was astonished. "What?"

"Yes, me. You found a picture of me in the paper. It was the day after I graduated from college. I had received a special community service award."

John thought. "Wait a minute, why the hell are you graduating in January?"

"The school had a special program that allowed finals after you returned from winter break," Karen answered.

"Must have been a ray of light in a bleak winter that drew me to that article."

"Thanks a lot!"

"No Karen, I didn't mean it that way. But imagine all the other stuff in the paper that day. Middle of winter and all. You must have really come across as a magic point of light."

They looked at each other. John, doing calculations to determine how long it took them to meet after that. Karen thought the same thing, but figured John would get to the answer before her.

"Four years and about a week."

"It took that long?" Karen reacted.

"Yeah, that's about right." John reiterated.

They looked at each other, thought about how fate had led them so close, then kept them apart for so long afterwards.

"John, do you think that thought implant changed the way you thought about me when you met me?" Karen explored.

"Yes of course it did. I think it opened a door to my feeling comfortable to ask you to dance. I never dance, yet for some reason I was compelled to do so that day."

"You couldn't dance, you kept stepping on my toes...my feet. I couldn't believe how scrapped up my shoes were. I also couldn't get you out of my mind."

"The strangest thing was that I did not remember seeing your picture in the paper. I felt comfortable with you, you seemed familiar. You even almost fit my 'ideal woman' model."

"Almost fit!" Karen laugh-screamed, "I was your goddamn ideal woman model."

"Yeah, but you were also four years older and had become more sophisticated. I couldn't recognize you as 'the woman' of my dreams. You were familiar," John retorted.

Karen thought to respond but didn't before John added.

"I felt like I had known you in another life. It felt like *deja vu*. No, not really, rather precognition. As if I was to meet you, would meet you and feel as if I already knew you." "You scared me to death when you asked me to dance using my first name," Karen replied.

"I used such a lame excuse too. 'Oh, I overheard your name in a conversation.' Yeah, right. But it put you at ease."

"John, I've been up since five. I've scanned most of the diary pages. I was looking for any other mention of this. I didn't find one."

"Okay, what else did you find?" John said knowing there was more.

She had a stack of pages. She had only read two and there had to be another twenty. Karen looked down at the pages. Then said, "you're not mad that I jumped ahead, are you?"

"Are you kidding? I love it. It's a look into my past, you know we have no plan for this. Any approach that works is the one we will take."

John thought a moment. "The only thing is, you need to keep notes on the interesting stuff."

Karen's only remark was to raise a pad of paper. She had at more than a dozen notes!

John was impressed. "Karen, I think our approach should be having you do the investigation. You are more thorough than I am. You have a very strong interest in getting to the bottom of it. And lastly, you are a little detached."

"I am not detached!" Complained Karen.

John rephrased. "You are not connected to this except by the present. Regardless of the one incident, you were not a part of this experiment. You are as detached as we are going to have."

Karen relented and said, "okay, I'll work on it. There is one condition."

"Name it," John responded.

"When I find stuff and share it with you, you promise to respond as clear and as honestly as you can."

"I promise," said John.

He and Karen proceeded to read through the other fifteen or twenty diary pages. John made notes, Theresa made notes, Ted held an ice pack to his face and drank a beer in between. Karen read the diary pages and her notes. The other three sat in intense interest and listened.

\* \* \* \*

Behind Theresa the recorders, almost silently, saved every spoken word to tape.

"So what do you think? Is this going to work?" Ted mumbled.

"Is what going to work?" Theresa shot back.

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"Having Karen do the investigation instead of John," Ted said. He had thought that it was perfectly clear that there was an alteration to the plan. Karen and John had just agreed to do the investigation differently. "God Theresa, sometimes you are so thick," Ted complained.

"Shush. Just listen for now," Theresa admonished.

"Fine," Ted responded.

"Then shut up!"

They sat and listened to the rest of the night's activities. Both were enraptured by the pattern of Karen's speech. Karen was being gentle, caring and picked out only the most meaningful diary pages.

"This is going to work out just fine," Theresa said.

Ted nodded his agreement, his ice pack covering most of his face.

# CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

"Fine, just fine. I feel everything is under control."

Jones waited as the other man spoke.

"Yes it is exactly what I wanted to hear."

He waited again.

"Thank you."

He hung up the phone.

Jones turned to Theresa and spoke. "Thanks for coming in. I'm really proud of the work you're doing. How's Ted?"

Theresa scowled at Jones. "He's fine, well as fine as he can be with a dozen bruises, black eye, and fat lip. Other than that, he's his old self. Why do you ask?"

"Look, that was necessary."

"Necessary!" Theresa interrupted, "nothing like that is ever Necessary."

Jones continued, "yes it was, Ted has screwed up in the past. Much worse than this. He was ordered shaken up. It's like spanking a child when they do something that they may have gotten hurt or killed doing. They remember better."

"So, we can expect to be treated like children now?" Theresa extrapolated.

"No, no. That was an illustration. Look Theresa, Ted is a fuck up. He held a much more important position than I do, and he's been busted down to simple surveillance..."

Theresa stood, as if to leave. "So, what's that make 'Mom' and me, his baby sitter? Why the hell is he on my team if he's such a fuck up?" she sputtered.

"He looks like your brother and like 'Mom's' son. He was the best choice. Besides, he's big, strong, and he is there basically to be a defensive member of the team."

"Why was I not informed of this?" Theresa demanded.

Jones looked at her. "It was need-to-know basis. Theresa, you didn't need to know until now."

Theresa walked to the door grasped the handle, turned to say. "Anything else..." paused and said sarcastically. "Chief?"

"Yes, one more thing. Stop down at Theatrics, your department head wants to meet with you."

Theresa opened the door and left without a further word. The door clicked quietly behind her.

She was doing good work, thought Jones. The feeling of concern she had for Ted was remarkable. That agent was really getting into her part, or falling for Ted. One was good, the other was a problem.

He picked up the phone, called down to Theatrics. He hung up before they answered. They've been warned. It's up to them to get her back in line. He was functionally her supervisor, but they were her line management and they were responsible for her. Jones looked out his window. It faced another equally non-descript building; one that was a bit taller than the one he was in. He can see the Washington Monument over it and the incessant flight of air traffic in and out, in and out. There seemed to be a plane passing the monument every single time he looked out. DC, the center of the empire.



The phone rang. Jones walked to the phone, picked it up. "Jones," he said.

There was a man on the line. He listened for a moment. The guy was talking nonsense, or so it seemed. He listened to the man talk. Finally he recognized the voice. "Todd! You're back?"

\* \* \* \*

Miller stirred the boiling pot of witches brew. At least that's what it looked like. It smelled wonderful and filled the house with a heady-heartly steam of malt and hops.

Doreen walked into the kitchen. "Can I stir it for a while?"

Miller's shoulders and arms were aching with tired. "Sure," he said, relieved to have the help. He sat and watched as Doreen stirred and inhaled a deep breath of steam.

She closed her eyes and exhaled. "Why doesn't this taste as good as it smells?"

Miller laughed. "Same reason coffee doesn't taste as good as it smells."

"Why's that?" Doreen asked.

Miller stood to relieve her. "Our sense of smell is much more sensitive than our sense of taste. But our sense of taste is diverse. We smell the whole, but taste it in parts. The tongue has regions of taste buds, each for its own sensation. We never experience the whole."

Doreen nodded. She remembered Miller explaining this before.

Miller continued though he knew Doreen had heard this before. "The regions of the tongue receive sensations at different moments of drinking a beer." Miller was in his glory.

Doreen was pretending to be asleep, snoring with her head back. She was truly bored hearing this again.

Miller continued, "That is the trick to making a fine brew. Know how the taste buds work. Excite them in order and leave a lasting impression on the drinker. A combination of malts, hops and alcohol create a series of sensations. Hops for bitterness, hops for aroma. Malt for sweetness; balanced by the bitterness of the hops. Some special malts for color and other flavors."

"Thanks Miller. I have heard that before," Doreen snapped.

"Then why'd you ask?" Miller furrowed his brow.

"You're a bright guy. Ever hear of a rhetorical question?" Doreen snapped in jest.

"Oh, yeah. So that's why you keep asking, huh?" Miller goes back to his brewing. There are still several steps left to the process. To match from brew to brew, each of the steps must happen within a time period. Depending on the step the time tolerances may be small.

Miller looks at his watch. It was getting close to one of the events. He grabbed a bag. "See, this is going to be a black beer. I've used both roasted malt," he held up the dark brown 'seeds' of the malted barley. Grabbed another bag took a small handful of the contents out, "and this black malt. Almost burnt black. This adds a really dark color and a smoky taste," he said. Doreen was really getting bored and let Miller know with body language.

He reflected on what he just said. "Sorry to bore you, I love this process. I should write about it, I've been brewing for years and know a lot of tricks. That would make me feel good."

"I think you would be a fine writer. You should write about making beer. Everyone loves your beer. Even me."

Doreen stood to leave.

Miller continued watching his boiling brew. Looked at the clock. It was the time to add the aroma hops. He grabbed the carefully weighed container, held it up to his nose and took a deep breath. Wonderful, Saaz hops. "The finest aroma hops in the world!" he exclaimed.

There was no one in the room to share the experience. So he dumped them in and let them boil for a minute, then he turned off the heat.

Doreen had sensed the process was coming to an end. She always fled just before the cooling process. That was followed by the dumping of the brew into the fermenter. It had to be sterile and Miller always yelled at her whenever she moved. He was afraid she would stir up dust. Dust carries wild yeast. Doreen was at a safe distance. She was outside enjoying the last of her flowers in their fading fall flower garden.

Miller finished up and began the hour long cleanup.

She saw him washing up. Safe to return, she thought. She began walking back to the house, spotted an odd bit of color in one of the gardens and went to it. "Oh, it's a Zinnia," she said to herself, "they are amazingly hardy, these guys made it though the frost!"

She continued back to the house to join Miller. He never did quite get the stove clean. Doreen knew she would have to clean it after he was done his cleanup. She laughed to herself and thought, he better make Meade next time. That was her payback for her patience and cleanup help.

"How'd you do?" Doreen asked as she reached the back door.

"Good, I think this one will come out great. Want a taste?" Miller offered Doreen a murky dark liquid in a tube.

Doreen made a face and said, "no. Get that away from me. Yuch."

"Yuch! You say yuch now, but wait until it's fermented. It's going to be one of my best ever," Miller said proudly.

"That's just what I will wait for," Doreen acknowledged. Doreen looked around the kitchen. A war zone must be cleaner than this. Oh, well she thought, I'll give him his hour before I kick him out. "Don't forget the stove this time." Doreen yelled back to Miller as she left the kitchen.

"I always clean the stove," Miller yelled in his defense.

"Not good enough though," Doreen said, almost out of earshot by that point.

Miller decided not to say anything. He continued to clean. He looked at the stove he just cleaned. "Dirty," he said out loud, "no wonder she said that." Miller recognized for the first time that he did not clean up after himself very well. He cleaned the cloth he was washing up with and started back at the stove. That made all the difference. "Doreen is going to be amazed," he said proudly to himself.

He went back to work on all the other areas of the kitchen. He was so proud of that discovery. He recleaned every surface. That is what she had complained about. He was spreading the sticky malt rather than cleaning it off.

"Hey, Doreen!" Miller yelled, "come here and see!"

Doreen got up from her chair. She wondered what could be so exciting. She walked into the kitchen. Miller was smiling.

"See," Miller said.

"I do. Yes indeed. Miller, you got the kitchen clean!" Doreen praised.

Miller was incredibly proud. "It has to be cleaned twice. But this time I cleaned it the second time so you don't have to!" He added.

"Thanks. Nice job!" Doreen said smiling.

They both left the kitchen. Miller had a beer in his hand. Whenever he brewed, he always drank one of the previous brews. He said it made the new brew better.

# CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

Karen dressed for work. She had a plan. She cannot tell John she must just do it. Excited, she ran out of the house, the door closed behind her and she realized she didn't wish John a farewell for the day. She turned back, opened the door and yelled up to him. "Bye John! Have a great day!"

She closed the door. It was off to work. In the car, Karen was planning how to approach the issue. She was wondering how to ask, if to ask or should she demand.

Driving through the back roads, she passed small houses nestled in the hills. She had once longed to own one of these houses. She and John owned a beautiful house. It was a house that needed a whole series of repairs, but a house that nonetheless, was wonderful. Still, she felt that a house in the woods, far away from the masses of people was where she could find peace.

"Peace. Peace is found inside," she said to herself. Karen leaned forward and clicked on the radio. News blasted forth, a traffic report. Karen didn't care about traffic, there was no traffic on the route she took. She quickly changed the station.

Soft, melodic sounds came out of the speakers. John had installed a terrific set of speakers in her car for her last birthday. She remembered arguing that the ones that came with the car were good enough.

Then she heard the new ones. "I'm glad I didn't argue too much for those old junky speakers. This is sensational," Karen said to herself.

The rich bass, full midrange of the singer's voice and sweet timber of the violin all came forth clearly. In many ways, Karen felt her car system sounded better than the one at home. John would tell her they are functionally the same. Still she loved her car's system, it was personal and it made her feel close to John whenever she listened to it.

The song had ended and her peace was interrupted by news. "Why do they have to do that?" Karen complained. She was flicking through the stations. Each one had news. "News, news, news. Who needs it!" she almost yelled.

There was a cassette in the stereo, Karen pushed it into the player. Again sweet music filled the car. "I wish John would make me more of these," Karen thought out loud.

Karen drove the remainder of the way to work listening to the tape John had made last week. It wasn't that John didn't make tapes, it was that Karen got tired of the tapes he made and wanted different ones. Anyway, she thought, I've got this one now. Time had vanished. She was in front of the school. She drove into the parking lot. She parked her car.

She had her plan. She was going to do something. She didn't know what. She would do whatever came into her mind and out of her mouth. She walked with confidence into the office of the director.

The director looked up, startled by the intrusion into her office. "Yes?"

"Mary, I'm sorry to just barge in like this, but I have something important to say."

Mary just looked at her.

Karen continued. "I'm handing in my resignation."

Mary leaned back into her chair and said, "Karen, is there something wrong? This seems so sudden."

"No, nothing at all. I have a project I want to pursue, and to do so I must have my free time."

Mary looked at her, thinking about the statement Karen just made and offered. "Karen, can't that project be done on weekends?"



"No, no it cannot!" Karen reacted with conviction.

Mary countered. "Okay, I don't want to have you leave. Can we discuss other options?"

"Like what?" Karen responded. She hadn't thought Mary would want to discuss any other solution. Work or not work. That was how she thought Mary would react. Karen figured she would say something about needing her to work full-time. She had thought of other ideas, but none seemed to fit with what she thought Mary would accept. She was feeling short-sighted.

"I'd like to have you work here. We have an opening for a 24 hour a week position. That would be three days a week. It could be any three days except Monday." Mary offered.

Karen became excited. "So I could work Wednesday through Friday?"

"Yes." Mary responded.

"What would it pay?" Karen inquired.

"Three fifths your current pay."

Karen became uncontrollably happy.

"And it can become full-time again when your 'project' is completed," Mary added.

"Thank you, Mary, thank you very much. I accept."

"Then get out of my office and back to work. I'm busy," Mary said feigning briskness.

Karen left her office, quietly closed the door behind her and clasped her hands and pulled them tight to her chest. The smile

never left her face. Karen reflected on that conversation. She never knew what Mary did really, now she knew. Mary held the place together, and earned every dollar of her pay.

Karen was so excited. She was walking on air. The other teachers saw her happiness, but didn't have the time to discuss it with her. The students were arriving.

'Students' Karen was taken aback by that term for the kids. They were all five and under. They were not there to learn, they were there for day care. But, the program got more money from the parents selling the program as a pre-school.

She realized she needed to get to her class. In all her excitement she forgot it was her day to start a class. She rushed to her room. As she entered she saw all the kids, they were all over the place. There was no order. The door closed behind Karen with a thud.

The thud of the door was a signal to the children. They came to order as if someone had said 'take your seats'.

"Another day," thought Karen.

The day progressed quickly. Karen had a chance to tell almost everyone about her change in position. Many congratulated her some thought it strange she wanted a part-time position. Theresa, in particular seemed happy. Karen had wondered about that reaction, but passed it off as Theresa feeling good for her. They were after all, fairly good friends.

All the children were picked up. Mary asked Karen to come speak to her for a minute. Karen was worried as she knocked on Mary's door.

"Come in," Mary said.

"You wanted to see me?" Karen asked.

"Yes, please sit down," Mary offered.

Karen sat. Her palms were sweaty, she was worried.

"You look worried, don't, I just want to tell you about what you'll be doing in your new position," Mary comforted.

"Oh. I was afraid you changed your mind," Karen said.

"No, no, this is going to be good for the school. Here's your new schedule," Mary said as she handed Karen a piece of paper.

"I'm going to be Theresa's assistant?" Karen asked.

"Yes, that's okay, right?" Mary thought the two women got along.

"Oh, yes more than okay. It's great, Theresa and I get along quite well," Karen said.

"Fine. Take that home with you and we'll sit down tomorrow with Theresa and discuss it," Mary said.

"Good, that'll be good," Karen stuttered.

Karen shook her head and thought how she needed to calm down.

"Good night Karen," Mary said.

Karen realized it was a sign to leave. "Good night Mary...and thanks again!" Karen stood, walked to the door and left. Mary didn't look up at her. Karen was relieved.

After that was over, Karen rushed home with even greater excitement than which she had gone to work. So much better. John wasn't home yet. She was going to make the best dinner they've had in a long time.

But what? She better get to the market. To make a really good vegetarian meal required veggies. She didn't change, turned around and got right back into her car.

At the store, she picked up a fresh Spanish onion, a red and green pepper, the store had some zucchini, so she got one. She forgot to see if they had potatoes, she picked up a few. She got eggs for the next morning. Rice, long grain wild rice and saffron, that'll be a treat.

Karen was going to make a specialty John had taught her. It was wonderful. Zucchini, potatoes, tomatoes...

"Oh my God, almost forgot the tomatoes!" Karen said as she stood in line.

"Excuse me," she said to the man behind her.

The man looked up from the magazine he was reading. A blank stare was on his face.

"Excuse me, I forgot something, I need to get out of line," Karen explained.

The man reluctantly moved out of her way.

Karen thought his reluctance was strange. He was, after all, getting ahead in line. Karen fetched the tomatoes and got back in line. This time behind 'Mr. Reluctant. She continued on the recipe. ...tomatoes, peppers, onions and thyme. Such a simple recipe but it was a wonderful, full bodied vegetarian delight. Karen added cheese to the top and put it in the oven for a minute to crisp the cheese.

"That'll be \$18.23," the checker told her.

Karen got out a twenty and handed it to him. She thought that was a lot for what she just bought, but vegetables did get pricey in the cooler months.

"And \$1.77 is your change. Have a nice night," the checker said robotically.

"Thank you," Karen replied. She grabbed the bag of groceries and walked to her car. She glanced at her watch. "Shit. John will be home any minute. I've got to hurry." She made it home before John. Without stopping to change, she started making dinner.

Karen heard John's car pull into the driveway. Dinner was almost ready. Lentil soup, Tomato-Potato-Pepper-Zucchini casserole, French bread, French wine (and beer), candle light and here he comes.

The door closed. It didn't slam, but it did make a loud noise.

John said, "hi!" He headed upstairs to change. He yelled down, "hey, something smells really good. Is there enough time for me to take a quick shower?"

Quick shower, Karen laughed to herself. For John, that's at least ten minutes. She looked at dinner. It'll be ready in ten minutes. She said, making a face, "John, it'll have to be a really quick shower. You have five minutes."

The shower was on in ten seconds. John showered and showed up for dinner before it was ready. "How'd I do?" he asked.

"That broke your record. Thanks for getting down here. Want to pour us some wine?"

John looked around for the wine. Didn't find it. Got up, went to the 'fridge and looked in. He found his beer. "Wow, French wine and French beer! What's up?"

"...and French bread! John, just pour some of either for yourself, I want wine," Karen told John.

John got out the cork screw, opened the wine, poured it into Karen's glass and poured beer into his. Karen shrugged, she really expected him to have beer. That's why you bought it, she affirmed to herself. She turned the heat off the stove and oven and brought the food to the table.

They ate while talking about their days at work. Karen was waiting for the best time to tell John about what she did. She had decided to tell him exactly what she did and what transpired. Rather than keep the details to herself. She began.

"Karen, you quit?"

"Wait John, let me finish."

"I can't wait. Do you still have a job?"

"Yes, I do. Let me finish now. It's great. Be patient." She continued. John began feeling proud of her, she really was important to the place she worked. He told her so. She blushed, and went on.

When she finished and John asked, "you did this so you'd have more time on the diary?"

"Yes, I want to do a really good job and get through this as soon as possible. We can then get our lives back on track."

John responded, "sounds good to me."

"Dessert?" Karen asked.

John patted his stomach, thought and said, "yeah, I've got some room. What's for dessert?"

Karen produced two slices of chocolate chip mint cheese cake. She grabbed a can of instant whip, whipping cream and put a fancy pile of whip cream on each. John applauded for the performance. His cake was gone in about a minute. Smiling, they both retired to the living room. Each with a glass of their beverage of choice. They sat and began to plan the new method of diary investigation.

\* \* \* \*

Ted turned his whole body to face Theresa, his neck was no longer flexible.

"This is great! They will be moving out on this now. That'll give them six working days a week between them."

Theresa looked at Ted. How pitiful he looked, black eye, swollen face. His lips were almost normal again. But he still walked a bit crunched down from the kidney punches and the shot to the solar plexus. He got a cracked rib from that one.

"That was a good idea you had to prime Mary for what Karen was going to say," Theresa answered.

"Yeah, and you did a really good job!" Ted commended.

"Thanks! Now we just have to wait to find out how well she does on Monday when she's working alone."

Ted stood, walked into the kitchen. 'Mom' was cooking something, he grabbed the pain pills he was taking and a can of soda from the 'fridge.

'Mom' asked, "how are you feeling Ted?"

He grunted and left the kitchen. He didn't care for her doting manner. She was not his mother and he was getting tired of the

play-acting. He walked in the other room where he had left Theresa. He sat down and swallowed his pill.

They sat listening to the plan.

\* \* \* \*

"No John, I think there is still a lot of work you can do. Even if I am doing twice as much. I want you to look through the diary too."

"I thought we agreed you would work through it, make the notes, and I would help," John reminded Karen.

"Yeah, that's right John, but you still have to read the original works. Besides, something may strike you that I'm ignoring."

John didn't even want to continue the discussion. So he said, "fine, I agree."

"Karen, do you mind if I turn on TV?" John asked.

Karen sensed a futile battle and said, "sure John, It'll be nice to stop and relax. Should we rent a movie?"

John shook his head. "No, I think we've spent enough money for one week. Let's see what's on for free."

Karen agreed and they relax to watch TV.



# CHAPTER

# NINETEEN

Detective O'Brian was working late again. The office was nearly void of any other human. He sat there feeling sorry for himself. He hated dealing with murders. Murder investigations, like Dr. Peterson's, take forever. This one will not be solved, but he must continue to investigate actively until either the Captain or the state Attorney General decides that he give up.

He never expected the phone to ring. Nor did he expect who was on the line.

"Yeah?" O'Brian said into the receiver.

"Detective O'Brian?"

"Right." O'Brian instinctively responded.

"I've got some information for you on the Peterson murder."

O'Brian straightened in his chair, grabbed a pad and a pen and said, "shoot."

The phone was silent.

"Hello?" he said, "are you still there?"

"Yeah, but we can't discuss this over the phone."

O'Brian wanted to ask, "why Not?" Instead he held back. People have several reasons not to discuss things on the phone, murder gave them plenty. "Then, can we meet somewhere?" O'Brian asked and offered.

The voice responded, "yes we certainly can."

O'Brian was beginning to feel jerked around. "Where then?" Nothing came across the line. O'Brian waited. He was growing impatient. "Where do you want to meet?" he snapped.

The voice cleared his throat. "I'll meet you at your apartment in an hour." And hung up.

"My apartment? How the hell..." O'Brian realized that the line was dead. "SHIT!" He slammed down the receiver and knocked the phone off his desk. "Shit," he said as he kicked it. "How the hell does this guy know where I live?"

Another detective looked around. "Hey O'Brian you want some backup?"

O'Brian thought about it. Started to answer and stopped. Did he? He was not sure, if this was for real he may blow it by having backup. "Do you think we could get 'plain clothes' down my way in an hour?" he asked.

The other detective said, "oh yeah. This is a biggy, they'll cover your ass. So you want backup?"

O'Brian answered without hesitation, "yes, I would like backup. Backup in plain clothes. Real quiet backup. I want it in a little more than an hour, though. I don't want those guys there when he shows up."

"How will they know when you want them?" asked the other detective.

"I'll turn off my porch light. Then they can stop and watch and be ready to react. I'll wear a wire." O'Brian took a deep breath and said, "I should head home. You know where I live?"

"Yeah, we know. They will be there. You can bank on it." The other detective assured O'Brian.

"Thanks," said O'Brian as he left.

\* \* \* \*

Karen began working on the character Todd Wilson. She remembered that John found a diary page from late August. That was before they started taking notes. All of the diary pages thus far revealed a simple experiment. They seemed to be harmless mind games, some childish, some were progressive thoughts. It was largely nothing. But she couldn't get her mind off that one disturbing diary page that talked about Todd.

She got file folders for each month, the hanging kind. She got big extra strong, flat bases so they could hold multiple folders without being a mess. She divided up the months, then as she found interesting diary pages, they were separated from the rest. Her notes were added as well. Each in their own manila folder.

The first month was October. But the year started on the 21st. So that was day one. She created a carefully hand written chart of what day matched which date. For example August 1st was the 286th day of the experiment. There were what seemed like a hundred folders or more all carefully divided by date and within date by level of importance.

Her sort was: Month, John's notes, Karen's notes, important diary pages, secondary diary pages, virtually useless pages and finally, childish. Karen found that almost half the diary pages fell into the 'childish' folder, about a quarter into the 'useless' folder. About two a month into the 'important' diary pages. Finally, the remainder of the diary, in the secondary folder. Those were the meat of the investigation. They reported on John's feelings, but didn't directly reference events of the experiment.

Then came late August. The trend reversed. Todd's involvement changed the face of the experiment. Todd brought drugs into the picture. John's life was to change dramatically.

Karen put the diary pages for October 20th into their folders. She sighed. "Thank God I've got that done!" she said to herself.

\* \* \* \*

Joseph A. Sabin Jr.

At eleven forty, Todd Wilson knocked on O'Brian's door. He was looking around him. He was very nervous. He would stand on one leg, then the next, then the first, and back and forth. He looked like a child that needed to use the bathroom but was too busy at play to stop.

The door opened. O'Brian had taken his coat off, but was still wearing the same clothes.

Todd sized up O'Brian.

O'Brian sized up Todd.

"Come in," O'Brian offered. He had not even asked if he was the man that called on the phone. It was an hour later, give or take a few minutes. No one ever knocked on O'Brian's door at this hour. O'Brian correctly assumed it was his informant.

"Thanks," Todd said.

O'Brian closed the door. He turned around and found Todd had gotten almost to the living room sofa. "Make yourself at home," O'Brian said sarcastically.

"Oh, sorry. I didn't mean to be rude," Todd apologized.

"No, that's fine. Really, make yourself at home. Do you want a drink?" O'Brian asked. "Yeah. Do you have any Irish Whiskey?" Todd asked.

"Do I have any Irish Whiskey?" O'Brian says rocking his body side to side. O'Brian walked over to the bar. Reached inside and pulled out three bottles of Irish Whiskey.

Todd recognized two, one was 'Jamison's', the other was 'Old Bushmills'. He could not make out the third, nor did he know of a third brand. "I'll have Old Bushmills," Todd told O'Brian.

"Good choice! That's my favorite too. How do you want it?" O'Brian inquired.

"Straight," Todd said.

O'Brian proceeded to pour too much whiskey into both glasses. Neither one got ice. He brought them over to Todd, handed one to him. "To truth," O'Brian said.

"To justice," added Todd.

The glasses clinked. Both men took a gulp of their whiskey.

"Ah, that's fine Irish mothers milk," O'Brian said over his coughing.

"You can say that again," gagged Todd.

The two men sipped their whiskey. They were careful not to over do it again. They chatted idly for several minutes. O'Brian was getting irritated with the chatter, yet he continued.

"Let's get on with it, how 'bout it chief?" Todd said.

"My sentiments exactly," O'Brian said.

O'Brian took a big swig from his glass. He emptied it. Todd looked at him, shook his head and drained his glass.

"More?" O'Brian asked.

"Not just yet," Todd evaded.

The two men sat in the kitchenette around a small square table. They began the formal portion of their meeting.

\* \* \* \*

Karen was stretching, the process had been grueling. Will she file the diary pages she had kept count; almost a thousand pages. Nine hundred ninety four to be exact. What an immense project John had worked on. Karen realized she was quite tired, she looked at her watch. "Two Thirty! Shit, I have to go to work tomorrow."

John had long since retired to bed. Karen snuck up into the bedroom. She was not sleepy, she had passed that stage more than an hour ago. Now she was wide awake. She quietly stripped and climbed into bed. Whoa, she thinks, is this bed cold. She snuck over toward John and curled up into his warm space. He reacted very well to this, she thought. He was asleep though. He turned, she rolled with him. He continued to roll. She wondered if he was feigning sleep.

Karen began to feel very excited by John's attention. He rolled on top of her. She breathed deep, closed her eyes. They began moving in unison. Karen felt sleep overcoming her, consciousness was fading; a warm rush was her last conscious memory of the night.

John and Karen woke before the alarm.

Karen said to John. "Did we make love last night?"

"I dreamt we did," John responded.

Karen smiled. "John, I don't think that was a dream."

John said, "it sure was for me!"

Karen agreed. They hugged each other. The alarm went off and so did John. "Damn that thing!"

Karen reached over and shut it off. She calmed John down and asked for an encore performance of his dream last night. John obliged without hesitation.

"We're going to be late for work." John said as he finally pulled himself out of Karen's friendly grasp.

"Who cares?" Karen laid and smiled. She almost fell asleep again.

"Karen? When did you come to bed last night?" John asked.

Karen mumbled something about it being late but not remembering exactly when.

"Come on Karen! You have to get up. Look, it's Friday and you have a four day weekend coming up. GET UP!"

She jumped out of bed. Saluted. Her nipples were as erect and rigid as her back. "Yes Sir! Karen reporting for duty."

John said. "You're out of uniform, Miss."

Karen said straight faced, "yes sir, as I said, I'm reporting for duty."

John shook his head, left the room and headed for a shower.

Karen took the hint. She went downstairs and checked the coffee situation. "Good, it's coffee this morning," she said out loud. She poured herself a cup and headed for the living room to sit. She looked at the clock, 6:25 read the digital clock. "That's less than four hours of sleep. Hell, it's probably only about three with all the activity." She smiled, shrugged her shoulders and said. "Who gives a fuck," then laughed.

\* \* \* \*

O'Brian had gotten no sleep. It was almost seven in the morning. He was still working on the notes he got from his reluctant source. He has a full description of the man.

'White male, late thirties, early forties, five foot nine inches. First name Todd, refused to give his last name.'

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O'Brian reflected on that, actually he got his first name when Todd made a mistake. He wouldn't have that either. O'Brian caught him off guard and he said his name. His first name was understandable, his second was Van something or Von something. But Todd, yes Todd was his first name.

Todd, was balding and graying. He wore a mustache and an unshaven beard. The beard looked a week old. This man cannot grow a full beard; it breaks halfway down his jaw line. He weighed about 140 pounds, really thin, might weigh less. He did not look well. His jaw was sunken and he had dark circles under his eyes. They almost looked like black eyes.

His dress was very upper class. He wore high quality clothes that have seen better days. Yet they still had a style that said he had money, or in Todd's case, once had money.

O'Brian thought that was enough for a sketch artist to begin. So he began focusing on his statements. He was glad he was wearing a wire and had backup recording this. Todd spent almost five hours talking with him. He never expected such a response from a surprise informant.

He looked at the clock. It was seven thirty and he had to report basic findings to the captain or at least the desk sergeant who would report to the captain when he arrived. This was a big break for the investigation. This murder may just get resolved.

"O'Brian." he said into the phone.

"The Captain in?" he asked.

"Yeah, I'll hold."

Music filled the empty space as he held the line. By pressing a button he was able to change the type of music playing. He decided on classical, easier on the nerves. The captain picked up the phone.

"Yes sir I do have something important. I just got a major lead in the Peterson murder investigation. An informant came by and gave me five hours of testimony."

The captain asked if this informant would testify.

O'Brian responded,

"Captain, I don't think that will be necessary. The leads he gave should provide sufficient witnesses to prosecute the case."

O'Brian listened as the captain spoke.

"Yes there is a suspect now. John Parker."

O'Brian continued to listened.

"No Parker didn't kill the victim, rather ordered the hit."

They spoke for a moment or two longer, the captain excused himself.

O'Brian welcomed the break. He could barely stay awake. He had to take a nap. He crawled into bed, set the alarm for two hours. He was asleep when his head hit the pillow.

\* \* \* \*

Cizzano demanded an explanation. "What do you mean?"

Max responded. "Sir, I know it's a twist, but hear me out. Todd appeared out of nowhere. He called the detective... ah...yeah, O'Brian. They met for hours. Todd's talking all sorts of bullshit to O'Brian. O'Brian is eating it up."

"Todd? Do you mean who I think you mean?"

"Yeah, Todd. Exactly," Max said.

"That son-of-a-bitch!" exclaimed Cizzano.

"You connected with this guy?" Max asked.

"I sure as hell am. Shit, he's the guy that designed the drug for us over a decade ago. What the hell is he talking to the police about this for?" Cizzano lied.

Cizzano was pacing around his office with the phone hanging off his neck.

"He worked with Parker on his memory alteration."

Max interrupted Cizzano. "He fingered Parker as the guy calling for the hit."

"What!" Cizzano exploded, "did O'Brian buy it?"

"Sure did."

"We need to get damage control involved, deeper into this matter. Max, get all the help you can. Get Theatrics to create a character who can play Todd's doctor from a psychiatric hospital. Get the writers working on the script so we can have Todd and Parker involved at some point in the past. Let's squelch this before it goes any further."

Max simply responded. "Yes, sir. I'm on it."

They hung up.

Cizzano was glad that Max was on the case. He and Max go back a number of years. Max has not let him down. Max would also not question the authenticity of what Cizzano told him. He was very quick on his feet, seemed to know where the action was and made

sure he was there watching. He has never been caught, and was so average looking no one could adequately describe him if he were.

It was Friday and time for the weekly Director's meeting. All the assistant directors gathered to meet with the director. Cizzano was one of eight, they met weekly to share information. Many of them have projects that cross each other's territory. By meeting often they keep each other apprised of their investigations. Many a major problem had been averted by those meetings.

Each man or woman had ten Agent Directors under them. Each of these AgDs could have up to five projects with a dozen field operatives each. The number of men and women in the field can reach an enormous number. No one person could track all that was happening. Therefore they met.

Those meetings were a drudgery Cizzano usually dreaded. But today he was looking forward to the meeting. He had a lot to report and there were many questions he had to ask. He was hopeful an operative working under another AgD have discovered something that would help in his work.

It was strange how the justice system had to work sometimes. Cizzano and his people were working behind the scenes to protect a man, and at the same time lead a civilian detective in the correct direction. It sounded like obstruction of justice, but it was not.

Cizzano prepared for his meeting. While he did so, Max was massing an attack on the detective. O'Brian would not know what hit him. Cizzano picked up the phone, dialed the internal number for the director. "Hi, Sally. It's Cizzano, the director in?"

He waited. The director picked up in a minute.

"Sir, I need to have Todd Wilson recalled to active duty."

He listened.

"Yes sir, it is Very important. He is obstructing a case, and jeopardizing over a decade of work."

He listened, got put on hold, and waited a few minutes. The director returned to the phone.

Cizzano listened. "Thank you sir. Yes, immediately."

He hung up.

"Okay you son-of-a-bitch, let's see how you do now." Cizzano said to himself.

\* \* \* \*

Todd stirred in his bed. He looked over at the clock, it read seven something. He rolled over and thought about more sleep. He couldn't sleep. I've got to get up he thinks. He rolled to the edge of the bed, got up and walked to the kitchen. He thought he smelled coffee. The kitchen light was on, or was that sun he thought.

As he walked into the kitchen, he was sure that there was coffee. He turned the corner through the door and a man was standing with a cup of coffee in his hand.

John Parker said, "Todd, want a cup?"

Todd said, "sure John, black."

The two men spoke for a moment. Todd motioned to the kitchen table for them to sit. Todd turned toward the table.

John yelled, "Todd you son-of-a-bitch!"

As Todd began to turn back toward John, shots were fired. Todd felt the tearing heat of a bullet finding its mark. It struck hard into his side. Todd fell to the floor.

Shots continued to be fired. It was a semi-automatic weapon of some kind. Todd could see John no longer. Todd felt his life fading.

John walked up to Todd, placed the gun to his head.

Todd closed his eyes, he was too weak to resist.

"AH!"

Todd almost jumped out of bed. He was sweaty and cold.

"Jeeze, that dream."

He got up walked to the bedroom window and opened the shade. Todd blinked as the bright sunlight came intrusively into the room.

"Guess it's morning." He said with no enthusiasm. With a need for fresh air exceeding the need for coffee, Todd threw the window open, stuck his head out and took a deep breath. "Ah, nothing like the smell of fresh diesel exhaust in the morning to wake a man."

He quickly closed the window and turned the airconditioner on high. He walked out of the room and toward the kitchen. When he reached the kitchen door he sniffed for coffee. He didn't smell any so he stuck his head into the room.

"No one here," he said.

He began to relax. He walked into the kitchen.

"Gotta make coffee to stay awake." He grabbed the coffee pot, coffee and looked for filters. No filters to be found. He made one out of a paper towel. He shoved it into the basket and spooned in a few too many grounds. He filled the coffee pot and started the machine. Rather than wait for coffee he wandered around the apartment.

"What a crappy place," he said and looked around him. Cracked walls, dirty floor, view over the freeway. "The Beltway, that's what they call it. A hundred mile circle around the nation's capital. Nice place to live," Todd commented aloud.

He heard a sizzling sound coming from the kitchen. He returned to the coffee maker as quickly as he could.

Coffee was in the pot, overflowing the sides of the basket and beginning to run all over the counter top. The coffee machine was making its last sputtering noises as it finished with the water Todd had planned on being coffee. Todd grabbed a handful of paper towels and began mopping up the flowing coffee riverlets. The sputtering stopped and the mess was under control.

Todd grabbed a coffee cup, took the milk out of the 'fridge and looked for sugar. No sugar. He smelled the milk. It's out of date but it still smelled okay. He poured some coffee, added the milk, and no chunks floated to the surface.

Safe.

He sipped the coffee. "Not bad," he commended himself.

He heard a thud outside the door. His heart began to beat faster. What could that be? he thought. He heard it again, this time a little further away. "Morning paper, you ass." He opened the door a crack, looked down and there it was. He quickly grabbed the paper and closed the door, double locked it and put the security chain in place.

Sitting at his couch Todd began reading the headlines. Death, murder, auto accidents. Woman wins the lottery, out of state winner, of course. He started flipping through the pages. Nothing of interest. He kept passing pages. He reached the obituaries. "John Garrison, 99. Dies at home..." "Virginia "Ginny" Delaney, 56. Will be buried in private..."

He continued scanning the names. Todd had always liked to keep up with the dead. Morbid curiosity. He had always convinced himself that it was important because you never knew when a friend or a family member of a friend was going to die. He continued.

"Thomas Uttly, 32. Dies of heart failure ..."

He reached the end of the obit's and began reading the church news. "Useless," he thought out loud, "well at least to me it is."

Todd knew he can't show his face in any large public gathering. He began thinking about his 'death' and obituary. "Wilson 'Todd' vanDierclift, 26. Private services were conducted for immediate family members only. ... In lieu of flowers the family has asked that donations be made to one of the following charitable organizations. ... "

The obituary never said that it was a closed casket funeral. In fact, it didn't mention the family buried sixty bricks either. Todd had requested he be able to attend his funeral. The agency wouldn't let him.

He remembered his coffee. Sipped it. "Cold." He went to the kitchen, dumped out the cup and poured more and returned to his paper and couch.

\* \* \* \*

Detective O'Brian rose and showered. As he was in the shower his phone rang, rang, rang...

"Hello, this is Bill O'Brian, I am unable to come to the phone right now. ... If you ... please leave a message and your number after the beep."

There was a long pause, then a shrill beep.



"Hey, O'Brian. Hope I woke you, ha,ha. Well, I'm calling because ... Oh yeah, this is Max ... I'm calling to let you know that we have had another call on the Peterson murder. This guy is really anxious to meet with you. His number is 765-1234. Okay then. OH yeah, his name ... ah ... here it is. Marion Rourke."

Click.

Silence.

O'Brian heard part of the message, but the shower obscured most of it. "Another informant?" He said as he rinsed his hair. "This is beginning to get weird. Ha, not beginning, it is weird and this just is the icing on the cake."

He turned the shower off stepped out and was handed a towel.

CHAPTER

TWENTY

Shirley O'Brian was standing inside the bathroom with a smile on her face. Her eyes didn't meet O'Brian's, but are rather, focused lower.

"Want some coffee?" she asked.

"Why didn't you get the phone?" O'Brian asked his wife.

"I just got home from work, and didn't want to talk to anyone."

Shirley O'Brian was a registered nurse and was working the eleven-to-seven shift at the VA hospital. She was an emergency room nurse with experience from Viet Nam. Her tour in 'Nam made her an excellent care provider for many of the veterans that arrived at the hospital.

"Who's Max?"

"Huh?" O'Brian said as he dried his hair.

Shirley looked at him as if he had heard and wanted to ignore her question.

He really hadn't heard and said. "I didn't hear what you just said." A bit too forcefully.

"I said," Shirley said again, "who's Max?"

"Oh, he's some goon from some government agency. The JSA."

"What's the JSA? I thought I've heard of them all," Shirley asked.

O'Brian had almost finished getting dry. He wrapped the towel around his waist and went to brush his teeth. O'Brian responded. "It's a branch of the Justice Department. 'Justice Security Agency'. Sounds like a phony agency, but I checked. It has real teeth."

"Real teeth?" asked Shirley.

"Yeah, sort of like an internal CIA."

"CIA? they're not allowed to work within the US." Shirley spoke the obvious, but ridiculous.

O'Brian laughed with a toothbrush in his mouth. It was sort of a sputtery laugh followed by a gagging sound as the toothpaste made its way to his throat. He spat, gagged some more, then responded. "It's not CIA, it's different. It's part of the Justice Department. That's all I know. This guy Max is supposed to help me with the investigation. This is the first help I've gotten from him."

Shirley was getting bored. She wanted to rip the towel off of Bill, but refrained. She thought that she had to get off this night shift. It was ruining their sex life. No, not ruining, it had eliminated it. She said, "wanna make love?"

O'Brian looked at her, she looked tired and he was tired. His response was a measured. "I'm already late for work, how about tonight?"

Shirley sighed and left the bathroom. She went out into the kitchen, poured herself and Bill a cup of coffee, although she never got an answer about the coffee. She brought them both to the bedroom and put Bill's down on his dresser. They had coasters all over the house. Almost everywhere, there was a coaster. They kept all the antique pieces nice.

O'Brian came into the bedroom, he was still wearing his towel. He saw the coffee and took a gulp. It burned his mouth and throat but he swallowed. "Ah, that's hot!"

Shirley shook her head.

O'Brian got out underwear, socks, a pair of pants, a shirt, jacket, and a tie. None of them matched very well and Shirley told him so.

"So, should I get a different pair of underwear?" Bill complained. "A detective is supposed to look like a fashion nightmare. If I dressed well the guys would think I was gay."

"I'm not asking you to wear a flower tie and tight pants," teased Shirley. "Just match the colors a little more closely. Make it more subtle."

Bill ignored her and removed his towel and began to dress.

Shirley thought about raping him. "Okay if I rape you?" she asked.

Bill ignored her and began tying his tie. He brought it up tight and then loosened it so it hung in a sloppy dangling fashion. He put on his jacket and looked for shoes.

"The brown shoes Bill," Shirley counseled.

Bill ignored her and grabbed the black shoes; his favorites.

Shirley flopped back into bed. Defeated. "Bill, I'm going to ask to transfer to day shift."

Bill yelled back, "that would be great. I'm really tired of this night shift."

He gulped the remainder of his coffee and called out, "I'll see you tonight."

The door closed behind him.

Shirley looked at the clock and decided that the day supervisor was probably in. She picked up the phone and called her. Shirley said, "so, there is a position, you would be happy to have me fill it!"

She waited as the supervisor spoke.

"Great, so you and Janet will decide when I can start days?"

The day supervisor answered and Shirley listened.

"Fantastic. Yeah I know it pays less, I don't need the money."

Shirley listened again.

"Yeah, that is exactly what I need, so does Bill. Thanks, thank you very much."

Shirley hung up the phone. She looked at the clock again. "Let's see, Bill will be at the office in about fifteen minutes. I'll call him then." She sat for another minute then jumped up and shouted, "YEAH!"

She went into the kitchen, thought about coffee and decides a beer is a better idea. As decadent as some people may think it, I'm done work and a beer is what I need. She opened a bottle, got a glass and retired to the living room to celebrate.

Shirley turned on the TV and found 'Washington This Week', kicked off her shoes and settled in to relax. She did such a good job that she was asleep by the first commercial.

O'Brian arrived at his office. He looked into his mailbox, he found about twenty pieces of internal correspondence. "Jeeze, it never ends," he said to the desk sergeant and walked to his office and sat.

"Damnit, I forgot that guy's name and number." He picked up the phone and tried Max's internal number. He found Max was not in. I'll call Shirley, he thought. He dialed his home number it rang, and rang, and rang.

"Hello, this is Bill O'Brian, I am unable to come to the phone right now. ... If you ... please leave a message and your number after the beep."

There was a that long pause, then a shrill beep.

"Shirley." O'Brian said into the phone. "Hey, Shirley, it's Bill. Pick up would you?"

O'Brian waited. Nothing. "Come on Shirl, pick up the phone!" He almost yelled. Nothing. "Okay, call me at the office when you can. Thanks." He hung up.

Can't start that, he thought. So he looked down at the pile of internal stuff. "Might as well get rid of this pile of crap," he said as he began opening string closed envelopes. After they were all open he realized that the Peterson case had taken a turn. There was more evidence and more information than he had ever seen in a murder investigation with no witnesses.

O'Brian looked up from his desk. Max was walking past the window. Max looked in and O'Brian signaled him to come in. Max came into O'Brian's office.

"So what's this about a new informant?" O'Brian asked Max.

Max began to lie, "this guy called last night. It was about a half hour after you left. I decided not to let you know last night because of that other guy."

"Good idea, we spent almost five hours together. Your call might have made him edgy and shortened the meeting."

Max was now sorry he didn't do just that. "Anyway, here's the details. He asked not to be called before six this morning. But that's no problem now." Max continued lying.

"Anything else Max?" O'Brian asked.

"Not now." Max reported.

"Okay then..." O'Brian looked down at the note Max had given him. "Thanks."

Max took that as a hint to leave. He did so slowly. As he closed the door O'Brian was picking up the phone, to call Marion, Max hoped. The door closed quietly but with a rattle of glass and Venetian blinds.

O'Brian didn't look up, he dialed the phone.

\* \* \* \*

"My name is Marion Rourke, my name is Marion Rourke. Hi, I'm Marion Rourke." Special Agent George Jackson said out loud.

"Marion Rourke, that's M-A-R-I-O-N R-O-U-R-K-E." He spelled the name several more times.

Jackson was an actor in New York City, never made it to Broadway. The agency recruited him after investigating several hundred other actors.

Jackson was a very successful method actor and had a relatively high IQ. He was active in sports both in high school and college. Graduated Summa Cum Laude from a small midwestern school, second in his class. He had disappeared off the face of the earth, in his place:

'Marion Rourke'

"Yes, I suppose it was O'Rourke at one time, but my grandfather, and father both used Rourke." Jackson paused and continued reading the script that he was given by Theatrics. The script he had was a monologue designed by the experts at the agency. It would allow him to tell a story that would refute the story told by Todd. The details would bring many of the things that Todd had to say into a questionable light, yet not sound like it was designed to do just that.

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As he delivered the monologue there were breaks and continuation points that allows Jackson to follow almost any line of questioning. There were a series of answers to the questions that were posed to Todd. There were also additional answers to questions that may be asked of 'Marion.' He continued to study. He waited for the phone call. He was instructed to make sure he put off the interview for as long as he needed so he could be prepared.

The phone number was one in central Virginia. The line was forwarded back to Jackson's apartment there in Chevy Chase. The distance alone allowed 'Marion' an excuse not to meet right away.

The agency felt it could even give him a few days if he needed them. Jackson was feeling quite ready for that meeting. The phone rang.

"Hello," said Jackson/Rourke.

"Mr. Rourke?" the voice said.

Jackson prepared himself. He thought for one second, he thought as Marion Rourke. He needed to be Marion Rourke. "Yes," replied 'Rourke.'

"This is Detective O'Brian. I was given your name by one of our special agents. He told me you called last night." O'Brian began in an official, abrupt tone.

"That's correct Mr. O'Brian. I understand you are investigating a possible murder. It is the death of an acquaintance of mine, Dr. Fred Peterson," Marion Rourke offered.

"That's correct. From your phone number I assume you are some distance from my district. Can we speak now?" O'Brian asked hopefully.

"No Detective, I'm sorry, I've waited as long as I can before going to work. Can we meet?" Rourke asked.

"Sure," O'Brian responded.

"Detective, I was thinking maybe somewhere convenient, and interesting."

"Interesting?" responded O'Brian.

"Yes, I was thinking about Washington D.C. It's sort of half way between us. It's a bit further for me," lied Jackson, "but I've been meaning to get there for a couple of years and this would certainly be a good excuse."

"That would be fine with me Mr. Rourke."

"Would your department be able to put me up in a hotel?" Jackson decided to jerk his chain a bit.

"No we can not," O'Brian spat.

"All right, can't hurt to ask." Marion Rourke submitted. "So, let's see, I've got to go in a minute, but how about if I leave tomorrow morning, I should be able to get there by noon or so and then we can meet for dinner. How's that sound?"

O'Brian agreed to that, they spoke for another minute. They agreed that Rourke would call from the hotel when he arrived to firm up the plans. They wished each other a good day and hung up.

Jackson dialed the phone to report that contact was made. His immediate supervisor in that action was Tim Jones.

Jones agree to set up a room in the Sheraton Washington. The location of that hotel gave the agency clean access, and a visitor could see the zoo, a convenient walk from the front door. Beside

that, the recent renovations of the hotel had made access to listening devices very simple.

"Nice open wall arrangement in that hotel." Said Jones and he continued, "I think we may even have a room preset. I'll check that out for you."

They continued the conversation for another minute and hung up agreeing that Jackson would report to Jones' office first thing Saturday morning to finish planning.

Jones was feeling confident. He needed to prepare for this meeting. During that meeting he must respond to the man Jackson as if he were Marion Rourke. Since this would be the morning of the first and maybe the only meeting Jackson would have with O'Brian, he would be in character. Jones must do all he can not to mess with his concentration.

Jones' phone rang.

"Jones."

It was Cizzano.

Jones reported his progress and gave a summary of their plans. He hung up.

"Damn I wish I could be part of this field work. They need me," he said out loud. "I need to be part of it," he said wishfully. "Oh well, I know what they are going through, so at least it makes me a good leader in that respect."

Jones still didn't accept his position, unlike those working for him. Rank, regardless how how it was achieved, received it's due respect.

\* \* \* \*

Theresa and Karen were sitting in the teachers' lounge sharing coffee and some cookies that one of the other teachers brought in.

"So, you are only going to be working three days a week for a while." Theresa stated, and questioned at the same time.

Karen looked at her, took a bite of a cinnamon sprinkled butter cookie. She thought a moment, sipped her coffee and said nothing.

"Earth to Karen, earth to Karen!" teased Theresa.

"I heard you! I just didn't have anything to say about it, that's all," Karen shot back.

Theresa was genuinely hurt by that and told her so.

"Theresa, we both know that I'm going to be working with you. I am happy about that, and happy to be only working three days a week. I've got a lot to do around the house. John and I have wanted to fix it up since we bought it," Karen said quickly.

"But why so suddenly?" Theresa asked.

"John has constant work right now. It looks like he'll have work straight through the winter," Karen answered.

"So?" Theresa was genuinely confused.

"That gives us a source of constant money which is something my job used to give us. Now I can do the things around the house that I've let go," Karen lied.

"Oh, that makes sense," Theresa said, deciding to let it go.

They talked a while, but all around the central issue.

Theresa decided to press a bit. "So you Are going part-time, right?"

Karen decided to respond clearly this time. "Yes, Theresa. I just told you that. I am going part-time for a while. Didn't you listen?" Karen stopped and gazed past Theresa.

"...so..." Theresa prompts.

"...so, I spoke with Mary and asked her for some time off. She told me about the part-time position and said she would like me to take it. I agreed since that was better than having no income." She paused.

Theresa began to speak, but Karen cut her off. "John is very happy that Mary offered me the part-time. The best thing is I can come back to full-time when we're done our projects."

"That's good, I'm glad you didn't quit." Theresa couldn't stop herself before she said that. She waited the painful next few seconds to see if Karen caught her mistake.

She did. "I didn't say I was going to quit. Where'd you get that idea?" Karen was more upset that she wanted to be when she said that. But what was Theresa talking about? She wondered if Mary told her anything about their conversation. "I just needed time off, and Mary and I came to an agreement," she finished.

"Karen, wait a minute. Let's not get all up tight about this. I think it's great. I still need the money and I'm getting your position while you are on part-time. Mary and I agreed that when you are ready for full-time, either I would resume part-time or they would make a new full-time position." Theresa quickly repaired the damage.

"Oh, I see. Hey, that's great! I wondered how I was going to be working with you. That makes sense."

Karen agreed with the other two women's decision. "Now I see why you know I was going to be part-time."

Theresa and she looked at their watches almost simultaneously.

"We better get back. Break's been over for five minutes," Theresa said.

The two women returned to their classrooms. Their respective teachers greeted them and took their breaks.

\* \* \* \*

"Hey John you gettin' any?" Ted asked John.

"Getting any what?" John asked Ted.

Although he was sitting, Ted was able to move his hips in a suggestive manner and raised his eyebrows.

"What business is that of yours asshole!" John yelled.

"None, but I'm not," Ted replied.

"Want to go for a beer tonight? I might be able to get lucky."

John looked at Ted.

Ted looked like his head was caught in some sort of machinery.

"Ted, what kind of girl is going to give you a second look with a face that's been through a meatgrinder?" John said shaking his head.

Ted was driving, as usual and turned his face toward John. "Hey, it's not that bad!"

"Oh yes it is. Ted, give yourself a week before you think of girls. Besides that, where you going to take a girl, your mommy's house?" John loved himself for that. What a great shot.

"It's not my mommy's house. The house is mine. My sister and mother live there. I am allowing them to live in my house. Get it?" Ted displayed a real sense of masculine bravado, though he shouldn't have felt put down, he did.

"Yeah, but still, where do you bring the girl? Mommy's still at your house, regardless whose house it is." John decided not to let this one go. He had Ted on the run and he was having a lot of fun with it.

"Well, a lot of girls have a place you know. It's not like we're teenagers or anything. Besides, there's always the back seat," Ted said with little conviction.

"The back seat?" John laughed, "I thought you just said you weren't a teen-ager!" John broke up laughing.

Ted joined him. They laughed until they reached their turn.

Ted looked at John. "Hey, where's our turn?"

John looked up, still laughing. "Right behind us."

They broke up laughing even harder.

Ted slammed on the brakes and almost tipped the panel truck over making a much too quick K-turn in the road. But they were back on track and riding up the bumpy construction drive. Ted looked at John and said. "So, do you want to catch a beer after work?"

"Sure Ted, sure why not!"

Ted parked the truck within a few feet of the building and they began unpacking the truck for the day's work. As always they checked around to see if there has been any theft or damage done by vandals. But this was a quiet neighborhood. Nothing was out of place, nothing was damaged.

They set to work.

John set up the chop saw. They were going to work on the siding. All the sheathing was in place. The foam thermal insulation was up, caulked and taped. Several runs of siding were already in place. The day was beautiful, they would be able to finish this side and get a good start on the front of the house.

"Did you bring gas?" Ted yelled to John.

"Yeah, it's in the truck. Where else? Didn't you look?" John yelled back.

"Yeah, I looked. Didn't see it," Ted responded.

John walked over to the truck, he looked inside. There was no gas can.

"Shit. Siphon some out of the truck," John said.

"Okay," Ted responded. Ted got some hose out of the truck. He opened the gas tank cover and sucked on the hose. Gas filled his mouth and began flowing onto the ground. "Yuch, that tastes like shit," Ted yelled.

"Put the damn hose in the compressor's tank you asshole!" John yelled as he ran to where Ted was fumbling around gagging and spitting. John reached him before Ted recovered. He stuck the hose into the compressor's tank and filled it. "What the hell is wrong with you?" John asked.

"I screwed up. That stuff really burned my lips." Ted looked really pitiful. His lips were bleeding again from the effect of the gasoline. He wiped them on his shirt, his mouth was full of blood, he spit a mouthful.



"Oh yeah, I guess it would. But that's no excuse for letting all that gas spill on the ground. Look at the mess." John pointed to the little river of gas.

"Better not smoke near here." Ted spoke the obvious.

"Move the compressor, and get it started. We're getting a late start already," John said.

John was back at work unlocking the electric panel so he could plug in the saw. He got it unlocked, plugged in the saw and checked to see that it would start. It screamed into life and John released the switch. It stopped almost instantly with a metallic sound like 'Zzinckk'.

The compressor had kicked in with a chugga-chugga sound, it stalled simultaneously with John's test. Ted pulled the rope again, BANG-chugga-chugga, it caught and ran rough for a minute. After that it started to produce compressed air for the tools.

The two men set to work. All day, as they worked, the two men discussed where they wanted to go after work.

"I'm not going to Billy's tonight," Ted said, "let's go to fern bar. What's it called?"

"Clare's?" answered John.

"Yeah, Clare's. That's where all the women go. That's where I can meet Ms. Right for tonight." Ted felt he was on a roll. "So what do you say? Think you can handle it?"

"Ted, if we go to that bar, we will meet up with my wife and your sister. I think there must be another place we can go."

John could hardly imagine going out and sitting at a bar while his co-worker tries to pick up girls. Never mind doing just that, and

having his wife watch! "Besides, the women that go to Clare's go there to socialize with each other, not to meet men."

"Okay, John, you win. Where to?" Ted tossed the ball into John's court. "You've lived here a lot longer than I have."

"Maybe, but I moved in married, so I haven't tried to pick up any women," John pointed out. "But maybe one of the other guys will have a suggestion."

"No way John! I'm not going to ask one of the greaseballs where they go to meet girls. I mean, just look at the inside of the truck. Those guys have no sense. They might even have a club and hit women over the head, throw them on the back of their motorcycles and off they go."

John finds that illustration of Ted's very amusing. "How about a singles bar?" John poked fun at Ted.

"Never mind John. I'll find a spot by myself. I'll do better not having you hanging around anyway."

Now it was John's turn to be hurt. "Wait a minute Ted, I thought we were going out for a beer. Now I can't go?"

Ted responded, "right. I'm going by myself."

They spend the next half hour cutting siding, nailing it up with pneumatic nail-guns. Bang-fiz, bang-fiz, bang, bang, bang-fizz. The compressor kicks in and makes a racket, finishes restoring pressure and settles back down to idle. The bang-fiz sound continues interrupted occasionally by the screaming sound of the circular saw cutting siding to the correct size.

"Hey Ted!" John yelled.

Ted pulled off his ear protection and said. "What you say?"

"Nothing yet. I thought of a place we can go. It's the A&K Bar and Restaurant. Lots of college kids, good music and a good collection of divorced women."

"How would you know?" Ted questioned John.

"You can just tell. Their on the hunt, just like you. Better chance of getting lucky there than any place I can think of," John answered with a wink.

"Look John, I have to admit I'm not looking to get picked up. I wanted to go to Clare's for a change. That's all. I just didn't want to admit it."

"Oh," John said.

"Fine. Mind if Karen joins us?"

"No, not at all, that would be nice. Let Theresa know that we'll be there, maybe she'll come too," Ted said.

They agreed and set back to work. Time flew. The siding was going up a little slower than they would have liked. But it was looking slick and they were both proud. As the sun got behind the hill to the south-west, John asked Ted if they should call it a day.

"Sure thing!" responded Ted. "It's beer time!"

"Actually..." corrected John, "it's Chablis blanc time! We're going to Clare's"

"They have beer!" argued Ted. "Besides, I'm not drinking wine even if it is a fern bar."

John shook his head, laughed at Ted. He began carrying tools to the truck. The two continued with the packing process and finished

in no time. Siding work doesn't take many tools. Much less than framing.

John locked up the electric power. Gave the area a quick look around. Everything was just as it should be. "Hey Ted, give me a hand with the compressor." John yelled.

Ted came over, the two picked it up about an inch or two above the ground and carried it to the truck.

"One...Two...Threeee..." John said.

They both pulled on three and lifted the heavy tool onto the back of the truck.

"That's one heavy son-of-a-bitchin' tool," Ted complained.

"Maybe, but just think of hammering all those nails in," John reminded him.

"Whew, really. Good point," Ted agreed.

"Let's get back and clean up. We have to let the ladies know we are going to Clare's before they leave the school." John was now trying to hustle Ted.

Ted had a tendency to slow down at the end of a day. "I'm comin' boss, I'm a comin'. Keep your pants on buster," Ted teased.

"Yeah, I've got my pants on. But I'm also thirsty and tired and you are keeping me waiting. So LET'S GO!" John said with a touch of enthusiasm that he was not feeling. The two men jumped into the truck. They took one last look at their work. Ted started it up and put it in reverse before it has a chance to warm up. They pulled out into the road and drove back to the office.

Once at the office they parked the truck and went inside to give 'The Dude' their hours. John used the phone to call Karen.

"They're both coming," John informed Ted.

"Great, let's get the hell out of here!"

# CHAPTER

# TWENTY ONE

As the five of them sat in Clare's, John had the strongest feeling he was being watched. He began nervously looking around and the others noticed.

"What's the matter John?" Joan asked, "you seem spooked."

"Yeah man, relax," Ted added.

"I feel as if I'm being watched," John responded. "It's real strong tonight. I've been feeling that way for almost the whole time we've been here."

Karen thought about what she was about to say. "Maybe we are being watched."

John and the others looked at her.

"I mean, just how many times do so many good looking women sit with guys like you two!"

The two other women laughed. John and Ted were not amused.

John retorted, "well, maybe Ted is a sight, but I think I look just fine."

"Yeah," agreed Joan.

"Hey, I had a little accident and now you guys are picking on me. What kind of friends are you anyway?" Ted complained.

Joan thought a minute. "Well, since I just met you, I'm no friend at all. But really Ted, we're picking on John, not you. He's the one being paranoid."

Theresa sat thinking. "Paranoid, oh no he's not. He is being watched, every move and word he says is being paid close scrutiny. But I better say something funny, too." She thought a moment

longer and said. "Hey John, actually I think that blonde at the bar thinks your cute. Maybe that's who's watching you. Look, look right now. She's checking you out again."

They all laughed and went back to their conversation. John was feeling a little better, but still had a nagging uneasy feeling about this place. He tried to let it go and have some fun. He decided to watch Ted. As he did so he noticed both he and Joan are hitting it off.

John studied Joan. She was an attractive woman. Mid to late thirties, probably a little older than Ted. She had short-cropped hair, the color most people called mousy. She had a sweater on that clung nicely, and accentuated her well-endowed chest. John noticed that Ted had also noticed that. Ted was trying to maintain eye contact, he was failing miserably. Joan didn't seem to mind.

He continued his study. He looked down at Joan's left hand. Aha, either single or divorced. Theresa must have mentioned this woman in conversation. That is why Ted wanted to come to Clair's tonight. He realized he had withdrawn his attention for an extended period of time, so he stopped that line of thought and joined back in the conversation.

Conversation had broken into two groups, Ted and Joan, and Karen and Theresa. John decided to join in his wife's conversation, leaving Joan and Ted to theirs. Though their conversation was much more animated.

"So how do you feel about having Karen work as your assistant, Theresa?" John asked, butting in.

"Huh, oh. I think it's great. I really am happiest about getting the full time position." Theresa answered.

"I'm hoping that the other full-time position is open for when we get done all our projects. That way both Theresa and I can have full-time teaching positions," Karen added.



"That would be great, although I did agree to give up the full-time position when you want it back," Theresa said.

"I'd feel bad about that. I would have to take it, but I'm hoping that Mary will fill the part-time one first. Leaving the full-time for me. That's what she said she was going to try to do," Karen said.

"We're going now," Joan said.

Karen, John and Theresa looked up. They all had heard the we are going now. John had half expected it.

"We should be going to, what do you think Karen?" John said.

"Yeah. Let's go. You ready Theresa?" Karen added.

"Sure. I could stay another couple of hours, but if the party's over, it's over," Theresa said a little sadly.

They all got up, said good night and headed for their cars. John drove Karen back to school to pick up her car. So they drove home in separate cars.

\* \* \* \*

"John, what the hell was going on in your head?" Karen asked John.

They were home now and upstairs getting changed. John was quiet and Karen wanted to hit him for not answering her. But she waited.

He tossed his socks toward the hamper, missed and had to go retrieve them. He looked up and they made eye contact.

Karen's eyes were saying "Answer me!"

John straightened up. "Karen, there was definitely a strange feeling in that group. Maybe I was just picking up the energy between Ted and Joan. But whatever it was it was making me feel uncomfortable," John finally said.

John had displaced Karen's interest. She too had noticed how Joan and Ted reacted to each other. "I think Joan was really smitten by Ted. How strange. I've known them both for almost a year and Theresa has known Joan almost that long. I never would have thought to put them together."

John and Karen continued to change their clothes. They finally got all their work clothes off and either hung up or in the laundry hamper or dry cleaning basket. They begin to dress in their informal every day stay at home, hanging out clothes. Those clothes were so comfortable and ugly they dared not wear them in public. But at home, they were great.

"So, did you see how Joan got home?" Karen asked John.

"No, I was too busy worrying about being watched to see what was happening between those two. Why, how did Joan get home?" John asked.

"Ted gave her a ride. We came to the bar in Theresa's car. Both my car and Joan's were back at the school. Ted gave her a ride to it," Karen answered.

"What does Theresa think about Joan? Sisters can be a pain in the ass if they don't like the girl a guy chooses."

"Girl?" Karen inquired.

"Yeah, girl. I also said guy. It's not a derogatory form of address. It's the term used to refer to the female gender when that said female is possible girlfriend material. I personally find the term 'woman-friend' repulsive," John answered.

"Oh. Because Joan is in her late twenties and certainly not a girl," Karen interjected. "So, back to them. Do you think they'll hit it off?"

"Karen, I certainly hope not. I don't want to be put into a position that I have a man asking me to ask you what some woman you work with thinks about him. It sounds like high school. Ted was talking like a high school boy this morning. This is a waste of time."

"Sorry to bother you sir," Karen snotted back at John. She felt he was being a jerk about this.

\* \* \* \*

As Theresa listened to that banter, she too wondered if Joan and Ted were hitting it off. She had expected Ted by now. 'Mom' walked into the room.

"So where's Ted?" 'Mom' asked.

"How the hell should I know!" Theresa almost shouted back at her. "Sorry, you don't deserve that. Ted met a woman I work with. He drove her back to her car, and should have been home by now."

"Oh, I see." Responded 'Mom.' "Are you feeling a bit jealous?" "Why should I be jealous if Ted is with a woman? 'Mom' that doesn't make any sense. I'm his sister." Theresa defended herself.

"Theresa, you are his sister for this assignment. You are not his biological sister. Being together under one roof can cause a whole range of feelings toward another person. I've been in this business for almost forty years. I've had my time when I've fallen for a man I worked close to. It's an occupational hazard. Single men and women fall prey to it eventually." 'Mom' correctly assessed the situation before continuing.

\* \* \* \*

"There's my car," Joan said.

Ted looked across the parking lot to where Joan had pointed. He drove his car over to it.

"Thank's for the ride," Joan said kindly.

Ted leaned over to her side of the car.

Joan leaned away from Ted.

Ted had not noticed. He was reaching his arm over her shoulder to embrace her.

Joan saw that he was planning on kissing her good night. She thought about that and decided that it would be okay. She started to lean back toward Ted. She felt him pulling her gently toward him. She sort of liked the feeling.

Ted leaned closer.

They kissed.

Ted did not let Joan go. He wanted more.

"Ted, please let me go," Joan asked.

Ted's arm snapped back to his side of the car. "Fine," Ted said.

"Ted, come on. I had a nice time with you. I just got divorced a couple of months ago. It's hard," Joan said.

"Okay," Ted said.

It was clear to them both that Ted was upset. Joan wanted to see him again. Joan really liked Ted. She was going to try to make him feel better.

"Ted, come here," Joan said in a sexy voice.

"Why?" Ted asked.

That seemed stupid to Joan. She answered anyway. "I want another kiss before I go."

Ted leaned over, kept his arm on his side of the car. Joan wrapped her arm around his neck and gave him a kiss he was sure to remember. She removed her arm and opened the car door. "Good night Ted," she almost whispered.

"Good night," Ted mumbled.

"Hey, let's go out tomorrow night," Joan suggested.

"Maybe," Ted said.

Joan shook her head. Joan, you were a jerk. She thought hard. She couldn't think of anything. She didn't want to hang out in the car with him, not in front of the school. She stopped trying, slammed the door and marched to her car. Tears were in her eyes. She didn't know what to do.

Ted put his car in gear and backed up. He looked back at Joan's car. It had started so he drove away.

\* \* \* \*

"The reason there are no married field operatives is for that exact reason. When men and women work together as if they are married or brother and sister or whatever, eventually you find a combination that triggers the feelings you are having toward Ted.

Ted may have the same feelings toward you. He, as you have been, has been guarding himself from rejection."

"Has it been that obvious to you 'Mom'?" Theresa asked.

"No, it has not been obvious. It has become obvious tonight." 'Mom' thoughtfully responded.

"So what do I do?" Theresa asked

"Nothing. Anything you do in that direction at this time can jeopardize the mission. You must contain any emotional or physical desire you have for Ted until this mission is completed." 'Mom' said, suddenly seeming in control.

They both turned as they heard the front door close. Ted was home, 'Mom' and Theresa stopped their conversation and resumed their normal roles. Ted was home too early for anything to have happened. Theresa felt better.

Ted looked depressed.

\* \* \* \*

"Hey John! Ever notice these little notes on the bottom of the diary pages?" Karen asked.

"What little notes?" John responded.

"Like this one." Karen held up a page and pointed to the bottom of the diary page. There was a little, carefully printed series of numbers and letters.

John was looking at it, he shook his head. "I have no idea what they are. Have you found them on each page of the diary?"

Karen was shuffling through pages in each folder. Folder after folder. She was a woman obsessed.

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John watched her with amazement.

After about thirty folders Karen announced, "I am convinced they are on each and every page. John what do you think it means?"

"Karen, I already told you I don't have a clue. Nothing I've ever seen before." He thought about that and then said, "Well, nothing I've seen and can remember. Are they all in my handwriting?"

"No, they are all printed. That's what makes them stand out even though they are so small."

They continued reading through the diary papers.

"Karen, should we track this?" John asked.

"Yeah, I think we should, but how?" Karen asked.

"How about like this." John said.

John began making note of the numbers written on the diary pages. He made a carefully aligned page with the date of the diary page, the number of the diary page and the series of numbers and letters.

It looked like this:

Day # Diary # Sequence

106 347 56

106 348 8B7604

106 349 8A4404

107 350 98

107 351 50

108 352 E8F503

And the list went on and on and on. There were almost a thousand pages and so there were almost a thousand number sequences.

"That looks good. That way we can eventually get all the pages you write that on in order," Karen said.

"Yeah, and if I can't make order, I'll start a new page," John offered.

"That's a good idea. Even if a page only has one number on it. At least we can always put them in sequence," Karen agreed.

Both John and Karen were staring at the numbers. They were sitting there trying to make sense out of them. Either of them went to speak a number of times, stopped just as they were about to say a word. Then they thought better of it stopped and exhaled a sigh.

Finally Karen thought of something she felt worth saying. "John, these are license plate numbers!" Karen exclaimed. She was filled with such great enthusiasm. She was so sure of herself as she sat back against the wall and waited for her praise from John.

"Wait a minute Karen, what are the two digit numbers?" John said.

Her balloon popped. "I don't know. But the other ones if you take, let's take the one E8F503. Change that to E8F-503 and it's a license plate number." Karen lost some of her initial enthusiasm for this argument. "But really, don't you think it's possible?" She had almost given up hope.

"Yeah, it's possible, but I don't think that's it. There's something else going on. Look at the numbers, then look at the letters. I haven't seen any letter after 'F'. A license plate would have any letter. Only these don't seem to have any of the later alphabet."



"That's right!" Karen exclaimed without knowing what she was so excited about.

So they sat and thought. Karen got up, went to the kitchen and refilled each of their glasses. She opened the 'fridge and looked inside. She was getting hungry and knew John must be too. Karen found something in the freezer and tossed it into the electronic oven, Set the defrost cycle, and looked on the box for a temperature goal and cook time. Finding what she needed, she tapped it into the keypad and pressed start.

The oven's fan kicked in and the light inside glowed. That was the only indication that the oven was working.

Karen hated that oven, but used it because it was fast.

Karen returned to the office, with freshened drinks, where John was still working on the puzzle.

"Well here's one that blows the theory of license plates..."

"Didn't we already give that up? Come on John, let go of it, it was a stupid guess..."

"Whoa, whoa, Karen, it was our only idea at the time. Actually, it still is our only idea. But listen. This one is longer than them all. 833E901000 But it also is repeated. Not on the next page, but the one following it."

"So?" Karen asked.

"There's a pattern. A pattern. Get it?" John pressed.

"No, I don't get it. What are you seeing?" Karen paused and looked at John. John was deep in thought. He couldn't be disturbed Karen thought.

She waited.

In the background there was a sharp beep, beep, beep. That sound let Karen know that it was time to turn the dinner.

She looked at John as she rose from the floor.

He didn't hear the beep.

Wow, she thought, he was really deep in thought. She left the room for the kitchen.

\* \* \* \*

"What do you think those numbers mean?" Theresa asked Ted.

"I don't know. I didn't see them when I was looking at those pages. They must be printed really small," Ted responded. He had gotten up and was pacing frantically. "Shit! This is one more thing I screwed up on. Cizzano is going to chew me out. This time he may just kill me!"

"Nah, he won't kill you." Theresa said in a very assured and reassuring manner.

"You've got all the 'stat's of the pages. Let's get them out and make a list of those codes. Some 'egghead' in the lab should be able to break the code."

"That's a good idea." Ted stopped pacing and smiled. "That's a really good idea. But what will we do with the info once we have it?"

"Be prepared, that's what we do with it. Ted, if you haven't learned anything by now. In this business, you need to know what the other guy knows. If you can know it first, then you're prepared for what they might do next."

\* \* \* \*

John stood and walked out of the office. When he saw Karen was returning he turned around and went back. He was not seated when Karen entered the office.

"Karen, I say we ignore these numbers for a while. If we keep a list of them and show them to everyone we know, maybe someone will make sense out of them. But I think we're wasting time right now. I don't have a clue and neither do you."

"Right. Back to what we started out doing. Looking for your past," Karen agreed.

"Yeah," John halfheartedly agreed. He thought about what he said. As he thought he realized that this was not that important to him. It was so damn important when they started. But now it seemed to be nothing. He wanted to tell Karen that. "Karen, you know..."

Karen looked up at him and nodded her head.

"Know what John?"

"...this doesn't seem so damn important after all." He blurted out.

"How can you say that?" Karen almost shouted. "This is your past. A past, from what I can see, you altered."

"Yeah, little changes. Stupid things really. Nothing I really care about. How can we get worked up about how I think about Pearl Harbor?"

"But, but..." Karen stalled and stuttered.

"...what about Todd? That stuff you did with Todd certainly isn't minor." Karen was now shouting. And they were both pacing. The room was narrow. It was long so there was good pacing space, but

as they passed each other they had to yield to one another by the desk.

"What have you learned about Todd?" John finally asked.

Although both continued to pace. Karen did not answer right away. They continued to pace. The feeling was frantic. There was a sharp insistent beep, beep, beep. That time John heard it.

"Did you make dinner?" He asked with a mellow, happy note to his voice.

"Yes, I figured we'd need it. I made one of those big slabs of lasagna. Plenty for both of us. Do you want some bread or salad?" Karen asked.

"I'd love some of both," John said. He realized some of his snappiness came from a rapidly falling blood-sugar level. He laughed at himself and thought, how the hell do I know if it was my blood-sugar or if it was just acid build-up in my stomach. Ah, who cares, that's what everybody said it was, so who am I to argue.

"Let's eat!" Karen said as she was halfway to the kitchen.

As John arrived in the kitchen doorway, Karen had the fixings for a salad on the counter the bread on the table and the plates stacked next to it. "Wanna set the table?" she asked John.

"No, but I will," he smarted off at her.

And they proceeded to get a rather elegant looking dinner off the ground.

"Now this is a dinner!" John exclaimed as he looked over their wine collection.

"Red okay?"

"Sure, that'd be great," Karen said as she finished making the salad.

\* \* \* \*

After they finished dinner, the dishes were placed into the dishwasher by John.

Karen took the left-over salad and dumped it into the compost bucket under the sink. She wrapped the remainder of the lasagna, that would make a nice lunch, she thought. She looked on the bottom of the pan, it had the three arrow triangle of a recyclable plastic. She cleaned it and tossed it into the recycle bucket.

John finished loading the dishwasher and closed the door. He pressed the correct cycle and woosh it began cleaning.

"That thing never ceases to amaze me," Karen said to John. "It can clean the dishes in less than two minutes and hardly uses a gallon of water."

"And hardly any power," John added.

They finished cleaning up their kitchen, after dinner cleaning, the dishwasher stopped with the completion of the dry cycle. John popped it open and began putting the dishes away.

Karen said to John, "I'm going to go back to the diary. I'll just make note of the numbers and ignore their meaning. Sound Okay?"

"Fine, I think that's the best approach for now. I'll ask Miller if he's seen anything like it. Maybe someone where he works will recognize the pattern, or something." Karen walked out of the kitchen.

John continued puttering and he was slowly finishing up the dishes. Karen always teased him on how slow he his with that process. He liked it and enjoyed the care he gave it. "Done," he

said to himself. Then he looked at the oven, walked over to it and peered inside. "Shit, we forgot this."

John had wanted a self cleaning kind, but they cost too much, so he will have to clean it. The oven had come with a special cleaner. John thought it was just alcohol, seemed he was right. So John got out the alcohol and cleaned the interior of the electronic oven. "Now I'm really done!" He left the room to rejoin Karen in their effort.

\* \* \* \*

"I've got the 'stats' and I'm making a list of those numbers." Ted tells Theresa. "How should I present the numbers to the lab people?"

"I'd just write them down carefully, in order, and FAX them a copy of the list," Theresa responded.

"All of them?"

"No, I think if you send them a good portion of the numbers you would get an answer back as to what they are. If they have an idea, they may need more. Leave it up to them. Send them about a hundred," Theresa said resolving the issue.

"Fine." Ted sat down to work copying the numbers to a carefully lined sheet of paper. He started with the first one and was working his way through. One by one, over and over and over again.

"Hey, Theresa."

"Yeah?" Theresa answered.

"Some of these numbers repeat," Ted responded.

"Right, that's what they said. Just do them exactly as you find them. If there is a pattern, the lab will need even the repeat ones," Theresa surmised.

"I guess you're right there." Ted continued for another hour. He was checking every so often to be sure he was copying the number exactly. "Finished," he announced to Theresa.

"Let's FAX them right now," Theresa said to Ted. She reached for the pages.

Ted pulled them close to his chest. "No, I'll do it. I worked for two hours on this fucking list, I'll fax 'em," Ted shouted.

"Okay, go FAX them Ted." Theresa watched as Ted fumbled with the fax machine.

"Shit." Ted was not having an easy time of it. But after that exchange he is not going to give in and let Theresa fax them. "Got it."

The fax machine squealed with delight thought Ted, as it made a connection with the main office.

"Did you put a cover sheet on that transmission?" Theresa yelled.

Both over the squeal and because of distance.

"A what?" Ted asked.

"You moron," Theresa said under her breath. She got up and walked into the room. "You moron," now much louder. "You need a cover sheet to let the fax office know which department you want the fax delivered." She thought a minute. "As the last page gets pulled into the machine," she said, "put the cover sheet on the end. They'll figure it out."

Ted scrambled to get a cover sheet made before the last page was through. He made it and the cover sheet was grabbed by the machine and sent off to headquarters.

\* \* \* \*

"Hey Miller, how's it going? It's John." John told Miller over the phone.

"Hi John. It's going okay. Things are a bit quieter here than over the past few days." Miller thought a moment then said, "so what's up with you?"

"I've got a question for you. I think you may be able to help," John started. "On my diary pages Karen found a series of numbers and letters."

"Okay," Miller waited for his cue.

"I think it's something technical. You know, because I was suppose to be a computer techie before all this. So I thought maybe you'd have a clue about this." John exposed the whole thought.

"Yeah, all right. What are the numbers and letters?" Miller asked.

John proceeded to read him a whole series of the codes. Line after line. Miller listened and wrote them down.

After a couple dozen lines of the codes Miller said, "Okay, hold up there for a moment." He looked at the codes and said. "John, these are Hexadecimal numbers."

"Hexa-what?" John asked.

"...decimal. Hexa meaning sixteen, decimal meaning sixteen decimal per place numbers."

"Huh?" John was still confused.

Joseph A. Sabin Jr.



"Just wait!" Miller said a bit pissed at John's impatience. "I'll explain. It's base sixteen. It is a convenient way to represent numbers in a binary manner without having a bunch of ones and zeros."

John's head began to swim. "Wait Miller, let me get this straight. It's like being able to count from one to sixteen without changing place?"

"Almost right. It's counting from zero to fifteen, then what is normally the ten's place means sixteen." Miller explained, glad that John seemed to be catching on. "You count like this: zero, one, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight, nine, A, B, C, D, E, F, ten."

"What do the A, B, C, D, E, and F stand for?" John asked, trying really hard to understand.

"The numbers after nine. A in hexadecimal equals ten in decimal. B in hexadecimal equals eleven in decimal. And so on. When you reach ten in hexadecimal that is equal to sixteen."

"The hell you say?" John said.

"Right, it takes a bit to get used to. But it's really simple if you just accept that each number place can contain more than just zero through nine. Now there is A through F. Get it?"

"No, not really," John said honestly confused.

"Let's try this. If you have sixteen in decimal what would it be in hexadecimal?" Miller asked. "I don't know," John responded.

"Ten," Miller answered. "So if you have 32 in decimal what would that be in hexadecimal?"

"I don't know," John responded dully.

"Think, John, think." Miller pressed.

"If sixteen is ten then 32 is ?"

"Twenty?" John asked and answered.

"RIGHT!" Miller exclaimed. "That's right. See, it's not that hard. It's just a different way of thinking about numbers. If the number is hexadecimal and you want a decimal you multiply each place by sixteen, start on the left working right. Add the number on the right and multiply again." Miller was starting to get into it.

"Wait here Miller. I don't think I need to know this, do I?" John was worrying about the thousand or so numbers he is about to face. This could be a real task.

"I don't know. All I know is the numbers you read to me are exactly that and if you want to know what they equal in a number you understand, well yes. Yes you will have to know that," Miller answered. "Or, you could buy a hexadecimal calculator. They always have a conversion function key. Type in the number, press the DEC key and your decimal value is on the screen."

"That sounds better to me," John said hopefully. "Where do I get one, and how much do they cost?"

"Go to the college store near you and they should have one. Oh, they don't cost much, less than fifty bucks," Miller answered.

"Fifty bucks," moaned John.

"Or, you can calculate them all by hand," warned Miller.

"Yeah, right! Hey, if you don't mind, could you show those numbers to some of your buddies at work and see if they know what they mean?" John asked really nicely.

"Sure. Be glad to. Hey man, I've got to go. I've got a very early day tomorrow," Miller said.

"Right. Hey, thanks a lot," John said, "good night."

# CHAPTER

# TWENTY TWO

Miller was to meet Angelo for breakfast. They were going to a place that made great pancakes and other breakfast items. Actually they made them all day long. You could get pancakes for dinner, if you so desired.

Miller was sitting at the table in a booth. He got there so early he was able to get a one of the best seats. It was one of three that overlooked the main street. The city was just waking, people were just appearing on the street in any sort of numbers.

The door opened. Miller craned his neck to see who it was. He didn't know the woman who came in. He settled back in his seat.

The waitress came by. "Are you ready sir?" the waitress asked.

"No, not yet. I'm waiting for a friend," Miller answered.

"OK, would you like some coffee?"

"Coffee would be great," Miller answered.

A coffee cup appeared out of nowhere, with a handful of little plastic milk containers. The waitress picked up a coffee pot and poured the coffee into the cup. "I'll keep an eye out for your friend, then give you a minute to decide," She said with a friendly smile.

"Thanks," Miller said. He continued waiting.

"Would you like a newspaper?" the manager asked.

"Sure," Miller answered.

The manager handed him a morning paper. It was not read. It was a fresh paper.

Miller wondered why he didn't come to this place more often. He looked at his watch, 7:12. He was wondering where Angelo was. Angelo was not normally late. It was odd.

The door opened. Angelo walked in.

Miller couldn't get around the table soon enough. No rush it turned out the waitress saw Angelo looking and directed him to Miller's table.

"Hey Miller, sorry I'm late. Just couldn't pull it together this morning," Angelo apologized.

The waitress appeared.

Miller thought that she said that she'd give them a few minutes. "Coffee sir?" she asked.

"Yes," Angelo answered.

The waitress was even more efficient with Angelo's cup. Then she vanished. On the table was another menu.

"Hungry?" Miller asked Angelo.

"Oh, yeah. I'm always hungry when I come here," Angelo answered.

"Are you ready to order?" Miller asked.

He had noticed that Angelo hadn't picked up the menu. Also he was impatient since he had gotten there almost a half hour ago.

"Yeah, I know what I want," Angelo said. He proceeded to signal for the waitress.

"Hi Angelo," the waitress said.

"Hi Cindy," Angelo answered.

"The usual?" Cindy asked.

"Yup," Angelo said.

"And you sir?" Cindy asked.

"I'll have the whole wheat pancakes with a side of bacon," Miller ordered. He felt a bit guilty ordering the bacon. He thought of his vegetarian friend John. He shook his head as if to clear the idea. He thought he liked bacon so he'd have his bacon, John never gave him a hard time, actually never said a word. His thoughts were disturbed by Cindy.

"Ok, that'll only be a minute," Cindy told them. She gathered up the menus and the empty milk containers. She left their table nice and neat.

"Come here often?" Miller said to Angelo.

"Once or twice a week," Angelo answered.

"You must," Miller said.

The two men sat quietly watching the foot traffic on the main street. People walking dogs. People heading off to get milk for coffee, the morning paper, or whatever they felt they needed to make their morning complete.

"How's Tom?" Miller asked.

"He's doing well. He was on the dean's list last semester," Angelo said.

"Good," Miller said.

Angelo thought this meeting was odd. He had no idea what to expect. He sat there not saying anything. Drinking his coffee and glancing at the paper.

Miller moved the paper.

Angelo saw something else on the table. "Why'd you hand write the dump?" Angelo asked Miller.

"What dump?" Miller looked up at Angelo. "What the hell are you talking about Ang?"

"That." Angelo pointed at the paper on Miller's desk with the numbers he wrote down from John. He had forgotten about the numbers by the time Angelo came in.

"Oh, that. A friend of mine read them to me over the phone, I wrote them down. Do they look like something?" Miller asked.

"Yeah, just like the hex portion of a disassembler dump," Angelo responded. "But why would your friend not have the op-codes too?"

"I don't know. Can you get the op-codes from this?" Miller asked. Miller knew what op-codes were because he has enough experience working around these guys. Hex means Hexadecimal, op-codes mean operation codes, or instructions to an assembler.

"Oh yeah, no biggie. Want me to try?" Angelo asked.

"Sure. That would be great. Thanks man," Miller answered.

"Is this why you wanted to meet for breakfast?" Angelo asked.

"Yeah. I didn't want to discuss this at work. Can you keep it quiet?" Miller asked.

"Sure. Why?" Angelo asked.



"It's a secret project this friend of mine is working on. He doesn't want it to leak out," Miller answered.

"Some hot new software package huh?" Angelo said.

"That's it, something like that. He needs to know what kind of processor this would run on," Miller lied.

"I can see that. That makes a lot of sense," Angelo said.

Cindy returned with two steaming plates of pancakes. As she had promised it only took a minute or two. "Whole wheat and bacon," She said. She placed Miller's breakfast smoothly in front of him. "And JT's special," she continued as she placed two plates in front of Angelo. There were over a dozen pancakes on the one plate. The other had sausage and hash browns.

"Can I get you guys more coffee?" Cindy asked.

Both men answered affirmative.

Cindy filled their cups and vanished.

"Jeeze man, that's a major breakfast!" Miller said to Angelo.

"Breakfast, it's the most important meal of the day," Angelo answered. He was already stuffing food into his mouth. He picked up the syrup and poured more than half of the container on this pancakes. Then he handed it to Miller.

Miller took it from him and dumped the remainder on his pancakes.

The two men ate in silence. Punctuated by swallows and moans of enjoyment.

\* \* \* \*

Cizzano picked up the page.

"Cizzano," he said into the phone.

He listened for a moment, spoke again.

"Send him up. I want to see what he's got." He hung up. He continued to work while he waited for the lab guy to show up. Cizzano got the call instead of Jones because Jones didn't come into the office very early. Jones was having a difficult time adjusting to office hours. There was a knock on the door.

"Come," Cizzano stated with no affect in his voice.

The door opened. A man in his mid-fifties entered. He turned and closed the door firmly behind him. He turned to Face Cizzano.

"Well, come in!" Cizzano said.

The man walked the rest of the way into Cizzano's office. Stood in front of Cizzano's desk and remained silent.

"What do you have for me?" Cizzano asked.

"Here are the results on the lab analysis of the code numbers as sent to us by Ted," the lab manager reported.

Cizzano looked at the page. There were a series of numbers and letters. None of them made any sense to Cizzano.

The first four lines read:

```
8CCA mov dx,cx
```

```
2E CS:
```

```
89160D03 mov [030D],dx
```

```
B430 mov ah,30
```

"What the hell is this?" Cizzano yelled at the lab manager.

"It's a dump from a computer program. The code numbers are the hexadecimal values held in memory addresses where the works and symbols to the left are assembler code," the manager answered.

"So? What the hell does it mean to anyone?" Cizzano demanded.

"Nothing. Not a thing by itself. All I can see from what Ted sent us is that this is the startup of a program. The code we analyzed does nothing but initialization. It looks like a crude version of a 'C' library initialization sequence." The lab manager responded.

"What's see?" Cizzano asked, a bit calmer than before.

"'C' is a language widely used by programmers a decade ago. It's largely been replaced by more advanced languages," the manager answered and continued, "but, it is still used in creating operating systems for most computers."

He found himself defending it a little. Edwin Martin had been in computer systems for almost twenty years. He had a soft spot for 'C'. It was one of the first languages he learned after abandoning COBOL.

"So, what does this tell us?" Cizzano was still not clear at all as to what value, if any, this discovery had on the case.

"Well, if we input all the values we'd know what the program did. We could run it on one of our lab computers. We'd have to emulate an old IBM PC computer. But we could do it. I think we've already built an emulator."

Cizzano cut him off with a wave of his hand. He picked up the phone. He hammered in a series of numbers. It was clear he was calling an outside number.

The two men waited. Martin was nervous. He had no idea what Chizzano was up to at that moment.

"Ted, it's Cizzano. I want you to send the whole pile of 'stats' up to the lab. Those guys figured something out."

There was a pause.

"Right, all of them."

Another pause. "Just do it Ted."

Cizzano hung up the phone.

"Asshole," he shouted at the phone image of Ted. He looked at Martin. "Let me know as soon as you have it running."

Martin began to protest. "I don't know how long it'll take to ..."

"Just do it. Thank you. I'm quite busy you'll have to excuse me." Cizzano feigned a polite ousting Martin from his office.

Edwin Martin stood and walked out the door. As he reached the outside of the office he finished his sentence. "...debug the damn thing."

\* \* \* \*

"It's an old style computer microprocessor configuration," Angelo reported to Miller. "It's simple 8088 code. But that doesn't mean anything. Everything back then was 8088 code. It took almost a decade to advance past the antique operating system used on most PCs. Two warring companies each trying to own the operating

system market. Neither one did it. A third startup company came out with the replacement and blew them both away."

"Angelo, what did you find? I don't need a history lesson." Miller stopped Angelo and put him back on track.

"Yeah. Well, it was pretty easy. This is just the initialization code for a 'C' language library. What I don't understand is this would be a 'COM' file not an 'EXE'," Angelo continued.

"A what?" Miller asked.

"Well, there are two different types of executable formats on that style computer. One was called a COM file the other was an EXE. It's just strange that the initialization code would be for a 'C' compiler library, but the code would be in a 'COM' file format."

"What's to not understand?" Miller asked, really wanting to know.

"Because no 'C' compiler produced a 'COM' file format, as far as I know. At least not as the default, but it makes sense that it is a 'COM' file. It would be a lot harder to build an 'EXE' from a bunch of assembler dump lines."

"So, the guy who did this knew what he was doing?" Miller asked.

"Right, knew what he was doing enough to know that it wouldn't work to have someone try to put together an 'EXE' file when the original machine was long gone. A machine like this hasn't been used for almost a decade," Angelo remarked.

"Yeah, well that makes sense. These notes are very old. This friend found them and is trying to decipher them. Would you be willing to put all of it together?" Miller asked hopefully.

"Hey buddy, that's a lot of work. Twenty lines is one thing, but a whole program. Shit, it could be thousands of lines," Angelo protested.

"About a thousand. How about if it's in machine readable form? Would that be ok?" Miller hoped.

"OK, if it's machine readable, I'll make it a program that we can run," Angelo agreed.

"Thanks man, I've got to let this guy know," Miller said as he picked up the phone to call John. He looked at his watch. Oops, better not. Miller remembers it's Saturday and John and Karen are probably not up yet.

# CHAPTER

# TWENTY THREE

"What do you mean it keeps getting an address fault?" Martin was yelling at one of his systems people. A young woman, she had strong cheekbones reminiscent of an American Indian. She was well tanned and her ebony hair fell over her shoulders in tightly curled, frizzy tendrils. Tina Hawkins referred to herself, only half-jokingly, as an African-American-Indian Princess. Her father was an Iroquois, and her mother was from the Ivory Coast; the daughter of the former United Nation's delegate from that country.

"It won't run. Simple as that. I'm setting trace points right now. If you just give me a few hours I'll have it working," she yelled back at him.

"We may not have a few hours." Martin insisted. Martin could just see the angry face of Cizzano if he failed to produce a program. That man was always unreasonable, but he was being a tyrant on this project. How could he tell this woman?

"What, the world at war? Did I miss something? Come on Ed, that's ridiculous, this can't be that important. Look we just got it," Hawkins said.

"It is that important," Martin told her.

"OK, so it's that important. Hey, I figured out which processor it was for, didn't I?" Hawkins responded.

"Yeah, that was pretty amazing!" Martin gave her.

"Partially luck. It didn't look like a modern dump. I just picked a logical first choice, given the age, and it was the right one," Hawkins said modestly.

"All right, we're wasting time now. Get back to it. And find out what's wrong!" Martin got firm again and was getting ready to leave.



"I'm sure I've typed a few of the dump lines in wrong. The trace will tell me that." Tina Hawkins, Senior Systems Supervisor responded to the pressure.

"Look, this is for Cizzano. You know how he's always yelling for things yesterday," Martin explained.

"Tell him to fuck himself. This will take some time," Hawkins insisted. Tina was looking into the console. She shook her head. It didn't make any sense. All the code looked like it was functioning properly. It all looked like real code. It seemed unlikely that she had made a mistake.

His voice made her jump. "Ok, I'll ease up, but you have two hours." Martin left the computer center.

"Yeah, fuck you," Tina said under her breath, "let's see you make it work asshole."

\* \* \* \*

John started to stir in bed. He looked at the digital clock. It was gleaming 10:55. John rolled over and then panic hit.

"Jeeze it's almost eleven!" He jumped out of bed and ran for a shower.

Downstairs Karen heard the shower start and yelled up. "Hey butthead, it's Saturday!"

John heard the word Saturday. "The weekend," he said to himself, "thank God!" He started to calm down and put his nightshirt back on, got his robe and slippers. As he wandered down the stairs he caught the smell of coffee. "How old's the coffee Karen?"

"I made it at about eight." Karen responded.

"Great," John muttered.

"Three hour old coffee. Well, it'll have caffeine." John poured a little more than half a cup, took the milk and started to add that. It took almost the remainder of the cup to make it a color he thought looked drinkable. He took the remainder of the pot and dumped it down the drain. He dumped the coffee grounds in the compost bucket and turned off the coffee pot. He proceeded to make fresh coffee.

"What are you doing?" Karen yelled in.

"I'm making coffee that will pour out of the pot," John yelled back. "I'll be in there in a minute, I'm almost done here." John waited a full three minutes before turning the coffee pot back on. He was giving the machine a chance to cool down so it wouldn't flip out when it got the newly added cold water. It began to perk, John left the kitchen to join his wife.

\* \* \* \*

Todd got up. He staggered to the kitchen. "Man I drank too much last night," he said to himself.

Todd had begun drinking too much every night. He made himself some coffee. It smelled good. He couldn't wait for it all to pour through so he put his cup under the basket. The coffee dripped into the cup and he almost filled it with the pot. He then fairly deftly exchanged the two. The pot continued to fill.

He took the cup of coffee to the table. He sat and consumed most of the cup. His stomach heaved, he held his mouth shut with all his might as he rushed to the bathroom. Just in time he vomited in the toilet.

"Shit. I didn't think I had that much to drink," he moaned.

The last sounds of the flushing toilet were muffled by the sound of water filling the sink. He began to rinse his face, and wash out his mouth. That's a really bad taste he thinks. He headed back to the kitchen.

The coffee had finished going through the machine and the last drips were falling into the pot. He picked the pot up out of the machine and the last few drops hit with a high pitched sizzle. He replaced the pot and the sizzle turned into a popping sound. Todd placed himself back into the kitchen chair and resumed drinking coffee.

There was a knock at his door. Todd went to stand, dizziness forced him back to the chair. Nausea returned. He rushed to the bathroom. The other half of his stomach emptied into the toilet. The door knock got louder.

He said, half heartedly. "Give me a minute."

The knocker didn't hear and knocked even louder.

"I'm coming."

Todd had a half roll of toilet paper in his hand. He was wiping his mouth clean. "I must look like hell," he thought as he opened the front door.

"Good morning Todd!" Max said in a cheerful voice. "May I come in?"

"Who are you?" Todd lied.

"Max. You remember me." Max told him as he pushed into the apartment. "Come on Todd, it's been a few years, but don't try to tell me you don't remember your old buddy Max."

"Ok, I won't tell you then."

Todd continued feigning non-recognition. All the time he was thinking about what he did with the detective. Worrying about having come back to the east's bay area. Now the agency has found him. They know. They know he's pointed the finger at John Parker. He also knew they either wanted him back, or dead.

"Look," Max began, "you've been a shit and now you are going to have to pay."

That's it, I'm dead. He thought. They wouldn't have sent Max to get me back. Max was too good at making people disappear.

"Shit." He ran to the bathroom. Max saw his escape attempt, or so he thought that was what he was doing. He jumped in his way. "Max, no, let me get to the bathroom, I'm sick."

Max turned his head, saw the bathroom turned back just in time to see Todd's face. "Man, you really are sick, go on."

Just in time, for the third in a series of many, Todd made it to the toilet.

Max helped himself to some coffee, keeping a sharp eye on the bathroom. There was no window, so Todd had to exit the door. Besides, thought Max, this man has no strength to run. He sat down at the kitchen table, faced the bathroom door but not in a position to watch Todd.

Todd emerged the bathroom in some pain, but looked better than before his mad dash.

He said to Max, "what do they want with me?"

Max, halfway through a big gulp of coffee, put up the index finger of his right hand.

Todd nodded, understanding the universal signal for 'give me a second'. "Yeah, go ahead, enjoy my coffee, I can't."

Max swallowed and said, "they want you back. Your stupid prank has landed you back in the agency's service."

"They can't do that!" Todd yelled. "What gives them the right. I'm retired."

"Bullshit," Max retorted, "no one retires from the agency. You go on inactive. Where the hell do you think all that money has been coming from?"

Todd had no strength to fight, shook his head and looked at Max. "So, what does it really mean?"

"It means that you are being recalled, you will have your old position plus a promotion. That promotion is contingent on your coming back without a fight. If you fight the recall, you'll end up back, but they'll demote you."

Max warned Todd in a friendly sort of way, but made it clear that this was not something to even try. In his statement there was an implied danger. A danger Todd had thought was the reason Max was there.

"Great, do I have to do it today?"

Todd was feeling his stomach begin to churn again, he knew he would never be able to leave the apartment for hours. He may even be sick all day. His head was throbbing. A pain ringed his head like a vice. His mouth was dry and his tongue felt swollen.

Max looked at him. He remembered feeling that way. He felt sorry for Todd, but that wasn't his job. His job that morning was to inform him of what the agency expected from him.

"No, but you are to report in on Monday morning. Hey are you sick or hung over?" Max asked.

"A little of both," Todd lied.

\* \* \* \*

Cizzano's phone rang. "Good, very good work Max."

He listened for a second.

"Yes, put a twenty-four hour a day guard on his apartment. He doesn't go anywhere without us knowing. Thanks for your diligence Max, I don't know how you do it."

He hung up after a few minutes of back patting and general information gathering.

He decided to check on Martin's progress, he phones down to the lab.

"Hawkins." Came a serious female voice.

"Tina, is Martin there? This is Cizzano."

"No, he's away, thank God," Hawkins responded.

"What's up with you two?"

"Nothing is UP with us two. He's an asshole and was getting in my way on a project. That's all," Hawkins spat back at Cizzano.

He's got rank but no position over her and she's not going to take his condescension.

"Hey, hey. Wait a minute. Are you working on the program code that was found on those note pages?" he asked. Now in a considerably more professional, yet gentler voice. If she was, he didn't want to alienate her.

"Yeah, what's it to you," Hawkins challenged.

"It's my project, that's what." Cizzano was growing tired of the banter. He was about to say something else but Hawkins cut him off.

"It's going fine. Most of it makes sense. There seem to be a few missing pieces. I've got the system working on analyzing the flow. We keep getting address faults. Seems like the code is trying to touch areas it doesn't own."

Cizzano was out of his league, he didn't want to insult this woman, but he said anyway. "Tina, is there someone on staff that has experience with this architecture?"

Hawkins was surprised by the question, and not insulted at all. She responded, "yes, there are a few. I'm not one of them, but the others are not working today."

Cizzano thought, so get them in here. "Tina, can you get one of them to come in and assist you?"

"Maybe...yeah I'm sure I can. Is this that important?" After all the yelling, pressure and conversation with Cizzano she still hadn't grasped the importance of the project.

"Yes Tina, this is very important. Wake them up if you must."

"OK, I'll get right on it. Oh, Cizzano, do you want me to report directly to you on this?" Hawkins asked.

"Yes, directly to me." Cizzano hung up without another word. Hawkins heard the click. "Bastard. What do these people think I am?" she said to no one. She hung up just long enough to get a dial tone. She punched the buttons without looking up the number. It rang.

\* \* \* \*

It had been one long week for Detective O'Brian. He was in his office on Saturday. Only murder investigations get him up and to the office on the weekend. Weeks are long enough without extending the workweek through a weekend.

"Oh well," he said to himself, as he settled in to his chair. "That Rourke character should almost be in Washington by now. I've got to get myself prepared to get to D.C. and meet him."

O'Brian began filling in the forms. One form is required to get him travel reimbursement, another form to get him an advance, and yet another form to register his gun with the D.C. local police. The final form, was asking for temporary jurisdiction to question a witness in a different city.

"You finished with those forms?" A voice from no where asked.

"No. Not yet. I'm still working on it," O'Brian responded.

"Better hurry up. Don't want to blow it because you failed to file the right forms in time." Chided the voice.

O'Brian looked up, it was the desk sergeant. "Look Brackett, I'll get them to you in plenty of time. I've done this before."

"Right. Don't blame me if you fuck up," Brackett responded as he left the office and went back to his post.

O'Brian was hardly moved by that dialogue. He knew he had to have the paper work in. He also knew the department's regulations. Nothing was going to stop this investigation. He would get what he needed, even if he fucked up by not getting the papers in on time. The sergeant knew he would have to pick up the slack. So he harassed O'Brian.



"Done," O'Brian said. He stood, straightened out his pants, tucked his shirt in where it had slipped out in the back. Grabbed the papers and marched into the sergeant's area.

"Here you go," he announced.

The sergeant took the papers, looked at them for a long moment. He reached under the desk, pulled out a folder. In the folder there were FAX coversheets. He pulled out a coversheet, put the folder away.

O'Brian was wondering if he had to stay. He wasn't getting any help from the sergeant. He waited.

The sergeant started filling out the form. Stopped, picked up a loose-leaf notebook and leafed through it. He found the page, copied some information from the page. He closed the book and set it down where it was.

O'Brian started to fidget.

"You don't have to wait." Came a dull statement.

"Oh, I wasn't sure." O'Brian responded.

Without another gesture, the sergeant went back to his task. With the FAX sheet completed, he took the three forms for the DC police and stacked them neatly in a pile under the coversheet. He jotted down the FAX number from the coversheet on a yellow sticky pad, and placed the sheets upside-down on the FAX machine.

O'Brian stayed and watched. He was amazed at the slow process this man was going through. Every step had purpose, but every step was as if it was in slow motion.

The sergeant pressed one number after another. Once all the numbers were entered, he checked the sheets once more. He pressed a button and the machine dialed the number.

DO,DIT,DA,DO,DITTA,DA,DADOT,DITA,DOT,DOT

There was a pause, then a screeching sound. It was like the sound of a thousand fingernails running down a blackboard.

The screeching stopped, and the first faced down page began to move through the machine. The sound and motion was as slow as the sergeant had been.

By now O'Brian had taken about all he could of this slow motion action. He turned and left the room, confident that the permissions would be in place when he arrived in DC.

\* \* \* \*

Jones and Rourke were meeting in Jones' office. The conversation had been animated. They were disagreeing on process.

"Mr. Jones, I have seven years of field experience and more than ten years acting experience. I know what I'm doing." Argued Jackson.

"I'm not disputing your experience or success in past encounters. What I want you to do is simply cast sufficient doubt on Todd's story. Make him look bad."

"Mr. Jones, I have a script. This script has been written by the best in the business. I will use the script and refute Todd's story. I will not..."

Jones cut him off. "But you can't go line by line and refute his statement."

"No shit! I know that. The script goes line by line so I know what happened. I will use that information as needed. Not all of it. I'm not stupid." Jackson was getting red faced.

"Yeah, but did you memorize it?" Jones asked.

"Yes, every single line," Jackson answered sarcastically.

"Then how are you going to use it to answer questions? You'll get stuck jumping around and O'Brian will know you're lying."

"Mr. Jones. This is my job. I do my job very well. I remember key words, I remember my story line. I can jump from one thing to another. I don't have to follow a linear path through the story. That's..." Jackson was cut off again.

"OK, let's try this..." Jones went to ask Jackson a question.

"NO, NO, NO. I will not do this any more. You are going to fuck this up if you keep badgering me. I know what I'm doing. You have no idea, do you?" Jackson was standing and he paced around the office.

"No idea about what?" Jones asked.

"You don't know anything about how an actor recalls his lines." Jackson said a bit calmer, but scarlet faced.

"No I don't know," Jones admitted

"Cues. Actors remember lines based upon cues." Jackson answered. The two men were quiet. Both were breathing hard, Jackson was pacing Jones was seated. Jackson wanted to continue but he was seriously out of breath, Jones gave him that and waited patiently.

Jackson continued, "when making a movie, rarely are the scenes filmed in sequence. The action carries from one scene to another. Film may require picking up a scene midway. Maybe the film was bad, or the action weak, whatever, but action can start anywhere within a script." Jackson paused.

"I see," said Jones, waiting for the point.

"No you don't," argued Jackson. "If you saw, you would understand how I can work from anywhere within the script."

"Oh, I do get it now. You just respond to O'Brian's cues." Jones almost had a light go on over his head. His face grew bright and his eyes gleamed. "I really do understand."

Jackson's face grew slowly lighter, it was a shade of pink. Almost normal. "Thank you. May we continue on?"

"Yes, let's," Jones agreed.

\* \* \* \*

"What! That's it!" Hawkins could not believe what she saw on the screen.

'HI!'

"HI! Indeed. That's ridiculous. I spent five hours typing in the code and three more debugging it."

"Not to mention what I just did," reminded George Comer. He had done almost nothing. He recognized the problem almost at first glance. He was prone to sarcasm.

They both sat and stared at the console. Comer had almost ten years of experience working on systems like the one this code was designed on. He was often called in during investigations that span back ten or more years of computer systems.

Joseph A. Sabin Jr.

When he arrived, it took him less than a minute to discover what Tina was doing wrong. He looked at the error, glanced through the disassembly of the code and simply said.

"Wrong operating system."

"What do you mean, wrong operating system. This is the one that was prevalent during that period. Which one could it be?" Hawkins said.

"An older one. This code comes from a time when the operating system didn't protect memory outside a user's workspace," Comer explained.

"Come on, you're kidding. No one would build an operating system that let a program alter RAM outside it's workspace," Chided Hawkins.

RAM as both engineers knew, is memory that is randomly assessable. Known as Random Access Memory years ago, now it just means memory. No one worries about whether it's really there or being made 'virtually' available by the processor. Virtual memory looks and acts identical to RAM, though a bit slower because the information needs to be written to and from magnetic storage.

The operating system to which Comer was referring, was more a facilitator to creating working programs. It provided access to the magnetic storage or 'Disk Drives', as they were known as well, primitive access to the screen and input devices such as a keyboard. And it also made feeble attempts to manage the memory. The operating system in the computer system they were using did so much more. So much so, that Hawkins had a hard time understanding how any system could be a primitive as the one they had to run their code on right now.

"Oh yeah, back then there wasn't that much memory and processors were slow. Anything that could be done to make a program run faster was allowed. Even changing the areas controlled by the operating system," Comer explained.

With that, Hawkins and Comer ran the program under the previous iteration of the operating system and they got the word 'HI!' on the console screen.

"Well, it runs. That's one thing. It might take some sort of command line option to make it do more." Comer offered.

"A command line option? What's that?" Hawkins asked.

"Many programs were written so when run the user would type the program name and a series of letters, numbers and either dashes or slashes to indicate how a program was to behave. The things following the name of the program were called 'command line options'.

"Oh, yeah. I remember reading about them in my 'History of Computer Systems' class in graduate school," Hawkins said.

"Well, get out of my way. I'll try all the obvious ones. If they don't work, I'll have to look for patterns in the code. See if anything jumps out at me."

"Good luck. Want anything?" Hawkins asked.

"Yeah, could you get me some coffee and some sort of pastry?" Comer said.

"Sure, how do you like your coffee?" Hawkins remembered to ask before she let the door shut behind her.

"Light, no sugar," Comer said as he began requesting repeated runs of the program with various command line options.

He didn't look up when the door closed, nor did he answer the phone when it rang. As far as he was concerned, he was not there.

\* \* \* \*

Hawkins knew she had to report this to Cizzano. She headed for the elevator bank, pressed the up button and waited. After a moment the light on the button went out and a bell indicated there would be an elevator momentarily.

The door opened and Tina Hawkins stepped in. She pressed the button for Cizzano's floor and waited. Nothing happened. She leaned forward and pressed the button again.

The doors closed and the elevator began its rapid ascent to the 38th floor. It did not stop in between. When the bell rang and the doors opened, Hawkins realized she was on the 38th floor, the door almost closed on her.

"Oh yeah, it's Saturday." She accepted the lack of traffic on the elevator and headed off to Cizzano's office.

Cizzano's assistant was not in. So Hawkins announced herself on the intercom phone.

Inside his office Cizzano was startled by the intercom. "Yes, who is it?" He gruffly asked the intercom.

"Tina Hawkins, sir. I have some information for you."

"Come in. I have a moment or two." Cizzano answered. He got up and walked toward the door to greet Tina.

The door opened and Tina Hawkins entered the room. Cizzano had forgotten how beautiful she was. She stood just short of six foot, dark blue-black hair, dark olive skin and jet-black eyes. She has the figure of a fashion model and the brain of a rocket scientist.

Cizzano caught his breath and welcomed her. "Here, take a seat. What's on your mind?"

That seemed odd to Hawkins. "My mind is on resolving the problem with the code fragments. I was able to get them working with the aid of George Comer."

"Good, good. What did you find out?" Cizzano asked.

"Nothing. All it does is print 'HI!' on the console," Hawkins said.

"That's it? That doesn't seem right." Cizzano remarked.

"I certainly hope that's not all the stupid program does. I spent too much time reconstructing it to end up with just that. But, Comer felt that there might be a trigger that will have it do more. It's something that was called a command line option." She paused at that statement, thought better of it and decided to explain to Cizzano what a command line option was. "That's sort of like a switch or key," Hawkins explained.

"Well that makes some sense. If I were trying to hide something, I certainly wouldn't make it too easy." Cizzano agreed.

"Comer's working on it. He says there are some obvious choices. So he's trying those first. After that, he's going to search the code to discover any other details. I..."

Hawkins was about to say something when Cizzano cut her off. "When was this program written?" he asked.

"Well, that's what's doesn't add up. From the details you gave me, I would have assumed much later than it now seems. The operating system it uses was in use during the early 1980's. But doesn't this case have its roots later than that?" Hawkins answered and questioned.



"Yes, that's right. But I don't think technology moved very quickly in the personal computer market back then. I wouldn't be surprised if the same operating system was used for a couple of decades," Cizzano quipped.

"That's what Comer told me. I had learned something different in the history of computers class I took. Odd." She was sitting quietly, as if she was waiting for Cizzano.

"Well, if that's all, I should be getting back to my work." Cizzano rose to show her the door.

Tina Hawkins also stood, towering over Cizzano, he was barely shoulder high to her.

She said. "I can find my way out, thank you." And turned and walked out the door.

After the door closed Cizzano said to himself. "Wow, now there is one hell of a beautiful woman!" Sighed and tried to get his mind back on work.

\* \* \* \*

Todd was completely freaked out. He was almost running around his apartment. Why did I come back, why? He kept asking himself. That damn experiment, what a stupid idea. There's just no way you can transfer thoughts like that. No way. He was being well paid to stay hidden. Todd knew he was supposed to stay away from the east coast away from Parker. But they never told him it would be for so many years. It was only supposed to take ninety days then a debriefing period of less than a year. This was ridiculous, it had been over a decade. Time to get his life back in order. That was why Todd came back.

"Now you stupid ass, now you're back in the agency," Todd said to himself.

He was never an agency man. He had a talent, the agency corrupted that talent. They bent it and warped it to fit some security concept. Didn't work, he told them it wouldn't work.

The phone rang. Todd looked at it. It rang again. Todd was stopped dead in his tracks, looking. It rang four more times. Todd decided it might be a good idea to answer it. He walked up to the phone, it rang again.

"Hello?"

"Hi Todd, this is Tim Jones. I'm your new supervisor at the JSA. How are you feeling?" Jones asked.

"I'm getting better. Who are you?" Todd asked. He was stalling to gain some time to think clearly about what he is about to say.

"I'm Tim Jones," repeated Jones.

"Oh, hey Mr. Jones," Todd answered.

"Everyone calls me Jones. Just Jones, you can skip the Mister," Jones informed him. "Anyway, the reason for my call was to welcome you back on board and to introduce myself. You are to report to me, in my office at 8:30 Monday morning. Understand?" Jones asked.

"Yes sir, I understand. Ah, I, ah, well, umm, I ..."

"Spit it out Todd, what's on your mind?" Jones pushed.

"I, ah, wondered. What am I going to do?" Todd asked.

"Nothing Todd, nothing for a while. After some time passes and we're ready, you may receive an assignment. But not for at least a week. You'll be my advisor."

Jones statement to Todd was direct without any pretense. So much so, it surprises them both.

"Oh," is all Todd could say.

"So, I'll see you day after tomorrow, 8:30 my office. You know the building. Right Todd?" Jones asked.

"Yes, I know the building all right. What floor?"

"37th," Jones answered.

"Wow!" Todd exclaimed.

"What Todd?" Jones asked proudly.

"Impressive. I didn't think I'd report to anyone at your level," Todd said.

The two men spoke for another minute and hung up. Todd was feeling a little better, he stopped throwing up. He had gotten out and bought some ginger ale. He still didn't think he could eat, but he was getting there. The aspirin he took an hour earlier were beginning to take effect. The vice was loosening around his head.

\* \* \* \*

Miller looked at his watch.

"Well, I think it's late enough."

He picked up the phone, banged out the number for the Parker residence and waited.

"Hello?" answered Karen.

"Good morning Karen, it's Miller. Hope I didn't wake you." Miller said in a friendly, light and gentle voice. Just in case he did wake her.

"Oh no Miller, no problem, we've been up for some time now. How are you?" Karen asked politely.

"Fine, fine. Hey, I've got some news for John, is he there?" Miller asked.

"Yeah he's right here. Hold on. ... Wait a minute Miller, what kind of news." Karen changed her mind and wanted to know rather than wait for the two to finish their conversation to find out from John.

"A guy who works with me figured out what those lines of code mean." Miller answered quickly.

"Really figured them out? Wow, that's wonderful! Wait and tell John." Karen held the phone out to John. John looked at her questioning. She shook the phone in her hand. A gesture of take the damn thing.

"What's wonderful?" Asked John.

"Let Miller tell you, he's on the phone," said Karen pushing the phone at John.

"Hey Miller, what's this wonderful news you have?" John asked, barely able to wait.

Miller repeated himself to John. Then he went into more detail. "So Angelo figured out that the program was written in 'C' for an old style personal computer."

"How'd he do that?" John asked.

"Beats the shit out of me. He did it though. Clear as can be he's sure that's what it is. Also, he's convinced he can get the program working," Miller reported.

"That's great, when does he think he can do that?" John was being a bit pushy, he knew it, but this was so important he couldn't seem to help himself.

"Whoa there. There is a catch."

"What's the catch?" John asked.

"You have to provide a machine readable series of codes for him. He is not willing to type all those codes into a computer."

Miller said knowing that John did not have a computer.

"How the hell am I going to get them into a computer? I don't have access to a computer. Oh, man!" John's heart fell to his stomach.

In the background Karen was mouthing something. John waved his hand at her to stop. She didn't. John got more adamant and waved more.

Karen spoke softly and mouthed clearly. "I can use the computer at the school."

"Miller, Karen just said she can use the computer at the school," John reported to Miller.

"What kind of computer is it?" Miller asked.

"What kind of computer do you have at school?" John asked Karen. He left the mouthpiece clear so Miller can hear him ask and hopefully hear Karen's reply.

"Ah, it's a Compact or something like that," Karen answered.

"Miller, did you hear that?" John asked. "Yeah, yeah, that'll be just fine," Miller responded.

"So, what do we do?" John seemed stuck as he asked.

"Have Karen type the code number into the computer. Leave them line-by-line just as they are written on the papers. Hey John, let me talk to her a minute." Miller decided it was better to talk directly to Karen about how to put the data into the computer.

John held the phone up and said, "Karen, Miller needs to talk to you about how to put the numbers in."

"Hi, Miller," Karen said after getting back on the phone. "Yeah, we have a wordprocessor."

"OK, which one?" Miller needed to know.

"It's called, 'Professional Word Plus'," Karen told him.

"Oh, that's good, that's one of the ones we use here. Great, so put the lines of numbers and letters in just as they appear on the pages. One line per page, each page on a separate line. Type them very carefully. Make sure you don't make any mistakes," Miller told her.

"OK," Karen answered.

"Then put the document on a cartridge and send it to me overnight. OK?" Miller asked.

"Yeah fine, overnight," Karen responded.

"Karen, can you do that today?" Miller asked.

"Yeah, John and I will go to the school and start right now," Karen told Miller.

"Super. Hey Karen, be extra careful," Miller warned again.

"Right, absolutely careful. I'm a good typist Miller," Karen defended herself.

"Maybe," said Miller, "but these aren't words. I won't be able to read mistakes.

"Bye, Miller," Karen said.

"Bye-bye," Miller answered.

They hung up.

John looked at Karen and said, "let's go do it!"

"Let's go!" Karen said with false bravado. This was a task she was not looking forward to in the least.

# CHAPTER TWENTY FOUR



Tina walked back into the lab. Comer was leaned over the console like he was doing battle. There was a look in his eye that did not suggest he had much luck. She approached him carefully, quietly. She discovered that was not a good idea.

"What the..." Comer almost shouted jumping out of his stool.

"Sorry man, I was trying to be careful not to scare you. Guess it didn't work."

She was carrying two cups of coffee, a couple of doughnuts and a thing that looked like it might be a honey bun. The remainder of the box was filled with little plastic artificial milk containers.

"That place has a bunch of no good PRs working there." Hawkins almost yelled, indicating the pile of milks. "Who the hell needs this many milks!"

Comer looked up at her with an evil eye and said, "so, what am I a no good PR or a good PR?"

"Depends." She countered her poor choice of ethnic group to slur. "Does the program work?"

"No. I've not found any switches. I tried all I could think of, even some that made no sense. Then, I started to look through the code. Nothing I can find," Comer said almost helplessly.

"Can I do anything to help?" Hawkins asked.

"Yeah, go back in time, collect up a series of good quality debuggers and bring them back. This crap we have on this machine just doesn't cut it. Who wrote these?"

"I did," Hawkins responded.

"OH, that figures. Why did you get the job? You don't know the first thing about the architecture of those old machines," Comer said.

"Someone had to do it. There was no way we could use one of the original debuggers on this machine. The way they controlled the hardware was not compatible. I did my best." Hawkins was feeling hurt by the not so subtle put-down.

"Well, I'd rewrite them if I had the time. But hey, could you add a feature to one of them for me?"

"What do you need?" Hawkins asked hopefully.

"I need to be able to produce a listing of the hex value of each character and the ASCII representation alongside. The traditional method was to put two hex numbers a space, two more hex numbers, a space, and so on until you reach sixteen. Then print out the ASCII characters that represent the hex values. If the ASCII character is not printable, print a dot."

"Was that an ASCII machine?" Hawkins asked.

"What the hell? You wrote this code and don't even know that the machine was an ASCII machine?" Comer was amazed.

"I assumed it was one of those old time representations of characters. I didn't need to know which. This machine can interpret either to the current representation. Imagine trying to represent the entire world's symbology in just 128 different characters." Hawkins was shaking her head.

"It was a good system. Most computers used it. It was simple and fast. I still remember it. 'A' was 65, 'a' was 97 and space was 32. Every letter had a numeric representation that made sense. Today's system no longer follows such a simple series. It may represent all symbols known to man, but this man for one can't remember what represents A." Comer finished his stand on the soapbox.

"Well now you old dinosaur! Let me work on that problem for you. I think I've got a really simple solution." Hawkins said as she began to work.

Hawkins searched the computer's database for an object that could produce the output Comer was looking for. The particular database contained all the objects used in the agency. Anything available for programming was documented in this one massive listing. At first she searched for an ASCII dump. Not finding that she asked for any kind of dump.

The computer worked.

There were four different dumps available. None were ASCII, but one was close enough. She requested the source.

The computer responded that the source for that routine was archived.

"Do you want to retrieve?"

"No, I want to guess what's in the source. Of course!" Hawkins hit the 'Y' key.

The computer responded. "Searching archive for TEXT\_DUMP... Please wait."

The two wait as the computer cursor blinked on the screen. The cursor began to move. That indicated that the computer was doing something. The cursor, after all, pointed to the place on the screen something was either needed from the operator, or the place the computer was about to print something.

The computer responded. "Enter local storage name:"

Hawkins typed, "ASCII\_DUMP" and pressed the enter key to indicate she was ready for the computer to process her request.

The computer responded, "Stored."

"Great. Let's take a look at the code." Hawkins said with an enthusiasm Comer didn't expect.

Hawkins loaded the source code into an editor. The editor was a striped down version of a popular word processor. It didn't do any of the fancy word processor features like bold face, or italic or centering lines. Rather it was designed to aid programmers.

She was looking at the code for only about a minute. Scrolled down a few lines. Changed a couple of words.

"There. That should do it." Hawkins announced to Comer.

"Let me rebuild it and you'll have what you need."

Hawkins requested a rebuild of the project she called IBM\_PC.

The computer responded, "Replace current version?"

Hawkins pressed 'Y' and the enter key.

The computer responded,

'Compiling.....'

'Linking.....'

'Binding Resources.....'

'Project IBM\_PC Built.'

"All yours Comer." Hawkins stood and pointed to the stool with a wave of her hand.

"How do I dump?" Comer asked.

"When you want to dump the listing you asked for press D." Hawkins told him.

Comer loaded the program with the program IBM\_PC and started pressing 'D' right away. He got screens that looked like a bunch of numbers and the right hand side had a bunch of garbage. He continued.

Hawkins watched without saying a word. She didn't know what he was looking for, but she knew what he was doing. He knew there was something that he couldn't find by running the program.

Comer looked up at Hawkins and said, "there it is!"

Hawkins mouth dropped.

The computer said.

00 44 11 44 44 00 00 00 00 00 00 48 49 21 00 .D.DD.....HI!.

54 68 65 20 77 68 6F 6C 65 20 74 68 69 6E 67 20 The whole thing

68 61 73 20 62 65 65 6E 20 61 20 74 65 73 74 2E has been a test.

It continued in the same format.

"Shit," Comer said.

"I second that," Said Hawkins.

"Do you see it?" Comer was surprised.

"What you don't think I can read!" Hawkins almost flipped.

"It has nothing to do with reading. It's the style of terminating a string of characters. The NULL. Did you see that?" Comer questioned.

"No, I don't know what you mean," Hawkins admitted.

"Look at the character right after the 'HI!'" Comer instructed.

"It's a dot," Hawkins said. Then she noted her mistake. "Oh, it's not a dot, it's a NULL. The value for that place is 00, or NULL."

"Yeah! So that's just where the computer stops printing the string of characters. Right at the ! after HI." Comer said shaking his head.

"That's why this debugger didn't work for me!"

"But you have it now," defended Hawkins. "Do the rest. What's the rest of it say?"

Comer instructed the computer to print the next group of ASCII characters in the dump. The sentence finished. And it read:

"The whole thing has been a test. Conducted by the JSA.

Everything is going to be Okay. Ignore these notes, they mean nothing."

"Holy Shit!" Hawkins stared at the computer console. She couldn't believe what she was seeing.

Comer said nothing, just stared along with Hawkins.

"Cizzano is not going to like this." Hawkins said.

"I'm out of here," Comer said, "I've done my job." He stood to leave. He grabbed his coat and was out the door before Hawkins could stop him. She was still sitting staring at the screen.

"Now what?" she said to no one. Her hand moved to the console keyboard, she typed, "Delete Project MIND\_CHANGERS" Her hand hesitated at the enter key.

\* \* \* \*

John was frantically gathering up the pages he had written the codes on. He had them carefully numbered. He checked them all. There were some missing lines. "Shit!"

"What's the matter John?"

"Some of the lines are missing. Damn it, I thought I had gotten them all," John answered.

"Let's sit down in the office and fill in the missing pieces," Karen consoled.

"Okay."

John and Karen walked to the office. John sat down at the desk. He lined up the pages with the codes. He looked through the pages. "August 4th is missing," he announced.

Karen got out the August folder. She paged through the various manila folders. She was being quite careful not to disturb her order. "Here it is. F744020300" Karen read out.

"F74402300" John read back.

"No, it's 20300 not 2300," Karen corrected.

"Okay, got it." John had written that code down. He was looking at the dates. More were in place than out of place. They weren't in order and that sometimes slowed him down. "I'm missing September 12th. No, wait, here it is," John said.

He continued looking, when he reached a code that was hard to read. He couldn't be sure he could read it. He showed it to Karen. "Karen, can you read this?" he asked.

Karen studied the code. She shook her head.

"Let's look it up. It's September 23rd." John said.

Karen put the August file away and got out the September one. With the same care, she shuffled through the pages. She got to the end and hadn't found the date. She carefully went back to the front of the file and began again. This time through she found it. "F747024000" She read out.

John repeated it correctly. He went on looking for missing dates. He found three or four more. Karen went to each file in turn and read the codes to John.

"I think that's it," John said.

"Great. That wasn't too hard," Karen answered.

"Not hard at all. But I'm going to look one more time just to be sure I've got them all. What a bitch it would be to get all the way to the school and find we're missing one," John said.

"Right. I'll go get a snack for us," Karen said.

John shot a glance at her, then thought better about it. "Yeah, good idea. For the school you mean?" He asked.

"Right."

Karen left the office off toward the kitchen. John looked back down at his pages and began his slow, careful search. Line by line, day by day he searched. There wasn't a day missing. John hoped that there wasn't a page missing from one of the days with multiple diary pages.



Karen returned to the office. She had a picnic basket and a cooler.

"Are we going on a picnic?" John teased.

"No, but this will take a while, probably several hours," Karen told John.

"I called Mary and asked her if I could use the computer. She was very friendly and said sure. She didn't have any reservations," Karen said.

"That was a good idea. Make sure, for sure, rather than just assume. Imagine explaining to a cop," John said.

"That's what I thought," Karen agreed.

John piled each page on top of the next, in correct order. Even though there was just a line for each diary page, there must have been forty or fifty pages. Quite a stack.

"You ready?" Karen asked.

"Yeah, how 'bout you?"

"Let's go!" Karen said.

They grabbed coats, John looked down at his feet. He still had slippers on. "Let me get my sneakers." John said laughing at himself.

"Okay."

John ran upstairs to the bedroom. He was hopping on one foot trying to put his sneaker on. He almost fell, but finally got it on. He repeated the process for the other foot. That one went on a bit easier. He sat on the bed and tied his laces. Jumped up and ran down the stairs to meet up with Karen.

Karen had her coat on, she handed John his, he started for the door, his coat half on. He didn't have his wallet, didn't have car keys and he had left the pages on the desk. "Hey, Karen," John said.

"Yeah?"

"I don't have my wallet. I don't have my keys. And most important, I don't have the pages," John said.

"Then get them," Karen said.

"Have you seen my wallet?" John asked.

"I'll drive, John. Just get the pages." Karen had lost her patience with the process. She had her purse and the keys. She needed her keys anyway to get into the school building.

"Okay." John was resigned to that idea.

They left the house. John didn't lock the front door on first try. Karen was almost to the car, she looked back and laughed. "John, did you remember your brain?" she teased.

"No."

"Wanna go back for it?"

"No."

"How we going to work without it?" Karen asked.

"We have thus far today. I think I can read a bunch of numbers while you type," he said.

"Then lock the damn door and let's go!" Karen shouted.

John locked the door, slammed it shut and ran down the steps to join his wife. Karen had the passenger side door of her car unlocked. John got in, put on his seatbelt and unlocked the driver side door, just before Karen did with the key.

"Beat you!" he said.

Karen was, by that point, no longer feeling very playful. She scowled, got in the car and started it.

"Hey, just playing," John said.

"Right. Let's just get this done," Karen responded.

They drove to the school not saying anything else.

\* \* \* \*

Tina sat, staring at the console. She did not know what to do. The information she just discovered, clearly changed the case. If Parker figured out what it meant, the agency needed to have a plan. She sat unable to decide. The phone rang.

\* \* \* \*

Ted hung up the phone. He had just spoken to Jones. He told Jones that the Parkers were going to type in the code numbers and that their friend Miller had found someone who figured out the code was a program.

"What did he say?" Theresa asked.

"He was flipped out."

"Not at us, was he?"

"Of course not. We couldn't change this. We are only reporting what we know," Ted told her.

\* \* \* \*

Cizzano sat in his office, the phone was to his ear. He was waiting. The phone rang, and rang, and rang. She didn't pick it up.

"What the hell!" Chizzano yelled much too loud. He was also counting rings. He was up to almost fifty.

"Hawkins," came a voice.

"Hawkins, where the hell were you?" Cizzano demanded.

"The ladies room," Tina answered.

"Oh." Cizzano paused, shrugged his shoulders and then went on. "Did you find anything?" he asked.

"Yes. I think we did," Tina answered.

"Well..."

"You won't like it," she said.

"That's not for you to say!" he shouted.

"Okay, here it is..."

In the meantime, Hawkins had fixed the null in the code and made it into a carriage return. So she ran the program.

"What the hell are you waiting for?" Cizzano said impatiently.

"I'm running the program," she answered.

The console said:

"Hi!"

"The whole thing has been a test. Conducted by the JSA.

Everything is going to be Okay. Ignore these notes, they mean nothing."

Hawkins sat staring at the screen. She didn't read it to Cizzano. He waited, and waited. He became impatient again.

"Did the damn thing finish yet?" He asked.

"Oh, yeah," Tina said.

"What does it say?" he demanded.

Tina Hawkins read the words. She enunciated each word as clearly as she could. She was freaked out by what she had to tell Cizzano.

He listened, then said, "good work Hawkins, very good work. Thank you."

Hawkins sat stunned. She didn't say a thing. Neither did Cizzano. He held the line. She held the line. Nothing happened.

"Why don't you take the rest of the day off Tina," Cizzano said in a quiet almost sweet voice.

"Thank you sir," Tina responded. They hung up.

\* \* \* \*

Detective O'Brian was on the beltway. There's an exit here somewhere. He was thinking. It's exit thirty something. He hadn't even seen a number over twenty five yet. He drove further. He saw a sign for Chevy Chase. He knew that meant he was getting close. He had to drive through Chevy Chase to get to the Sheraton Washington.

\* \* \* \*

Everything was in place. Mics, cameras, and recording equipment. The room was perfect. Agents were milling about the room. Casually milling.

"Okay, everybody listen up," announced a voice. "I want everyone out of this room, I want you out NOW!" The voice demanded.

The milling came to an end. The room became animated. Men and women were moving about with a purpose. The room was vacated in less than a minute after the announcement.

"Good. Thank God, they are gone!" Marion Rourke said.

"You come through loud and clear," a voice said in his ear.

Marion Rourke was wearing one of the state-of-the-art earphones. It was small enough to fit inside his ear. Nothing showed outside. It used his body as an antenna. It had a short range, but certainly large enough to work inside this room. The room had broadcast stations enveloping the room with a field. The earphone should work regardless of where Marion was in the room.

"So did you. This thing is amazing," Marion reported.

"Good. That's really good. Now, we'll be out of touch with you while you two are at dinner. But, when you come back to the room, we'll be able to talk to you again," said the voice.

"You'll still pick me up, right?" Marion asked.

Joseph A. Sabin Jr.

"Oh, yeah, don't worry about that. I just won't be able to speak to you," the voice said.

"Fine," Marion said while pacing the room.

\* \* \* \*

The Chevy Chase exit was right in front of him. He was in the middle lane.

"Shit, there's my exit."

O'Brian hit the brake, fell behind a car to his right, hit the gas and cut right in front of another car. The horn of the car behind him blared.

"Ah, fuck you," O'Brian said.

He made his exit. Came to a 'T' in the road.

"Shit, which way?"

He looked down at his directions. They said 'South'. Fortunately the light was red. So he had some time. He thought about how he exited and how the road had turned. Left would be south, or close enough for the purpose of directions.

The light turned green while he was still thinking. The guy he cut off was behind him, blowing his horn again. O'Brian turned his head and gestured with a single raised finger. Turned back forward and accelerated, turning the car left.

The city of Washington, DC was finally visible in front of him. He knew he was going the right way. "Whoosh, Beeeeeep!" Went the sound of a car.

O'Brian looked to his left. There was the guy he cut off. He just passed. It was a relief to have him out of the way. O'Brian didn't mean to anger him, but he also didn't want to miss his turn. He was amazed at how upset some people get when a fellow driver makes a simple mistake.

He drove on, checking his directions carefully every few blocks. There's his turn, he thought. He drove through a basically residential area and then to his right he saw, sitting high on a hill. The majestic Hotel Sheraton Washington!

\* \* \* \*

Hawkins was amazed. Cizzano didn't seem to care. He seemed to have already known. She stopped her foreground process, forgetting about the deletion process running in background. She logged off of the computer terminal and shut down the terminal. She gathered her papers neatly into a folder and placed it into her file drawer. She looked around the office. Everything was mostly in place. She walked to the door and left.

\* \* \* \*

Cizzano and Jones were in a meeting. Neither man wanted to work this long on a Saturday, but they had no choice. Two really important things were happening. They had to be available to answer questions. They talked calmly about various possibilities, neither one seemed too worried.

\* \* \* \*

John was reading the codes off to Karen as she typed. She was working much slower than she would have if she was typing words. She worked with only her right index finger, pressing each key and verifying it with John.

"D," John said.



Karen pressed the 'D' key on the keyboard and announced, "David."

"7," John said.

Karen pressed the '7' key on the keyboard and announced, "Seven."

"Enter," John said.

"Enter. End of line 467," Karen sighed.

This had gone on for over an hour. They worked diligently. One character at a time. Although it went fairly fast, it looked like another hour and a half.

"5," John said.

Karen pressed the '5' key on the keyboard and announced, "Five."

John continued to read off the numbers, but he was reaching for something out of the cooler. Karen saw what he was doing.

"John, grab me a soda," Karen asked.

"What kind?" John asked.

"There's only one kind I like, the other kind is for you," Karen snipped.

"Okay."

John got out two sodas and handed Karen her's. He had opened both before handing it to Karen. It spilled on the desk, just missing the keyboard.

"Shit! I didn't think it was open," complained Karen.

"Yup. I'll get some paper towels," John said. He stood and walked to the bathroom labeled 'Boys'. He could not believe how small everything was. The sinks were at his knee height. The paper dispensers were about six inches higher. He grabbed a paper towel and left the bathroom.

"Here you go," John said to Karen.

"Thanks. Sorry I snapped. Why don't we stop and get something to eat."

"Yeah, let's."

Karen grabbed the picnic basket. She opened it with flair. Inside there was a table cloth, napkins and...

John was peering over the edge. He was trying to see inside. He was much hungrier than he even realized.

Karen blocked his view. She wanted to have the picnic have a surprise effect. She fluffed the table cloth high into the air and let it billow down to the floor. The basket was closed and John's hand got slapped playfully when he tried to open it.

John sat down beside the part of the table cloth he decided was his. He silently agreed to wait for Karen.

She continued grabbing things out of the basket. One after the other, things appeared on the cloth. The picnic became a magic event. Crystal wine glasses, a bottle of wine, china plates.

John started to wonder if there was any food in the basket. He was hungry and the show wasn't getting on the road nearly fast enough.

"Karen, is there any FOOD in that basket?" John asked.

He was ignored. Karen was on a roll. Napkins next to the plates, knives, forks, spoons. A basket of bread, a butter tray with a cover!

"Karen!" John complained.

Ignored again. The basket was empty. No food except the bread.

"Bread, wine and me," said Karen in a silly paraphrase of a famous line. She had a sly look in her eyes.

"That's lunch?" John asked.

"You had lunch!" Karen defended.

"So. I'm hungry," John whined.

"So eat bread," Karen said. Karen was clearly disappointed in John's reaction to her picnic. But something was up. John didn't know what. He waited. Karen knew he was waiting, so she kept quiet, cut the bread into thick diagonal slices.

"Karen, are you serious?" John asked.

She continued with her bread slicing. A flicker of a smile appeared on her face. She started to laugh, "gotcha!"

"So there is more!" John almost shouted.

"Yeah, there's lasagna. Didn't you see it when you opened the cooler?" Karen said.

"No."

"Well, it's there."

"We gonna eat it cold?"

John got a sneering look on his face. Deeply disappointed by the thought of eating his food cold.

"No, there's an electronic oven in the other room. I'll go heat it up," Karen admonished.

"Well, how was I to know?" John reacted. Karen got up, grabbed the cooler, opened it and got the lasagna out. It was in a sealed white container.

"That's why I didn't see it," John defended.

"Yeah, but what did you think this big white thing was?" Karen chided.

"I didn't. I was looking for something to drink. I found that and closed the cooler before it got warm."

"Baby." Karen got up and walked into the teachers' lounge. It wasn't much of a lounge. It had a bathroom at one end, shared by all the teachers. It also had a couch and four chairs. All were well worn. There was a table with four caned chairs around it. All the caning was in a state of disrepair. At the end of the room was an old electronic oven. Must have been twenty years old.

She loaded the lasagna into the oven and looked at the controls. This one was so old it only had low, high and a timer. She set it to low and the timer to two minutes. She pressed the start button and it roared into action.

The beeper almost made her jump out of her skin. She walked up to the oven and opened the door. She felt the lasagna.

"Another two minutes should do it," she said.

Karen pressed the repeat button and the oven roared into action again. The light inside the oven didn't work any longer. She couldn't see how it was progressing. She just hoped. It beeped and she opened the door. The sauce was bubbling and it looked thoroughly hot. Cheese was melted out the sides and even the container was hot.

"Done!" she said. Karen looked around for something on which to carry the food. She found a newspaper. Good enough she thought. She opened the door and returned to John.

John was buttering bread and shoving it down his throat.

"Didn't know you were that hungry," Karen said as she entered the room.

John jumped at her voice. He didn't hear the door open. Her presence was a surprise.

"Didn't hear you come in. Is the lasagne ready?"

"Yup. It's bubbling hot, so be careful. That oven is old and I couldn't set the temperature like on ours," Karen warned.

John sliced off a piece. It steamed like crazy. He put it on his plate, the cheese was melted and stretched in long stringy lines from the container to his plate. He reached out and pinched them off and carried them to his plate. He made a neat pile of them beside the slice of lasagna.

Karen watched.

John grabbed the remaining half and brought it to Karen's plate. The cheese stretched as before. He neatly tied off the strings and placed them on Karen's plate.

There was a little cheese and sauce left in the container. John divvied it up between their two plates.

"Very impressive," Karen remarked.

"Let's eat!" John said.

"Hot!" Karen said.

The first fork full was on its way to John's mouth. John had it in his mouth. It was out of his mouth, back on its way to his plate in about a hundredth of a second. "HOT!" John echoed.

He grabbed his soda and dumped a mouthful into his mouth. He swallowed. He took more and swished it around his mouth.

"Shit, I hate when I do that!"

"I told you it was hot," Karen said.

"Yeah, but this is molten," John said.

He took another swig of his soda. It was gone. He grabbed the bottle of wine, tore off the foil and saw there was a cork. Quaint, he thought.

"Did you bring a corkscrew?" he asked Karen.

"Yes, it's in the basket," Karen answered.

John grabbed the basket, found the corkscrew and began opening the bottle. It proved to be a stubborn cork. John placed the bottle between his thighs while he knelt on the floor. He held the bottle with his legs while he pulled with both his hands. He twisted slightly as he pulled. The cork gave up its hold.

"THU-RUPT-POP" Went the bottle.

"Ah," sighed John, happily.

Karen lifted her glass and waited as John filled it.

"That's not the right way to do it," John said.

"Girls first," Karen said flirting.

"No, boys first with a little, then girls," John corrected.

"So."

"So, I like to do it right," John said.

"You didn't and I'm glad."

"Why?"

"'Cause, I've got my wine and you don't," Karen answered.

John shook his head, grabbed his glass and poured some wine. He held the glass up and said, "a toast."

"To good sex!" said Karen.

"To getting all these codes in correctly," John said.

Glasses clinked and husband and wife drank the glasses dry. John poured more and they both ate. Safely this time.

"What are these little things that look like lizard eyes?" John asked.

"What?"

"Lizard eyes, these things, what are they?"

"That's buckwheat," Karen answered.

"Oh. I never saw that before in your lasagna. Just wondered. It tastes great," John said.

"Thanks."

They ate for the longest time without saying a word. Karen sliced more bread. John shoved six or seven more pieces down his throat. They finished up and John said, "let's get back to the codes."

"Okay. Can we drink our wine?" Karen asked.

"Sure. Why not."

They started back. Same as before, John read off letter or number at a time. Karen typed it and repeated it. They were being careful, just like Miller asked.

"You know what Karen?"

"What John?"

"I bet this is perfect when we're done."

"I hope so." And on they went.

\* \* \* \*

"May I help you sir?" Janet asked.

O'Brian knew her name was Janet by the tag she wore on her smart burgundy blazer.

"Yes, I'm here to see a guest," O'Brian answered.

"And what is their name?" Asked Janet.

"Rourke, Marion Rourke. R-O-U-K..."

Janet interrupted. "Yes sir, we have a guest by that name. I'll ring the room. You can use the white courtesy phone to your left."



O'Brian looked left. There was a comfortable looking chair in front of a small desk. On it was a telephone. It was white. He assumed that was the phone to which Janet referred. He started over to it.

"Sir?" Janet said firmly.

"Yes?"

"Who may I say is calling?" Janet asked.

"O'Brian, Bill O'Brian."

Janet wondered if he thought he was agent 007. He kept referring to people by their last name, then full name. She dialed the room number.

"Mr. Rourke?" Janet said.

She paused but a moment and listened.

"Yes sir, I have a Mr. Bill O'Brian to see you."

She paused.

"Oh of course, yes sir, I can do that. Good-bye," Janet said.

O'Brian had just seated himself in the chair. He looked up at Janet and she motioned him to come back to the front desk. He made a slight face and stood. He walked slowly to the desk. He was stiff from the drive.

"Sir, Mr. O'Brian, I'm sorry. Mr. Rourke asked me to send you up to his room," Janet told O'Brian.

"Okay. Where's his room?"

"It's room 1137. You take the elevator around the corner." Janet was pointing toward a corner.

O'Brian looked where she was pointing. He nodded.

"Take it to the eleventh floor and you will take a left out of the elevator area," Janet told O'Brian.

"Thank you," O'Brian said.

"You're very welcome," Janet smiled.

O'Brian turned away from the desk.

"May I help you ma'am?" Janet said.

O'Brian walked toward the elevator. A well-dressed man waited at the elevator. They waited together in silence.

# CHAPTER

# TWENTY FIVE

"So, do you think that John's friend Miller really figured out how to make those codes into a program?" Ted asked.

"How should I know. John seems to think so. He and Karen left with a mission," Theresa answered.

The two of them had been sitting reading books for the past two hours. Ted had started to pace just a moment before speaking. He sat back down and picked up his book. He thumbed through the pages until he reached his spot. He started to read again.

Theresa thought he wanted to talk. She looked at him. Stared is a better term. She stared for a few minutes. Ted never looked her way. She stopped, looked down at the book that sat on her leg. It was opened, she picked it up and saw that she had bent the left hand page almost in half.

"Shit," Theresa said.

"What?" Ted asked.

"Nothing really, I just bent the page. It's not my book. I borrowed it from Joan."

Ted almost stood at the mention of Joan's name. He thought back at how they had acted toward each other. They were like teens in the car. Theresa won't be any help. He can't ask Karen. Even though she would help, he felt weird asking. Asking a personal favor from a subject. Nah, couldn't do that.

Theresa saw his reaction. It made her feel bad. She wondered how Ted felt about her. She may not have the chance to find out, not if Joan and Ted get together before this case is resolved.

"Hey Ted, why didn't Jones flip when he heard about the program code?" Theresa asked.

"I don't know. It was as if he expected it. He just said, "Uh-huh," nothin' else. Except he had to go and talk with Cizzano," Ted answered.

Theresa started to think maybe they were closer to the end of their project than they suspected. Maybe this is the end. This program resolves an issue. Stops the one process and begins another.

"Ted, do you think this could be the end of our work on this case?" Theresa posed.

"Could be. They really seem to be keeping us in the dark about this. I just can't imagine what it could be."

"Did anyone tell you what they found out?" Theresa asked.

"No. Maybe they found out the codes don't mean anything. Maybe it's a happy birthday wish or something," Ted answered.

Theresa picked her book up again and began reading. She was rubbing the page with her finger as she read. She was hoping she could make it go flat enough that it wouldn't show and make her look bad.

Ted stared at her for a moment, then picked his book up and began reading. He got involved deeply with the book when the phone rang. He nearly jumped. It was right next to the chair he was seated.

"Hello?" Ted said.

"Ted, Jones. The codes have been turned into a program. That program, if deciphered by the Parkers will end your surveillance work."

"Oh!" Ted said.

Theresa put the book down with that word. Ted said it with such force she knew it must be Jones. She mouthed the question 'Who is it?'.

Ted shook his head slightly and very quickly, saying in a motion not to press. Not now. He was listening to Jones.

Theresa tilted her head and questioned him.

Ted turned away from her. She was distracting his concentration. He needed to hear what Jones had to say.

"These people will need their friends. You guys are neighbors and friends. They will use you as support. You will not be needed as surveillance, but as support," Jones said going on.

"But, don't we want to know what they are doing?" Ted asked.

"Yes, but we must not have you two knowing too much. They may lean on you. If they do, you need to be as sincere as possible. Knowing what's going on may jeopardize that," Jones explained.

"So, what do the codes produce?" Ted asked.

"This is an 'as needed knowledge', Ted, you don't need to know." Jones answered.

"What?" Was Ted's reply.

"You don't need to know," Jones repeated.

"So what do we do?" Ted asked. "Same as up to now. I'm just letting you know that things may change. If they do, they may be different tomorrow morning. That's all Ted," Jones said.

"OK."

"Bye," Jones hung up.

Click. The phone line was dead. Ted hung up the phone.

"So what was that all about?" Theresa demanded.

"We may not be on surveillance, but on friend duty," Ted answered.

"What's that mean?" Theresa pressed.

"I don't know. He wouldn't tell me," Ted answered.

"Why not?"

"'Need to know', and we don't need to know," Ted answered.

\* \* \* \*

"0," John said.

Karen pressed the '0' key and said, "Zero."

"Enter," John said.

Karen pressed the enter key and said, "Enter."

"Done," John said.

"Done, did you say done?" Karen said.

"Yes, we are done! That was the last number," John almost screamed.

"YEAH! Oh my God, I thought my back was going to break. We did it, We Did It, WE DID IT!" Karen finally yelled.

Before moving any more, Karen pressed the function key on the computer that caused the machine to save the document and exit the word processor. It finished saving and she cheered. "John, do you think Confederated Deliveries is still open?" Karen asked. She was planning on getting the file onto a cartridge and shipping it over night to Miller. She reached into the drawer under the computer, she brought a cartridge out of the drawer and put it into the slot. "Shit, I forget how to do this," Karen said.

"Click on the file, then click on the image of the cartridge on the screen. It'll copy the file," John said absently.

Karen did as John had told her. It started to copy the file to the cartridge. Karen looked at John. John was packing things up to go. "How did you know that?" Karen asked.

John just looked at her.

"Did you remember from the days you were a programmer?"

"No, I saw it on TV," John replied. John was laughing. All this stuff about the past seems to not be holding true. He doesn't remember anything about computer systems. Nothing at all. The only clear memory he has is of Cheryl. "What a beautiful woman," he said out loud.

"Why thank you." Karen said.

John felt lucky to have avoided a situation. He was thinking about Cheryl and Karen was in the room. Close, very close.

"Got it. The file copied," Karen told John.

"Good. Leave it on the computer until Miller gets this copy. If it doesn't work we can tell him what's wrong," John said.

"How?" Karen asked.



"We'll have to come here and look," John said. "Maybe I should print this out," Karen offered.

"That's a good idea, that'd be the best way. Then if there is something wrong and the program doesn't work we can look for a 'typo'," John said.

Karen glared at him. She knew there were no typos. Her typing had been perfect. "John I didn't make any 'typos'," Karen spat.

"Yeah, I know. But, what else would you call them?"

"Your mistake," Karen said.

She started to laugh. John laughed too. The both laughed really hard. The tension from the past three hours nearly put them both into the loony bin. Now they felt free. Until they found out what the program would tell them.

"Let's go to Confederated Deliveries," Karen said.

"I'm almost packed," John said.

They finished packing everything up. Karen found a box for the cartridge and some crushed paper to pad it. With that they left for Confederated.

John was driving. Karen sat with the package on her lap. They drove for a while, John pulled over to the side of the road.

"Something wrong?" Karen asked.

"Yeah, I didn't bring my wallet, I don't have my license. You have to drive," John answered.

"Right. I forgot," Karen said.

"So did I. It's fine, but you better drive anyway," John said.

He got out of the car and walked around back. Karen took off her seatbelt and slipped over to the driver's side and adjusted the seat. She put the seatbelt on and settled in to drive. She looked over and John was outside the car looking in. He was pointing...pointing to the lock. Karen reached over and unlocked the door.

"Thanks," John said sarcastically.

"Your welcome, I'm sure," Karen smarted back.

They drove off. Karen asked John the way a couple of times. She saw the Confederate trucks ahead. She slowed down to turn into their parking lot. They parked and Karen looked at her watch.

"Shit, I only have a minute," she said.

Karen was running across the lot. A man was outside the door with keys in his hands. He was locking the door.

"Oh no," Karen said.

The man turned around and looked at her. He frowned. But then he smiled when he saw she only had one little box.

"Got an overnighter there?" he yelled.

"Yeah. Just one," Karen responded.

"Ok, I'll take it," the man said.

"Thank you, thank you very much."

They went inside. The man locked the door from the inside. John watched. He didn't like that the man locked the door. He got out of the car and headed toward the building. By the time he was

halfway there, the man was opening the door. Karen was leaving with a yellow slip in her hand. He heard.

"Thank you again. I'm so very grateful," Karen said.

"No problem. Try to make it earlier next time. Your friend will get that first thing Monday morning," the man said.

"Bye."

"Bye," the man said. He locked the door and turned toward the parking lot. He saw John standing there waiting for Karen. He waved to John. John waved back. The man walked to his car and got in. Karen reached John and said.

"Did you worry about me?"

"Yeah, when I saw that guy lock the door. I freaked," John told Karen.

"I was ok. He was a nice man," Karen said as she smiled.

"Yeah, but how was I to know that! I was across the parking lot in the car," John defended his action.

The two walked to the car. Hand in hand. Relaxed. Very much more relaxed than they had been in weeks. Even more so than before all this had started. Every step made them feel more in control. Closer to the truth.

"Let's get home," John said.

"Yeah, let's."

# CHAPTER

# TWENTY SIX

"So what do you want to do with Ted?" Cizzano asked.

The two men have been discussing the disastrous change in the events. Neither one of them could imagine what they were going to do if Miller's friend got the program running. And worse if it revealed the same message.

"Do you really feel it's his fault? I mean, in this instance I can't say I would have spotted those codes," Jones said.

"You would have found the codes. You would have scoured the pages for any hint. Ted is a fuck-up and he may have just fucked up the biggest thing I have ever worked on." Cizzano said.

This silenced Jones. The two men sat trying to stare each other down. Neither one wanted to give an inch. For all the appearances it looked like they were having a calm coffee discussion. As if neither one had a care in the world. The conversation was animated at times, but usually calm and quiet.

"This has to be your call. I was an operative during most of the process. I didn't get to see the insides 'til now." Jones tried to excuse himself from the decision.

"Not that easy Jones. He's your man. It's your decision." Cizzano told him.

"He's not really my man, he reports to Theatrics, doesn't he?" Jones corrected.

"But he's functionally reporting to you, you have the right to make a recommendation. That's what I'm asking for, a recommendation," Cizzano said.

"What would you do?" Jones asked.

"Pull him from the field and ship him off somewhere where the investigations go on for years. A job that won't give us much value, if any," Cizzano answered.

"Where would that be?" Jones asked.

"Request he get transferred to the Bering Strait." Cizzano answered matter-of-factly.

"What's going on there?" Jones asked.

"Russian shipping lane. We watch the trawlers."

"That sounds like a waste," Jones observed.

"Exactly, and cold," Cizzano sneered.

"I don't like it," Jones answered.

"I'll give you two days to decide. If you don't I will send him to a worse place. And you will get demoted. If you can't make a decision like this one, you can't hack the position," Cizzano said.

The two men became quiet again. Jones looked at Cizzano. He couldn't believe he just threatened him.

"Is that a threat?" Jones asked.

"No, the truth," Cizzano answered.

Oh, thought Jones. The truth. That means he really thinks that I'm close to being a fuck-up in my position. If one thing can influence his decision making.

"You think that little of me?" Jones asked.

He was hurt and confused. He hoped the answer he would get from Cizzano wouldn't push him further into despair.

"No, I think highly of you. You were one of the best field agents we had. I just need to take your job for real. I have spent over a decade on this project. Ted probably screwed it up. And but good!" Cizzano said.

"Then I suggest we recommend him for transfer to the west coast office and let them reassign him," Jones said.

"They'll hate you for it," Cizzano warned.

"So, don't they hate us anyway?" Jones asked.

Cizzano laughed. He liked the style and devotion to his people. Cizzano wanted it to look like Ted deserved less. But Ted was a nice guy so Jones didn't want to punish him. He could retire in a year or so and be out of everybody's hair.

"Okay, one condition," Cizzano said.

"What's that?" Jones asked.

"You tell Ted that he has been spared. You tell him he needs to turn in his retirement papers to me before he goes. Those papers will be filed in one year. He's eligible for retirement with half benefits then," Cizzano said.

"Sounds fair," Jones agreed.

"Ted won't think so. But he should like San Francisco better than the strait!" Cizzano laughed.

"Right," Jones agreed.

\* \* \* \*

The elevator door opened. The well-dressed man and O'Brian stepped in. The man pressed the penthouse button, placed a key into the special slot next to the button and turned it. The doors closed and the elevator started its ascent.

"No one else can get on now," the man said. "Oh. Can I get off at a floor?" O'Brian asked.

"Which one?" the man asked.

"Eleven," responded O'Brian.

The man pressed the eleventh floor button. The elevator continued to climb. When it reached the tenth floor the man turned the key. They passed the tenth floor and started to slow. The elevator reached the eleventh floor and it stopped, the doors opened. The man turned the key again. He looked at O'Brian and nodded at the door.

"Thanks," O'Brian said.

"Was nothing."

The door closed, the man and the elevator were gone. O'Brian faced another bank of elevators. To his right was a window overlooking the city. To his left was the hotel. He turned left and began to walk. He reached the hallway and saw a sign. Just as he was told room 1137 was to the left. He turned left, down the hall and started looking for Rourke's room.

The door for 1137 was inset into the hallway. In the same inset was room 1135, just to its right. O'Brian stepped up to the door and knocked. He waited.

O'Brian couldn't hear a thing from inside the room. That's one thing about good hotels. They are quiet. There could be a war going on outside and you wouldn't know it inside. The door opened.



"Detective O'Brian?" said a voice.

"Yes. Are you Marion Rourke?" O'Brian asked.

"I am, please come in" Rourke offered.

O'Brian stepped into the room. He was surprised at the size. It was small. It was the same as every other hotel room he's been in. Well, almost. The decorating was superior, the furniture was in good shape and very nice. The carpet wasn't stained, in fact, it was in almost perfect shape. It had been vacuumed that morning. The lines from the vacuum were still visible. The carpet was so thick it left telltale footprints. O'Brian could see every step made by Rourke.

"Something to drink?" Rourke interrupted.

"Yes, Irish whiskey if you have it, or Scotch," O'Brian answered.

He wondered how this man walked so much. As he looked at the prints he noticed that there were a couple of different sized shoe prints. No bare feet, or stocking feet. All shoes. He looked carefully and he...

"Here you go, it's Scotch. The bar didn't have any Jamison's," Rourke said.

He had interrupted his thinking. He saw woman's high heeled shoe prints. There were a lot of people in this room since it was cleaned up.

"When did you get in?" O'Brian asked.

"About noon," Rourke answered.

"Were the people out of the room in time for you?" O'Brian asked.

"He's on to something," the voice said, "stall him."

"Check in time is three. I pressed and they said they might have a room ready," Rourke said stalling.

The cameras were moving around the room. All the different camera angles were being used.

"What the fuck does he see? Does he smell something? Come on guys, let's figure this one out," Henry Reynolds said.

Henry Reynolds was in charge of a three man, four woman squad. He was pressing them into action. Something was up. What did they leave out?

"The carpet," said a voice.

"What? What about the carpet?" asked Reynolds.

"Look at all the foot prints. There must be a hundred,"

"So, so the guy paces," Reynolds asked.

"Not in woman's shoes,"

"Shit. What do we tell him to say," Reynolds asked.

There are all sorts of ideas flying around the small room. The room was a buzz with thoughts. Nothing sounded right. They kept at it, over one idea to another back again.

"How about the people that moved out of the room came back to get something they left. It was lost and they looked high and low for it," said Peg Gallo.

"Good idea Peg!"

"People came back for a forgotten item. It couldn't be found right away. They looked high and low for it. They became frantic. We finally found it under the bed," Reynolds told Rourke over the mic.

The two men were talking. They were not talking about much. O'Brian still suspected something. Rourke had kept the subject on check in. It was about to change.

"Well, then all of a sudden a room was free. The desk person, ah Janet, yeah that's her name. Said to me that a couple had just checked out. That room could be made up in a few minutes," Rourke continued.

"Oh, I see. Yeah. Not much of a room though is it?" O'Brian said.

"No, it's not. I don't have that much money to spend. I like to stay in nice places. This one is nice and also expensive. Anyway, I get to the room, my stuff was waiting for me. I open my suitcase and there's a knock at the door."

"Who was there?" O'Brian asked.

"I was just getting to that! The people who just left were back. They told me they forgot something. I told them I didn't see anything. They said they were sure. They started looking for it. I was walking behind them as they looked. I wanted to be sure they didn't touch my stuff."

"I can imagine. Any city has its weirdos. Looks like you got your share," O'Brian said.

O'Brian was beginning to see how come there were so many foot prints. He started to relax.

"So these guy start looking in drawers, in the closet, in the bathroom and finally under the bed. They found it under the bed. It was a shoe. Can you believe that?" Rourke said.

"They were worried about a shoe?" O'Brian asked.

"His favorite. So they said. Looks like the cleaning crew pushed it under the bed with the vacuum. Amazing," Rourke concluded.

"Truly amazing. You hungry?" O'Brian asked.

"Sure am. Let's finish our drinks. Then off for, well your choice, Italian, Russian or Chinese," Rourke told him.

"I'd like to have Russian. I could go for a good Stroganoff" O'Brian answered.

"Great. I'll call down for a cab."

\* \* \* \*

"Hey Miller, it's John. We finished the codes. Karen put them onto a cartridge and shipped it via Confederated Deliveries. They said you should have it first thing Monday," John said.

"Good, that was a good choice of carrier. They get to our place before I leave for work," Miller said.

"We shipped it to your office," John said.

"Oh."

"That's okay right?" John was nervous.

"Sure, fine. That's fine. I'll get it there also, it'll just take longer. The mail room has to do their thing with it, but I should have it by noon," Miller said.

"Then what?" John asked.

"Then I give it to Angelo and he tries it out," Miller said.

"Hey John, hold on a second Doreen just yelled for me."

John held on. He could hear the two talking in the background. He could not hear what they were talking about. He waited then heard the receiver moving.

"John, I have to go, Doreen has some people over and dinner is ready. As soon as I know something from Angelo, I'll call you," Miller promised.

"That's fine Miller. Have a nice dinner," John said.

"Bye-bye." Miller said.

# CHAPTER

# TWENTY SEVEN

The sensation of movement was undeniable, though he could see nothing. The motion was smooth, but with little jerks and hesitations, like rolling along on a train. He had the feeling that there were people around, though he heard no voices.

There was a hiss sound followed by a bang. He felt threatened, he went to lift his hand in defense. He could not move his right hand, he tried his left. That too was restrained. His left leg, followed by his right. He could not move. He could not see and he only heard odd sounds. He could not place himself in time or space. Where was he? Panic.

Thrashing his head left and right lifting it off the pillow and pressing back down. Left, right, up, down, again and again. Where did the pillow come from? Who put it there? What is going on?

"Relax John," Cheryl said.

John went to answer. His mouth was held shut. Rather not shut but it was jammed open part way. Why can't I open my mouth? Thought John. The object in his mouth was rigid but not hard. There was a strap under his chin. He felt some pressure on top of his head.

"Mmmfph," John muttered.

"It's going to be okay," Cheryl said.

What's going to be okay? John wanted to say. What is going on? Why can't I see, why can't I speak, why can't I move anything but my head. He suddenly thought he must have been in a car accident. I'm paralyzed.

The motion stopped. There were several voices. There was movement around him. The voices were hushed, he could not make out what they were saying. He was panicking inside.

"Okay, Mr. Parker, just relax. This will only take a few minutes," a male voice told John.

"Mmmmmmmfffphtft," John panic mumbled.

"Just relax John," Cheryl said calmly.

Why won't Cheryl tell me what is going on? John continued to panic.

There were a few beeping sounds. The voices were still talking too low for John to understand. Moments past like hours. John tired of fighting, began to relax.

"It's ready," said a female voice, not Cheryl's.

John felt a feather touch to his brow. A slight movement toward the back of his head. Then, a flash of brilliant light and a pain he has never known. His paralyzed body was filled with a violent fight to move. He felt his tongue going down his throat. His eyes rolled back inside his head, they felt like they were being pushed back. His body felt cold, then hot, then cold again.

The voices were gone.

His body stopped moving. He felt calm but panicked very deep inside. He felt a feather stroke against his brow. He tried to fight.

"Ready sir," came the voice of doom.

Flash, yellow, red, orange. Hot bright light. No cool colors. No greens or blues, just yellow, orange and red. Colors filled his eyes. Though he knew his eyes could not see.

"LET ME GO!" John bellowed. He knew he could not speak, yet he heard his voice.

Karen reached over to him.



"Leave me alone!" he yelled.

"John, relax," Karen said.

"Yeah, that's what you say, then you push my brains out," John yelled. John was a little calmer now.

"John, you had a dream," Karen said.

"Dream?" John said.

"Yeah, you fell asleep watching TV," Karen said.

"Whoa, God that was no dream, that was a full-fledged nightmare," John said. He was still shaking. He looked at Karen as if he didn't trust her. He felt his arms and legs. He looked at his hands. Everything worked and was there and free.

"What happened?" Karen asked.

"Pain and restriction," John answered.

"What kind of pain?" Karen probed.

"This is what I remember. I could not see, I could not move anything except my head. I could not speak for something in my mouth and a brace holding my mouth shut," John started.

"Where were you?" Karen asked.

"I don't know, I couldn't see!" John yelled.

"Okay, okay. Tell me more," Karen asked calmly.

"I remember being rolled around. I remember people, people I couldn't see, but could hear their footsteps. When I was moved, I

know that because I could feel motion, the movement was not entirely smooth. It had turns and uneven pressure on the thing I was lying on," John said.

"What did that feel like?" Karen asked.

"What did what feel like?" John asked back.

"The thing you were lying on?" Karen defined.

"It was soft, I think. There was a pillow," John said.

"A pillow?"

"Yeah, I remember that because when I moved my head around I would come down on something soft. I figured it was a pillow. You know how a pillow hits your neck and head that certain way?" John said.

"Yeah, I didn't question if you knew what it was, I was just amazed that there was a pillow," Karen said.

"Right, you know, so was I. That clearly sticks in my mind as strange," John said.

"What was the pain?" Karen prodded.

"I felt a feather touch my brow and then a massive amount of pain followed it. Oh, yeah, and just before that, a woman said 'It's ready'," John said much calmer.

"John you've got to stop eating all that spicy food!" Karen kidded John.

"I don't think it's that Karen. I don't know where this came from, but boy it sure was scary. I'm glad I'm awake," John said.

"Do you want a beer?" Karen asked.

"Yeah, make it six!" John joked.

"One for now," Karen corrected.

Karen stood, looked down at John. He looked okay. She walked to the kitchen and opened the fridge to get a beer. She took the second to last one out and grabbed the bottle of white wine. She closed the door and got a wine glass out of the cabinet. Next she poured a half glass and recorked the bottle and placed it back into the fridge. Grabbing the glass and bottle of beer and walked back to join John in the living room.

When she arrived back in the living room, John was not there. She looked around and then called out. "John, where'd you go?"

"Bathroom," Came the muffled reply. The toilet flushed and a rather pale version of John appeared.

"Here's your beer John," Karen said.

John took the beer from Karen's hand and looked at the neck. It hadn't been opened. He plopped carelessly onto the couch. If the bottle had been open he would have put it down first. He grabbed the twist off top and gave it a twist. It spun in his hand putting a small cut on his hand between the index finger and his thumb.

The cut didn't bleed right away, so he put the bottle under his shirt and gave it another twist. The cap gave in and came off. He left a small spot of blood on his shirt. It was just a knock-around shirt, so he didn't care.

Karen looked over at John, saw his, now fiercely bleeding hand, and went to the kitchen for a paper towel.

"Here John. Sorry I didn't open that for you," Karen said. She handed him the towel. He took it and looked down at his hand. "Shit, I didn't think it did that much damage. Why don't they make these things smoother?" he asked no one.

"I don't know. And easier to remove," said Karen. Karen never twisted off tops, she always used a bottle opener. She didn't want to build up a callous like John had from opening bottles that way.

"I may need stitches," John joked.

The bleeding hadn't stopped. It almost soaked the towel.

"Am I dreaming this?" John asked.

"No, come to the kitchen," Karen ordered.

They both went to the kitchen. John followed Karen. Karen flicked the switch to a big overhead light. It illuminated the whole kitchen.

"Give me you hand," Karen told John.

John brought his hand up and placed it into Karen's waiting hand. Karen turned on the water and washed the blood away.

"There's something shiny in there." She announced. She touched the wound and John nearly jumped.

"Ouch. That hurts," John yelled.

"It's a piece of glass, hold still," Karen ordered. Karen was able to grasp the shard and pull it out of John's hand. John's body jumped around a little, but his hand kept still.

"Baby, hold still!" Karen yelled quietly.

"It hurts and gives me the willies," John said.

Karen removed the shard and shoved John's hand under the water again. She looked at the area and announced, "I got it!"

"Great, let me go sit down," John moaned.

"Not yet. This needs a bandage," Karen said.

"Okay, Nancy-Nurse, go ahead, bandage me up," John said teasingly.

"Oh go bleed all over," Karen said. She pushed his hand away and pouted.

John looked at her pained expression and said, "sorry. Could you bandage my hand?"

"No."

"Why not?"

"Because."

"Because why?"

""cause I don't want to any more."

"Come on Karen! Look at all the blood. I may lose too much and die," John said.

"You won't die," Karen laughed. She grabbed his hand, took gauze out of the cabinet and began 'nursing' his hand. She wrapped it with a self-stick gauze wrap after the pad. Just to be sure, she added a piece of adhesive tape to the end of the wrapping gauze.

John looked at his hand, it was throbbing. There was a little red dot. He could feel his stomach twitch. His knees got weak. Good

thing it was a minor injury. He left to go sit down. He sat and grabbed the beer bottle. He looked at the neck before drinking. It was broken. The threads were all cracked and no way could he drink from it.

"Karen, this bottle is broken," John announced.

"I'll get you the another one," Karen yelled in.

"Thanks. Ah..." John said. Karen interrupted. "I'll open it first."

They both knew they didn't need that again. Karen returned to the room with an open beer bottle.

"I checked, this one is okay," Karen told him.

"Thanks," John replied.

"It's also the last," Karen said.

"Oh. There are a few of Miller's brews in the cellar. I'll have one of those after this one," John solved the problem.

\* \* \* \*

O'Brian brought the knot in his tie up to his collar and fixed up the neck. He checked his jacket. The left pocket flap was partially tucked, he untucked it and it stuck out at a diagonal. He decided to tuck them both in. He didn't like that look, but it was better than totally sloppy.

The two men walked into the restaurant.

"Two for dinner?" The maitre d'hotel asked.

"Yes," Rourke answered.

"Reservations?"

"Rourke," Rourke responded.

"Very good. It will be a few moments. If you would follow me to our cocktail lounge."

The two men followed. They were seated at a very nice table.

"I will return when your table is prepared."

They both acknowledged him and he left.

A girl approached the table. "May I get you men a drink," she asked.

This was not a girl, this was their cocktail waitress. She looked thirteen, obviously wasn't. She wore noticeably short skirt, a ruffled white blouse and matching apron. The blouse was cut to fall over both shoulders and reveal cleavage when the woman leaned over the table. Improves tips. So the management assumed. A peasant blouse, they used to be called. Silly, thought O'Brian, though he did not object to the view.

"Yes, please. I'll have a Jamison's neat," O'Brian said.

"Make that two," Rourke replied.

"My pleasure."

The woman walked away. Rourke followed with his eyes. Her skirt flipped with each step.

"What do you think?" Rourke asked.

"Of what?" O'Brian knew.

"That babe," Rourke said.

"That, woman, could be either one of our's daughter. She seemed very nice," O'Brian said.

"Nice, that's an understatement," Rourke said. He shook his hand.

"Let's drop it, okay?" O'Brian said. O'Brian thought about his wife. She is one of the sexiest women he ever met. Their life has been hell since she started working the midnight shift. Thank God that is going to end. He didn't need this conversation. He needed to have his wits about him.

The drinks arrived. So did a bill. "Could you initial this please?" The waitress asked.

"Sure." O'Brian put his initials on the check and the waitress picked it up. "Thanks. Your table should be ready in a minute." She walked away. This time O'Brian followed her with his gaze.

"She is a fine looking woman," Rourke said.

"Yes, she sure is. Silly outfits though," O'Brian countered.

"If you've got it, flaunt it," Rourke said.

"Can we get back to the subject at hand?" O'Brian asked.

"Sure. What was it?" Rourke laughed.

Both men laughed at that. Much too hard, much too loud for their environment. Neither one cared.

Their host arrived. "This way 'Gentleman', your table is ready."

There was a twist on the word gentlemen. A not so subtle put-down. They followed him into a room with deep colors, rich



woodwork and a man walking around playing a violin. The food smelled terrific. O'Brian's mouth began to water.

\* \* \* \*

Chekov introduced himself as their waiter. O'Brian remembered an old TV show where a member of the futuristic bridge crew was named Chekov, or something like that.

"Are you really going to have Stroganoff?" Rourke asked.

"Yeah, I like it, haven't had it in a big city for years and am dying to have it," O'Brian defended.

"But it's so, ah, so..."

"Stereotypical?" O'Brian asked.

"Yeah. Stereotypical. That's it. Why not try something different?" Rourke asked.

"I had a friend, everywhere he went, he had chili. It made most of use crazy, but he loved chili."

"So, do you have Stroganoff everywhere you go?" Rourke asked.

"Every Russian restaurant, yes. This'll be my third time. So get off it," O'Brian was getting upset.

"Fine, I'm having Chicken Kiev," Rourke said.

Rourke had a smirk on his face. He waited. O'Brian looked at him, raised his eyebrows. Both men broke up laughing. They laughed harder than they had in the bar. They couldn't stop. They were attracting attention and neither man cared.

"Well, aren't we the men about town!" O'Brian snorted.

Both men laughed even louder and more out of control. They felt they were on the verge of being asked to leave. Management was looking their way.

"Fuck them," Rourke laughed.

"Yeah, if they kick us out, we've had free bread and liquor," agreed O'Brian.

The two men got control of themselves. They were breathing heavy. Little snorts of laughter snuck out between breaths. They did not dare look at one another. The laughter would break out again.

Chekov returned.

Both men had thought the same thing about Chekov. When they saw him they started to laugh hard again.

"Is ewrey ting all right?" Chekov asked.

This pushed the laugh button again. Both men cracked up. They were laughing like old buddies. These men had no history, yet they were having the time of their lives.

"Yeah, everything is fine," O'Brian said.

"We're ready to order," Rourke added.

"Fine," Chekov waited.

"I'll have the Chicken Kiev, and my friend will have the Stroganoff," Rourke ordered for them both.

O'Brian was surprised by this. He looked at Rourke. Rourke just shrugged.

"You both have a choice of vechtibals. You get a potato, and a choice of, broccoli, gren beans, or sweet corn." Chekov told them.

"I'll have sweet corn," O'Brian answered for himself.

"Broccoli," Rourke said.

"Wery good," Chekov said. Chekov removed the menus and marched off to place their orders.

The two men had laugh tremors still. Chekov's Russian accent, although predictable, still struck them funny. Everything was striking them funny. They were like two giddy children. O'Brian thought about it. He had no idea what got into him. He will have a difficult time determining if this man is telling him the truth.

"Marion, do you mind if I record our conversation?" O'Brian asked.

"Ah, why?" Rourke asked.

"We're having such a good time, I know I'll end up not getting all this down on paper. Does it matter?" O'Brian asked.

"There are people who will kill me for what I am going to tell you. Yes, I mind, don't record it," Rourke said.

\* \* \* \*

"Kill you my eye. Jackson, you sure can lay it on thick," Reynolds said.

"What are they going on about?" Gallo asked.

"That's a good question. They are having the time of their lives aren't they?" Reynolds concurred.

The other staff were out getting dinner. Peg Gallo and Henry Reynolds were alone in their vigil. Peg manned the recorders, Henry the receivers.

"I'm hungry with all this talk of food," Gallo said.

"Tell me about it. I skipped lunch like an ass," Reynolds agreed. "Hopefully those guys get back soon with the burgers," Reynolds continued.

"Yeah. Shakes too," Gallo agreed.

\* \* \* \*

Their salads arrived. Chekov didn't tell them about salad, but it looked good. Both men dove into the salad like they hadn't eaten all day. O'Brian's stomach was flipping from nerves and from all the coffee he had consumed. Rourke had lunch, but was still hungry.

"Good dressing!" exclaimed O'Brian.

"Really. I guess they just have house dressing here," Rourke agreed.

"Yeah. But I'm glad for the salad. I was shoving the bread down, but this tastes much better." O'Brian had been eating slice after slice of Russian rye bread, piling it with the herbed butter. He didn't know that it was butter at first, it tasted like a cheese. But the herbs altered the flavor. Rourke had assured him it was butter and he was to use it on the bread.

"Shall we get down to it?" O'Brian asked between bites.

"Okay. You want to start?" Rourke asked.

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\* \* \* \*

"Of course he wants to start!" Reynolds yelled.

"He can't hear you," Gallo said.

"I know that, but what is he doing?"

"Being friendly," Gallo answered.

The door of the media truck opened. Two big bags entered the truck attached to a hand. Peg grabbed one of the bags out of the hand. "Burgers!" Gallo shouted.

"Let me have one," Reynolds almost begged.

The two ignored the men entering the truck. They were too busy eating their burgers.

\* \* \* \*

"No, why don't you tell me a little about how you know Doctor Peterson," O'Brian said.

"Sure, I studied under Professor Peterson in West Virginia State University during my sophomore year."

"Wait, wait a minute. Professor Peterson? I've gone through his records, he was never a professor," O'Brian interrupted.

"He was. A visiting professor to 'State'. Anyway, he was teaching theory of recombinant DNA. He spoke about his research at the complex."

"The complex he now works at?" O'Brian asked.

"Yes, that complex," Rourke answered.

"Okay, sorry, go on."

"Is ewery ting okay?" Chekov asked.

He had come out of no where. O'Brian jumped, he had been looking down at his notes. Rourke had seen him one second before he spoke.

"Fine, everything is fine," Rourke said.

Chekov left and hovered over another table.

"Shit, that was a shock." O'Brian said.

"Don't worry, I don't think he'll sneak up on you again," Rourke said.

"Continue, please," O'Brian urged.

"So, let's see... oh yeah. He was very excited about DNA research. He told us about what he was doing, how it was getting to be a commercially viable process. He urged us to consider a career in recombinant DNA," Rourke finished.

"So, did you have any other contact with him at that time?" O'Brian asked.

"No, one lecture a week. There were a thousand of us in the lecture hall. He couldn't have even known I was there. I found his talks very moving. I changed my major to biochemistry," Rourke said.

"Go on."

"When I graduated, I sought him out. He ignored my calls and my letters so I decided to pay him a visit. I went to his house. I spent

weeks finding out where he lived. It was easier because he had a listed phone number. But I had a large number of areas to look. I never guessed he would be living in the ritzy area he lived in," Rourke finished.

"How did he respond when you found him?" O'Brian asked.

A smaller Russian man was removing their salad plates. Both men had cleaned the plates. He did not even have to ask if they were done. If not, they would have to have been planning to eat the plates next.

He left their area, so Rourke continued.

"I just knocked on his door. Mrs. Peterson answered. She was very gracious. She invited me in, introduced me to her husband and asked if I would like some tea."

That sounded about right, thought O'Brian.

"Did the doctor join you?" he asked.

"Yes. He was grumpy at first. He calmed down and was very nice by the time Mrs. Peterson brought the tea. His wife had a strong affect on his behavior," Rourke said.

"Yes, I know that. She is a wonderful woman," O'Brian added.

"Yes she is. He was a remarkable man too," Rourke said.

The two men paused and sipped their drinks. O'Brian had finished his a minute ago and he only got a drop in his mouth. Rourke saw that and signaled to Chekov.

"Yes sir?" Chekov asked.

"Another round please," Rourke said.

"Wery good."

Neither man laughed this time. Chekov felt better about that. He wondered about those men, but now he knew they were not laughing at him. He left to retrieve their drink order. He, as of yet, did not know what they were drinking.

"You said remarkable, not extraordinary, or nice or any other adjective. How did you perceive him as a person?" O'Brian asked.

"He was a son-of-a-bitch. He was a money grubbing, back stabbing SOB," Rourke said adamantly.

O'Brian was taken aback by that statement. He let it sink in a moment before continuing. He thought about why this man pursued the doctor when he felt that way about him.

Chekov returned with two fresh drinks. "Gentlemen," Chekov said. He placed their drinks in front of them and picked up the empty glasses. The he placed the glasses on his tray and asked, "is there any ting else?"

"No, that's it right now," O'Brian assured him.

Chekov left as quietly as he had arrived.

"An SOB aye? Why do you say that? Did you know it before pursuing him?" O'Brian asked.

"He was very self serving. That's why I called him an SOB. I sought him out because he spoke of opportunity. I needed something new, something exciting to get me out of the middle of nowhere. That's were I was living. And finally, no, I did not know he was an SOB when I pursued him for a position," Rourke answered.

"When did you find out?" O'Brian asked.



"That he was an SOB?"

"Right."

"A week after I started at the complex. He didn't do anything to me, but after my initial week, some of the guys warned me to stay out of his way," Rourke answered.

All of Rourke's answers had been researched. They were a fictional account of a composite employee working with Peterson. Theatrics had done their homework. They found almost twenty people who worked with Peterson willing to talk about him. All but one hated his guts. Five said they were glad he was dead.

\* \* \* \*

John was still clearly shaken. He was sitting slumped down in the couch watching TV. The news was on. Nothing new, just a rehash of all the bad news they had heard last night. Different people, different places, but it was all the same, rape, murder, traffic problems and corrupt officials.

"Let's turn it off," John said.

"Okay," Karen said.

"Do we have any books I haven't read?" John asked hopeful.

"Yeah. I just got a pile from Joan."

"Where are they?" John asked.

"On the hutch." Karen said, and pointed to the pile of books sitting on the hutch. John wasn't thinking clearly at all. He looked, nodded his head and got up to retrieve a book.

John reached for the books. There were a variety. Good he thought. One about love, nah. One about the mob, nah. One about the west, nah. Then one caught his eye; 'Rebuilding The Past'. It was listed as Nonfiction. It was about recombinant DNA being used to bring back extinct species of animals. He put the others down and returned to his spot on the couch.

The cushion had pulled almost all the way out. It looked like the couch was sticking its tongue out at John. He lifted the back cushion and pushed the seat back in. Karen looked at him, stood and allowed all the cushions to be returned to their starting positions. Karen and John sat in unison.

John opened the book and began to read.

\* \* \* \*

The scream of sirens and the flashing of the red and blue lights into their house caused both John and Karen to jump from their seats. They both rushed to the front door.

Two doors down, three state police cars were stopped, each pointing at odd angles at Ted and Theresa's house. Several cops were behind doors and pointing guns at the front door of the house.

"Holy-Shit! What the hell is going on?" John said.

"I don't know. But it looks big. Is Ted into drugs?" Karen asked.

"Not that I'm aware," John answered. He stared out the front window.

Three cars, six cops and a bullhorn that blared, "Theodore Robins!"

There was a pause. No cop moved, all eyes and guns were focused on the house. John noticed that there were flashing lights the next

block back. They have the house surrounded. Just like in the movies.

"Come out with your hands in clear view. We have the house surrounded. There is nowhere to hide," the voice boomed.

"What could he have done?" Karen asked.

"I don't know. This is is not possible," John answered. The front door of the house opened. A figure appeared. It was Ted. His hands were in the air, almost stereotypical old west, 'hands in the air'.

"Are you Theodore Robins?" bellowed the voice.

Ted said something. John and Karen couldn't hear. They could barely hear the bullhorn. Ted was not armed.

"Come forward and place your hands on one of the cars. Spread your legs and freeze," the voice ordered.

Ted moved forward to one of the cars. All eyes were on him. He was not armed, the feeling eased as the officers realized that. Ted put his left, then right hand on the hood of a police car. He leaned, slid his feet back into a position of submission. Three cops moved to him. The remainder aimed their guns at the house.

John could not contain himself. "I'm going out there," he announced.

"John, don't," Karen ordered.

Too late, the door was opened, John was outside. Some attention shifted to him. He was shouting something. A cop left his post, came toward John, his gun was pointed at John. John didn't stop, he was almost running toward Ted.

"What did he do?" yelled John.

"Stop, stop where you are," yelled the officer in pursuit.

The two were running almost full speed now. The officer overtook John, he holstered his weapon and jumped to tackle John. He put him to the ground easily. John took a swing at the officer. The officer countered with a swift movement of his arm and baton. The officer reached and retrieved his handcuffs. John's right hand was in a cuff before Karen got out the door. His left hand was cuffed and he was jerked to his feet when Karen hit the sidewalk.

"Don't, he didn't do anything!" Yelled Karen.

People were pouring out of their houses at this point. All over the street, the cops had lost control of the situation. One cop was on the radio. Their backup was appearing from the other side of the block. An angry mob was forming. John was a friend and a good neighbor to most of the people on the block, they were upset with the way he was being treated.

There was the sound of a helicopter overhead. Then a bullhorn, "please, return to your homes. Everything is alright. Everything is under control," came the voice.

"Like hell it is," yelled Karen.

John was in a squad car. He was sitting with his hands secured behind him. Ted was in another car. Karen was yelling and getting the whole neighborhood in a frenzy.

A neighbor walked up to Karen, he tapped her on the shoulder. Karen was crying. She looked at him, they made eye contact, it was their next door neighbor. Karen broke down and fell on to his shoulder crying.

"What's going on?" he asked.

"I don't know. Ted was getting arrested by six cops, John flipped and ran out the door yelling. Now he's arrested too," Karen sobbed.

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"It'll be fine. The cops didn't arrest John, they are detaining him so he doesn't disturb their arrest. John got a little carried away."

"More than a little. But that's John," Karen was still sobbing.

The cars started to move. Each one backed up from where it had stopped to arrest Ted. Karen lifted her head and saw the action.

"Shit, they're leaving!" she yelled. Karen was running in circles. She didn't know what to do.

Her neighbor said, "wait, let's go to the police station and see what charges, if any, are being filed against John," Chris Neary said. He waved to his wife Marsha to join them. Marsha was talking with Theresa. She waved him off.

"Let's go and talk to them," Chris suggested.

"Okay, but we need to get to the police station really soon," Karen said.

The two of them walked up to Marsha and Theresa. Theresa was really upset, she was crying. Inside the house, their mother was also crying. She was looking out the window, wringing her hands, tears flowing down her face.

Ted looked back at them. What an act, amazing. No wonder they made it a surprise. He hoped it was the agency that was moving him. Otherwise, he didn't know what was going on.

"We're going to the station," Chris announced.

"Oh, good," Theresa said.

"Will there be room for Ted's mother?" Karen asked.

"Yes, I'll bring the van," Chris said.

"We'll wait here, okay Chris?" Marsha asked.

"Fine, I'll get the van. Go get Ted's mother ready to go." Chris made sure the women were okay with the concept before he left to get his van. He ran to the house. He had not dressed for the occasion, he had bare feet and no coat.

The four women were waiting inside the house when Chris returned with the van. He pulled into the driveway with the van, got out and walked to the front door. The van was running, he knocked. Theresa got the door.

"Come in Chris. We're ready, but come in."

"Thanks," Chris responded.

Everybody was horrified by the events that just transpired. No one understood. Theresa began to understand, but not really. Karen knew John had gotten himself into trouble with his attitude, but he always was radical. 'Mom' was torn up inside. She didn't expect this, and thought it was very unfair to Theresa and her to do this.

\* \* \* \*

"What the hell did you do that for?" Jones yelled.

"Had to." Cizzano answered.

"Well, that's no answer. Ted was a friend to both John and Karen. Theresa cared about him and 'Mom' is such a good method actress, that she's probably torn as well. It stinks," Jones said.

"It may stink, but I had to let Ted know that he fucked up. You were going to give him a farewell party I assume?" Cizzano said sarcastically.

"NO! I was going to let him know, but your plan stinks. Don't you think it affects the plans?" Jones asked. "Anything affects the plans."

"Well, now John has been arrested. What do we do now?"

"Let Karen bail him out," Cizzano answered.

Cizzano had gone too far, thought Jones. He was acting in a completely unprofessional manner. This arrest proved to him that Cizzano was not mentally balanced. Jones felt he was reporting to a madman.

\* \* \* \*

The five piled into the car. Chris driving, Marsha beside him, Theresa, Karen and 'Mom' in the first rear seat. 'Mom' thought about it and moved to the next rear seat.

"You can sit up there," 'Mom' said to Theresa.

"No, I'm going to sit with you 'Mom'," Theresa said.

The two women take the next bench seat back. So the five sit two by one by two. Everyone has a 'buddy' except Karen. They drive for a while. Marsha looked at Chris.

"Do you know where to go?" she asked.

"Yeah, I called the state police and asked where they were being taken. It's not far," he answered.

They drove on in silence. Karen missed John, more than just being alone on a seat, she missed his support. She worried about what he had just done. Why did he do it? She knew why, he felt very strongly about his friends, he acted even to the foolish end he had

just acted. He was a friend, in the deepest meaning of the word. That was why she missed him.

"We're here," Chris announced.

No one else said a thing. Marsha touched Chris' shoulder. She was telling him it was alright. The other's were deep in their own thoughts. Chris parked the van. Everyone got out. They waited for Chris to lead the way. He obliged.

The five walked into a clean, stark front to the police station. There was a desk, above the desk was a Plexiglas panel about an inch thick. Bullet proof, Karen thought. Chris found seats for the women, he walked up to the desk sergeant and waited.

"Can I help you?" Sergeant North asked.

"Yes. Sergeant, can you tell me anything about Ted Robins and John Parker. They were just brought in," Chris said.

"Who are you?" North asked.

"I'm a friend to both families," Chris said.

He pointed to the women sitting just behind him. The women looked utterly sad. Good move. It made the sergeant react more humane.

"I'll see what I can find out," North said.

Chris returned to the women. They were anxious, but waited for him. Chris sat down and faced the women. That required him to move a chair. That movement caused a lot of noise. No one seemed to mind.

"He is going to see what he can find out. I don't know anything. I guess he didn't know anything either. I don't think he was pretending to be ignorant of the arrests," Chris said.



"John," Karen said leaning forward and pressing her face into her hands. "John, what did you do?" Karen moaned.

"It'll be okay. Just wait a few minutes, you'll see," Chris said.

"You don't know," snapped Karen. "Right, I don't, but John didn't do anything. It'll be fine," Chris said.

Chris worked in the State Division of Motor Vehicles. He dealt with cops all the time. When someone does what John did, they put cuffs on him. It didn't mean a thing. John was going to be released on his own recognizance within the hour. Ted, on the other hand, Chris had no idea what was going to happen to him. He offered no real support to either Theresa or his mother.

"What about Ted?" Theresa asked.

"I don't know. Do you know why they came to arrest him?" Chris asked. He hoped he wouldn't have to deal with Ted. It came up, he had to deal with it.

"No, I have no idea," Theresa said.

"Drugs?" Chris asked.

"No" Karen and Theresa said in unison.

That caused Chris to smile. "I guess not then."

They sat quiet for a while. Each one fidgeting in their chair. The chairs were stiff plastic with a cloth cover. They looked nice at first, but they did not fit any form of human body ever conceived. State contract no doubt.

John appeared behind the front desk. Karen stood.

"JOHN!"

"Shush!" Chris said, "wait."

They waited, Karen stood and waited the others took their seats again. The desk sergeant handed John a large brown envelope. John looked inside, nodded his head. The sergeant handed him a clipboard. John signed the piece of paper. The sergeant opened the door. John walked out.

"JOHN!" Karen screamed.

She ran the four steps to him. They embraced. John picked Karen off her feet. Tears streamed out of Karen's eyes. John put her down, they looked at each other.

Karen hit John. "Don't you ever do anything so stupid again!" she snarled.

"Okay," John said.

They hugged again.

"What about Ted?" Theresa said.

"I don't know. They didn't let me near him. We were in different cells. I was put in a holding cell. Ted was arrested, I think," John said.

"We'll wait a while longer," Chris said.

The two men and four women sat back down and waited. The desk sergeant didn't return for almost a half hour. When he did, all six stood.

"Your friend is under arrest on an open warrant from California," North announced.

"What? A warrant?" Theresa said.

"Yes, it's a warrant from almost six years ago. California has requested extradition," North said.

"Extradition! To California?" Theresa was upset.

"What should we do?" Chris asked North.

"Nothing to do. Get him a lawyer. It's a valid claim. New Jersey and California have long standing extradition agreements. He'll probably go," North said.

"Can I see him?" Theresa asked. "No, not now. Maybe tomorrow. Best thing is if you folks go home and get some rest," North said.

North sat down and started working on the project he left when the five arrived. Theresa was upset beyond sanity, she went to charge the desk. Both John and Chris held her back. North glanced up and went back to his work.

"Let's get out of here," Chris said.

"Good idea," agreed John.

"No," said Theresa.

They all left quietly. They were dragging Theresa by the arms. She put up a fight. Nothing the two men couldn't handle.

# CHAPTER

# TWENTY EIGHT

Chris dropped John and Karen off in front of their house.

"You guys okay?" He asked.

"Yeah, we're fine." Karen answered.

They walked to the house, the van drove away. It slowed in front of Theresa's house and pulled into the driveway. Chris wanted to make it easy for 'Mom' to get into the house. John stood in front of the house. Karen watched as Theresa and 'Mom' walked up to the house and entered. She turned to John and glared at him.

"You going to open the door?" She asked.

"I didn't have the opportunity to get my keys before I left," He answered.

"Oh, shit," she said.

"What, don't you have any?" he asked.

"No."

"Great. We'll have to break in," John said.

"How?"

"I don't know, I haven't had to do this before. Did you leave any windows open?" he asked.

"Can't think of any," Karen answered.

"I'll just break a window. We can fix it tomorrow." John started looking for something to break a window. He found a rock.

"John, don't!" Karen said.

"You have a better idea?"

"Not yet."

"Let me know when I can break the window. I'll just sit here," John said.

Karen was looking at the windows of the house. She walked all around the house. John saw her appear on the right side of the house coming forward. She had a look on her face that indicated she had no luck.

"Can't we open something with your tools?" Karen asked.

"Maybe, but I can't get my tools either, they are locked in the car and the garage," John answered.

"I'm going to ask Chris for some tools," Karen said.

"That's an idea," John said cheering up.

The two walked next door to Chris and Marsha's house. They met them in the driveway. They scared Marsha.

"Sorry, Marsha. We locked ourselves out," Karen said.

"Oh, my," Marsha responded.

"Did you leave any windows open?" Chris asked.

"Yeah, but only on the second floor," Karen answered.

"I'll get the ladder," Chris said.

A ladder. Of course. Karen wasn't thinking. John clearly wasn't. Chris went around to the garage.

"Why don't you come in. I'll fix us something to drink," Marsha said.

"Oh, no, we don't want to be a bother," John said.

"No bother, it'll be a good way to wind down." Marsha said.

The three walked up to the front porch. Marsha opened the front door. With keys, John noted, as he looked at Karen. Karen stuck her tongue out at him. He shrugged. Marsha turned on the light.

"Can I get your coats?" she said.

She turned around and saw that neither one had a coat on. Neither one had anything. This was a surprise to everyone. "Oh, I guess not," she chirped. "Let's go into the kitchen, Chris will see us and the light from the garage," she added.

The three headed through the house. It was decorated Early American yuppie plastic looking reproductions. It was like litter to Karen's eyes. At first glance, it looked good, just don't look again. John notice also. He chose to ignore their bad taste and aim for the kitchen and the drink he was offered.

"John, Karen, would you like a some iced tea?" Marsha asked.

"That would be nice," John said.

"Yes, thank you," Karen said.

"And I'll have some too," Marsha chirped.

John was thinking, how this woman could be so 'up' after all that they just went through. It just didn't hit her did it? He looked around. The kitchen chairs looked comfortable. He sat, he was right. Just as he sat down, Chris appeared at the back door. He

knocked and Marsha unlocked the door. She didn't open it, just unlocked it. Chris came in.

"Iced tea?" Marsha asked.

"Yeah, thanks," Chris answered.

Marsha poured four ice teas into tall, thin glasses. She brought them to the kitchen table on a tray. "Here you go," she said. She served Karen first, then John. Moved around gave Chris his, returned the tray to its proper place and carried her glass to the table. She then made a toast. It sounded like a TV commercial.

"Here's to our neighbors, on this auspicious occasion. May we become good friends...Cheers!"

Karen held back her traditional toast. "Cheers!" Karen said.

"Cheers!" echoed Chris.

"Cheers!" said John

The glasses clinked and all present drank. Karen almost spit out her iced tea. She coughed.

"Are you okay?" asked Marsha.

Karen waved her hand in the air. Held up her index finger and coughed again. "Yeah, yeah, I'm fine. It went down the wrong pipe," she lied. My God that's sweet. Karen thought, but now that I know it, I'll be okay. She drank more.

John drank from his glass. "This hits the spot," John said.

"Yeah," Chris agreed.



They all drank their iced tea. Karen was more careful, she made a show of being so. John drank his to match Karen's pace. He knew there was something wrong. He knew they would not more. So he had to finish almost the same moment Karen did. Or, drink more ice tea and not sleep. Not a bad plan he thought, no nightmares if you don't sleep. "Needed that, didn't you John?" Chris said with pride. Unknown to John and Karen, Chris had made the iced tea.

"Oh yeah, what a night!"

"Well, there's plenty more where that came from," Marsha assured him.

"Great, I may just take you up on that!" John said.

Karen smiled and took another sip from her glass. She hoped John knew she wasn't going to make it through that glass, never mind another one. They made eye contact. She relaxed and looked at John. He understood.

"Why don't you ladies talk and we men will go break into our next door neighbor's house," Chris said.

"Good idea. I hear they have a good tv and stereo," John joked.

"John, don't brag," Karen chided.

"Oh, he was just teasing," Marsha remarked.

"Yeah," John rolled his eyes.

The two men headed off to break into the upstairs window. As they were heading out John realized he didn't know which window it was.

"Hey Karen, which window is it?" John asked.

"The upstairs bathroom," Karen answered.

Off they went. The ladder was leaning against the back porch. It was an aluminum extension ladder. Certainly tall enough to reach the bottom of the window.

"Nice ladder," John said.

"Thanks. It'll reach the peak of the house," Chris proudly noted.

"I may borrow it again one day. During the day, to paint that is," John struggled. He owned a ladder, but not quite that long, his wouldn't reach the peak, and he'd either have to borrow one from work or his neighbor.

"Sure, anytime. Unless I'm standing on it!"

John wondered how the heck Chris could keep that up. Both of them. Didn't they even see what happened. They must have. They both reacted like champs. Yet now they both seem like they didn't see what was going on.

\* \* \* \*

"What'cha in for?"

"I don't know," Ted answered.

"Bullshit."

"I really don't. They came to my house and arrested me. They say it's for a warrant from California. That just can't be," Ted said.

"Why not?"

"I wasn't ever in California," Ted said.

"Good reason. You sure that's what they said. The man don't like makin' mistake like that."

"That's what they told me," Ted said.

The man stood so Ted could see him. Ted knew he was a black man. He also had an accent like he was from Trenton, NJ. The man reached his full height. Ted couldn't believe what he saw. That man must have been just short of seven feet tall and every bit of three hundred pounds.

"Shit," Ted heard himself say.

"Didn't know they could pile shit this high did ya?" The black man joked.

"Not what I meant," Ted quickly said.

"I know that. My voice fools most people. I'm Jake." Jake reached out his hand. His hand was twice the size of Ted's. Ted looked at it and pushed out his hand in kind.

"Good to meet you Jake, I'm Ted."

"Bitch of a place to meet. It's a pleasure Ted."

The two men shook hands. Jake had a gentle handshake. Probably practiced after years of scaring everyone out of their mind when they met him. His voice was also, as he had noted, not that of a big man. Not that he had a small voice, but this man was huge, muscular and clearly very, very strong.

Both men sat back down into their respective cots. Jake's knees pointed up and were level with the middle part of his chest. Ted could not get over the size of this man. Jake caught his gaze.

"For your information. I'm six foot eleven and a half inches tall and three hundred twenty pounds. All mean, all nasty and all lover. Not for you, don't worry," Jake said.

"Sorry, I was staring," Ted said.

"Is this your first time in?" Jake asked.

"Yeah."

"Virgin meat. Better hope you don't stay. You're a pretty one. Those bad boys inside will eat you up."

"What do you mean?" Ted asked.

"What, you stupid too?" Jake said.

Ted just shook his head.

"They make you their woman," Jake said.

"Make me their woman?" Ted asked horrified.

"Yup. Make you sorry you aren't," Jake answered.

"How so?"

"The place you poop'll be the place they pop," Jake said. He leaned over and started to laugh. He was laughing so hard at the new guy's ignorance. He continued laughing. Ted was watching him and thinking about what he said. He knew he was going to get raped by some guy. Was Jake going to rape him? Would he just wait until the middle of the night? He could never defend himself against Jake.

"What about you?" Ted asked.

"I ain't no fagot. I've got my whores. I'll be out of here tonight, tomorrow morning latest," Jake said.

"So what you said isn't what you would do to me?" Ted asked.

"You lookin' for a beating dude?" Jake asked.

"No, no. I just got scared," Ted said.

"You betta' not be calling me no fagot. Cause I ain't."

"Right. I didn't think so. I just got scared, that's all." Ted said, really scared.

"Right," Jake said that and turned away. He was either asleep or faking. Ted didn't know or care. Just as long as he stayed away from him he was happy. And safe.

\* \* \* \*

The two men clamored over to John's house with the ladder. John was having fun, his next door neighbors were wacky and fun. Their taste in things left a lot to be desired, but they were good people. More importantly, they were quiet. John and Karen liked their quiet.

John was in the lead, Chris had the rear of the ladder. Chris was calling cadence as they were weaving between bushes and trees. The darkness and Chris' wacky personality combined to produce a very funny sight. Abbott and Costello they were not, but with a little practice they could make a comedy short of this action.

"Stop!" John yelled.

Chris reacted a little slow and almost pushed the ladder through a downstairs window. John looked at him. Chris felt a little stupid.

"Oops, sorry," he said.

"No problem. We missed by an inch, though." John replied.

"Where's the window?"

"Karen said it was the upstairs bathroom window. That could be either on this side or above the porch," John said.

Chris pulled a flashlight out of his tool belt. Chris brought all the tools he imagined them needing to get the window open. Chris' tool belt was new, the leather was still stiff, all the chrome was shiny. John wondered what they would do with a hammer, but he didn't want to ask. Chris hit the flashlight against the palm of his hand, it flickered on and off. He hit it again. It flickered on a bit longer. One more strike and it stayed on. John just watched.

"Damn cheap flashlight!" Chris yelled at it.

John thought about that. He recognizes that it's cheap, but they continue to buy cheap stuff. He watched as Chris shined the light on the windows. One window was open about an inch or two. Can't be that one. He moved on with the beam of light. It shut off. Chris banged it on his hand again. It came back on. John wished he had his flashlight, his was a high quality, bright beamed light. Chris' was cheap, plastic and the beam barely lit the windows.

"There it is!" Chris said.

John had stopped paying attention. Chris found the window at the back of the house. It was one over the porch. That would make it easier to work. Both men could climb up onto the porch and work on the project.

"Good. That'll be easier to work from the porch. I'll get the ladder," John said.

"Want a hand?"

"Nah, I've got it, it's only a couple of feet."

John walked back to the ladder, grabbed it in the center. He could feel all the weight, it was a light ladder. He was glad that they didn't have to extend it, he hated aluminum extension ladders. They never felt like they would support your weight, flexing upon each step. Especially when they had to be extended, fully contracted this should feel secure.

John maneuvered the ladder to the porch, he began hefting it up against the gutter. He couldn't get a steady grip, it began to fall. Chris saw this happening and ran to his aid, he grabbed the top of the ladder before it hit a bush. There was a twang sound and Chris' yell of pain. Chris was ok, it just hurt. He aided John in righting the ladder and placing in against the gutter.

"Hard doing this in the dark, I misjudged the center. You ok?" John asked.

"Yeah, fine. It just stung and scared me, no cuts. I'll go up first, you shine the light up there so I can see."

Chris handed the light to John, it went out. John tapped it against his hand like Chris had. It came back on. Chris began his ascent to the porch roof. John lit the way. Chris reached the step just under the roof, he slipped his right leg around to the roof and wrapped himself over to the roof. John watched. Jeeze, I'm glad I don't have to work with him, he thought.

"Toss me the light," Chris said.

John tossed the light to Chris. It was a really good toss, it reached his hand and almost held in the air while Chris reached for it. It looked like it defied gravity.

"Nice toss!" Chris acknowledged.

"Thanks."

The light was out again. John was growing weary of that damn flashlight. Chris was banging it against his hand. John began his assent without the aid of light. Then there was light, right into his eyes.

"Hey, turn that away!" John said.

"Sorry, where should I aim it?"

"Just aim it at the roof by the top of the ladder, but not down the ladder," John instructed.

Chris did as John suggested. John climbed up the ladder and hopped onto the roof. He was quite sure of himself in those circumstances. Chris pointed the light at the window. The two men walked over to it and checked it out. The screen was down and both the storm window and inside window were open.

"Easiest thing to do is to peel the screen's gasket out," John said.

"Yeah, but it'll have to be rescreened," Chris noted.

"Hell, I was going to break a window."

\* \* \* \*

"Can you see them?" Karen asked.

"Yeah, come to this window. They are on the porch roof," Marsha said.

Karen left her kitchen window and joined Marsha. She looked up on the porch roof. She would see both men looking at the window, they seemed to be having an animated discussion. They were arguing. Chris seemed to not want to let John get near the window.



"What do you think they're doing?" Karen asked.

"Arguing about how to get in," Marsha answered.

"Why?"

"I don't know. I would think that Chris would let John get in any way he wanted to. Not like him."

\* \* \* \*

"Look, I think we can force the screen open without damaging it," Chris raised his voice.

"Don't yell at me. Let's discuss it. What do you want to try?" John said calmer.

"The screen has two latch points, one on each side. By pressing in with a small screwdriver on each side and lifting I bet we can open the screen," Chris explained.

"Yeah, but do you have two screwdrivers small enough?"

Chris deftly pulled a small screwdriver out of his toolbelt, and a thin blade putty knife. The putty knife slipped into the window and the men heard a small snip noise. The window was unlocked on the left hand side.

"Hold this," Chris instructed John.

John grabbed the putty knife and held it still. Chris traded places with him and pushed the screwdriver into place. That didn't go in quite as easily, but with a little work, Chris got it in place. It too snapped the window open.

"OK, let's move the window real slowly. You have to move the blade with it. I'll guide it because the screwdriver blade is so much smaller," Chris said.

John nodded. The two men started lifting the window. It moved an inch and a small snap sound indicated Chris' side had locked. John felt frustrated, but Chris proceeded to unlock it again.

"OK, one more time. If we can get it at least to the next place we'll be able to open it by reaching inside," Chris explained.

John moved in unison with Chris as the screen reached three inches open and then snap. It locked again. Chris pulled his screwdriver out, put it in his belt. He reached inside the screen, by sneaking his hands under. Doing this he was able to reach the locks and opened the screen.

"There it goes!" John said.

He patted Chris on the back. Chris stood back and motioned John into the window. John stepped in. There was a thud. Chris shined the flashlight inside. John was laying on his back with his head near the toilet.

"What happened?" Chris asked.

"I hit the rug, it gave way and I fell. I pulled a muscle in my leg. It's not bad, just hurts a bit. I'm fine," John answered.

"OK, move, I'll come in too. I don't want to have to try and get down the ladder," Chris said.

John had not realized how scared Chris was on the roof. He had hidden it well. He saw it now in his face. Chris was crawling through the window. The flashlight lit his way. The flashlight went out again.

"Damn that thing. Put it away, I'll get a light," John said.

He had gotten up and was out of Chris' way, but now he reached for the light switch. the light was on. Both men blinked at the sudden change in illumination. Chris was looking pitiful, he had been hurt by John's harsh statement about his flashlight. Chris was proud of his tool collection, he would replace the flashlight soon. It had started to act up a week or so ago, but he was attached to it, it had been one of his first tools.

"It's old, I've got to replace it. I...I...just can't seem to part with it though," Chris said. His voice was trebly. It was as if John had asked him to give away his puppy.

John felt bad. "Hey man, it got us in the house. You got us in the house! Thanks a lot. I didn't mean to make you feel bad about your flashlight, I've got things that I'm attached to. I know how you feel."

John headed out of the bathroom, Chris followed. John was turning on lights as he walked. Normally he wouldn't have turned on so many, but Chris didn't know his way around.

"What's your number?" John asked.

Chris gave it to him and he dialed the phone. It rang only once and Marsha picked up. "Hey, you guys got in!" She answered.

John was taken aback by that method of answering the phone. I guess she just figured at this hour no one else would be calling. "Yeah, hey can I speak with Karen?"

"Sure."

"Hi," Karen said.

"Hi, wanna come home?" John asked.

"Yeah. Let me finish my iced tea," Karen said.

"OK, see ya soon."

"Bye."

They hung up. Chris had, obviously, overheard the conversation. He looked at John wondering if he wanted more iced tea. Never mind, he thought, it was getting late and he'd like some sleep anyway.

"Let me give you a hand with the ladder," John said.

"Oh, no that's ok, I've got it," Chris said sadly.

John didn't listen, instead he followed Chris out to the back, leaving the front door unlocked, and grabbed the hind end of the ladder. Chris appreciated his help and the two men walked it back to the garage. Hanging it up was a chore, the hooks needed the rungs at exact positions. But once everything was in place, it hung securely.

"Want to come in?" Chris asked.

"Sure, why not. I got a bit thirsty trying to hang that ladder. Neat hooks, but a bit hard." John said.

"Yeah, I've got them an inch too close. One day I'm going to change that. The guy who used to have this house put them up, didn't do a very good job," Chris answered.

The two headed back. They saw the women in the kitchen. They turned toward the kitchen door, Karen opened the door for them. John followed Chris into the house. Chris went right to the fridge and grabbed the iced tea pitcher, refilled their glasses and handed John his glass.

"To a successful break-in!" John said.

"Cheers!" the other three chimed in.

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Clinking of glasses. John noticed that either Karen had really nursed that iced tea, or Marsha gave her more. Karen's eyes were a little droopy from tiredness. It was well after eleven, and had been quite a day.

Marsha grabbed the iced tea pitcher, refreshed her drink and looked to Karen. She shook her head and held up the glass. Marsha nodded and put the pitcher back in the refrigerator. The four stood and talked about the event. John gave Chris full credit for the break-in. John did not tell about his fall into the window. Karen had seen it, but decided to wait until they were home.

It was almost midnight, John looked at his watch.

"Whoa, it's really late. We've got to go."

"Oh, yeah, can't stay up all night. Thank you both for the help, and good company!" Karen said.

"You're welcome, we really enjoyed it too. Let's get together again when we don't have a crisis," Chris said.

"Yeah, let's do that," Marsha added.

The four said their good-byes for another few minutes. It went from getting out of the house before midnight to a little after. Finally, John and Karen walked home. The front door was unlocked and they just walked in.

"You left the door unlocked?" Karen admonished.

"Yeah, I thought we might miss you, 'cause we were going the back way," John replied.

"But still," Karen remarked.

"But, nothing. It's fine, we were only next door and everything is ok," John said.

Karen agreed. She did so by not carrying on the argument. They were both really tired. John double locked the door, added the chain. He still didn't get the locks changed, had to look into that. They both walked through the house and directly upstairs to the bedroom.

\* \* \* \*

Ted sat in his cot. He could not sleep. Jake seemed to be sleeping, but he still didn't trust the situation. Not after what Jake told him about rape. Jake didn't get out that night, Ted hoped he would in the morning. He hoped they would extradite him so he wouldn't spend any time in this holding cell.

Jake screamed something. Ted jumped out of his cot. He looked at Jake, he was still asleep. That man scared the shit out of Ted and he's laying there sleeping like a baby.

"Get me out of here," Ted said quietly.

"Get me out of here!"

\* \* \* \*

Theresa and 'Mom' were both still up. They had been talking about the arrest. The agency didn't contact them, so they still were not sure it was the agency. Theresa had called Jones, but he didn't return her call. All they could do was wait. Theresa planned to go back to the police station tomorrow, oh, she thought, this morning.

"Is it really after midnight?" Theresa asked.

"Yes it is. I think I'm going to bed. Even if I can't sleep at least I can get some rest," 'Mom' said.

"Me too. Good night."

"Good night Theresa."

# CHAPTER

# TWENTY NINE



Theresa lay in her bed. She couldn't get to sleep. The thought of Ted being in jail was too much for her. That jerk Jones can't be reached until Monday, and he probably won't take her call until after nine. They want Ted to sit in jail over the weekend. What did he do wrong? Did he really have an open conviction in California? Can't be, the cops used Ted's covert name, not his real name.

She lay for another hour, on and off fading in and out of sleep. Each time being shaken awake by the thought of Ted in jail. Jails are so cold and lonely. Ted is probably scared to death. He's not a big man, and never was much of a fighter. Jail will be hell for him. It's hell for anyone, but this was such a shock.

\* \* \* \*

Jones was thinking about Ted being in jail. How did he let Cizzano convince him to let Ted stay in over the weekend? That was Cizzano's payback for him letting me send him to San Francisco instead of to the Bering Strait. What a mean son-of-a-bitch that Cizzano is. First me, then Ted. It's like being in jail having to do office work. I want to be in the field.

He turned in bed, fluffed his pillow and closed his eyes. The vision of Ted being carted off by cops just would not leave him alone. He was glad he didn't have to watch. If he had watched it would have left an indelible impression. He rolled over again. His wife shifted, he looked over at her. The last thing he wanted to do was disturb her sleep with his restlessness.

Jones got up and went to the kitchen. He had not turned on any lights. He did so now. Their little kitten jumped up on the table Jones was standing next to. He looked down at her and reached his hand over. She rubbed her head against his hand and arched her back to meet him. She petted herself with his hand, something cats will do if they like you.

He walked over to the fridge. He opened the door, grabbed the milk. Kitty had followed. She was rubbing against his leg and meowing. Jones got a glass and a little bowl out of the cabinet. He poured a little milk into the bowl and set it down. Kitty ran to it and started lapping. She purred as she drank. He looked back at his glass and poured it full of milk.

He returned to the fridge and placed the milk on the shelf where it belonged. Back to his milk. He took a big gulp, reached into the cabinet and grabbed some aspirin. Aspirin and milk, that ought to be able to put him to sleep. He finished up his glass of milk, went to the bathroom to pee, and returned to his wife in their bed.

He lay thinking about Kitty, stupid name for a cat! Anyway, thinking about Kitty helped him forget about the office, and more so, TED! He rolled over and fell quickly asleep.

\* \* \* \*

They cuffed him and put him in the squad car. John was yelling obscenities at all who surrounded him. His neighbors were all around, they yelled things at him. They praised the cops for getting him out of their before he hurt someone. The car he was placed in started to back up. People were banging on the car as it moved. John was frightened by the mob scene. He felt somewhat safer sitting in the car. He just wished he was not in handcuffs.

They drove along the streets of his neighborhood. He was having trouble remembering some of the streets. It seemed so strange. Suddenly he recalled why, he was not in his neighborhood, he was in the town in which he was born. He tried to yell, he could not find his voice. The car turned into a parking lot. The parking lot of a hospital.

Waiting at the door were three men. They had with them a girney. The police car pulled up to the three men and stopped. The cops got out of the car and walked over to the passenger side of the car and one cop opened the door.

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"Step out please," the taller man asked.

John moved to get out, he almost fell sideways on the seat, but regained himself. It was hard to move without the use of hands. John righted himself against the car when he stepped out of the car. The cops just watched. John stood.

"Are you John T. Parker?" the other officer asked.

"Yes," John responded. He wondered why they asked again now. He was identified when they arrested him. He stood watching. The tall officer handed one of the men a clipboard. The man signed the paper on it and handed it back. The two officers looked at the three men, it was their turn to take the lead.

"Mr. Parker, you are to come with us. If you will sit on this girney and not fight we will not restrain you. Do you understand?"

"Yes," John responded.

"Will you come along with us quietly?"

"Yes."

"Please release the handcuffs," the man said to the officers.

The officers removed John's left hand first, holding the handcuffs restraining his right hand. They wanted to see how he was going to respond. He did not fight. They released his right hand. He stood quietly.

"Please take a seat on the girney, Mr. Parker."

John looked at the girney, he assessed how he was going to attempt placing himself on it. He turned to face the car, away from the girney. All eyes were on him. Two of the men held the girney still.

John placed his hands on the girney and hopped up and sat on the girney.

"Please lay back."

"You said I didn't have to be restrained," John protested.

"You are not going to be restrained. But it will be easier to transport you lying down. I'll raise the back, you'll almost be seated. Okay?"

"Okay."

John waited as the man changed the angle of the backrest. It was upright about at a 45 degree angle. It looked okay. John shifted back and leaned against the angled back. It was comfortable and he waited. The three men were standing by him, one told the officers that they felt they had control. The officers returned to their car and left.

"Okay, Mr. Parker, we are going to bring you to admitting," the one man said.

This man seemed to be the spokesman. He may be a doctor. He always spoke, he signed the paper and the other two men had held the girney. John couldn't tell from how they were dressed, they dressed almost alike. Though the man he thought was a doctor, had a tie. He almost missed that.

The two men turned the girney around and started to wheel it to the hospital. John's stomach churned. He didn't know why he was arrested, and didn't know why he was going to the hospital. As they approached the doors a sensor caused them to swing open. They opened with a swish.

John sat up in bed. "Shit!" he said.

Karen rolled over and muttered something unintelligible. John looked at Karen and looked around. He could just make things out. There was enough moonlight to illuminate the room in a baleful glow. He looked at the clock, its red illuminated numbers told him it was 12:48. He had only been asleep for a little more than fifteen minutes. Long enough to go into hell.

He was shaking a little but not much. He felt an ever growing desire to scream. He didn't. He needed to have a light on, he needed to know he was still home.

John got up, walked to the bedroom door, passed through and closed it behind him. He turned the hall light on. He was home, he was home. It was all going to be okay. He paced around a while, he looked at their things. He was feeling a little better. John decided to get himself a glass of milk. He turned on the light going downstairs and headed down. He was being careful, he felt shaky and thought he could fall. He made it to the foot of the steps, looked around and felt more and more relaxed. This was home, that was a dream--nightmare. He got to the kitchen, found there was not enough milk to drink and still have coffee in the morning.

"Shit. We were going to get milk and forgot with all the hubbub," John said out loud. What else, what else. He thought, oh yeah the calcium tablets. That's the active ingredient in milk that makes you sleep. He filled his glass with water and took two calcium tablets. Finished the water and went back up stairs to the bedroom.

He turned off the hall light and saw a glow from down stairs. "Shit, I left the kitchen light on," John said to himself.

He turned the hall light back on, went down the stairs and returned to the kitchen. He flicked the light off and it was back up stairs. Off went the light and the house was dark.

John opened the bedroom door and heard an eerie sound. He listened but did not move. It was Karen, she had moved to a

position that her breathing was restricted. It almost sounded like the snoring of a little under-the-bed demon. He was clearly still shaky from the dream. He headed to bed and lay down.

He stared at the ceiling. It was his ceiling, Karen was laying beside him. All was fine, all was right. He had been arrested, but he was released on his own recognizance. He would have to appear in court, but that wasn't for more than a month. The charges would be dropped, or so the officers had told him. He had made himself a nuisance and had to be dealt with. They did, they arrested him. He never imagined that happening. What got over him? he wondered.

He felt sleep beginning to creep in on him. He wasn't quite through thinking, John tried to force himself awake. Sleep was about to win.

\* \* \* \*

Todd was having a violent night. His drinking has been giving him crazy dreams. He had one dream in particular that kept repeating. Sometimes more than once a night.

He was in a straight jacket, restrained and locked in a room. The room had an observation glass in the ceiling. He can't reach the glass, nor can he find a place to hide from it. He felt he was being watched all day and all night. His captors don't let him out. A nurse comes six times a day, three for medication, three for feedings.

Todd is kept tied up in the jacket, the nurse feeds him. He is completely cooperative. He never fights, never spits out the food. He had refused to eat some food, but only after he had tasted it and only if it was not to his liking. The nurse was very kind and allowed him his likes and dislikes. With time, she was more often bringing him his favorite things.

He had come to know her name, Cheryl. She was very pretty. He liked seeing her. The weekend nurse was not nice. She was also

pretty, but ugly inside. He felt sad whenever he had to deal with her. She fed him in a hurry and left his face messy if he had a problem with a bite. The first day Cheryl came back she always cleaned him up first, then gave him breakfast.

Cheryl was in today, she told Todd that she was getting married. "I'm getting married!" Cheryl said happily.

"To whom?" Todd asked.

"To a man called John Parker," she answered.

"Isn't he a client?" Todd asked.

"Yes, so?" Cheryl responded.

"That's not right!" he yelled. He got agitated for the first time. He stood and started pacing. He kept repeating himself. "That's not right!"

Over and over again. Cheryl stood, she went to the door. The attendant was not there. She was locked in. She pressed the buzzer button she had in her sweater pocket. In a few seconds the door opened.

"Is there a problem?" the attendant asked.

"No, nothing," Cheryl responded. "Todd's not hungry this morning."

The door closed.

Todd woke up. He was in a cold sweat. The dream always ended the same way. He was always a patient, locked in a padded cell. Cheryl was marrying John. It was a delusion. The dream seemed so real, like it was a reminder of things that had happened. He couldn't shake it, he couldn't stop them from happening. Todd was

wide awake, thinking about the nightmare made sleep much more difficult.

That bastard John Parker. He ruined my nights sleep. Thought Todd, that was why he turned him in and made up the story about him. John was crazy after all, not him. Todd was hired by the agency to work with John on this project. John agreed and so they worked on it. John got to live his life, Todd's had been put on hold. On hold because of an agency screw up.

"Well, I'm back," Todd said out loud.

He stood spontaneously and started pacing around the room. He looked at the lighted dial of his alarm clock. 3:18 was the time. Sunday morning, he still had to wait more than a day to find out what Cizzano wanted with him. This new character Jones, what the hell is he doing in this. Todd remembered him as a field operative. Now he's a desk jockey. Probably a jerk.

Todd grabbed a sleeping pill and headed to the bathroom for a glass of water to swallow the pill. Reconsidered and just popped the pill and swallowed. Bad choice, it just dragged down his throat. Todd could feel it's pathway. He went to the bathroom and swallowed some water. It didn't help much, the pill seemed to be jammed in his throat.

"Shit," he said out loud.

He got another glass, swallowed that, then another, and another. He drank water 'til he could fit no more in his stomach. His stomach heaved. All the water and his sleeping pill ended up in the toilet. Good he thought, I'll start again. He went to the bedroom and got another pill. Got a glass of water and swallowed only enough water to put the pill down. It stayed. Todd slowly found sleep.

\* \* \* \*



The alarm clock rang. Without even thinking, John reached over and hit the snooze button. He rolled back to his pillows. He thought it was Sunday. Must have missed Sunday, or forgotten it. It wasn't working, he was thinking so hard about what he and Karen did on Sunday he couldn't sleep. He lay staring at the clock thinking, thinking about yesterday. Yesterday was Saturday. Yeah he thought, it is Sunday. He looked at Karen, she didn't hear the alarm, she was still sleeping soundly.

Quite sleepy still, John moved his hand to the alarm clock. He nearly knocked it off the nightstand but he was able to turn it off. No sense in waking Karen. He was able to do so without disturbing her. He was really tired, less than six hours of sleep thus far, he thought he felt able to fall back to sleep. He did.

"What am I doing here?" John asked.

"You are back where you belong," came the answer.

John sat and stared at the nurse. What is she talking about he thought, I don't belong here, this is a hospital. He looked around the room, it wasn't even a normal hospital there were no medical devices on the walls. No blood pressure units, no oxygen outlets, nothing like any hospital he's ever been in. It just didn't make any sense.

"I don't belong here," John said.

"The court thinks so," the nurse replied.

"What court?"

"New Jersey State Court, John."

"Huh?"

John woke. He looked at the clock, it read three minutes different than before. He recognized that because it was 6:33, the alarm was set for 6:30. That dream, it was occurring again. John remembered years ago having that dream. He turned his attention to Karen, she was sleeping soundly. Very carefully he moved to get out of bed, Karen stirred, he stopped. Karen settled back into peaceful sleep, John got out of bed.

John grabbed his robe and left the bedroom. Behind him he closed the door, although it was late dawn, he turned on the hall light. He was feeling disoriented. Dreams make you that way he thought. He staggered into the bathroom, he turned on another light and caught a glimpse of himself in the mirror.

"Shit I look bad!" he said.

John left the bathroom, he still had to pee, turned off the light and went downstairs to the kitchen. He looked at the coffee pot, Karen had made coffee, all he had to do was turn it on. He flicked the switch, the lights dimmed a bit and brightened back up. The coffee pot began to hiss and rumble. Coffee would be John's in a matter of a few minutes. He left the kitchen for the front of the house. John wanted a diversion, that dream was causing more upset than he'd felt in a long time.

"The paper," John thought out loud.

He looked out the window and there sitting on the sidewalk was his Sunday paper. John hadn't put anything on his feet, but he went outside nonetheless. The concrete was cold but he got to the paper and brought it inside. The paper was also quite cold, it had absorbed the cold. No he thought, the cold air had absorbed the heat from the paper.

Once again inside, John discarded the plastic wrapping. He hated the use of plastic but didn't know what to do about it. Can't fight every battle, so he let it go for the morning and sat on the couch with his paper. Karen enjoyed different sections of the paper, so

John divided the paper into his pile and Karen's pile. There was common interest in such sections as the front page and weekly magazine. Today, those would be his first. Normal Sundays, Karen is up first and has first dibs on the paper.

Coffee, John remembered, was what was missing from this Sunday morning. He got up and went to the kitchen. The coffee pot was sputtering its last bit of water into the basket. John retrieved his and Karen's coffee cups, got milk and made himself a cup of coffee. Back to the newspaper he went, spilling large splats of coffee as he went.

"Shit, I hate when I do that!" John cursed as he realized the coffee was falling all around him onto the floor. It had soaked a small portion of his terry robe and his feet had drops as well.

John returned to the kitchen, grabbed a neat square of paper towel from the roll. He worked his way back to the living room cleaning the floor as he went. When he finished the last spot on the floor he cleaned off his cup. With the same piece of towel. He thought that was disgusting, but figured what difference, it was the outside not the inside. The inside, after all, held the coffee. He sat spilling the coffee once again. He rolled his eyes and wiped the floor with the nearly saturated paper towel.

"That was easy." He moaned.

A noise caught his attention. It was directly overhead, Karen had exited bed and was walking around upstairs. He stood and returned to the kitchen to make her cup of coffee. Carefully he filled the cup a half inch short of the rim. That way he could carry it to the living room without spilling.

Karen had beaten him to the living room and held the front page. John had lost his edge in the battle for supremacy in the Sunday paper contest, now it was every 'man' for himself.

"Hey, how'd you sleep?" John asked.

"Like a rock, once I fell asleep. Man does my head hurt." Karen answered.

"I had a hard time getting to sleep also, with all that tea in me, that'll do it every time."

"Yeah, you guys took too long for me to nurse my first glass, I had to have another or insult Marsha. Right now I wish I had insulted her." Karen grabbed her coffee and sipped it.

"Good coffee, huh?" John bragged.

"Yeah, I made it," Karen shot back.

"Right, like I said, good coffee."

Karen crinkled the paper to get it folded just right to read the lead story. Nothing very interesting, continued on to the next one criminal behavior of some rich person. Karen read a little. On to the next article, nothing. There was a little article on the left-hand bottom corner that caught her eye.

"Holy shit! John look, you and Ted made the front page!" Karen exclaimed.

"What!" John said.

Neither one could believe it. They sat with the paper on their laps reading. The article was accurate and to the point. But why was it on the front page? John hurried Karen along, he had finished reading and wanted to get to the continuation. Karen finished and adroitly turned and folded the paper to the correct page. What they read there flattened them both.

"John Parker, former patient in the County Psychiatric Hospital, was detained for interfering in the arrest of Theodore Robbins."

They both stopped at that line, there was more but neither one cared.

"John, what the hell are they talking about? Psychiatric Hospital? What?" Karen asked.

"I have no idea. Who wrote the article?" John was pale.

Karen unfolded the paper and turned back to page one for the by-line. There wasn't one, she turned back to see if it was reported by a press agency. There was no attribution there either.

"What the..." Karen said.

"What?" John asked.

"There's no attribution what-so-ever. That's not right."

"Staff reporter then I guess," John replied.

"But, where did they get such a bizarre idea as you being in a mental hospital?" Karen asked.

"Psychiatric hospital," John corrected.

"Were you?" Karen looked concerned.

"Not that I remember," John answered.

"Whoa, man, that had me going," Karen sighed.

"I'm going to call the paper," John said. "It's Sunday morning, no one will be there," Karen said.

"I bet they'll return my call," John said as he walked to a telephone.

"What's the business office number?" John asked Karen.

Karen began shuffling through the front page looking for the masthead. She found it and read off a number to John. He asked her to repeat the last four numbers, she did.

"It's ringing," John reported.

The two waited in silence. The phone rang at least six times, John reported each ring to Karen. Karen wanted to ring his neck, but restrained herself from yelling. They were both nervous. The phone was answered, Karen knew because John began talking with someone. It wasn't a moment later he entered the room.

"What happened?" Karen asked.

"I got the answering service."

"And..." Karen lead.

"I left a message for the editor or publisher to give me a call," he answered.

He sat and picked up his coffee cup, sipped the nearly cold coffee and sighed deeply. Karen sat beside him, she gulped the last bit of coffee out of her cup and stood.

"Want me to warm yours up?"

John simply raised the cup to his lips, drank a big gulp and handed Karen his cup.

\* \* \* \*

Cizzano was up early. It was even early for him. He did not feel what he was doing was evil, though it was. He had exceeded his authority in the Parker/Wilson matter. The official books on this matter had been closed years earlier. It was Cizzano's ego that keep

Joseph A. Sabin Jr.

him going. There was no precedent for him to have a man arrested for the purpose of relocation. Jones might push that point with the Director, but Cizzano was betting he wouldn't.

Legally, Ted could only be held until this afternoon. Cizzano wanted to work up a plan to hold him one more day. He needed him in that dank holding cell for the weekend. Ted needed to learn his lesson, Cizzano wanted him out of the agency forever. This was the third project they had contact on, it was the second time Ted screwed up. This was the most damaging screw-up, this time Cizzano thought it was fatal.

He was sure this case would place him into contention for the directorship. Ted may have just threatened that with his incompetence. Cizzano loathed incompetent people, Ted held a special place in competition for the lowest ranking in Cizzano's book. Ted may have cost Cizzano his future. \* \* \* \*

The jail door clanked shut with a loud bang. Ted nearly jumped out of his cot to a position of attention. He was standing, but not very straight. His eyes wouldn't focus and his mind was not clear. He looked around him, he was confused.

"Go back to sleep," a voice yelled.

Ted didn't move, instead he stood almost motionless looking around. He began to focus on details of the cell. He remembered Jake, he turned his head to Jake's now empty cot. "Relax man, it's not your turn to get out!" the voice yelled again.

"Oh."

That was all Ted could say, he almost fell back into the cot. He was exhausted, worrying all night about Jake he couldn't sleep. He must have been asleep, must have just fallen asleep. Ted felt like hell and worse, he hit the cot and tiny pillow and sleep hit him again. He awoke again and drifted back to sleep. Back and forth

between sleep and a partial waking state. Ted finally gave in and slept.

\* \* \* \*

The phone rang. John jumped to answer it.

"Hello?" John said.

He listened for a minute and then slammed the receiver back into the cradle.

"Shit!" he yelled.

"What was that about?" Karen asked.

John came back into the room and looked at Karen. He didn't answer, he sat and continued with his coffee. The phone rang again. John didn't move. Karen looked at him. The phone rang again. Neither one moved.

"Do you want me to get that?" Karen asked.

"No, let the machine get it, we'll pick up if it's someone we want to talk to," John said sternly.

The answering machine picked up the call, John walked into the room with the machine, turned up the volume and listened. His message ended and there was no one on the other end of the phone, they had hung up. John returned to the couch.

"Who was it?" Karen asked.

"Hang up," John answered.

The phone rang again.



"Shit! This is awful, I'm going to answer the phone," Karen said.

"Please don't," John pleaded.

"But if I don't, and we don't handle this head on it'll get worse," Karen said.

"Maybe you're right, get it," John said.

Karen ran to pick up the phone. She too slammed down the receiver.

"John, did the last person on the phone tell you go get out of town?" Karen asked.

"Yeah, something like that, but not in those words."

"Neither did this guy, he used far too many profane adjectives for any sentence. I hung up and cut him off," Karen said.

"This is like my dream," John said.

"What dream?" Karen asked.

"You know, the one where I get taken off to a hospital by the police," John answered.

"Did people call you and curse you out?" Karen asked.

"I don't remember, but I do remember them being relieved that I was being carted off. Almost all the neighbors stood outside and watch as I'm arrested and carted off to the hospital."

"Like yesterday." "Yeah, like yesterday. I made myself look pretty crazy didn't I?" John asked.

"Sure did, but not to deserve this. Besides, there wasn't any press," Karen said.

The phone rang again. Karen got up calmly and walked to the phone, picked it up and said hello. She started pressing the buttons on the phone. Hung it up and returned to John.

"There, everyone will get an earful if they want to curse us out. I'm calling the police," Karen said.

"Please don't, was it the same voice?" John pleaded and asked.

"I think it might have been," Karen answered.

"Then let's wait and see if it stops."

It didn't stop, the phone rang almost nonstop for the entire morning. Finally the call came from the managing editor of the newspaper.

"John, it's Hugh Moore, an editor of the newspaper," Karen yelled to John.

"Great! Now we can get to the bottom of this," John said.

"Mr. Moore, thanks for calling me back," John said answering the call.

"What can I do for you Mr. Parker?" Hugh Moore asked.

"I want to know where you got that information that I was in a psychiatric hospital," John responded.

"It's public record, when you were arrested the reporter queried the paper's database. Our database is connected to the state's and we found your records," Moore answered.

"Must be another John Parker. Not an uncommon name," John said. He recalled hearing that exact statement from Tim Jones.

"No Mr. Parker, it was you. We are very careful that way, we cross checked it and it was, or rather is indeed your record," Moore said matter-of-factly.

"Now wait just a minute!" John started to raise his voice.

"No you wait a minute Mr. Parker. I called you back as a courtesy, not to be yelled at. It's Sunday morning and I don't need this kind of shit," Moore stated firmly.

"Oh," John barely said.

"Now, if there is nothing further, I'll be going," Moore said.

"One more thing, who was the reporter? His name was not listed," John asked.

"Several staff reporters worked on the article. Why?" Moore asked.

"Curious, that's all," John said.

"You can call the paper Monday and speak to me then. I don't have those details at home. Good bye Mr. Parker," Moore said with finality.

"Good bye Mr. Moore."

John hung up the phone and shrugged his shoulders. Karen waited for him in the living room.

# CHAPTER THIRTY

"Ahhhhh!"

Todd woke with a start. The nightmare has continued. His stomach churned and he knew the whiskey from the night before will force him to throw up. He could not contain the contents of his stomach any longer, although his head swam he had to get out of bed. This was a path he knew well, from his bed to the bathroom. His life was ruined, he had vomited six of the past seven mornings. This will be the seventh. He was in a dead run for the bathroom.

The phone rang. Todd halted and vomited on the floor.

"Shit! What a Goddamn mess." He shouted.

The phone continued to ring. Todd's stomach continued to churn. He knew it was not over, he had to heave again. He almost fell when he stepped into his own bilious mess, but he could not stop lest he miss again. He made it to the bathroom and vomited into the bathtub. He reached and turned on the water, the shower started. He was getting soaked with the cold water of the not yet hot shower. The phone continued its incessant ringing.

"Who the fuck is calling at this hour?" Todd yelled at the phone.

He grabbed a towel to clean up the mess. He had to clean it up right away, or it would make him sick again. Right now he had no more in his stomach to vomit. What a life he thought. The phone continued. He ran to it, dropped the towel on the flood in the hallway and answered the phone.

"Fuck you and all who love you!" Todd yelled in the receiver.

He hung up the phone and ran back to the bathroom. Water ran on the floor out of the shower, he had failed to cover all the flow. He heaved again, this time into the toilet.

"Shit, what a mess! I've got to stop drinking."

Todd knew he was lying to himself, he knew the drinking had become a fixture in his life. His life had fallen totally apart, it would never again be ok. The agency recruited him almost as he walked out of the psychiatric hospital, they promised him help. He never received any real help, just drugs. Drugs, he can't touch them so he drinks instead.

"Big fucking deal, I don't do drugs, I'm a drunk. At least I'm socially acceptable, or at least, legal," Todd muttered.

He turned the water off in the shower, flushed the toilet and stood. He looked at himself in the mirror leaned down and turned on the sink faucet. Splashing his face with water he began feeling better. He had emptied his stomach as he had so many times before, he knew it was over and he could relax. He washed his face and soaked his hair. It made him look and more importantly, feel better. Off with the water and on to clean the hallway.

Todd looked at the towel, it was halfway soaked with vomit. Not as bad as it could have been. He was able to contain most of the contents for the bathtub and toilet. Todd wiped the floor with the towel, dry heaves but no more vomit. He cleaned up fairly well and carried the towel to the kitchen. The kitchen had a small washer/dryer and he tossed the towel in the washer and started a hot cycle.

The phone rang again. Todd looked at the clock, it was afternoon.

"Hello?" Todd said.

"Todd, was that you a minute ago?" Cizzano asked.

"I'm still me chief, who were you talking to?" Todd feigned.

"Fuck you and all who love you! Was that you?" Cizzano asked.

"Yeah, I was getting sick and the phone was pissing me off," Todd answered.

"Pretty good, actually very good. I'm going to remember that line for the next time."

"What next time?" Todd asked.

"Next time it makes sense for me to say that to someone," Cizzano answered. "Look Todd, we've got an increasingly difficult situation here. The fucking papers have just released information on John Parker being in the nuthouse. We need you even more." Cizzano cut right to the chase.

"So?" Todd said. Todd was clearly dazed, he should have known the importance of that kind of information being leaked by the press. Todd was using alcohol to kill himself. If he kept it up it was going to work.

"Earth to Todd! This is a breach of our security, we never planned for this to go on so long, so we didn't purge all the records. Someone found the records," Cizzano continued.

"So what do you want me to do?" Todd asked. "It's time for you to meet with John Parker," Cizzano said.

"No fucking way!" Todd said.

"Oh yeah, there is a fucking way! It's going to be my FUCKING way! You are going to meet John Parker, you will meet him today."

"How?"

"You'll be a reporter for a local paper. You'll be looking for a sympathetic side to all this. You'll meet his neighbors first, then have them work on your side to get you into the Parker house. Then drop the bomb," Cizzano said.

"What bomb?" Todd asked.

"The Hospital," Cizzano answered.

\* \* \* \*

The phone rang again. John jumped up, by now he had gotten used to answering the annoying calls from the press.

"Yes?" John answered.

"John?" the voice said.

"Who's calling please?" John said politely.

"Northern Virginia Pervert Academy," the voice answered.

"What?" John asked.

"John, it's Miller! Didn't you recognize my voice?" Miller asked.

"No Miller I didn't. I've been hounded by the press all morning. Something really shocking came out in this morning's paper. It reported I was in a psychiatric hospital and that's why I freaked out when my neighbor Ted was arrested," John explained.

"John, slow down. Tell me what has happened, a neighbor of yours was arrested and you freaked? Huh?" Miller was confused.

John went on to tell Miller all about the past few days. Miller hadn't called about that, but it was the most important think on John's mind, so they spoke about it for almost an hour.

"Miller, why'd you call?" John asked.

"Ah, oh yeah, man I almost forgot. I called to tell you I was going to be out of town for most of Monday, so I told Angelo to get the package from you and begin working. Also, if he found anything to call you right away. OK?"



"Yeah, that's fine. Does he know what's going on?" John asked.

"No, he knows we are working together on some historic project of yours and that you need the info as so as possible. So he'll be cool," Miller answered.

Cool, John had not heard that for years. He wondered why Miller used that phrase word. He let it go. The two men spoke for a few more minutes and Miller needed to end the conversation.

"Hey buddy, Doreen needs the phone, we've had it for more than an hour. I've got to go. I'll talk with you tomorrow night. I want to know what's up and I don't think I'll get back in time to talk with Angelo."

"That's fine Miller, I'll look forward to your call, and Angelo's. Tell him that for me would you?" John asked.

"Oh he knows, believe me he knows!" Miller assured.

"Great, well I'll let you go, shit it's almost three!" John said.

"Yeah, not to mention my ear is about to fall off," Miller said.

"Bye," John said.

"Bye-bye," Miller said.

The two men hung up the phone. John always got a kick out of Miller saying bye-bye. It seemed childish to John, but Miller was anything but childish. Actually he was very child-like, happy and free to enjoy life. John admired him for that.

"How's Miller?" Karen asked.

"He's doing well. He called to tell me that his friend Angelo was going to call directly," John answered.

"Why?" Karen asked.

"Miller has to go out of town for a meeting and he didn't want that to hold up the experiment," John answered.

"That's a good friend," Karen exclaimed.

"What else did you talk about?"

"What else? The stupid newspaper and..."

The phone rang again. The husband and wife just looked at each other and shook their heads. Karen stood to answer the phone. She knew John was in no mood to answer yet another call.

\* \* \* \*

Todd was dressing for his interview with John. He's had another drink and was feeling more himself. He laughed at that thought, he was feeling more the himself that he had become, much less the real self he had become while on the west coast. People complain about the laid back attitude of the 'west coasters', but Todd had become a new man out there, now he was being asked to become the old form he happily had left behind. He had thought that he wanted this man back, but now it has become apparent he did not.

The shirt was reasonably well pressed, the tie clean, but previously food stained. He finished tying the tie, he did not tie a Windsor knot, rather a simple wrap it around once kind of knot. It was the kind of knot Todd assumed a newspaper reporter would tie. He didn't shave since he had the day before, his light hair made that ok.

"Ready?" Todd asked himself.

"Ready!" he said with false bravado.

Todd slammed the remainder of his drink down his throat, coughed and laughed at himself. He took a really deep breath and picked up the phone. He dialed the number of Marsha and Chris Neary, the phone rang just once and it was answered.

"Hello?" Chris said into the phone.

"Hello, Mr. Neary?" Todd asked.

"Yes," Chris answered.

"Mr. Neary, this is Todd Wilson of the North Philadelphia Times. I would like to meet with you about yesterday's activities," Todd lied.

"What activities?" Chris evaded.

"The activity that required the intervention of the state police. Those activities Mr. Neary," Todd answered.

"I had nothing to do with them Mr. Wilson," Chris answered.

"That's what I was told, that is why I would like to speak with you," Todd said.

"Fine, my wife and I are free this evening," Chris earnestly offered. "How does six sound?" Todd asked.

"Five is better," Chris said.

"Then five it will be. Can you give me directions?"

Chris thought that odd, but he proceeded to give Todd Wilson directions to his house. Todd was not coming from the direction that Chris thought, but he accepted the directions. Finally Chris mentioned a major highway, Route 95 North. Todd knew he could find that road, so he began writing down the directions from there.

"Did you get all that?" Chris asked.

"Yes I did, thank you Mr. Neary. You know this area very well, I'm impressed."

"I've lived here all my life and I used to commute to Philadelphia, so I know all the routes. We'll see you at five," Chris said.

"Yes sir, at five. Thank you."

"Good bye," Chris said.

"Bye," Todd offered.

Chris hung up the phone. Todd stood with the receiver in his hand. He held it so long that recording came on asking him to hang up the phone. "If you would like to make a call, please hang up and try again!" came the voice from the phone.

"Shit, what the hell?" Todd said. "Oh," he hung the receiver back on the hook.

\* \* \* \*

"Can I get you something?" Karen asked.

"How about morphine?" John joked.

"Sorry, fresh out. How about something else?"

"Sure, something to drink, I'm parched." John said. "OK, how about iced tea?" Karen asked.

John held his hands up and crossed his two index fingers, hissed like a movie vampire and said, "no, please, anything but iced tea!"

"Yeah! Right!" Karen shouted.

"We do have cranberry juice, I'll have some of that." John said.

"Okay, coming right up," Karen said. She grabbed two glasses and poured cranberry-apple juice for John and a glass of water for herself. She grabbed two aspirin for her headache. She didn't like taking aspirin, but her headache lasted all day. It was time for it to end. "Do you want ice?" she asked.

"Not if it was in the fridge," John answered.

\* \* \* \*

There was a knock at the door. Chris stood to answer, he assumed it was that reporter Todd Wilson. He opened the door. Todd was standing dressed in his finest pretend reporter clothes.

Chris said, "Mr. Wilson?"

"Yes I am Todd Wilson, are you Chris Neary?" Todd asked.

"That's right. Why don't you come in Mr. Wilson."

Todd welcomed the phony reporter into his home. He and his wife were excited to have a reporter in their home. Marsha appeared from the hallway. She was smiling.

"Is this your wife?" Todd asked.

Chris turned toward Marsha, smiled and turned back toward Todd. He didn't say anything. Marsha walked into the room and offered her hand to Todd.

"I'm Marsha Neary."

"Todd Wilson, North Philadelphia Times," Todd lied.

"It's a pleasure to meet you, won't you sit down?" Marsha asked.

"Yes, thank you," Todd said as he sat.

The three of them began talking in excited terms about the activity yesterday. They spoke for some time, the sun began to set and Marsha stood to turn on some lights.

"Oh, where are my manners. Can I get you a glass of iced tea or something?" Marsha asked.

"Iced tea would be fine," Todd answered. He had already had a couple of shots of Scotch and couldn't imagine drinking anymore.

\* \* \* \*

"It's Sunday afternoon for God sake, I say we tell Ted that we are shipping him off to the bay area office," Jones argued.

"Fuck him! Let him rot in the cell until Monday," Cizzano said.

"No way, we are way passed our twenty four hour holding. The police are threatening to release him," Jones said.

"Let them release him. Next time they need us, we'll just take our time. They know that, they are just trying to get rid of him. He's a pain in their ass and they don't want him. Let him rot."

"Cizzano, you're being unreasonable about this. Ted is not the problem, his mistakes have just accentuated the problems," Jones said.

The two men had been arguing this point for an hour or so. Neither one wanted to give in. Ted was one of Jones' first subordinates and he felt a sort of allegiance because of that. Cizzano was fighting for his career, this was such a major project and so screwed up that it required a head to roll if it didn't work. Cizzano did not intend

on letting that head be his, if Ted could take the fall, that was just fine with Cizzano.

"You are not being fair!" Jones yelled.

"Fair, since when is what we do fair? Look Jones, this is not a matter of being fair, being clean, or whether it is Ted's fault or not. Ted will, like it or not, take the fall for this screw up. He has screwed up so he can take the fall for the whole thing," Cizzano said.

Jones, Cizzano did not know, was wearing a wire back to his office recording system. Jones knew he could take the fall for this as well and had no intention of doing so. He never assumed he would be able to catch his supervisor, and Assistant Director in a cover up. this was what made careers in the agency. He was going to let Cizzano hang himself.

\* \* \* \*

"Dinner!" A guard yelled

"Huh?" Ted said.

"Your dinner, here, take it I'm busy." The guard hurried Ted.

"Looks like shit," Ted said.

"Might be, I wouldn't eat it."

"Great, I'll probably die here," Ted whined. "Nah, this is a holding cell, they'll move you before you die," the guard said laughing at Ted.

"Fuck you," Ted yelled.

The guard had walked off, he heard Ted but chose to ignore him. Ted yelled again, again the guard ignored him. Ted looked at the meal, it truly did look like shit. It was a meal many military men have come to despise, chipped beef on toast. 'Shit-on-a-shingle'.

"Hey, this is 'Shit-on-a-shingle'! Get me real food, I won't eat this!" Ted yelled.

"Then go hungry!" the guard yelled back.

Ted sat on his cot, picked up the spoon and began to eat the dinner. He had not eaten the previous meals and now he was too hungry to continue with his strike. It didn't taste that bad, it looked much worse than it tasted.

"Actually not bad," Ted half-heartedly yelled.

"Glad you like it!" laughed the guard.

"Fuck you!" Ted yelled back.

"No thanks."

Silence, then a bang of a heavy steel door. The guard was outside the cell area, Ted was truly alone. He sat eating the chipped beef, a tear fell down his cheek. He was not only alone, but feeling very lonely. Ted was wondering why Theresa didn't come to visit, she had promised. He felt like a child, he wept freely the tears fell into his food. Ted laughed. "The damn thing needed salt!" He went on eating and sobbing, lonely, tired and afraid.

\* \* \* \*

Todd was about ready to try and get Chris to bring him over to John's house. They had been sitting and talking a while, Chris had loosened up. Now was the time, Todd couldn't keep up the act much longer, he was running out of things to say. He had almost finished the iced tea Marsha had brought for him. That was enough



he didn't want anymore, he had to maneuver Chris before they finished their current drink.

"Chris, I'd like to get John's opinion on this, do you think he'd be open to discussion?" Todd asked.

"I don't know, I haven't seen him since yesterday," Chris answered.

"Do you think you could give him a call. I'd be happy to publish his side of the story. I know he wasn't interviewed by any of the papers," Todd said.

He had put an interesting twist on the statement. Chris heard what he said, and knew it was true. John might just want to talk to this guy. It was not his place to decide if John wants to talk to Todd or not, that was up to John.

"That makes a lot of sense, I'll give him a call," Chris said as he stood.

Chris left the room, leaving Marsha to entertain Todd. Marsha found Todd amusing. From their vantage point they could hear Chris talking on the phone. They were too far away to tell what was being said. Nonetheless it seemed to be going fairly well.

"Yeah John, this guy seems to want to hear your side of the story. He seems to be a nice guy," Chris said. "A huh. What paper did you say he was from?" John asked.

"The North Philadelphia Times," Chris answered.

"Not very local, but close enough I guess. Ok, why don't you send him over," John relented.

"Want me to come over with him?" Chris asked.

"No, I think I would like to speak to him alone, or rather Karen and I would like to speak to him," John said.

"Ok, I'll tell him. Good luck."

"Thanks, I think I'll need it," John said.

The two men hung up the phone and Chris returned to the room where Marsha and Todd were sitting. Todd was looking rather flushed and happy. Chris couldn't imagine what was wrong with him. Maybe he was feeling hot, he would have to speak to Marsha about the temperature in the house.

"He said he'll speak to you," Chris said.

"Great," Todd said.

"I'll get my coat," Marsha said standing.

"Don't bother Marsha, John asked that he speak to Mr. Wilson alone," Chris said firmly.

"Oh," Marsha said sadly.

Todd stood, staggered a bit but regained himself. Todd was standing and Marsha remained seated. "I thank you folks for your help, and thank you for helping me contact Mr. Parker. He was very reluctant to speak to anyone he didn't know," Todd said.

"No wonder after the lies they wrote about him," Marsha said.

"Well, I'm not sure you can call them lies, there is documentation to back up those statements. I want to speak to Mr. Parker to see if I can clear it up," Todd said.

"He's waiting Mr. Wilson," Chris reminded.

"Right, I'll be on my way. Thanks for the iced tea Mrs. Nealy," Todd said.

Chris walked Todd to the front door. They shook hands and Todd asked which house was John's. Chris pointed to John and Karen's house and they said their farewells. Todd walked toward the road and turned toward the Parker's house. He walked like a man who has seen many a drunken nights. Chris had not noticed that he was drunk when he arrived, but he had also not seen him walk. Chris began to doubt his sincerity. He rushed into the house to the phone. He pounded out a number.

"Come on, come on, answer." Todd said out loud.

He waited impatiently. The phone was answered.

"You have reached John and Karen Parker's home phone. We are not able to come to the phone right now, but if you'll leave us your name, phone number and a message, we will return your call as soon as we are able. Please wait for the beep."

The wait seem interminable. Todd Wilson was almost to their walkway. Still no beep.

"The phone was answered by the machine!" Chris yelled to Marsha.

"BEEP!"

"John, it's Chris. This 'reporter' has been drinking, I didn't notice it until he left..."

"Hi Chris, it's Karen," Karen picked up the phone when she heard it was Chris. "Karen, it's Chris," Chris shook his head thinking how stupid, "get John quickly," Chris said.

He waited a moment, he heard Karen call John to the phone. He waited longer.

"Hello?" John said.

"John, this guy Todd is a bit off track. I'm a bit concerned," Chris said.

"What! I thought you said he was a nice guy?"

"Yeah, he does act like a nice guy, I just wanted to warn you, he might not be who he says he is," Chris said.

There was a knock on the door of the Parker's house. Karen went to the door to answer it. John was still on the phone with Chris. Karen opened the door, there stood Todd Wilson.

"Mrs. Parker, I'm Todd Wilson from The North Philadelphia Times. Mr. Nealy called," Todd said.

"Yes, we were expecting you, please come in," Karen said.

John entered the room from one end, Todd entered the house and room from the other. They met face to face. Todd's was red, John's was as white as a ghost.

"Holy shit!" John said.

Karen turned to face John. She looked at him, he looked like he had just seen a ghost.

"John! That's no way to greet a guest!" Karen admonished.

"I...I...just...j...just...can't b...believe m...my eyes," John muttered.

"John, what has gotten into you?" Karen asked.

"Karen, let it go right now," John said altering his attention to Todd. "Have we met before?" "Not that I'm aware of Mr. Parker," Todd lied.

\* \* \* \*

The wire that Todd wore transmitted only a short distance. There was a receiver truck with a microwave link back to the JSA office. It was in the JSA office of Tim Jones that the astonished and disappointed faces first broke from the stony-faced front they had held for the past week.

"Everything is a fucking mess!" Cizzano yelled.

Jones sat quietly watching his supervisor lose his cool. He knew Cizzano had bet his career on this project. What Jones didn't know was that nearly a thousand people's lives had been tied to the success of this project. The project had been successful, Cizzano just couldn't leave it alone, yet only time would tell how messed up it could become.

"Of course he has memories of his past, nothing unusual there," Jones said.

"Nothing unusual? He didn't remember anything, shouldn't have remembered anything. He was lost years ago and we assumed it had worked. John Parker had forgotten his past, remade his future and now this!" Cizzano yelled.

Neither Jones nor Cizzano said a word. Cizzano was panting and he foamed slightly at the corners of his mouth. His eyes were blazing, and staring directly at Jones. Jones made eye-contact with such force he drove Cizzano's away. A victory thought Jones. Jones was thinking that he may now be in the position to take Cizzano's job.

"It was your idea to give Parker the documents," Jones answered.

Cizzano almost leapt out of his chair, Jones reacted without moving more than his arm. Cizzano couldn't hope to even strike Jones, never mind cause him any physical harm. Jones was nearly twice his size. Cizzano began pacing around the office like a caged lion. He was furious, he watched his position fade, he watched his future unfold and break at the seams. The glorious plans were cracking like the pages of a sun burnt newspaper.

"I'm going home," Cizzano said.

"Home?" Jones asked almost laughing.

"Yes, I do have one!"

"We're in crisis and you're going home?" Jones taunted.

"Nothing I can do." Cizzano walked to the closet, grabbed his coat and hat and left the office. The door closed behind him with a bump and a click of the latch. Jones thought it strange he was alone in Cizzano's office. Naturally he began snooping. He had to do it fast Cizzano was not dumb, he might have set some sort of trap. As he began looking, he saw an envelope on Cizzano's desk. It was not sealed and the addressee was 'to whom it may concern'. All lower-case. Jones opened the envelope.

"To Whom It May Concern:

The project Parker/Wilson Mind Changes has ended in bitter failure. As project leader and director I hereby submit my letter of resignation." The letter was signed by Cizzano.

Jones stared at the letter, Cizzano knew better than to resign to no one in particular or was it a ploy? An Assistant Director resigns to the Director of the JSA, not To Whom It May Concern. Was Cizzano being facetious? Maybe he assumed he was going to be demoted and didn't know who he was reporting to. Maybe he already had been demoted and not reassigned. Jones only had

questions. But it was now getting late and he needed to pay attention to the events occurring at the Parker residence.

\* \* \* \*

The moment John heard Todd's name he knew who Todd was. But Todd seemed intent on pretending he didn't know who John was, so John decided to play along. Karen looked as if she didn't know who Todd was. John knew better than to imagine Karen had missed the name 'Todd Wilson' as a match to the diary character. This man, Todd Wilson, or whatever his name really was, was the man that had appeared in John's dreams.

John began. "So, Mr. Wilson, why did you decide to interview me? No one else seemed to think I mattered."

"I like to take a more human interest slant to my stories. Your side of the story will play well, that's why," Todd answered.

"Ok, I can accept that. What would you like to know?" John continued.

"Your reaction to the information being released on your time in the psychiatric hospital. What will you do, now that the information has been released?" Todd asked.

"I hope to have the article you are writing help me to correct that mistake. I was never in a psychiatric hospital, never treated for any mental illness at all," John answered.

"I've known John for almost ten years, he's always been very clear and...well I hate to use this term, but 'normal'." Karen added.

"According to the records, Mr. Parker, you were in the hospital fifteen years ago for two years. You were released and brought back for approximately eleven months. Therefore, Mrs. Parker, you would not have known him then," Todd corrected.

John was straining to remember fifteen years ago. Those damn diary pages seem to have been written back then. He wasn't in a mental hospital when he wrote those, he was a computer programmer. Odd as that might seem to him. But John could not come to any conclusion that would help him understand why he could not recall his life past about when he met Miller.

"Mr. Parker?" Todd interrupted John's thoughts.

"Yes?" John said.

"It is my understanding that you went through a relatively new procedure to alter your thought patterns. This procedure may have effectively changed your memory of the past. Would you like to see the documentation on your stay in the County Psychiatric Hospital?" Todd asked.

"I sure would! Where did you get it?"

"Through normal channels, your case was a criminal act where you were found not guilty by reason of insanity. So the records are public record. Old, hard to find, but nonetheless public," Todd answered.

Todd opened his briefcase and handed a large accordion folder to John. John looked at it, then reacted and took it out of Todd's hands. Karen shuffled her body over toward John so they could both look at it together. John opened the top of the folder by releasing the ribbon-like tie. It was wrapped compulsively around two buttons, one on the flap, one on the body of the folder. He flipped the top which revealed about two inches of papers.

"What is all this?" John asked.

"A portion of your file, that which is not counselor-client privileged information. The proceedings of your trial, it was brief, to say the least. Commitment papers from the court, release papers



from the hospital and the warrant for your arrest. And some other supporting documents," Todd said nonchalant.

"I can't remember any of this," John said.

"Let's read some of it," Karen suggested.

"There's too much. Mr. Wilson, may I keep this for a few days?" John asked.

"I don't know, Mr. Parker, that's my only copy, I'd hate to have to do all that work again," Todd lied.

"If I promise to return it to you, can I keep it? It's getting late, I won't answer any of your questions about this until I read this. So either you leave it with me, or..." John stopped.

"Or what Mr. Parker?" Todd asked.

"Or, I don't know," John answered.

The three sat still and quietly for an eternity it seemed to John's mind. Karen was rifling through the papers, keeping perfect order, just as she had done with the diary pages. John and Todd watched. Todd had not seen this before and sat amazed at how deftly Karen worked with the pages. Todd knew he was going to let the Parker's keep the pages, he just had to put up a show.

"You may have them until Tuesday night. Can we meet and continue this interview then?" Todd asked.

John looked at him, a smile filled his face. Karen and Todd both looked at John. Karen also beamed.

"I guess that means yes?" Todd asked.

"That means YES!" Karen said.

"Great, I'll leave you two and we'll meet again about seven, on Tuesday?" Todd asked.

Karen and John looked at each other, they signaled yes with their eyes. Todd didn't know how to read the signal, in fact, didn't even recognize there was a signal. Couples married for any number of years can begin making slight gestures with their expressions that are meaningless to others. Karen and John had perfected this form of communication.

"That will be fine," John told Todd.

John and Todd stood, almost in unison, Todd reached out his hand, John took it and they shook hands warmly. "It was good to see you aga...ah, good to see you Mr. Parker," Todd fumbled.

"Nice to meet you Mr. Wilson," John returned.

Karen had remained seated, she was still studying the documents. She realized she was being rude, she stood and offered her hand. "Good night, Mr. Wilson," Karen said.

"Good night," Todd offered. Todd turned toward the door, John hustled a bit to beat him to the door so he could open it for him. Todd and John nodded and shook hands again briefly as Todd exited the door. "Tuesday at seven," Todd said in closing.

"Tuesday," John agreed and closed the door.

"Turn on the light!" Karen said.

"Huh?" John asked.

"The porch light, that poor man!" Karen said.

John reached for the light switch, it was on. "The light must have blown out Karen," John said.

"Oh."

Todd staggered down the sidewalk to his car. He had done this so many times before, it didn't even matter whether he had light or not, he would have stumbled either way.

\* \* \* \*

O'Brian sat in his chair, thinking about the past week. None of the events made any sense to him. The murder of Dr. Peterson seemed an accident, wrong man. Peterson was mistaken for another because of his involvement with recombinant DNA research and because of his patents. He had filed a request to drop John Parker as a suspect. The evidence pointed to a mistaken identity, not anything involving the Parkers or the O'Millers.

He reached to the nightstand and grabbed his water. It had enough remaining to satisfy him, though all the ice had melted it was still cool. He shouldn't have had so much garlic, it keeps him awake and makes him thirsty as hell. It was getting late and surely the morning would arrive with him exhausted. I've got to sleep, shit, there was nothing that could be done once you reached the point he was at, there were not enough hours left in the night to get a good rest. He put the glass to his lips and emptied it. His wife was asleep beside him, he stood and went to the bathroom. He had to pee, all that water he felt bloated. He also could not find sleep, he was not tired. He was beginning to believe what he read about garlic and energy. Hell so long as he was going to suffer tomorrow, might as well enjoy tonight. Not really enjoyment, necessity, TV would give him something to think about instead of his problems with the Peterson case.

He walked into the kitchen, turned the light on and went to the refrigerator. He opened the door and grabbed the gallon jug of water, it was nearly empty. He preferred sparkling water, but there was none in the house. He opened the jug, grabbed a glass to pour the contents into and poured until it overflowed the glass. The

water had filled the glass and trickled down the side, he heard the noise but was lost in thought. Not until it was slashing on his feet did he notice.

O'Brian grabbed some paper towels and mopped up the counter and the floor. It was good enough, since it was just water it wouldn't stain, get sticky or make a mess of any kind. He sipped some of the water from the overly filled glass so he could pick it up. He headed for the living room and the TV.

\* \* \* \*

Doreen was asleep. Miller was worried about tomorrow. He had to travel to a city he had never been before. Miller hated to travel without Doreen. She was his balance when they were in a new city. Doreen could find her way around as if she was born there. Miller would head South when he wanted to go West.

Miller sat in a chair, his thoughts danced around, between tomorrow, John, Dr. Peterson, the investigation and the program that Angelo was to work on tomorrow. Everything just swirled in his head. He had to get some sleep, just not quite yet. \* \* \* \*

John sat with the papers all around him. They were very official looking, some of the copies were very poor and hard to read, yet they maintained the look of an official document. John was having a hard time accepting the possibility that he had suffered from a mental disability. The thought of that spoiled his self image. Karen walked in with drinks. She carried two glasses filled with a dark liquid.

"What's that?" John asked.

"Cola, figured the caffeine would help to keep us awake. Okay?" Karen said a little worried.

"Good idea," John said.

Karen sat down next to John, Karen also had a glass. John took a sip. "Tastes good, nice and cold."

Karen was quite concerned by this odd turn of events. Not that the past week hadn't handed this couple the most incredibly peculiar time of their married life, but neither one had imagined that John had been crazy. They sat and talked, read some of the diary and laughed. They both were getting a bit crazy because of the late hour.

It was after two when John and Karen looked to see what time it was. John had a little cola left and swallowed the last drops. It was warm and flat, but it still tasted good. Karen had long since finished her's and was looking droopy-eyed with tired. "Let's go to bed. Caffeine or not, I'm exhausted," Karen said.

"Oh yeah, let's." John agreed.

\* \* \* \*

"What a waste of time." 'Mom' said.

"I'm tired, worried about Ted and sick of this stupid pair. They don't offer any challenge," Theresa answered.

"I'm going to bed too," 'Mom' said.

"Right behind you," Theresa agreed.

The two women almost marched up the stairs. The two had exhausted themselves trying to keep track of the Parkers, get to see Ted and find out from the agency what the hell was going on. They got answers to nothing. Then they had to monitor Todd. Stupid drunken bastard, he almost blew his cover when he was saying good bye. Theresa was thinking about another job. Stop working for the agency and settle down with a guy. Her job at the day care

could lead to better things. True it didn't pay as much, but it was fun.

"Good night!" 'Mom' said.

"Oh, yeah, good night 'Mom'," Theresa replied.

Theresa went to her room. She sat on her bed and thought about how she felt. She really thought she loved that man. Ted was a bit of a jerk, but she did love him nonetheless. She began unbuttoning her blouse, as she did so she imagined what it would be like to have Ted doing that. She closed her eyes and continued. Slowly she undid each button and slipped the blouse over her shoulders. She sat and felt the cool air, she was breathing deeply. She laughed at herself and stopped the fantasy.

She unbuttoned her slacks and unzipped them without fanfare. Slipped them off and unhooked her bra. She looked at herself in the mirror. "Not bad, not bad at all. A bit of a bump in this stomach, but..."

She turned to her side and continued looking. "...should be able to turn some heads," Theresa concluded.

Nearly naked she grabbed her nightgown and slipped it over her head. She looked back to the mirror, now a woman who looked middle-aged and dowdy stood there. She had taken on a whole new attitude without her fantasy. Shaking her head she walked away from the mirror, picked up a book and lay down in bed.

# CHAPTER THIRTY ONE

The cell door slammed shut. Ted quickly rolled over to see what was going on. A disheveled man in his mid-twenties was sliding one foot in front of the other as he staggered to the other cot.

"What the fuck are you lookin' at?" the drunken man yelled.

"Don't start anything Freddy!" the guard said firmly.

Ted lay not saying a thing, he was exhausted and didn't want to argue. Freddy made it to the cot and flopped down on it. Ted could hear the crunch as he hit the cot. These cots were not soft enough for flopping, Freddy will hurt tomorrow for that move.

"Sho, what's yoush in fer?" Freddy tried to ask.

"Tax evasion," Ted joked.

"Bullshit!" Freddy said.

"Right," Ted answered.

Freddy leaned over the edge of the cot and vomited on the floor of the cell. He was racking in pain. Ted turned away, knowing that he would join Freddy if he didn't get his mind off the vomit. Ted could feel his stomach get queasy.

"Jeeze man! Use the toilet," Ted yelled.

Ted was facing the wall, away from Freddy and his grotesque behavior. He had never been in an environment where the social graces of society were so far removed. There was a smell that could only be one thing.

"What the fuck did you do, have chili and a case of beer?" Ted yelled at Freddy.

"Baked beans, ham and Tshunderbrew," Freddy answered.  
"What's it to yoush?"



Ted started thinking about getting out. They had held him a day and a half already. He didn't think that was legal. Where the hell was Theresa? God, they probably bought her off.

"Shit! Hey out there! This guy Freddy is puking all over the place here," Ted was standing yelling out of the cell.

"Get me the fuck out of here!" he continued

"Hey man, calm down, I've gotsh a head...headache," Freddy said.

"Well fuck you, I've got a pain in my ass...You!" Ted responded.

"A fuckin' comedian huh, I'll show yoush," Freddy said.

Now what, thought Ted. What can this little drunk punk do to me, throw up on me? Freddy was trying to get up from the cot. As he did, it was obvious he was going to vomit again. Ted looked around for protection. He turned and jumped up on his cot. As Ted, jokingly thought possible, Freddy was going to try and use puke as a weapon.

"Get the fuck away from me man!" Ted yelled.

Freddy lost his weapon, early and well out of range. Ted remained on the cot, the floor was no longer safe to walk on. Freddy was almost laying in his own waste. Then suddenly he jumped up with renewed strength, charged Ted. Ted could not believe his eyes. He braced himself against the wall and as Freddy charged, Ted laid a firm kick to his face. That knocked him down to the floor at the base of his cot. Between the kick and the landing it made him unconscious.

Ted maneuvered himself down from a standing position and sat on the cot. His feet stretched down the cot, he was not putting his feet over the edge until the floor was washed clean. Ted thought for a second of how he was in deep shit for that, but then realized that

Freddy wouldn't remember what happened and the guards will assume he fell and knocked himself out. That is as long as there's no sole print on his face. Ted laughed at the thought.

After an hour of sitting, Ted became relaxed enough to go back to sleep. Freddy slept on the floor, in his own waste.

\* \* \* \*

Five thirty, Monday morning, Cizzano's wife is awoken with a start. She thought she had a nightmare, the ringing sound from a gunshot was still in her ears. She reached over for her husband, he was not there. She looked at the clock and laughed. "He's probably already at work."

She rolled over, thought about sleep and decided to get up. She walked into the bathroom, the light was on, odd behavior for Cizzano. She walked in and Cizzano was there, she screamed the scream of a wife who just found her husband shot to death.

\* \* \* \*

The alarm rang louder than usual. At least that was John's experience this morning. He nearly smacked it across the room. One day, John was going to smack this particular alarm across the room. He and Karen purchased it as a travel alarm and use it as their real alarm since their clock-radio broke. Trouble with this little thing is the buttons are so small John has a hard time finding the snooze button. John finds it, but decided he was awake and might just as well get up.

John got up and looked back at an empty bed. He listened, but didn't hear Karen downstairs. The toilet flushed in the bathroom. She must have just gotten up before the alarm. Karen had an uncanny internal clock. John staggered to the bathroom, he and Karen cross paths.

"Morning," John muttered.

Joseph A. Sabin Jr.

"Hi," Karen answered.

Karen headed downstairs as John heads for the bathroom. John is so full he can't imagine how he didn't end up wetting the bed. He laughed at that thought, and almost misses the bowl. He finished and headed downstairs to join Karen.

"This is it, this morning the cartridge we sent will be in the system guys hands. What's his name...ah...Al...?" John said.

"Angelo, his name is Angelo, John," Karen said.

"Right, Angelo. He'll have the info in a couple of hours. I can't wait."

"You'll have to, you have to go to work, we need the money. You may need a lawyer with all this stuff going on. You may be able to sue for falsification of your past." Karen said.

Karen had both cups of coffee poured and was walking like a woman on a tightrope with both in her hands. She moved John's a little forward in a gesture of handing it to him. John took it and spilled some coffee on the floor. He rolled his eyes, reached into the pocket of his robe and pulled out a paper towel. John and Karen spill coffee all the time. John has a paper towel in his robe for just that occasion. It's brown and dirty, but it cleans the floor of the spill.

"That's disgusting, get a new one!" Karen said.

"Nope, I'll turn it inside out and it'll be good for another couple of spills," John answered.

He unfolded the towel, flipped it around a few of the folds and held it up to Karen. It was bright white and ready to clean a few more spills; just as he had said. Karen shook her head and continued on

her way to the living room. Behind her, like Hansel and Gretle, she left a trail. John was cleaning it up as he followed.

"Hey Karen, watch it, you're spilling coffee."

"So," Karen answered.

"So. So, I'm cleaning it up behind you!" John raised his voice.

"Like I said, so. You've got it under control," Karen laughed.

John laughed too. He also spilled more coffee. There were mornings like this, it seemed like a bad movie script, but it was their life. They spilled coffee in the morning, almost every morning. John had the spills under control and he sat down.

"Thank God that's over with!" Karen said.

"Yeah, but I cleaned it up! Anyway, do I really have to go to work?"

"John, we need the money, I'm part-time for a while because I'm working on the diary, you've been off a couple of days and we are behind."

"I thought we had gotten ahead because of all the extra work I had?" John complained.

"Okay, okay, John stay home, wait for the call. I can't argue about this. We need the money, but we also need to solve this mystery," Karen said.

"You don't have to get pissed off about it. Don't you want to know what's up?" John said.

"Yeah, I want to know, but I also want to be able to pay bills. But if you go to work tomorrow and for the rest of the week, we'll be

okay. Call your boss and tell him you need work the rest of the week, next week and forever!" Karen was laughing.

"Actually, with Ted in jail, I wouldn't have a partner for today. Bet I really don't have a choice."

"You might be right, either way, just stay home to get the call. When you get it I expect you to call me. Shit I can't believe I agreed to work today either." Karen said sadly.

"Call in sick."

"I can't call in sick, I'm not sick."

"So, since when has that stopped you?" John asked.

"John, like I said, we need the money. I'm not kidding. Go look at the checking account balance, I think there's about a hundred bucks in there," Karen shouted.

"Fine, I'll tell you what, I'll wait for the call then go to work. How's that?"

"That's a good idea. Just don't forget to call me when you find out, I'll be waiting," Karen said.

They agreed and continued drinking coffee, since John was staying home Karen showered first. John sucked down more than his share of the coffee, but Karen didn't seem to notice. That made John feel all the more guilty. He went upstairs with his coffee, there was still some in the pot. Karen was standing nude in the bathroom. The shower was running and she did not hear him approach. He was careful not to scare her, he watched her. He was amazed at the sharp transition from her shoulders down to her waist.

Men are so straight from the shoulders down, Karen's figure was nearly a triangle the transition was so sharp. It was abruptly halted

by her hips, smoothly rounding out to a beautiful very shapely rear end. She turned toward the shower, she still did not see him. She was cold, her nipples were erect on her firm breasts. John was very in love with this woman, but at the moment, love was not the feeling.

John whistled a cat-call at Karen. Her head turned toward him, she shook her ass and hopped into the shower. She left him feeling warm inside. They have been together for years, yet she could still arouse the deepest of lustful feelings in him. She had a wonderful body and an equally wonderful attitude toward sex.

"Karen, do you want some more coffee?" John asked.

"Yeah, my cup is on the sink, could you bring it up and put it on the rim of the tub?" Karen answered.

"Sure." John turned and was down the stairs in a flash. He filled Karen's cup. That required him to pour a bit of his coffee into her cup. He didn't mind, it was really hers anyway.

\* \* \* \*

Six forty-five. O'Brian was walking up the stairs to his office. The two witnesses he's had are worthless, they contradict each other. Neither one exists in FBI files, Social Security files, city files, nowhere.

"Where the fuck did these guys come from?" O'Brian asked no one.

He flopped down into his chair. There was a stack of messages an inch thick on his desk. He looked at them and got back up. Coffee, he needed coffee. He could smell it, a police station had coffee twenty-four hours a day, every day of the week. It wasn't good coffee, but it was there and hot. He poured a thick cup, shook some powdered white stuff that should taste like cream into the cup and stirred. It was almost the right color, he returned to his desk.

Joseph A. Sabin Jr.

The coffee was much too hot to even consider sipping. That plastic coffee colorant doesn't cool the coffee like milk or cream does. It adds a flavor, sure, that, it does, but no help for the impatient. The phone rings.

"O'Brian," he answered.

There was a disgusted look on his face. He talked with the caller for a few minutes. As the conversation continued he began getting more and more animated. With a gesture of final disgust O'Brian slammed the phone back on its cradle.

"Fucking assholes!" He shouted.

"Who?" came a voice. O'Brian spun on his swivel chair. He faced the voice. It was Max. "Your people. Did you hear?" O'Brian asked.

"Hear what?" Max asked.

"Your boss is dead, shot once in the mouth," O'Brian answered.

"What?" Max said. Max was truly shocked, he fell into a chair and he was shaking. All the color vanished from his face. It was not because he liked or cared the least about Cizzano, it was that his life might be in danger. Max was working on the hottest project for that Assistant Director.

"No motive, but it looks like suicide," O'Brian said.

"Suicide? Cizzano? No way, that guy wouldn't kill himself," Max argued.

"Well, he was found by his wife this morning. No windows were broken, nothing displaced, the gun was in his hand. Oh yeah, to finish the theory, the chain was still on the front door. No one in, no one out."

"Still it sounds wrong. Hey, why do you know so much?" Max asked.

"I asked questions, the person telling me filled me in on the details. It's going to be public information in a few hours anyway. Why?"

"He's a top ranking member of a semi-secret agency of the US government, that's why," Max said.

"Oh."

"I'm going back to DC, I'll be back in a few days," Max said.

The door closed behind Max. He left without so much as that simple statement. O'Brian looked at the closed door. No big deal, the whole investigation is fucked up anyway, why not this?

\* \* \* \*

Tina Hawkins had not slept well the last two nights. She knew she left the second session running. She shouldn't have deleted the files for the project Mind Changes, but she did. No one would believe her about changing her mind, anyway, that wasn't important, she deleted the files.

Cizzano had gotten the information she had discovered, but she did it verbally. The office was a buzz with the news of Cizzano's suicide. With Cizzano out of the way no one will care about what she found.

"Good morning Tina!"

"Hi!" Tina responded.

Nothing seemed different, no one seemed to care that Cizzano had died. Not just died, killed himself. Put a bullet through his head, aimed in his mouth and out the back of his head. A man had to be desperate to take his own life, yet no one reacted differently.

Joseph A. Sabin Jr.



Nothing beyond the whispered conversations in the hall and lady's room; probably the men's room too, thought Tina. She wondered about George, would he care, would he know? He would never know that she hadn't reported to Cizzano. George left right after they got the program to work.

Tina logged onto the system, there were a half dozen mail messages waiting for her. Her heart was thumping as she read each message. Nothing, just a bunch of howdys and cc's to keep her informed. Tina was talented enough to cover her tracks, that is just what she was about to do. First the logs of her activities needed to be altered or so deeply buried no one could find the information. She decided the fastest way was to bury the data. She connected to the file system she had been using, set the log level to maximum debug. That will require the log to record every transaction on the file system. Every read, every write to the system, every time anyone even looks at the system a half dozen lines will get added to the log. Within the day the log will purge and Tina will notice performance on the file system, report it and another systems programmer will discover the log level is wrong.

Done.

Next step is to change the date and send a message to Cizzano. No, no messages, that's wrong. Everything had to be done verbally. She quickly checked Cizzano's outstanding mail count. It was zero, that can't be right. She checked again. Same result. Someone has gotten into his account, not only read the mail but purged the entire thing. Cizzano's account showed no mail messages. She switched screens and found his account had been disabled.

"Shit, they don't waste any time do they?" Tina said out loud.

"Doing what?" came a reply.

"They've disabled Cizzano's account and purged his mailbox."

"Because of exactly what you're doing!"

Stupid, stupid, stupid! Thought Tina. I'm going to expose myself. No, it makes sense I'd be one of the ones to find that the account was disabled, relax. Tina stopped worrying about the mail and thought about what else there could be. Voice recordings, listings of who called whom. She spoke to Cizzano directly in his office. She never went up to his floor when she figured out the puzzle. Elevator logs will show I used them. Would that be enough? That's assuming there are recordings.

\* \* \* \*

In another area of the JSA, operatives were dissecting Cizzano's office area, checking recording devices and messages. Cizzano hadn't saved any mail messages that could lead them anywhere. His personal voice recordings were limited to a couple of cassettes. He cleaned everything out, he knew he was killing himself was the only conclusive one that could be drawn. He left nothing. The information that his personal effects were so limited could not be allowed to be known outside that group.

\* \* \* \*

Tina was recreating results of the testing. She was printing a report that contained the wording of the message. She would present this to Cizzano's replacement. She had to at least do that. A computer file system accident can explain the rest, but she has to tell someone what she found. She picked up the phone and called Cizzano's office.

Edwin Martin walked up behind her.

"What's up Tina?" Martin asked.

Tina jumped and hung up the phone. She turned to face him.

"Christ Mr. Martin!"

Joseph A. Sabin Jr.

"Mr. Martin? What is up?"

"You scared the shit out of me, that's what's up!" Tina yelled.

"What did you find? I need to report it to Cizzano's replacement," Martin asked.

"Oh, that's what I was trying to do. I don't have the programs. Something happened and we don't do fucking backups over the weekend, so I had to restore Friday's. That effectively eliminates all my work," Tina lied.

Martin was not a technician. He couldn't check what she said. Tina knew he could ask someone else, so she would have to do a restore of her area of the file system to cover her tracks.

"Shit! That's bad news."

No shit Tina thought.

"What did you find? Can you get me a memo?" Martin continued.

"Yeah, I remember most of what the program did. Hell, it didn't really do anything, just printed a message. I think I remember most of it. I'll send you 'e-mail' about it right away." Tina reported.

"Fine. Do that right now for me, Okay?"

"Yup, right now."

Tina sat down and opened a session to 'e-mail', chose to compose a message and addressed it to Martin. Martin walked away. Tina saved the message to retain the date and time stamp. She knew she would now have to restore her file system. She stood and snuck out to the tape library to request the tape. In order to get the restore done right away, she needed to get the tape and apply the restore herself. Otherwise a member of the data center would restore the

files. That would take an hour to happen. She needed the restore to be done ASAP. Martin might check with another systems programmer.

As she approached the Dutch door that was the tape archive room, she saw that Jim Farber was working. She didn't really have any feelings for Jim, but she could use his lustful feelings for her. She looked down at herself, she dressed almost prudishly, thought for a moment and decided what to do. She unbuttoned one more button on her blouse. She was wearing a rather sheer lacy bra, Jim could if he made the effort, see enough to really excite him. She looked down her own blouse to be sure she could handle what she was about to do.

"Pretty hot Tina..." she said to herself.

Tina was a slim woman with carefully chiseled features. She had dark black hair that could be called ebony. She had small firm breasts that did not contribute significantly to her figure. As she walked down the hallway she was unusually cognizant of them.

"I can't believe I'm doing this, why not just go topless?" Tina was thinking as she walked up to the door.

With confidence returned, she marched over to the tape room and leaned forward on the door folding her arms under her breasts. That action accentuated the already powerful allure. She cleared her throat and Jim turned to face her. His eyes nearly popped at the sight.

"Hey Jim, could you get me the Friday tape for my file system on pack JSA0332?" Tina asked in a sexy voice.

"Ah...sh..sure Tina," Jim answered. Jim almost ran to the area that the Friday backups were stored. He turned back toward the door, he wanted another look. Tina hadn't changed her position so Jim was not disappointed.

Jim had a limp and was a rather odd character. He had a crush on Tina. She used that whenever she needed to, they have gone out for drinks after work, nothing more. Jim was a nice guy but Tina was looking for more in her life. She had not straightened up, as she had planned, when Jim returned with the tape.

"Here you go Tina. How was your weekend?" Jim asked.

"Crap, I spent half of it here, and now I have to restore Friday's tape."

"That's too bad, did you lose a lot?" Jim asked, genuinely concerned.

"Yeah, the whole thing on a project for the dead guy. Look I've got to go, see you later," Tina said.

"Maybe at lunch?" Jim asked.

"Yeah, maybe," Tina said. Tina rushed off with the tape. She headed right to the secured data room and waved her badge at the sensor. The sensor was chest high and most of the males wore their badges on their lapel or jacket pocket. All they had to do was approach the sensor and the door would open. Tina had taken too much good natured abuse about putting her tits on the sensor, so she wears the badge on her belt.

"Tits," Tina said.

She looked down and buttoned her blouse two buttons, right below the neck. She felt a bit slutty having done that. It was somewhat necessary because she didn't want to have to fill out forms to get the tape, she just wanted the tape and wanted it now.

\* \* \* \*

"Nice tits huh?" Ricky said.

"That's no way to talk about a nice girl." Jim countered.

"Nice girls do it too! And button their shirt above their belly buttons." Ricky snorted.

Jim wanted to hit Ricky for saying that. Ricky was his boss and he had to try and maintain his cool. Everyone knew Jim liked Tina and that she wouldn't have anything serious to do with him. Beside that, he too had noticed the unusual exposure. He figured the button had come undone and she hadn't noticed it yet.

"Yeah, I know that, but why do you have to look at women only as bodies. I like her because she's nice to me," Jim said.

Ricky started rocking his hips and said, "gettin' any then?"

Jim wanted to cry, no he wasn't 'gettin' any', he wanted to but didn't know how to even get Tina to go out with him on a serious date. He didn't know what to say to Ricky to get him to stop. He decided to say nothing and pretend he was busy with something. Ricky took the hint and left.

\* \* \* \*

"What'cha doing Tina?" Comer asked.

Tina's heart dropped to her stomach.

"Lost a lot of shit, gotta get it back. Look Comer, do you remember the wording from that program?" Tina asked.

"Pretty much, why?"

"It's gone, half my data pack is gone, must have happened running that changed debugger," Tina lied.

"That makes a bit of sense. You did have to remove some of the memory protection. Shit, that's a bitch. Is that all you lost?" Comer asked.

"Think so. Hope we didn't trash anyone else's pack areas. If this backup is good, I'll get back to Friday when I left. I didn't do anything since then except that goddam thing for Cizzano."

"Good. That asshole wasn't worth losing work for. So, you want that wording?" Comer asked.

"Could you send it to me 'e-mail'? I want to get this running," Tina asked.

"Sure, you'll have it in a minute."

Comer left Tina alone. Perfect she thought. That cinches it, now she has Comer to back up her story. All she has to do is get the wording from him, fix it with how she remembers it and ship it off to Martin. The tape restore began and was running through a series of file names. It was progressing well. It should be done in a matter of five minutes.

\* \* \* \*

Karen had left more than two hours previously, John sat waiting for the phone to ring. John had made another pot of coffee and was just about to finish the last bit when the phone rang.

"Hello," John said.

"May I speak to John Parker?" the voice said.

"Speaking," John replied.

"Oh, hi John! This is Angelo, I work with Miller."

John's heart started to pound, his mind went blank and he started to perspire. He couldn't remember what to say, he started to panic, and then tried to calm himself. Neither was getting him anywhere. He was so wired from the pot and a half of coffee he'd had that morning he was unable to pull it together.

"John, are you still there?" Angelo asked.

"Yeah, yeah, I'm here. I'm just really excited to hear from you I...I ca...can't think straight," John replied.

"That's okay, I know you've been waiting all weekend for this. I got the program to run, now don't be disappointed..."

John cut him off. "What do you mean disappointed?" John asked.

"Give me a second, I'll read to you what the program printed to the screen. Let me get the page, I printed it out. Here it is..."

"Hi!"

"The whole thing has been a test."

"Conducted by the JSA."

"Everything is going to be Okay."

"Ignore these notes, they mean nothing."

John heard the sentences as Angelo read them out loud over the phone. Yet, he could not believe what he heard. He looked around the kitchen, for what he was not sure. He spotted a chair, grabbed it by the back and sat. He was breathing in a very shallow manner, not enough air reached his brain. Slowly he started to feel like he was going to faint.

"John! John, you there?" Angelo asked. "yeah, yeah, I'm here." John said softly.



"Does that make any sense to you?" Angelo continued.

"None. Well...no it doesn't make any sense. Can you read it again?" John asked.

"Sure." Angelo proceeded to read the short paragraph again. John listened. John was becoming a little more coherent. Angelo finished.

"What's the JSA?" John asked.

"I was hoping you'd know. I don't have a clue except it might be some government agency. You know, they always have these fabricated names," Angelo answered.

"Man, that's minimal. What bitch to only get from all that work we put into typing the codes. Are you sure you got it right?" John asked.

"Must be, it worked right after I translated your codes to computer code. That wouldn't have happened if it was wrong. And hey, that's pretty impressive, no mistakes!" Angelo offered.

"No mistakes? Wow, Karen will be proud," John said stunned.

"Do you want me to send you hard copy?" Angelo asked.

"Hard copy?"

"Yeah, a copy printed on a printer, so you can read it on paper."

"Please, yes please do," John said.

"Okay, I'll give it to Miller. Hey take it easy you sound flipped out by this news. I don't understand this stuff, but relax man, don't let this bother you. Look, I've got to go, I've spent most of the morning working on this." Angelo said.

"Oh sure, thanks, thanks a lot I really, really appreciate the work you put into this!" John said.

The two men hung up. John sat back down at the kitchen table. He grabbed a pen and an envelope. He wrote down what Angelo had told him. He didn't want to forget, Karen will want to know.

"Karen! I promised I'd call."

John hopped up from the chair, grabbed the phone and instinctively banged the school's number out on the phone. It started to ring. John waited for an answer.

# CHAPTER

# THIRTY TWO

Jones sat quietly in his office. It was getting late, he knew he had to turn on his terminal and begin the days work. Yet he resisted. Jones instead shuffled on pile of papers into three piles, taking another pile added some to the first three and created two more. On to the last original pile, shuffled all those papers into the existing five. He now had five piles from three.

"Good productive morning thus far," Jones said out loud.

He continued the processes of paper shuffling and created one massive pile on the far left corner of his desk. The urge to push it off onto the floor had to be stifled. A difficult task. He decided to turn the terminal on and log into the agency computer network.

There was a gentle beep and a prompt for his id. Jones entered his id and was asked for a password. Jones entered his password. He was told his password had expired and to please enter a new one.

"God, what do they do expire every day!" Jones said.

Most members of the agency were exasperated by the frequency of password expiration. Security required a password change every two weeks. It seemed daily. Oddly security was reduced by this requirement, everyone could think of a few really good secure passwords, but no one could think of an ever changing one that could not repeat. So everyone's password ended in a number and generally had an easy to guess prefix.

Jones pulled out his top drawer and looked at his list of passwords. It was time for Tanya7 again. Jones girlfriend in the seventh grade. He entered the password twice, the system accepted it as a new password and proceeded with the login.

There was only one new mail message. That surprised Jones, but he decided to read it right away. He entered the mail program and saw who had written the message. Cizzano. Jones had a message from a dead man.

"Shit, what does he want. Did he want. What the fuck!" Jones almost screamed.

He choose to read the message. It was simple and to the point.

"Jones, I know you were recording our sessions. I know you also stabbed me in the back on this project. You were not alone, my career is finished. I destroyed all the files on Mind Changes, so don't bother looking.

Fuck You!

P.S. Don't bother sharing this, you'll see there is an attachment, that contains incriminating documentation on your past. So, just delete this and be a good boy and close the case. Have a good life! A.C."

Jones knew he couldn't share the message, the attachment would follow it as long as it was a mail message. Jones knew no one would believe it was from Cizzano if he didn't leave it as a mail message. So, Cizzano got him one more time. He quickly moved the cursor to the attached file. He had to read it. He pressed the function key to read an attachment. The computer responded.

"Attached file is no longer available. \*\*\*\*\*E0419\*\*\*\*\*

Press F1 for further information about error codes."

Jones heart pounded. He could not believe the attachment was not available. He thought maybe something went wrong on the network and it would be available later. He hit the F1 key to see what the error message meant. The screen filled with various error messages he scanned down for E0419, he found it.

"E0419: Network file deleted after attachment but before being bound to mail message. Fatal error."

"Yes!" He shouted. Jumped up from his seat spontaneously raising his hand in a 'right on' gesture. Composed himself and sat back down to continue.

"What a stupid moron, he sent me the message and deleted the files. He never did understand how this network operated." Jones was a happy man.

Jones pressed the F10 key and chose to forward the message. The computer asked him for an addressee, Jones typed:

"THarrison@Director.JSA.GOV"

The computer wanted a message. Jones just put the letters FYI. Pressed the F10 key and the message was on its way to the director. Now he had to wait and see how the director felt about his dead boss's activity. Deleting files indeed.

\* \* \* \*

'Mom' was monitoring the bugs of the Parker's house since Ted was still in jail. Most of what had happened was not news to the JSA. When John got the phone call about the contents of the computer program she almost had a coronary arrest.

"Theresa! Come here, NOW!" 'Mom' yelled.

"What is it 'Mom'?" Theresa asked.

"John knows about the JSA, I heard it in a conversation he had with a man called Angelo," 'Mom' answered.

"Oh no, that can't be. How could he find out about the JSA? Was it something he remembered, or what?" Theresa asked.

"He got a call, the guy named Angelo read something over the phone to him. It was a little message a computer program printed on the screen. John and Karen had typed it into the computer at

school on Friday night. They sent a disk to Miller so he could have this guy Angelo run it on the computer," 'Mom' reported carefully.

"Call Jones, tell him what you just told me, give him all the details you have. Don't leave out anything. I've got to leave for work in a minute or I'd do it. 'Mom' please keep track of those bugs all day, anything could happen. If something does, call Jones and get some help. Don't hesitate a moment if you feel you need help. Got it?" Theresa asked.

"Yes dear, I've got it, now you go to work and don't worry about me, I've been doing this for longer than you've been alive. Don't let this frail body fool you," 'Mom' answered.

"Okay, good bye."

"Bye now dear."

Theresa headed out the door for her car. She was not happy leaving 'Mom' to handle what might transpire. Karen would be getting a call at work any minute now so Theresa felt the need to hurry. She slammed the door of the car, sat up straight in the seat and tried to neaten her skirt. It was caught in the car door, she opened the door and retrieved her skirt. There was a subtle grease mark, no time to change. She started the car, put her seatbelt on and put the car in reverse. Also no time to warm up the engine.

\* \* \* \*

"Karen! Big news."

"You got the call from Angelo."

"Right. The diary is bullshit according to the message. There is an organization called the JSA that was involved and created the whole thing."

"What did the message say? Read it to me."

"I don't have it printed, but I wrote it down."

John read the message to Karen. They spoke about it a moment.

"John, that is one strange message. What's the JSA?" Karen asked.

"I don't know, I assume it's a government agency of some sort. You know they always have initials."

\* \* \* \*

Harrison yelled, "I want all his projects stopped NOW!"

His assistant was almost cowering from the projected volume of the director's voice. "Yes sir, right away. Is there a roster?"

Harrison pressed the intercom button.

"Yes Mr. Harrison, " Sally said.

"Sally," he said in a gentle voice, "please get Mr. Andrews the Cizzano roster."

"Right away sir," Sally said.

"Okay Paul, you'll have the roster, get to work and terminate his projects. There is something he was up to that does not bode well for this agency. I want to know what that was and I want to know yesterday. Got it?" Tom Harrison's eyes were blazing, the veins at his temples were almost jumping out of his skin as he spoke.

"Yes sir," Andrews said.

"Dismissed," Harrison said.



Paul Andrews almost ran out the door. He was a rough looking man in his mid thirties, and up and coming star at the JSA. Paul's scarred and wind cracked face made him look years older and much more menacing than he really was. As the door closed he made eye contact with Sally. "Man, what the hell has happened to him?"

"Cizzano killed himself, but took out all his files before leaving last night. They're all on backup, but it'll take weeks to restore. No one knows where they all were stored, Systems is going over logs right now," Sally explained.

"Do you have that roster?"

"Right here. Good luck," she said.

Paul took the roster in one hand, pushed his other hand into his pocket and strode out of the vestibule. Sally watched as he left, his trousers pulled tight across his butt by his hand in his pocket made for a nice view. Sally had a fancy for Paul, the sight made her excited.

"Paul!" she called out. "Yes?" he turned to return her call.

"I...I...w...was w.wondering," she took a big gulp, her throat was dry, "would you like to have dinner at my place?" Slut she called herself in her mind, you are a slut, of course he wouldn't want to have dinner with you. She was panicked by her asking him to her place for dinner, they had never dated.

Paul's face lit, "Sally, I'd be delighted. I have to work until at least six, would 7:30 be too late?"

Sally almost cried, "7:30 would be perfect."

"I'll bring some wine. Red or white?" Paul asked.

"White, please," Sally answered. "Do you know where I live?"

"No, I assumed you would tell me," Paul said.

Sally started to tell him, Paul told her he knew the apartment building, so he would only need the number.

"7:30 then," Paul said in a voice that made Sally more excited than she could stand.

"Till then," she said with a smile.

Paul left the office area and Sally pressed the intercom button.

"Yes Sally?" Harrison said.

"Sir, I'm feeling a bit ill, I'm going to go home soon. Is there anything else you need from me?" Sally lied.

Shit, at a time like this, thought Harrison. No, it'll be fine, Sally is a dedicated worker, if she's feeling ill, she's ill. "Don't worry Sally, go home and get some rest."

The intercom went dead. Sally's hand went up in a silent cheer. She put her things together quickly, locked her desk and left. She had shopping and house cleaning to do.

Sally was down the elevator and in her car five minutes after telling her boss she was sick. Her car started without a hitch and she put it into reverse and backed out of her space. Into forward and she hit a man walking in front of her. "Shit!" she said and stopped the car. She put it into park and jumped out of the car.

Todd Wilson was lying in front of the car, not injured, just stunned. He looked at Sally and said, "what the fuck is the hurry lady?"

Sally looked at him and started to laugh. Her laugh was a nervous reaction to what just happened, but laugh she did. "I'm so sorry, are you okay?"

"Yeah, I'm okay. Good thing you had quick reflexes and hit the brake." Todd tipped his head left and right, back and forward feeling the muscles. Everything seemed okay, he was just frightened by being hit. "I'm fine, it's okay. Todd Wilson," he said holding out his hand. He had stood in the meantime.

"Sally Morland," she said taking his hand, "it's a pleasure to meet you."

"Harrison's secretary?" he asked.

"Yes, that's right."

"It is a pleasure!" Todd said.

"Look, ah, Todd, if you're okay I need to go, I'm in a kind of hurry."

"Sure, like I said, I'm fine. Go on," he said.

"Thanks!" Sally said as she turned back to her car. She jumped in, put it into gear and looked very carefully before pulling forward. As she did, she waved to Todd.

Todd waved back. "Stupid ass," he said with a smile plastered on his face. "If she wasn't who she was, I'd have her ass." He staggered to the elevator. His left leg was starting to tighten up. "Shit, I think she hurt my leg," he said to himself.

\* \* \* \*

Paul Andrews busied himself with the details of cleaning up Cizzano's projects. Cizzano had several, most were minor except 'Mind Changes'. That project has received tens of millions over the

past decade. Congress doesn't get to see what they are appropriating money for, rather just how much. Mind Changes is partially funded by the CIA. Odd, the CIA shouldn't have anything to do with the JSA. Paul made a note of that, he'd want to get a clarification later.

The first six projects accepted Paul's order to stop all activity, the seventh, and last would not stop on his say so. Paul picked up the phone and called Harrison.

"Harrison."

There was silence. Harrison repeated, "Harrison!"

Paul had been taken aback by Tom Harrison answering his own phone. "T...Tom, it's Paul," he finally said.

"Paul, are you deaf?" he asked.

"No, no I just didn't expect you to answer your phone. Where's Sally?"

"Sick, her replacement is due anytime," he said, "what can I do for you?"

"Press the project leader of Mind Changes to stop. I spoke with him and he refused, said I didn't have sufficient authority to stop his project."

"Bullshit! You're working with my authority," Harrison said.

"Yes sir, I told him that. No go. Would you call?" Paul hated to ask, it sounded weak, yet he had no choice.

"Sure will. I'll be in touch."

The line went dead. Paul sat with the phone in his hand for a moment, then hung it up. He wondered what happened to Sally.

Was dinner still on? Better check the computer. He turned to his terminal, logged on and there was a message. It was from Sally.

"Shit! She's going to cancel," he said out loud. He saw it was about dinner. He pointed to it and pressed the enter key. After a moment the message came on the screen and it read simply: "See you at 7:30...Sal"

Paul looked at the time, it was just moments before he called. Sally left sick to make dinner. Paul felt a little bit of pressure from that, thought about it and laughed. He looked at his watch, 4:48, "hot damn, I'm finished early. Better wait for Harrison to let me know about Mind Changes before I leave." He said to himself. He started thinking about what Sally looked like out of her clothes, he started to get himself excited. He was very glad Sally had asked him out, he had felt she was unapproachable. He assumed she was dating someone special, well now she is...Me. \* \* \* \*

The room seemed overly bright as George exited the darkened programming chamber. He blinked his eyes as they began to adjust. All around him were electronic marvels that could fill a science fiction novel, yet they were quite real. They have existed in their present state for almost a decade. There George stood among the second generation of computer assisted alternative memory systems. Code named Mind Changes.

"What the fuck is so important that you interrupt me?" George yelled at his assistant. The second time in less than a half hour. He was quite annoyed.

"The Director of the JSA is on the phone for you, he said it was a code red level one emergency."

"What! That's bullshit, we've been doing this for twelve years, we've only had one code red and that was a false alarm. Why would the director call one in?" George said red-faced, "that fuck Paul Anderson, or whatever his name is, he's causing this."

"Sir, I don't know, but he is waiting on line ten."

"I'll take it in my office."

George marched out of the computer room to the hallway that led to his office. Leaving behind him the single most impressive collection of computer hardware and medical equipment ever assembled. The computer room contained six matched, interconnected computer systems. Each computer system consisted of rack after rack of multiple processor, massively parallel computer 'cubes'. The term 'cube' came into being in the early 1980's to describe a computer system that contained a balanced binary number of independent microprocessors working together cooperatively. It was in the early nineties they became feasible, now they were a standard.

Each of the computer matrixes in the computer room had the capability of executing slightly more than a trillion instructions per second. No one has ever been able to or cared to try calculate exactly because of the variations in the time it takes to execute each type of instruction. Some instructions take only one tick of the computer's clock, others as many as ten. Some of the more frequently used instructions can run simultaneously with others, thus essentially running more instructions than clock ticks per second. Thus the complexity in calculating exact computer speed.

The speed of the computer is sufficient for the purpose at hand. Connected to each cube is an array of medical measuring devices. Each device is backed up by three identical units, they measure blood pressure, Rapid Eye Movement, heart rate, brain functionality--down to the synaptic, movement of every joint and muscle in the body. Almost nothing a human is doing or thinking is missed by these devices. Everything gets reported and responded to by the computer matrix responsible for monitoring the device.

All the medical devices, except the brain monitor, are two-way. They record and cause activity in the human subject. The computer can send a signal to the device and cause a reaction, such as muscle

contraction, momentary heart stoppage or increase in heart rate. Anything that might be useful in the cause of mind alteration.

The reason for redundant systems is a simple one, often a subject has a family that is in need of mind alteration. In order to facilitate completely effective change, the subjects are worked on simultaneously. Thus shared memories are induced at exactly the same time, in exactly the same way. Experiences are subtly altered for each subject based upon age, sex and past experiences. Therefore, families are bound by common backgrounds in their newly created past, just as they were in their genuine past.

In the programming chamber there was a man and woman. They have been married for a few years, the woman just finished testifying in a trial against her ex-husband. Her current husband agreed to the mind alteration, although he was not bound by any legal agreement with the JSA. This was their forth of twelve days in the programming chamber. All was proceeding well.

On their faces are black masks, similar to sleeping masks, these however contain high-resolution video devices. Over their ears are wide frequency headphones. Both have had all body hair removed and are attached to more than a thousand tiny electrodes. The electrodes almost cover their heads, fewer at the shoulders, many through the chest and abdomen. The genitals have special devices designed for reasonably accurate duplication of sensations experienced during sexual activity. The original model prudishly ignored the physical attributes of love making and produced more or less dream-like memories of sex. That result proved that is was necessary to stimulate every sense in every way possible, thus all the senses are handled in a similar manner. Finally the legs to the feet are wired to cause the muscles to contract in a way that simulates walking, running, riding a bicycle and rest.

Over, under and surrounding each client is a thermal blanket. This blanket helps keep them climate controlled for each phase of the programming. The blanket can change temperature quickly

enough to respond to a hot summer day at the beach, walking up to the ocean and touching a foot into the water and wading in. It can react to make the client feel the coldness of the wave as it slaps up against their belly, while still maintaining the heat of the sun on their back. The temperature matrix consists of over a million zones, approximately a thousand both vertically and radially around the client. Each square can be any temperature, thus the computer can accurately simulate a splash of water.

More than twenty banks of laser disk 'jukebox' players provide virtually any required visual and sound information as well the data required to stimulate the correct body function. These are the basic storage media for the programming. The computers can store up to a minute of video, sound and experiential information while the jukebox loads the next laser disk. Each jukebox contains a hundred disks. In all, approximately 4000 hours of recordings are required during a session.

During programming the client's brains are linked through the computers. As thoughts occur, the computer responds and chooses the correct laser disk to play. The data is presented at more than ten times normal speed and depending on the level of programming depth required, repeated as many as five times. Some of the experiences are shared, others are independent of one another. This man and woman are receiving a programming session that will change their three year marriage into fifteen years. Therefore many of their experiences will be shared. Their age being mid-thirties eliminates the need to alter their childhood significantly.

The major achievement in this operation was the elimination of the need to alter the brain. Through programming with ideas, images and feelings, this method eliminates the damage caused by previous methods. More than half of those who tested the 'brain-strainer' were severely retarded or psychotic when the procedure was complete. John Parker, a paranoid schizophrenic, was the first successfully altered mind in the phase one Mind Changes program.



He and Todd Wilson underwent the mind change together. Until yesterday, they had never seen each other since.

\* \* \* \*

"Baker," George announced to the phone.

"Mr. Baker, this is Sally please hold for the Director."

The line went dead for a moment.

"Shit yeah Sally, I've got all day!"

"Baker, Tom Harrison here."

"Mr. Harrison, this is a bit of a surprise; Code Red?" George said sarcastically.

"Yes it is George. You must stop your work pending investigation."

"What?"

"Stop your work!"

"I don't understand..."

"What don't you understand? Stop, Your, or Work?" Harrison asked.

"W...why should I stop? We've had tremendous success."

"We have a problem with one of the original subjects. He hasn't responded well to confrontation with his original life."

"How bad is it?" George asked.

"Not severe yet, but we suspect it will grow worse. He is having memories return," Harrison said.

"That makes sense, we were using first generation hardware then, now..."

"Look George, just stop, halt all work in progress."

"I can't, I've got two in there right now, and they are four days into the process. They are in deep coma and responding well to the stimulation. I..."

"Bullshit, stop the work NOW!" Harrison thundered.

"I can't, these two will be stuck with multiple personalities, well at least two. They will be clinically insane, there is no way they could ever reconcile the differences in their memories," George argued.

"They are not important. What is impor..."

"Who the fuck are you to say who is and is not important! I will not ruin the lives of these two people on your say so. The program will continue and be terminated in approximately 195 hours. That's completion."

"By which point I will have your ass!" "Fine, you can have my ass, I'm just not going to fry the two in the chamber just because you got cold feet."

"Look we have a mess on our hands, we can't have any more. So, okay what if I let you complete this couple will you assure me that the project will be shut down for hiatus? Do I have your word?"

"You have my word."

"Good, I know you have another dozen or so people to go, so don't start anyone after this pair. Also, don't tell anyone else about this

conversation. Tell them it's for routine maintenance of the computer equipment. Got it?"

"Got it. Is that all?"

"Yeah, that's all. Oh, except Cizzano sucked a bullet last night-early this morning, you report to Tim Jones on an interim basis."

"Jones? What the fuck does he know about administration?"

"Nothing," Harrison said and hung up.

George's first urge was to clear his desk with one mighty sweep of his arm. He restrained himself. Instead he threw the phone across the room, it struck a picture on the wall. The shattered glass sparkled down all over his leather sofa. It was rather pretty, the phone fell onto the sofa, pressed a piece of glass through the leather before falling to the floor with a bang and a ring.

# CHAPTER THIRTY THREE

Harrison settled down at his terminal, he needed to read the backlog of mail. On the keyboard he typed 'MAIL' and hit the enter key. The signon message appeared, waited a moment before retrieving his new messages. Most of the messages he received during the day were 'CCs', a new age carbon copy. Others were blind carbon copies, a kind of copy only the sender and recipient would know the recipient was copied. A good way to keep someone informed without raising an issue with the addressee.

Harrison quickly dispatched the majority of messages, he noticed a message from Cizzano. "The dead man speaks," he said to himself. He could feel his heart start to race, excited about what the message would hold. He pointed to the message and pressed enter. It was a message forwarded by Jones. He read the message, thought Jones was a fool as he moved the cursor to the attachment. The attachment was not found, just as Jones had discovered earlier.

"Shit! What the fuck was Cizzano up to that he didn't want anyone to know." He hit the intercom switch, "Sally..." he stopped mid-phrase remembering Sally left ill. He released the intercom switch and picked up the phone, dialed Jones.

"Jones," Tim Jones answered.

"Jones, what do you know about Mind Changes? I just got Cizzano's message."

"Mr. Harrison?" he asked.

"Yeah, what do you know of Mind Changes?" he repeated.

Jones was puzzled by being called directly by Harrison. This man stuck to a strict protocol, everyone except the assistant directors received a call from Sally. Sally then connected Harrison when the called person was on the line. He answered, "I worked on it as a field operative until about a week ago when I got this 'promotion'.

It's been Cizzano's pet project for more than a decade, but now I guess it's mine," Jones answered.

"It is yours, but I shut it down. I just spoke with George Baker, he's not to do any more until I say so."

"Who's George Baker?" Jones asked.

Harrison did not answer. He was stopped by this statement. He thought before he asked the next question. "What exactly have you been working on for Mind Changes?"

"I've been working with John Parker and his wife Karen. More recently Todd Wilson," Jones replied.

"Todd's involved in Mind Changes?" Harrison asked himself more than Jones. He started to remember Cizzano's request to recall Wilson, but the connection wasn't made at the time. Now it all was becoming clear. "Jones, what sort of documentation do you have on this?"

"My office is full of documents. Thirteen years of documents."

"That's got to be a bunch of bullshit, the Parker/Wilson portion of the project was finished, put to bed over twelve years ago. It was a success, it lead to all the work done since. You are in charge of Mind Changes because you are the acting assistant director, I'll authorize you for access to the data library area relating to it. Read up and we'll meet tomorrow."

Jones was stunned, what the fuck was Harrison talking about the Parker/Wilson matter was closed, it seemed awfully open to him. "Yes sir," was all he said.

"I'll have Sally make an appointment, leave the whole day clear for this, if you have meetings cancel them if you must." Harrison hung up.

Jones heard the click, he shook his head and hung up the phone.

Harrison exited the mail program, although there were a dozen or so remaining mail messages to be read, he accessed the personnel files. There he requested a listing of the complement assigned to Mind Changes. As his authorization was verified and finally the listing came on the screen, nothing was unusual. No one on the list Harrison was not familiar. "Looks okay," he said. He hit the escape key.

The computer asked, "cancel report?"

Harrison was surprised by that question. He, of course, did not want to cancel the report, he thought the report was finished. He typed a 'n' and pressed the enter key. The report continued by clearing the screen and listing three more members.

Name Division Current Alias

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Tracy R. Coleman Theatrics Theresa Robbins

Robert U. Edwards Theatrics Ted Robbins

Shella E. Huddleson Theatrics 'Mom' Robbins

"Who the fuck are these people?" he shouted. He reached for the phone, picked it up and dialed Theatrics.

"Broadway," a male voice answered.

"This is Harrison, I need information on who authorized the 'Robbins' trio for work on the project Mind Changes."

"Hold on sir, I'll have to put you on hold and get the file." A startled man hit the hold button and headed to the division director's office.

He knocked on the door and was admitted. Theatrics had a low-key atmosphere. "Rich, Harrison's on the phone, he wants to know about the 'Robins trio', what should I tell him."

Rich told him to get the file and give him all the details he wanted. The JSA director could look into any matter he found interesting. "Just give him what he wants." Was the simple final statement.

Harrison listened to the distinct hum of hold, he waited.

The man returned with the file. Harrison was about to hang up when he spoke, "sir, I've got the file. From what I can see is you authorized it, sir," the voice reported.

"What?" he thundered.

"Yes, sir. It's right here in black and white, your signature. It was requested by Cizzano."

"Send a copy of that up to me. Have someone walk it up to me, I want it in five minutes!" he ordered.

Remembering what Rich had said, he replied, "yes sir, I'll bring it right up."

They hung up and Harrison sat waiting. He was quiet and did nothing. He was thinking of how in the world did Cizzano get the authorization past him? That son-of-a-bitch, good thing he's dead, or I'd kill him, he thought.

\* \* \* \*

"You're out of here Robbins," the guard said.

"What do you mean?" Ted said. He was suspicious of the phrase 'out of here'.



"Out of here, no longer in jail, free. What don't you understand about that?" the guard asked.

"Nothing, but why?"

"Cause they don't have any reason to hold you. Go see the sergeant, he'll explain."

The guard had the jail door open, he looked down at the floor. "Jeese, what the hell happened to him?"

"Baked beans and cheap wine," Ted answered.

"Man, git your ass out of there. Is he dead?" the guard asked.

"No he's breathing. He's lucky I didn't kill him for this," Ted said pointing at the mess. He stood, walked carefully around all the waste on the floor. Walking as if on stepping stones in a brook. He found his way to the door and exited to freedom. Almost.

The guard pushed a button on his shoulder held microphone and requested a cleanup of the holding cell. "Yeah, it's puke. Freddy's a bit messed up, looks like he slipped and fell." he waited then said, "yeah it is a disgusting mess, but it is Freddy."

The voice on the other end promised to send a cleanup crew and with that the guard and Ted left for the front desk. When they arrived the desk sergeant had a manila envelope and a paper on his clipboard. "Please check the contents and sign here," he said pointing to the paper, "verifying you received all your property."

Ted looked into the envelope. All he had was his watch, a gold chain around his neck and the clothes he still had on. He looked in the envelope. The watch and gold chain were there, but so was some change and a five dollar bill. Oh, yeah he thought, I did have some money too.

"It's all there," Ted said. He grabbed the clipboard, signed his name and handed it back to the sergeant.

"You're free to go," he said.

"Can I make a phone call?"

"Not here, there's a pay phone over there."

Ted grabbed the change out of the envelope, it was enough for the call. He went over to the phone and dialed Theresa, 'Mom' answered. They talked for a minute and then he hung up. "Shit!"

The sergeant looked up and said, "a problem?"

"Yeah, only my mom is home and she can't pick me up. Shit I can't get a taxi for five bucks."

"If you need transportation home, I can have a squad car drop you off," the sergeant offered.

"Really?"

"Yes, I'll get the dispatcher to get a car for you." He picked up the radio microphone and called dispatch. "Officer Maloney will be here in two or three minutes to take you home." Ted felt a wave of relief spread over him. What the fuck had happened he was thinking. He sat and just as he got comfortable an officer walked up to him.

"Mr. Robbins?"

Ted looked up, there was an officer, it was Maloney according to this name tag. "Yes, Officer Maloney."

Maloney was pleased to be addressed with his name pronounced correctly, so many people mispronounce it because of the two Ls.

"Want to go home?" he said with a big smile on his face. Oh how much better this is than dragging someone into jail. To bring them home once in a while was a nice part of his job.

"Very much so," Ted said standing to leave.

\* \* \* \*

'Mom' picked up the phone to call Theresa, "yes, yes I understand she can't be disturbed right now. Please have her call me when she is free. Yes it is very important, thank you," she said.

"Shit!" 'Mom' yelled. She left the phone with a bang of the receiver. She walked to the front of the house. Maybe one of the neighbors could drive her to pick Ted up from the police station. Those nice Nearys might be able to do that for me. She thought. She had thought about the agency, but dismissed that thinking, no they put him there, they probably don't want him out yet. They won't help. By the time she got her coat and hat to go see if she could find some help, there was a knock on the front door.

'Mom' opened the front door and there stood a police man. Oh no she thought, not me. Crouched behind him was a man, the officer had a smile on his face and Ted hopped out from behind him.

"Surprise!" Ted said.

'Mom' was indeed surprised. "Ted!" she yelled, "oh my, I am sorry I couldn't get you."

"No problem ma'am, it was my pleasure to give him a ride home," Officer Maloney said. "I have to go now," he said as his radio blared in the squad car.

Ted turned to him and held out his hand, "thanks man, I needed your help and support."

"My pleasure," he said and it was, his face glowed. He hurried back to the cruiser and hopped in. Once inside he grabbed the mic for the radio, before putting it back he hit the lights on his car and took off down the street. Turned left and hit the siren.

"Glad he didn't do that in front of the house," Ted said.

"Ted, come in the house," 'Mom' said.

The phone rang, Ted walked up to it and answered, "hello?"

"Ted?" Theresa said, "Ted is that you!"

"Yeah, hi Theresa."

"Jeese, when 'Mom' called I never thought it was about you being home!"

"It wasn't, it was about picking me up, but a cop brought me home," Ted explained.

"I'm coming home now!" Theresa said, "bye."

"Bye," Ted replied but not before Theresa had hung up the phone.

It wasn't a minute later the phone rang again. Ted walked over to the phone and picked it up.

"Hello," he said.

"Rob, its Tom Harrison at the JSA, time to close down the operation."

Ted blanched at hearing his given name, he almost didn't recognize it, and he had been undercover as Ted for almost a year. "Tom, what do you mean?"

"Just what I said, shut down everything, leave it as is and return to Washington. I want you, Tracy and Shella here tomorrow morning, 9:00 am sharp, got it?"

"Yes sir, what happened to Cizzano?" Ted asked. He didn't know, he had not been informed.

"He sucked a bullet and is dead. You report to me now. All of Cizzano's projects have been shut down. Stop all your work and report."

"Okay," he said. Again he heard the rude sound of a dead line. He turned to 'Mom' and said, "Shella, pack your stuff, we're done here.

Shella was noticably affected by hearing her name. Her response was a nodding of her head and she went upstairs to pack her few personal belongings. The agency had provided their pseudo-personal possessions, so there wouldn't be much to pack.

Rob stood shocked by all that had just happened to him. As he stood staring into space, the door flew open and Theresa/Tracy came rushing in.

"Ted!" she yelled, ran to him and threw her arms around him. She landed a friendly kiss on his cheek.

"It's Rob, now Tracy."

"Huh?" Tracy asked.

"We've been recalled, we are to report tomorrow morning, first thing."

"Well in that case," Tracy said. She wrapped her arms around Rob and placed her gently parted lips against his. She pressed herself against him and kissed him passionately. Rob's reaction was strong and in kind. She felt him become excited as they kissed. She

released him and took a step backwards. "You feel it too?" she asked.

"Yes, I do," he said stepping forward to take her in his arms. His kiss was more passionate than before, his tongue met hers and their breathing grew shallow and fast. Rob felt his heart pounding. "We have to wait There...Tracy, there's too much to do before reporting tomorrow."

"I know, one more kiss," she said.

\* \* \* \*

John answered the phone, "hello?"

"Mr. Parker?"

"Yes," John figured one more newspaper reporter, why did he answer the phone.

"Mr. Parker, I'm glad I caught you in, this is Tom Harrison of the Washington office of the JSA. I think you have just recently heard of us. Am I correct?" Harrison asked.

John's heart dropped a foot, his legs got weak and he had to sit, "M...Mr. Haa...Harrison, I have to ss...sit," he said, he sounded a bit like a snake hissing. He put the phone down, walked to the living room, sat and picked up the extension. "I'm back."

"Sorry to be so abrupt Mr. Parker, but the events leading up to today require this manner of contact. I would like to invite you and your wife to a special meeting we are having tomorrow in Washington. Would you be able to attend?"

"Of course," John said.

"Fine, that's very good. I have taken the liberty of booking round-trip tickets for you with the travel agency, ah let's see, K.G. Travel

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on Main Street. You can pick your tickets up from them. I also wired a few hundred dollars in cash for other expenses. You will be staying at the Sheraton Washington, it's near the National Zoo."

John was sitting listening. He didn't react.

"Mr. Parker?"

"Yes, I'm here, I just can't believe this."

"I know, it is a shock I'm sure, but once we get to meet, I'm sure we can clear it all up for you. It is not as bad as it seems. We were involved, but it was years ago. A computer error caused the case to be reopened," he lied. We have closed the case, but since you have suffered because of this, we want to clear it up completely."

"Okay, I'd like that, I'm sure Karen would too," John said. He was stunned.

"Mr. Parker, if you can take the 5:17 MetroLiner from Trenton Station, I will have a driver waiting for you. Please plan on a few days in DC. We will cover all your expenses and loss of any salary. The JSA will pay you and your wife for lost pay, and reimburse your employers for any temporary help needed."

"NO, I don't want our employers notified. Karen and I will take vacation time," John responded. He was beginning to recover from the shock.

"As you wish. Can you catch that train?" Harrison asked.

"Yes, the station is only ten minutes from us, rush hour makes it a little longer, we can make it," John said.

"Good, I'll make all the arrangements for driver and hotel. We are meeting internally at 9:00, after that meeting I will contact you at the hotel. Until then, Mr. Parker," Harrison said.

"Yes, good-bye Mr. Harrison," John said.

"Good-bye," Harrison said, in an unconventional manner for him.

John pressed the button to get a dial tone. He dialed Karen's work. The phone rang four times before being answered.

"This is John Parker, please get me Karen, it's an emergency."

"Right away John," the voice said and rushed off.

Karen was on the phone, breathless from running and fear, in a matter of seconds, "John, what's up?"

"We are going to meet with the JSA. I just got a call. Can you come home now?" he asked.

"What?" Karen responded.

"Karen, it's too much to explain right now, please come home and I'll tell you everything. I still can't believe it." "I'm on my way. Give me a half hour to get coverage for my class," Karen said.

"Karen, get it faster than that, we have a 5:17 train to catch."

"Okay," she said, "bye."

"Bye Karen, come home quickly, but safely," John knew Karen was flipped out by the news. He knew, because he could hardly breathe. He got up and went upstairs to begin packing for the trip.



# CHAPTER

# THIRTY FOUR

The intercom buzzed. Sally ran to the front door and pressed the button, "yes?"

"Sally, it's Paul."

"Oh, good, come on up," she said and moved her finger to the button that opened the access door to the apartments.

Downstairs, Paul stood and waited, he heard the buzz and grabbed the door handle to open the door. It swung open toward him and he entered. He pulled the door closed, he had heard too many stories about how thieves got into apartments by people being lazy. The door latched shut and he headed for the elevator, he noticed the elevator was up at the twelfth floor, so he decided to use the stairs.

Paul looked around for the stairs, finding them he started to climb. He had to ascend to the six floor, not bad he thought.

\* \* \* \*

Harrison proceeded to call all the contacts he knew. Max had called in so he told Max to inform O'Brian of the perpetrator of the crime.

Max had asked, "are you sure you want to do this? Won't that cause us problems?"

"No, no problems, Cizzano is dead, he was acting on his own and had no authority to do any of what he was doing in this matter. The agency has no official records of this matter. If we try to cover it up, it will undoubtedly come out in a newspaper and we'll end up looking worse," Harrison explained.

"Okay, you're the boss," Max said.

"Right. Max this is the best thing to do."

Max had not left the hotel room he occupied while working with O'Brian. He picked up the phone and called O'Brian at the office."

"O'Brian," he answered on one ring.

"O'Brian, I have news about the Peterson murder. It should be solved."

"I've heard that before," O'Brian responded.

"No, this is different, really different. Don't leave I'll be there in twenty minutes, maybe less."

"Fine, I'll be here," O'Brian agreed.

\* \* \* \*

The phone rang most of the time as John and Karen packed. Nasty calls from people in the neighborhood. No voices either of them recognized, but nonetheless, local people not wanting 'his kind' in 'their' town. Up until the point of his arrest, John had felt they had made the town 'their town' too. He was very sad.

"Karen, I think we're going to have to sell our house and leave. I don't think I can take this."

"I think it'll pass. Let's not think about it right now," Karen said calmly. She had too many things on her mind. They didn't need to worry too much about packing sundry items, the 'few hundred dollars' turned out to be a thousand. Half in cash, half in traveler's checks. The tickets were for first class, called the 'Club Car' on the MetroLiner. Four hundred dollars for the four tickets. \* \* \* \*

"Marsha, look out the window. Ted, Theresa and their mom are leaving," Chris said.

"So?" Marsha asked.

"They have been carrying boxes and baggage out of the house for about an hour. They packed a small trailer and now they are all leaving."

"Are you being nosy?" Marsha admonished.

"Yes, but don't you find it strange?" Chris asked.

"They are renters, and they've been there about a year. Hey, wait a minute, you said Ted is there too?" Marsha asked. She had realized that Ted was not in jail. Chris had missed that.

"Oh yeah, right, he was in jail. Wonder when he got back? I wonder if they are skipping out on bail." Chris wondered aloud.

"I'll give Karen a call, maybe she knows." Marsha picked up the phone and called the Parkers.

"What!" John answered the phone.

"John?" Marsha asked a bit shocked.

"Yes, who's this?"

"Marsha Nealy, John, what's wrong?"

"We've been hounded by reporters, now by people asking us to leave the town. I figured you were just one more," John admitted.

"Oh my. We would never do that," Marsha said.

"I know you wouldn't, you are very nice people. Marsha, why did you call?" John asked.

"Right, is Karen there?"

"Yeah, right here," John held the phone for Karen, "Karen, Marsha for you."

Karen walked over to John and took the phone from his hand. "Hi Marsha, what's up?"

"Ah, did Theresa say anything to you today about moving?" Marsha asked. She decided not to beat around the bush about the issue at hand.

"No, why?" Karen asked.

"Well, Chris just watched them all pull away in a car with a packed trailer," Marsha said.

"How about that, was Ted with them?" Karen asked.

John was looking curiously at Karen, Karen shook her hand at him to keep him from saying anything.

"Yeah, Ted was with them. They snuck out and packed the trailer and drove off. Chris and I figured that Ted was jumping bail."

"I didn't hear a thing, but I left early. No wait, I do remember Theresa getting a call, she did leave in a hurry, but it was almost her normal time to leave," Karen said.

"Okay, I guess we'll just have to wait for tomorrow's paper to see what's up," Marsha said.

"Yup. Hey Marsha, since you're on the phone, John and I are going away for a few days, could you guys watch the house. As John told you, we've been getting these calls. With the house empty someone might try something," Karen said.

"Oh sure," Marsha said.

"I'll drop a key before we go, thanks." "Sure, no problem, that's what neighbors are for!" Marsha said cheerily.

"We are catching a 5:17 train, so I'll be by in about an hour with the key, okay?"

"That's fine. Bye," Marsha said.

"Bye," Karen responded.

\* \* \* \*

Music was playing quietly from her miniature stereo system. A really impressive setup her brother helped her buy. Candles were burning in every conceivable corner of the apartment. The cranberry-orange glazed duck was simmering in the oven, the salad was made, the wine chilled. Sally was ready. "Shit my hair!" she realized the quick curlers were still in her hair. "Oh my God, I'll never get my hair fixed before he gets here."

Paul was nearly out of breath, he had gotten to the fifth floor, he hadn't exerted himself like that for years. He had, until now, been convinced he was in good shape. He leaned against the corner of the stairway panting. "Shit, I wonder if I'll make it," he said. The rest gave him renewed strength. Thinking of Sally helped as well. He continued his climb.

Sally was wondering what had happened to Paul. He should be here by now. She worried about the elevator, it hadn't broken down for a while, probably was due. Paul was probably inside, stuck and it was her fault for inviting him to dinner. There was a knock at the door. Sally ran to the living room, stopped, and checked herself in the mirror. Fluffed her hair with her hands and walked calmly to the door.

There stood a man, a tired sweaty man, he tried to smile.

"Paul, what happened?" Sally asked.

Joseph A. Sabin Jr.

"I took the stairs."

"Oh my, come in," she said. She stepped back and he walked in. "Sit down, I'll get you some water." She ran to the kitchen, grabbed a glass and filled it with water and returned to Paul. "Here you go."

"Thanks," he said. He emptied the glass.

"Do you want more?"

He shook his head, "no thanks, wow I thought I was in better shape than that. I ran the first three flights and then slowed to a steady walk. By the time I got to the fifth I thought I was going to die," he admitted.

"Just relax, you'll be fine. I did that once too. I got into a fitness thing and decided the stairs would be good for me. They would be, but I almost died trying."

"I'm feeling better already, you are beautiful tonight," Paul noticed and told Sally.

Sally blushed a just noticeable amount and said, "oh, not really."

"No, really and I'm not just saying that because I'm delirious, I mean it."

Sally left the room without a word, Paul wondered if he embarrassed her. She returned with two wine glasses and a bottle of wine, "wine?" she asked.

"Yeah, Zinfandel, nice!" Paul complemented. The wine was a gentle blush color, about the color of Sally's cheeks about then.

Sally poured two half glasses and placed the bottle in an ice bucket beside the couch. "To a nice dinner," she toasted.

"To more," he said as he touched her glass.

Sally smiled at that, she too hoped for more, but not tonight she had already pressed by inviting him to her apartment for dinner on their first date. She didn't want him to think of her as too easy. She laughed.

"What's funny?" Paul asked.

"Oh, nothing...I was just thinking," she said.

"Thinking what?" he asked.

"About asking you here for dinner, what you must have thought of me."

"I was glad, I didn't think anything else," Paul answered.

Then what was the 'to more' to mean, Sally thought. Maybe to more dates, or more likely, to sex. "How are you feeling?"

"Great, the water helped, but the wine is doing more," he answered. "Sally, I couldn't ask you out, that's why I was so happy when you asked me. You work for the director and that makes you, ah how can I say this..." he stammered.

"Untouchable?" Sally offered.

"Yeah, that's as good a word as any. I've wanted to ask you out for months, I just didn't know how," Paul said.

"Sally you want to have dinner?" Sally said.

"Not that easy considering I'm Tom's assistant and you're his secretary."



The two knew each other very well professionally, so there was not much to talk about on that subject. They sat for an hour talking and munching salad. Sally glanced at her watch and said, "dinner is ready, we can either eat here, or at the table. Which do you prefer?"

"Here, it's much less formal and I'm really comfortable," Paul answered.

Sally took the duck out of the oven, put it on a platter, and carried it to the table. She prepared two servings, added carrots, fresh steamed asparagus and three boiled new potatoes. She rolled their silverware up into the burgundy napkins and carried Paul's dinner to him. She leaned over and handed him his plate, she saw his eyes dart quickly down her blouse. She smiled and he made eye contact with her. He leaned forward in his seat and kissed her. It was a quick, unstoppable kiss, Sally didn't kiss back.

Sally stood straight and returned to the table for her dinner. She brought it back to the loveseat she had vacated and sat.

Paul patted the seat next to him and said, "why don't you join me?"

"I can see you better from here," Sally said.

"And I can't reach you, right?" he asked.

"Right," she said as she laughed. "I'm not trying to keep you at bay, I just want to go about this slowly. I like you, Paul, let's eat," she stammered. She looked down at her dinner and began eating. It tasted better than the last time she made it. It was a recipe a friend who is a chef at a big hotel gave her. The asparagus was pretty good, not bad for hot house grown. She was glad about that, she paid six dollars for a half pound.

Paul had a smile on his face, "this is absolutely the best duck I have ever had!" He took a deep breath and placed a piece in his mouth.

A smile crossed his face in a wave, he was clearly enjoying his meal. "Where did you get the asparagus this time of year?"

"A friend works for a restaurant, he helped me get it. It came from a university in New Jersey, they are experimenting with growing root based plants in hydroponics."

"This is hydroponically grown? Asparagus? Wow," Paul said. "I've never heard of that."

"Neither did I, but when I explained I wanted to make a really special dinner, I..." she didn't want to say that, "I asked him and he asked for a favor from a supplier."

"Well, tell him your special dinner was extra special because of this, thank you."

\* \* \* \*

John and Karen had dropped a house key off to the Nealys and were on their way to the train station. There was no conversation as they drove. John was driving, although Karen knew the way better.

"Turn left here," Karen said.

John turned the car left at the traffic light off of the main highway. It was nicer this way than going directly into Trenton. Traffic was light, rush hour hadn't started yet. They wanted to beat the majority of it and arrive early if anything. The gas tank in John's car was low, so they were driving Karen's. That made sense since they were traveling, rarely did they use John's car for traveling, mostly for play.

They arrived at the train station with twenty five minutes to spare. John parked the car on the third level of the station parking garage. He stored the ticket in his wallet and they made their way down the stairs.

"Remember Level 3, Section B," Karen reminded John.

John pulled the ticket out of his wallet, on it was written, 'L-3, S-B'.

"Oh, good thinking," Karen complemented.

They arrived at the station. It was a simple station, long and thin, only about eight tracks. Their train left on track four. The railway information monitor said it was on time from Boston.

"Boston to DC, wow, that's neat," John said.

"I'd like to get to Boston again, maybe we'll do it by train," Karen commented.

"Yeah, I'd like that too. Just not Club Car!" he said.

"That's for sure, maybe not even MetroLiner," Karen added.

The time flew and the big panel announced the imminent arrival of their train. Still listed as on time. John suggested they go down to the track and wait there.

"Yeah, let's everyone else seems to be doing that. John grabbed both of the suitcases and they started down to the track.

"Want me to get one?" Karen asked. She had the overnight bag, John had both of the big suitcases.

"No, this makes me balanced, otherwise I'll bother my back."

"That doesn't make sense," Karen said.

"Sure, if I have only one heavy bag, I have to balance against it with my weight and strength. With two bags, the second bag

balances against the other one. All I have to do is hold them. Much easier than straining my back and balance against one heavy bag."

"Oh yeah, I guess that makes sense. It's been a long time since we packed so heavily," Karen said.

"It's the first time we have traveled in cold weather. Although it's a bit warmer in DC, it'll still be cold. Besides, we didn't know what kind of clothes to bring. So I've got suits and you've got dresses. I think between us we have a dozen shoes!" John said.

"At least a dozen, I brought eight," Karen said.

"Eight pair of shoes?" John protested.

"No, eight shoes," Karen teased.

"Anyway, we have a lot of clothes in here. Hey look, here comes the train!" John said.

Down, far off in the distance down the track off to the right there was a train coming in. It seemed like it was on the track they stood next to. Turned out it was. The big gleaming train stood waiting.

"MetroLiner tickets only, MetroLiner only," yelled the conductors.

The last car was the club car, that's what the travel agent had told them. They worked their way back to the last car and were about to step on.

"Excuse me sir, this is for club car ticket holders only," a red jacketed man told him.

"That's what we have," Karen said with a smile.

The look on the man's face said, 'you do?' but he did not hinder their progress. Karen and John had dressed in their everyday

clothes. They decided it would be easier to travel in their 'jogging pants'. They never thought about how they would be perceived.

The man with the red jacket said to John, "may I take your bags sir?"

"Sure," John said.

"May I have your tickets? I'll tag your baggage for you," the man offered.

John handed him the tickets and they boarded the train. Before they really had settled in, the train started to move. John took the overnight bag from Karen and stored it in the overhead compartment. Not really a compartment, rather a rack, but it held their coats and overnight bag very nicely.

\* \* \* \*

Max walked up to O'Brian's office and went to knock, before he did O'Brian was waving him in.

"Max, what do you have for me?" O'Brian asked before Max could even get through the door.

"A long story I will tell you completely some time, but for now let me explain briefly." Max took a deep breath and continued, "my supervisor has been operating outside the law and his position. He ordered the hit on Dr. Peterson. At this point we don't know who actually killed Dr. Peterson, but we do know the source of the request. You will be informed of the killer as soon as we know," Max said and paused for a breath.

"This is amazing," O'Brian said. "You can say that again," Max said before continuing. "Cizzano, as you know is dead. His supervisor called me and told me the project was stopped. The project never officially existed, Harrison, that's the JSA director,

discovered it and has halted it. He has recalled all the field operatives involved. One of them is me, I was to obscure any finding you might get on John Parker. He was not involved in this murder, rather he was the subject of our project."

"What about Todd and Marion Rourke?" he asked.

"Todd is a JSA employee again, he has a connection with John Parker that is not important for you to know. Marion Rourke was a JSA 'actor' posing to throw you off John Parker. Parker had nothing to do with the death of Dr. Peterson. That was the action of Andre Cizzano," Max concluded, "any questions?"

"Hundreds," O'Brian said.

"Well, here is a written statement FAXed from the JSA for you to put into your files. A formal statement will be made to the press after you are satisfied with the information you are given. This is, by the way, the truth in the matter. It is unusual for the agency to do this, but in this case a single man acted on his own. Cizzano, if he were not dead, would face very serious charges beside murder."

O'Brian took the FAX, he was reading it, it was official looking and the details, though sketchy, were sufficient for him to consider the case solved. "I'll get more than this?" he asked.

"Yes sir, you will get much more. Probably more than you want," Max said laughing a snorting sort of laugh. "I'll be leaving now. I probably won't be in touch with you again. Oh, by the way, Max Preston isn't my real name, so don't bother trying to find me. It's been a pleasure," Max offered his hand.

O'Brian took his hand and shook it firmly, "thanks Max."

# CHAPTER

# THIRTY FIVE

The train arrived in Union Station Washington, DC at 7:22 exactly on schedule. John and Karen had enjoyed a relaxed trip down, the Club Car was a decadent way to travel, but certainly enjoyable. The porter got their bags and pointed them in the direction of the station limousine waiting area. As they walked through the station Karen held on to John's sleeve and stared around. Union Station is an impressive sight. The vaulted ceiling with gold leafed panels seemed half a mile above. Rich wood paneled shops. The sights did not end.

"Karen, we have to exit here," John said to her.

"Okay, I'm with you."

They walked out into the cold again. They looked around. How were they going to find their ride. John saw men standing with signs, "Jones," "Thompson," "Parker,"

"Hey, there's our guy!" John said to Karen. They headed over to him.

"Mr. John Parker?" he asked.

"Yes," John answered.

"Let me take your bags sir, ma'am," he said in a perfunctory tone. He took all three bags and walked around the back of the limousine. The trunk flipped open with a wave of his hand.

"Neat trick," John said to Karen.

"Yeah, I wonder how it stays shut when we're driving along?" Karen asked.

"He probably had it set to open," John surmised.

"Right," Karen agreed.



"This way Mr. & Mrs. Parker," the driver offered an open door.

Karen and John got in. The limousine was not a stretch-limo, but it was very nice. The driver got in and proceeded to beep his horn, yell at people and otherwise act like any other driver John had ever seen deal with city traffic. It was just a moment and they were moving along at a reasonable clip. The driver took them out of the city.

"John, where's he taking us?" Karen asked in a panic.

"I don't know," he said, "I'll ask. Sir, excuse me, where are you going?"

"To the Sheraton Washington," he answered.

"Yeah, but isn't that in the city?" John said.

"Yes sir, but by skirting the city this way, we will get there much faster, it is just outside Chevy Chase, Virginia."

"Oh," John said. As he looked around he saw signs to Chevy Chase, guess he knows where we are going.

The two settled back and enjoyed the ride. They got to see an area of the suburbs they otherwise would not have seen. They arrived at the Sheraton in a matter of ten minutes. The driver brought them right up to the front door, an attendant at the hotel opened the door to let them out. The driver moved around the back opened the trunk and retrieved their bags.

"John you should tip him," Karen said.

"How much?" John asked.

"Give him twenty, it's not our money!" Karen sneered.

John grabbed a twenty and went to hand it to the driver. The driver would not take it.

"Thank you sir, that won't be necessary," he said.

"Huh?" John responded.

"The agency pays me and I am not allowed to accept tips, but thank you just the same. Enjoy your stay in our city," he said. The driver spoke to the doorman for a second and then got in the limousine and drove off.

"Mr. & Mrs. Parker, welcome to the Sheraton Washington," the doorman said. "The manager is waiting to greet you."

John and Karen didn't know what to say. Their bags were being whisked up and placed upon a fancy brass cart. A gray haired black man held the cart and smiled a smile of knowing. All knowing, he had lived a rich life, his face showed the lines, but these were lines of happiness, not sorrow.

"John, Karen, welcome to the Sheraton Washington, I'm Jack Reston the night manager. Your room is ready and James will show you the way, James here is the Parker's room key."

James, the man with the cart smiled and took the key, "this way Mr. & Missus Parka," he said with a distinct Virginia accent.

John and Karen followed him. He walked them to an elevator in a corner of the lobby, not the main bank. He reached a key that was attached to a loop on his trousers, turned it and the elevator door opened. He signaled that they should precede him into the elevator. They did so and he entered, pulling his cart.

"You've got yourselves some important friends here in DC, don't you Mr. Parka?" James asked.

"Yes sir, important, but not friends," John said.

"Yes sir, important indeed."

The three traveled up the elevator in silence. The elevator stopped, James pushed the cart out and exited, he reached in and held the doors open for John and Karen. "It's this way if you'll follow me," James indicated a direction.

The three walked down a hall, there were few doors, not like any hotel John and Karen have ever stayed before. James stopped in front of a door, on it was a sign, "Suite-29C"

"James, there must be a mistake, I don't think we are getting a suite," John said.

"No sir, no mistake, this is for you, bought and paid," James explained. He opened the door and led the way in.

John followed first, there was no bed, but a living room. Karen followed, she was awe struck.

James went to the window, he had jammed the door with the cart. He went to the window, pressed a button and the curtains opened. Before them was the city of Washington, illuminated, big as life was the Washington Monument.

"Holy shit," John said.

"Yes sir," James agreed, "if that is all, I'll be on my way."

"No James, there is one more thing you can do for me," John said.

"What's that sir?" James asked.

"Take this and have a good time," John said handing James a hundred dollar bill.

"Oh sir, I can't take this," James expressed disbelief.

"Yes you can, it's not my money and you deserve it just as much as I do. Do with it what you want, it's yours, please take it," John said.

"Yes sir, thank you sir, I'll buy the missus something special with it. Thank you again sir," James said as he closed the door.

"John how much did you give him?" Karen asked.

"A hundred bucks," John said.

"JOHN!"

"He was the sweetest man I've met in a long time, maybe ever. Besides, he reminded me of your father," John said.

"My father?" Karen asked.

"Yeah, a quiet southern gentleman who worked his whole life."

"Right, he is a bit like my father was," Karen remembered her father a tear formed in her eye. She forced it to vanish, by sheer force of will. "So, what do you think of this room?"

"This is not possible, this must be costing a thousand a night. Remember the last time we stayed in a regular room here, it was almost two hundred," John said.

There was a knock at the door. Karen went to answer.

"No, Karen let me," John said.

Karen ignored him and opened the door.

A man, dressed in a Sheraton uniform said, "complements of the management." He had a tray with a bottle of champagne, a ice bucket and two glasses. "Where should I set it?"

"Ah, where would you suggest?" Karen asked.

"Ma'am if this were my suite, I'd have it in the sitting room by the balcony."

"Where's that?" Karen and John asked in unison.

"Through here, follow me," the waiter said.

John and Karen followed the stranger through their suite. There were two more rooms that were still not the bedroom. The sitting room had an even better view than the living room.

"Here you go, sir, ma'am," he set the bottle down.

John had a ten dollar bill ready to hand him. He took it and graciously exited the room.

"Dom Perione," John said.

"Wow, open it, let's have some!" Karen said.

"You bet, this'll hit the spot, I've never had Dom before."

"Neither have I, I hope it's as good as it's suppose to be," Karen said.

"Karen, this bottle is more than fifteen years old!" John exclaimed.

"So, it's not getting any younger, open it!"

\* \* \* \*

Marsha saw a couple of kids throwing eggs at the Parkers house. She knew their parents, they would not be happy to hear about their children. Marsha looked their number up in the phone book, picked

up the phone and called. She explained what she saw. To her surprise the mother thought nothing of it. This was to be Marsha and Chris' experience during Karen and John's absence. The entire neighborhood had aligned against them.

"Chris, we need to do something about this," Marsha said.

"Yes we do, let's find out why these people are so upset and see what we can do." \* \* \* \*

The champagne had a numbing effect on Karen and John. They got into bed and fell asleep, a sound sleep. The phone ringing broke their rest.

"Mr. Parker?" a voice said.

"Yes, who's this?" John responded.

"Tom Harrison, we'll be ready to meet with you in about two hours."

"What? What time is it?" John asked.

"About ten," Harrison answered.

"We're going to meet at midnight?" John asked.

"No, John it's almost 10 am, did I wake you?" Harrison asked.

John and Karen had slept so sound, they did not experience any effect of passing time. The room was so effectively dark the sun didn't disturb them. Karen was still asleep.

"Yes, you did wake me, but I'm glad you did. Neither of us normally sleeps past seven," John said.

"It's past seven, so in two hours then?"

"Yes, noon, we'll be ready."

"I'll send a car. Until then," Harrison said.

"Good-bye, Mr. Harrison."

"Tom. Good-bye John."

\* \* \* \*

Sally turned to Paul, they had been up until three. Paul stayed the night, they slept together but had not made love. Sally was still tired, Paul was sleeping. Sally reached down between the sheets, she felt his strong legs. Her hand ran up to his buttocks, Paul stirred. He was still asleep, yet he was reacting to Sally's attention. Sally's hand wandered forward on Paul's body, she was a bit surprised as she moved toward his stomach. Paul was ready. Paul turned, barely awake, reached his hand over to Sally, he slipped it into her nightgown and touched her breast. Sally sighed. He moved toward her, they kissed Sally wrapped her right leg over Paul's. Paul was awake, he looked at Sally. He went to say something, Sally's index finger touched his mouth.

Sally said, "yes."

\* \* \* \*

John grabbed the room service book and looked at the menu for breakfast. "Want some breakfast?" he asked Karen.

"Yeah, what do they have?"

"Anything you would want," John answered.

"Okay, I'll have a small fresh fruit bowl, some wheat toast and a scrambled egg," Karen said.

"Is that all? Don't you want coffee?"

"I figured that was obvious, John."

John dialed room service, "yes we would like a pot of coffee, six slices of wheat toast, two scrambled eggs, a fruit bowl, a glass of orange juice,"

"Make that two orange juices!" Karen added.

"Change that to two orange juices, and some oatmeal," John concluded their order.

"It'll be about ten minutes," John told Karen. Karen didn't hear him she had gotten into the shower. John wandered around the suite. It was twice the size of their old apartment. There were five rooms and a balcony. The balcony must be beautiful during the spring and summer. John felt it was a shame it was so cold. In addition to the sitting room, the bedroom and living room, there was an office area and a dressing room connecting the bathroom and bedroom.

"John, wait until you try that shower, you will die!" Karen said.

"What's up with it?" John asked.

"It has four shower heads. You get in through a door and turn on the shower and a head from behind in front and each side comes on. Awesome," Karen said.

There was a knock on the door, "Room Service," it said.

"Great!" John said, he grabbed a robe and got the door. Karen was already in a robe. She looked sexy in it, it opened just a bit and exposed her long legs. Her damp hair came down in beautiful golden-brown waterfalls over her shoulders. The 'V Neck' of the robe allowed for a sensuous view of her collar bone with a suggestion of breast. Yet no breast was visible.



The waiter brought the food in and set it in the sitting room. He stood and waited.

John had forgotten a tip, he had forgotten he had to sign for the meal.

"Sir, please sign right here," the waiter said pointing to the check. He glanced at Karen, she sat like a virgin at the table. Her left leg draped over her right leg, her hands folded on her lap. She smiled at him, he returned her smile then quickly moved his gaze.

"Oh, yes, I'm sorry." John signed the check and handed it to the waiter with a ten dollar bill.

"Thank you sir!" he said and quickly left the room.

\* \* \* \*

"Is everybody ready?" Harrison asked.

It was almost noon, the driver had picked up the Parkers and would be at the JSA headquarters in approximately five minutes. All the systems had been checked. The projector was ready, the sound system was ready. The recording equipment was in place, as were the cameras and microphones.

"Yes sir, everything is set."

"Then let's relax and look natural," Harrison said.

The group tried to relax and calm down.

"They've just pulled into the drive, sir," a voice announced.

"Places," Harrison said.

# CHAPTER

# THIRTY SIX

"Welcome Mr. Parker, Mrs. Parker, I'm Tom Harrison, the director of the JSA," Harrison said.

"Mr. Harrison," John said reaching his hand out to the man.

Harrison took his hand and shook it. Then said, "please, why don't we use first names, I'm Tom."

"Karen, Karen Parker," Karen said extending her hand.

"Nice to meet you Karen."

"I'm John, John Parker," John said. He didn't shake again.

"Let's go into the meeting room, several members of the team are assembled in there," Tom directed John and Karen through a door.

In the room, there was a large extended oval table. The table seemed to be made of a highly polished ebony. The walls were mahogany, clearly mahogany. There were brass lamps set every few feet on the wall. Each had an amber glass shade. They looked like lights for a pool hall turned upside-down. Only instead of being green, they were amber.

In the room were several men, and a few women. Men dominated the room. John looked around and said, "Ted, Theresa, what are you doing here?"

"John, Ted and Theresa are JSA field operatives. Those are not their real names, but we will use them for our meetings," Tom said.

John ignored him temporarily, "Ted, are you ok?" John liked Ted and the last time he saw him he was being arrested.

"Yeah John, I'm fine," Ted said to John.

As John continued down the table he saw Ted and Theresa's mom, then his eyes came to rest on Tim Jones.

"Mr. Jones, why am I not surprised to see you here?" John said.

"I never expected it John, but after the last two days, anything is possible," Jones answered.

"Okay, John, Karen, please take a seat over here," Tom said motioning to a pair of empty seats. "And then we can begin."

The two moved to seats and sat.

Tom continued, "I would like to fill you in on how you are involved in this activity. John, you and the JSA have an agreement dating back more than thirteen years. That agreement is void now. Both parties fulfilled their part of the contract and the contract does not obligate either party to further action. However, the JSA exceeded its legal and contractual rights with the continued surveillance of the both of you."

There were murmurs in the room, members of the JSA talking in hushed voices to one another as Tom spoke to the Parkers.

"Please! Keep your comments to yourself until it is your turn to speak. This is complex enough without distractions." Tom yelled at the group. He regained his composure and went on.

"I will be blunt John, you were in a psychiatric hospital suffering from multiple problems. Primarily you were depressed, with shock treatments the depression waned, but you were then diagnosed a schizophrenic. The disease was mild, and you were intelligent. That is why you were chosen for our experiment."

Karen and John sat quietly listening. Karen's eyes were moist and she occasionally sniffed.

"The JSA had developed a plan to use a mind opening drug developed by a scientist working in one of our labs. The drug, as you found, was an LSD derivative. The scientist, was Dr. James Peterson, his assistant was Todd Miller."

"This is beginning to make sense," Karen said to John.

"Shush, Karen wait," John said.

"Your condition was serious enough that you ended up in the psychiatric hospital on a regular basis. You would be admitted, with treatment and drug therapy you would regain yourself and be released. However, you would stop taking the drugs and relapse into your disease. On once such relapse, Todd Miller was also incarcerated for a 'bad trip' he had from some of the drugs he and Dr. Peterson worked with in the lab. The consumption of the drugs was either accidental or induced. No one knows, Dr. Peterson swore he did not administer it to Todd."

"That's why I have memories of Todd in the hospital. Was there a nurse called Cheryl?" John asked.

"Yes, Cheryl was the nurse working in the isolation area of the hospital. Let me go on," Harrison asked.

"Okay," John said.

Karen squeezed John's hand under the table, John knew that was a signal of both support and shut up.

"It was at the hospital Todd met you. You were working on a plan to change your mind. It was fascinating to all involved when Todd reported that. You were not successful, but your diary was interesting and full of correct assumptions about the process. The problem you faced was you couldn't separate from your consciousness long enough to make a complete mind change. For that, it requires days."

There was a knock on the door. Tom said, "yes?"

The door opened and Todd Wilson walked in.

"Todd, we expected you earlier. Come in, you know everyone, please take your seat."

Todd sat next to Jones. He slumped down in his chair and listened.

"After gaining your confidence, Todd asked you if you were interested in trying a new method of mind changing. He told you he had discovered a form of LSD that with a guided trip could help you program your mind. You agreed. Todd played his part and pretended he had misgivings about doing the project. All that showed up in your diary. We had to wait until you could be released again. Todd fed you placebos. The two of you ended up locked in isolation for fighting. Your screaming and talk about mind programming convinced the staff you were both raving lunatics."

He paused for a sip of water. Another knock on the door. The door cracked open and a woman looked in.

"Yes Sally?"

"Sir the food is here, anytime you're ready for it," Sally told Harrison.

"Thank you. Anyone hungry?"

Around the room murmurs and shaking heads.

"We'll wait a half hour, please don't disturb us again."

John looked at Karen, she had eyes filled with tears and disbelief.

Harrison began again, "it took us three months to get both of you out. Once you were out we could begin the project. You signed a

release form and contract. Both of which are in front of you in your packet."

John, Karen and the rest of the members of the meeting opened their packets.

Harrison opened the floor for open discussion. He needed a break and he could feel the tension filling the room. Both John and Karen asked each member to describe their memory of the situation. They received a detailed explanation from each member. Then it was Todd's turn to speak.

Todd stood, "John, you and I took the drug Lysodposidil at the same time, we were connected to the mind changes device. Our minds shared similar experiences for seven days. I recovered, you ended up in the hospital. You did not come out of the drug induced coma. The agency abandoned you at that point. I did not, I wanted to find out what happened to you. The only member of the agency that would listen to me was Andre Cizzano. Cizzano worked with me for a few months, then my crazy passion to find you forced him to act. He sent me to the west coast office. It was supposed to be for a short period of time. It turned out to be thirteen years."

John looked at Todd. He had taken Todd to be a bad guy in this whole thing. Maybe he was wrong.

Harrison continued, "shall we eat?"

This time everyone agreed to eat. Harrison signaled Sally, she and Harrison's assistant Paul brought the food into the conference room. It was set up on the buffet along the wall opposite the side of the table John and Karen sat.

"John, Karen please help yourselves first, you are our guests."

"May we be excused for a moment to talk privately?" John asked.

"Certainly, you may use my office, Sally please show them the way," Harrison said.

"Come with me," Sally said in a gentle voice.

Karen didn't know what John wanted to talk about in particular, but they had days' worth of discussion ahead.

Sally left them alone in the office, she shut the door behind her.

"John, what's up?" Karen asked.

"Do you believe this?" John said.

"It sound like the truth," Karen said.

"Oh yeah, the truth alright, but what did they do to me? They pumped me with drugs and left me to die?"

"Sounds that way, except for Todd."

"Yeah, Todd. Todd the drugged up hippie. Doesn't sound like he had much of an effect. I think Cizzano found out I lived and ended up obsessed with me," John said.

They continued on this tact for a while until Karen said, "John I'm really hungry, if we don't get back all the food is going to be gone!"

"Okay, let's go eat. I hope they have something vegetarian for me," John said concerned. "John, I think they know you're a vegetarian, they'll have something," Karen said.

They walked back to the conference room and joined a seemingly jovial party. The room suddenly grew quiet, the voices became hushed. Laughter was no longer. All the occupants of the room turned and saw John and Karen's return. As depressing as the thought might have been to them, they were the outsiders and the others were not going to be comfortable with them.



Harrison broke the ice for them, "come, you must be hungry. Sally ordered out from a wonderful caterer just down the road. There's everything. John, here's a salad for you, and some cheese and rolls so you can make a sandwich. Karen, there's some seafood salad."

Karen and John felt violated. Although the foods were their favorites, they didn't want any. John spoke first, "I think I'll pass."

Karen looked at him, saw his resolve and said, "I'm not very hungry either. If you folks don't mind, I think preceding with the meeting would be more productive than a party."

Daggers from the other occupants in the room. Karen could feel their anger. John, on the other hand wanted to applaud her brashness.

"Fine, let's all grab our food and begin the meeting again. There is a lot to accomplish. Let me begin this part of the session by describing the process. What happens is the client is given the drug, a modification of the drug you received John. They fall into a coma like state, once in that state they are hooked up to a programming system consisting of computers and medical scanning equipment. Visual programming is provided by stereo video monitors contained in a small mask. Audio is provided by wide range headphones."

"What should we care about this?" Karen asked.

"Wait, you'll see. The clients live another complete history through the programming. Everything that is of significance in a life is seen, heard and felt during the thirteen day mind change process. When the client wakes in their bed in their new home, they feel as if they just woke from a night's sleep. They are living, however, a brand new existence."

George Baker spoke, "I'm George Baker, the director of the Mind Changes lab. We have been successful with the mind alteration and

placement of over a thousand men and women. Many of whom were married, and almost a hundred had children. We were able to alter their past and give them a new, alternate reality for their future.

"Why should we care, I've been through this already," John asked.

"Why indeed, John, Karen, please watch this video clip," Harrison said, "George."

The lights dimmed, a screen appeared and a film began. Good showmanship thought John. There was no audio track, rather George provide one.

"What you see right now are the computer banks. Each rack consists of 1024 microprocessors, all working together to form a single computer. Each person is hooked up to fifty two computers. There are over thirty distinct tasks performed by each of the medical scanners."

"George, I think you're going to lose most of us, please a little less technical wiz-bang," Harrison directed Baker.

"Sure, sure, no problem." He tried to recover and continue, "so, ah, let's see. The idea is that as a mind thinks as the body is comatose, a series of images, sound and sensation can be used to replace existing experiences. When the computer reads a certain reaction occurring in the brain, the other computer banks are instructed to provide an experience to match. However, the experience is different from the original, thus the mind is altered. The process is subtle and does not affect the brain at all. Rather it affects what is stored in the brain."

"Still, I don't see what this has to do with me, us," John stated.

Harrison stood and took the floor, "John, what we are offering you is an alternate past so you can have a future free from the awful things you have just gone through."

Joseph A. Sabin Jr.

"What?" Karen yelled.

"Wait Karen, let's hear him out," John said softly.

"Thank you, so, we will take your existing past, which we know in quite detailed terms, alter it slightly and within a week, maybe a few days longer, you will have freedom from all that has happened." Harrison said raising his voice to an almost fevered pitch.

"What? What about our friends, our family, our neighbors? What of them?" Karen asked.

"You will not go back to your neighborhood. Those people have rallied against you. There is no turning back to them. Your life in your home is over as a peaceful existence. You will be moved to a new location, your house will be sold and you will be given one of equal value in a new town. You will be given new ids and jobs will be waiting for you."

"What about friends and family?" Karen pressed.

"There will be no contact with them, they will be replaced with new friends and your family can either be estranged or dead. Those are the only two choices," Harrison said matter of factly.

"I'll never see my mother again?" Karen asked with tears in her eyes.

"That is correct, we can program a very beautiful funeral for her in your memory. You can remember her vividly, and you will have beautiful memories of your times together. But to you, she will be dead."

"And to her?"

"You and John will have died in an accident," George Baker said.

"I won't do it, John," Karen said.

"Karen, I don't know what to do, these thoughts in my head. They have gotten a lot worse since this all started, but if you won't be a part, I can't either. I'm not willing to leave you behind."

"John, if you make that choice, you will not miss her once the process is completed. You can do this alone," George Baker told John.

"At that Karen started to cry, she was sobbing uncontrollably, J...Jo...John...don't you dare leave me!" she said to him.

"I won't. Gentleman, ladies, I think you have just heard our decision. No," John announced.

Harrison was pacing. "John, this will not be offered to you again. You cannot go back and erase what has happened these past two weeks. We can, let us help."

"No, I think we are ready to go," John said.

Todd stood, "no, John think about what you are doing first. You will be living in hell if you decide to keep your current memories. They were not completely implanted, your past is still partially your real past."

"Part of my past, actually, thirteen years of my past is real. I desire to keep that, in particular I intend to keep the last nine of them. Those I spent with the woman I love. I love her, I did before I did this mind changing process, I did when I met her and I do now. No gentleman, Karen and I are going home. Thank you for the offer."

Karen started to applaud, she applauded loud and steady. Everyone at the table looked at them.

"John, I wish I could change your mind..."

"I'm aware of that Mr. Harrison," John cut him off.

"That's not what I mean, change your feelings toward the procedure so we could help you. However, since you adamantly refuse, that is your choice." Harrison turned to the intercom, "Sally, please have Mr. & Mrs. Parkers things brought here immediately."

John looked at Karen and said, "I guess we weren't staying in that nice hotel again, huh?"

"No John, you weren't. You'll need these. The two white ones are for the Metro, the larger tickets will get you home on the 5:00 MetroLiner. Their coach. Can I have the remainder of the cash and the traveler's checks please?"

John grabbed the cash and Karen got the travelers checks out. She handed them to John. John looked at them and then handed them to Harrison.

"There's only about seven hundred dollars here."

"Right, we're big tippers Mr. Harrison," Karen said.

"Mr. Harrison," Sally's voice came across the intercom, "the Parker's things are here."

"It seems like it is time for you to leave," Harrison said. He left the room. Everyone else followed, except for Ted and Theresa.

The four spoke for several minutes. Neither John nor Karen could accept their apologies. They were very sad, all four. They had become friends, now it was lost. Ted and Theresa left the room. The Parkers prepared to leave, gathered their things and the door opened.

Tim Jones entered the room. He looked friendly.

Karen stood, her legs barely held her weight. She looked at John and said, "come on, let's go." She held out her hand and her eyes darted toward the door.

John looked at her, he nodded with his body, "yeah, let's get the fuck away from these freaks." There was venom in his voice. He turned his attention to Jones, "fuck you asshole." With that he reached into his pocket and grabbed a piece of paper. The paper was folded neatly in quarters, John opened it up and read from it. They all knew the words, they were the opening paragraphs to the experiment.

"Experiment my ass," he said. John crinkled the paper up into a ball and tossed it gently at Jones.

Jones didn't move, the ball hit him just right of his nose. He could feel a tear forming in his eye. Not from the impact of the paper, rather the impact of John's words. He went to speak, stopped and thought then proceeded, "John you may never forgive me, but I wish you the best."

Harrison came back into the room. "Just to make your trip a little bit more fun, I've informed your friendly neighbors your coming home. They seemed delighted," he laughed as he left. Harrison didn't like being turned down. He was going to make their life miserable for the next few days if he could. After that, there'd be others to hassle.

Karen was sobbing and she tugged on John's arm, "let's go, now please!"

The husband and wife turned and walked out of the office, down the corridor to the elevators. Thirty-Eight floors and they would be free from the nightmare. John reached his right middle finger out and pressed the down arrow.

"John, don't," Karen asked quietly. She knew John was past his limit.

"Better than punching Jones," John said.

Karen laughed at that statement.

"What, don't you think I could hit him?" John asked.

"John, let's go home."

The elevator door opened, they got in. The two stood side-by-side in silence. The door closed, the elevator didn't move. Karen reached forward and pressed 'G'. The elevator moved instantly, at her request.

There was gentle sounds of mechanical stress as the elevator moved down, 36...32...28...20...15...7...3...G, a loud bing. After a moment the elevator came to a complete halt, the doors opened. They moved and exited the elevator, as John passed the doors began to close, they hit him and jerked back.

"Jeesh, even the fucking elevators," John complained.

"Let's go John!" Karen said sternly.

The guard nodded.

John asked, "where are our bags?"

"Right here Mr. Parker," he said and wished them a farewell as the couple left passed his station. The revolving door let a little cool air in as it turned. Karen went first and the brisk chill hit her face. John followed one pane back. They bundled themselves up a little better and proceeded to the Metro station.

"John, do we want the Orange or the Blue line?" Karen asked.

"Either one will get us to Metro Center, from there we have to transfer upstairs to the Red line to Union Station" John answered.

"Oh yeah, right," Karen said.

They took the escalator down to the subway. As they were putting their cards into the turnstiles, the lights began to flash. "Should we run?" John asked.

"Hell yeah, let's get the fuck out of this city!" Karen said.

The two bolted to the next escalator down to the station platform. There are two lines on the escalator, right hand side lets the escalator do all the work, the left hand side moves. Karen and John were on the left hand side almost running down to the platform. John barely keeping up with Karen because of the two bags he carried. They arrived in time and caught the Orange line. They passed through one stop.

"Metro Center," called the conductor.

"Our stop," John said.

The train stopped, Karen and John got out and went up the escalator to the turnstiles. Put their little magnetic cards through and they popped up on the other side. They walked to the big bank of escalators and up a level to the Red line. They didn't have to rush for the Red line, it looked like a train had just left. It was just the beginning of the rush period, so another train should be along in a few minutes.

The next train arrived, John and Karen got on. The train began to move as they sat. It rushed along.

"Gallery Place," the conductor said over the loud speaker. The train slowed to a stop. "Red line to..." he said as commuters rushed on and off the train. Bing-Bong, went the train speakers, and the train was off again. Moments later, "Judiciary Square, next stop Union Station, transfers for the Yellow line," the conductor said.



"That's our stop," Karen said. She looked like she was going to stand.

"Wait Karen, this is a long portion of the trip. It'll be a minute before we get to the station," John said.

Karen remained seated. The train accelerated to a much quicker pace than before. It almost seemed as if it was in a rush to get to Union Station. The train banked sharply to the right as it rushed headlong into the darkness.

"Union Station, transfer here to the Yellow line," the conductor announced.

John looked at his watch, "Forty minutes before our train. We can look around."

The doors opened and John and Karen got out. So did half the train. The lines were packed getting up the escalators. This time neither Karen nor John felt rushed, not with forty minutes to kill. They reached the turnstiles in a minute, this time as they put their cards into the machine, it churned a moment, let them through and said, "Exact Fare." No card emerged from the turnstile.

"Oh," Karen said, "I'm sad."

"Why?" John asked.

"I liked doing that."

"We'll come back and ride the Metro again. Next time, we'll do it for us!"

Karen knew they would be back. John had said that with conviction.

They wandered around for about a half hour, before heading to the train. By the time they reached the MetroLiner boarding area, there was a line moving past a pair of women checking tickets.

"Get our tickets," Karen said to John.

"I've got them, here's yours," John replied.

They got in line and were soon showing their tickets to the very happy attendant.

"Thank you, have a nice trip," she said. As she looked at each person's ticket, she made eye contact and said a friendly greeting. She was not robotic, rather genuinely friendly.

"What a nice gateway from the city," Karen said.

John was smiling, she made him happy too. "That's for sure, what a nice way to start a trip," John agreed.

They made their way through the cars, found a pair of seats in a non-smoking car and sat back. Both of them sighed. Partially to be getting out of the city, partially because they had made the train and were going home. John had closed his eyes, Karen was looking around. The train began to move a minute or so later. John opened his eyes.

John watched out the window as the train moved. Karen was watching all the action in the isles. She saw a man go by with a beer, tiny wine bottle and a sandwich.

"Hey John, they have beer, wine and stuff to eat," Karen said.

"Want some?" he asked.

"Not a sandwich, but a white wine would be great," Karen answered.

John stood, banged his head on the overhead compartment area, "oww!"

"eww, John," Karen said.

"I'm okay, let me get past," John said rubbing his head.

As he walked down, several other passengers banged their heads. Seemed like it was a common problem.

"Yes sir," the bartender asked.

"White wine and a beer," John asked.

"Imported or domestic beer sir?"

"Imported," John decided.

"That'll be seven dollars."

Seven bucks, wow thought John. He grabbed a five and two ones and handed them to the bartender.

"Thank you," he said half-heartedly, he turned to the next person, "yes ma'am?"

John noticed the money on the bar, he reached inside his wallet and withdrew another one and tossed it down. The bartender turned and said, "THANK YOU SIR!"

John felt a little flutter in his heart. He felt good having done that. Such a rush for so little money. He'd have to remember that. He worked his way back to Karen. His wares were in a little cardboard box, little plastic cups upside-down over each of their drinks. Karen's wine bottle was a miniature version of a 750ml bottle. She'll love it, John thought. He reached their seats.

"Oh, my that is so cute!" Karen said about the wine bottle.

"I knew you'd like it," John said.

John sat, and they opened their drinks and relaxed for their ride home.

Although it took more than two hours, it seemed like no time when the conductor yelled, "T-R-E-N-T-O-N-!"

"That's us," John said.

Karen just looked at him. She took the last sip out of her glass and handed it to John. John took it put his glass into it and finished his beer. They got up, got their coats on and stood with the other passengers waiting almost three minutes as the train crawled into Amtrak Station Trenton.

It arrived, they detrained and got their car. In less than ten minutes they were home. There were several cars parked in front of their house. They pulled into the driveway and parked. As they were walking around to the front door they heard a voice.

"John, Karen, come here!"

John turned to see who it was. He saw a man standing in the shadows. "Who is it?" he asked.

"Chris," Chris answered.

"Oh, hey Chris, Karen and I are really tired can it wait?" John answered.

"Well, not really. I've got something I need you to see."

"Karen?" John asked.

"Sure, why not," Karen answered.

They went to where Chris was standing and Chris motioned them to his house. The three walked up to a dark house. Only the front porch light was on.

"I guess Marsha's in back at the kitchen," Chris said, "come on in."

The three went into the house, Chris closed the door.

"S-U-R-P-R-I-S-E-!-!" yelled a crowd as the lights came on.

John and Karen, wide eyed in amazement stood and stared. They looked at the people attending. People started to come up to them and patted John on the back and wished him well. Some said they hoped he felt well soon. All sorts of happy well-wishing kind of statements. The whole neighborhood had turned out for the party. In all the hubbub John had not noticed a man walking around beside him.

"Hey John, you know we love you!"

John turned, Miller greeted him with a bear hug. Doreen stood beside him, Karen ran to her and hugged her.

Karen turned to John and said, "no alternate future could have topped this!"

John did not say a word, the tears flowed freely down his face.