

Missing Person

Missing Person

Federico Sanchez

Copyright © 2009 by Federico Sanchez.

Library of Congress Control Number:	2008908744
ISBN:	Hardcover 978-1-4363-7419-4
	Softcover 978-1-4363-7418-7

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying, recording, or by any information storage and retrieval system, without permission in writing from the copyright owner.

This is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places and incidents either are the product of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously, and any resemblance to any actual persons, living or dead, events, or locales is entirely coincidental.

This book was printed in the United States of America.

To order additional copies of this book, contact:

Xlibris Corporation
1-888-795-4274
www.Xlibris.com
Orders@Xlibris.com

Contents

New Haven, Connecticut, 2006.....	9
GOD (An Autobiography).....	16
The Orange Connection	21
Parallel Universes, Liu, 3432 B.C.	35
The Love Connection	55
Nefermaat and Snefru, Egypt, 2614 B.C.	77
The Five W's	116
The Vampire	124
Amun Ra and Tuthmosis III, Egypt, 1486 B.C.	136
A Disappearing Act	162
J.C., 10 A.D.....	174
The Search for More Stories.....	189
Illiam and the Hermit, 752 A.D.....	193
A History Lesson.....	199
Imbert and Jacques, 1307 A.D.	206
A Neuropsychological Theory	214
Mexico City, 2006.....	220
New York, 2006	224
Juan and Isabel 1486 A.D.	229
Legal Insanity.....	245
Killing for Stories	252
Miguel and the Count, Guanajuato, 1752 A.D.	259
Lunch at the Aquavit and the Mexican Connection	268
Sacagawea and Meriwether, The Missouri River, 1803.....	280
Schizophrenia, What You See Is Not	296
Vincent, Auvers, 1890.....	302
The Secret Service Connection.....	305
The Abusive Connection.....	310
Smith and Johnson, Iran, 1980	319
The Suicide Theory and Reincarnation	336
Epilogue.....	343

For my friend Mario, the real Michael Merchant,
who has put up with my stories, theories, and
hypothesis more than anyone should.

New Haven, Connecticut, 2006

“Hello?” Larry answered in a hushed tone.

“Hi, its Pops,” it was his father, Lawrence. “They’re after me again.”

Larry heard the tone of voice and knew from past experience that something was wrong. A shiver ran up his spine. He breathed to calm himself.

“We’ve been through this before, Pops,” Larry said patiently. Twelve years before, when he was sixteen, his mother had been killed in a gas explosion. His father had insisted she had been murdered and they were out to get him; he blamed himself for her death. Larry had tried unsuccessfully for years to get his father to therapy. Larry looked impatiently at his watch. He needed to be at Yale University in fifteen minutes, just a few blocks away.

“I know you don’t believe me, but I have some new stuff that you should know. Bad things have happened. There are things you don’t know, Larry. I don’t know what to do.”

“Pop, it is Wednesday morning. I am really busy.”

“I know, but I’m going through something awful.”

A long pause ensued. In a year and a half he would be finishing his degree in Neurology. Because of his father’s condition he was thinking of changing to Neuropsychology. Larry waited patiently for his father to continue, trying not to be emotionally affected. He looked out the window. In February the deciduous trees looked like burnt phantoms in the gray overcast sky. A thin layer of old, dirty snow covered the sidewalks. Two days ago his father sounded strange—the pitch was different—when they had talked on the phone. His speech was accelerated, almost manic. He had never shown such symptoms.

“I feel like getting rid of everything.”

“I don’t like that talk, pop.”

“I mean, like going to a deserted beach, where nobody knows me. I don’t know, I just don’t know.” Lawrence sounded close to tears. “I need to do something!”

“You’re not making much sense. Calm down. Take it easy, pop. Take a deep breath.”

"I wouldn't be asking you if it wasn't urgent." Lawrence continued with a hollow voice. "I . . . I have been feeling real bad. A terrible feeling."

"What kind of bad, Pop?"

"You know . . . that kind of bad." "That kind of bad," normally meant the moderate depression and occasional panic attacks he had suffered since his wife's death. "But this is worse. Bad things are happening, I'm afraid it's out of control. I just can't take it. I need to do something."

"I guess I can be there tomorrow afternoon. I'll catch the 4:30 train to Grand Central. I'll spend the night with you."

"I'm sorry to be such a bother . . . I wouldn't call if it wasn't so bad." Lawrence sounded like he was about to cry.

"You'll be all right until tomorrow?" Larry's voice carried a tinge of remorse. He thought about the unflinching support he had received from his father all through college and Med School.

"I think so. I guess I can keep them off balance for another day."

"Keep who off balance?" It was too late. Larry spoke to himself. His father had hung up. He felt bad, but it was probably better not to call back. His father generally got more agitated if he quizzed him. Larry decided to attend his classes at Yale, and clear the next day's activities to go see his father.

He returned late, checked his answering machine. No messages from his father. "Good," he thought. It was too late to call him, better to let him sleep.

The next morning, Larry called his father. The phone rang and he was almost ready to hang up when the phone was answered. He heard heavy breathing.

"Pop, its me. Is that you?"

"I had a really bad night. You're right, Larry. I need therapy, I need help."

"What's wrong?"

"After everything that has happened, I couldn't sleep. I had several attacks. Worse than ever." Lawrence sounded broken. "I don't know if I'll ever be normal again. They just keep coming."

"Nobody is coming for you, Pops," Larry said gently. "I already explained how Persecutory Delusions happen. You're just being paranoid. I'll check with my professors to see who's best in New York. We'll get a handle on this."

"It's not only people! The *attacks* keep coming! The panic. I don't think I'll ever be right. There is a blackness in my head." Lawrence sounded like he was about to start sobbing.

"You don't need to worry about that." Larry added mechanically, not knowing what else to say. Sometimes he wished he were a therapist. Then he might know better how to lead these types of conversations.

“But, I am worried; there is a great darkness inside my head. I think I am going crazy, Larry.”

“What do you mean by darkness in your head?”

“It’s hard to explain. Try to imagine being inside my mind. There, I sense a small black celestial sphere, like the sky at night. It’s dark, with no stars, but it is smooth and cool. I can remember everything about myself. I can reach out and find my memories. Other times, when things are bad, I sense the black, smooth sphere, slowly turning into a small cylinder. The cylinder’s black surface turns hot, closes in on me, pressing and cutting against me; its texture is thorny, like millions of sea urchin quills. The black quills slash my hands and arms, my face, my whole body, and prevent me from reaching through the cylinder as I try to break out. The blackness is made of hot steel blades, burning me! Constricting me! I know I can’t reach my memories! I feel all alone. I can’t remember anything. There is only darkness,” Lawrence screeched between clenched teeth. He took a deep breath and continued, “As the cylinder tightens around me, choking me, knocking the wind out of me, I remember less and less. Slowly the millions of black quills close in on me, squeezing me, cutting me. No matter how hard I try, I can’t see you, or anything. The torture is beyond words. I must be going mad.”

“Relax, Pops. Take a deep breath. You obviously can remember many things right now. Its all right,” Larry said soothingly. “I’ll be there this afternoon. Just stay in the apartment and try to relax. I’ll take you to see a good therapist tomorrow. He is the best.” He already had contacted Dr. Boukhardt and arranged to take his father for therapy as soon as he consented, with a couple of hours notice if need be. This was a psychiatric emergency.

“Good. You do that.”

“I’ll see you soon.”

It was dark by the time Larry arrived at Grand Central. A light snow flurry was falling as Larry sped up Third Avenue in a taxi. Recently his father’s state had seemed to improve considerably. He had told Larry excitedly that he was writing again. But now, this phone call about the blackness. *How can you go from one state of mind to the other?*

“Here, on the right curb is fine.” Larry jumped out, gave the man a ten-dollar bill as he buttoned his coat. “Keep the change.” He looked up to his father’s apartment. There were no lights on. A chill ran up his spine. He looked at his watch. It was 6:46. *Maybe he’s sleeping. I’ll try the doorbell.* Larry rang repeatedly but got no response. *Perhaps he went out to get something to eat.* That reminded him that he hadn’t eaten since early in the morning. He headed to La Tour, a French bistro a block away. His father ate there two or

three times a week. On the way, he pulled out his cell phone and dialed his father again. Again, not even the answering machine picked up. *I'll check La Tour and get something to eat. Hopefully he'll show up soon.*

As he dug hungrily into a bowl of cassoulet with a glass of French Bordeaux, he considered several possibilities. His father had slowly, over time, been drinking more and more since the death of his mother. Larry believed it was a case of self-medication rather than alcoholism, *but where does one draw the line? Maybe he's passed out from drinking, and he's snoring away. My poor father, he had achieved his dream, published two books and was on the verge of publishing a third. He just stopped working and writing and began drinking after mom's death. Occasionally, he suffered persecutory delusions, insisting that they would kill him if he published anything.*

An hour later he returned to the doorbell. This time he pressed down for a long time, definitely impolite under other circumstances, but still, no answer. He rang the concierge, who after, what seemed an interminable time, walked up to the front door and let him in.

"I'm sorry to bother you, but it's freezing outside. My father will probably be back soon. You wouldn't have a key to his apartment would you?" Larry inquired politely.

"No, but you can wait here in the hallway. There is a chair you can sit in."

"Thanks." As soon as the concierge went back to his basement, Larry headed up the stairway to the first floor. There were two apartments per floor. His father's was apartment 2A. He rang the doorbell, and then knocked loudly on the door. He checked hopefully under the mat to see if there was a key; there wasn't. After waiting two hours, he went back downstairs, jammed the door with the chair so it wouldn't close, and went back into the street. Next door was the ever-present locksmith advertising his services 24/7. He called the number and gave the man the address.

A short while later the locksmith was picking the lock of apartment 2A.

"It would be very expensive to make a new key. It would be cheaper and easier to change the entire lock. Are you sure you live here?"

"It's my father's apartment. He has the keys, so I won't need a new one. I just need to get in."

"Can I see and I.D.?" Seeing Larry's expression he added, "Just for security. I need to protect myself, in case of something."

"I understand," Larry pulled out his driver's license. The locksmith pulled out his receipt booklet and wrote the info down. A few minutes later an audible click announced the door had opened. He paid the locksmith. All the lights were off. The apartment was in slight disarray, but nothing out of the ordinary. It was

sparsely furnished with modern Danish furniture. *Where do I start?* He took his coat off and hung it on the rack by the door. He checked the bar—Cazadores Tequila, Bombay Gin, Absolute Vodka, Chivas Regal, and his father's favorite, Bacardi Rum. The bottles had all been opened, more than half-full; nothing conclusive could be determined. He checked the garbage and recycle cans. Nothing. He looked in the refrigerator: two Corona beers, some Swiss cheese and a carton of eggs. His father's small library seemed in order: typically, all the books perfectly vertical and lined up with the edge of the shelves of the four identical bookcases. A quick glance told him all books were in place—no empty spaces, about a thousand books in all. It was amazing how many books his father had read since the explosion had destroyed his library twelve years ago.

Larry sat in the chair at the small dining table. He slowly scrutinized the studio apartment. His heart skipped a beat when he noticed his father's wallet and watch on the bed. He inspected them quickly. Nothing seemed missing; the wallet had some cash and his credit cards. The watch was set exactly one hour behind Eastern Standard Time; it read 8:17 p.m. Larry had a sinking feeling. His father wouldn't go out without his wallet or watch; *and why was it set one hour behind?* He looked at the coat rack—the black cashmere coat his father usually wore was still hanging there. A key-ring with four keys hung on a hook on the wall near the coat rack. His palms got clammy. He tried them shakily on the front door; one worked. The door to the staircase used the same key as the front door. Inside the apartment, neither the closets nor the bathroom door handle used a key.

There seemed to be a small stain on the bathroom-door handle. Inspecting the floor, he walked over to the bathroom and saw what could be a drop of dried blood. He looked back towards the small dining table, and on the floor, next to one of the table's legs, there were many small drops of blood, if that is what it was. He knelt down and touched one lightly. It was dry, but it was impossible to determine how long it had been there.

He hesitated for a moment and then dialed 911 to report a missing person. He was informed that a person was technically considered missing after twenty-four hours, not any minute sooner. If his father didn't show up by tomorrow night, he was instructed to go to the 19th Precinct on East 67th street and file a report.

He hung up and headed to the 19th Precinct a few blocks away.

A police officer gently explained that ninety-nine per cent of *missing* persons show up in less than twenty-four hours, "We wouldn't have time to do anything else if we went chasing after every person whose whereabouts are unknown. We have more important things to do."

“But he left his wallet and his watch,” Larry protested.

“Perhaps he is with a friend, and didn’t need his wallet. If he doesn’t show up, son, come tomorrow and we’ll see what we can do.”

Larry returned to the apartment. He looked in his father’s address book, in spite of the late hour he called the few people that might possibly know anything. None did. Jack, a cousin, had received a message on the answering machine asking for help the night before, but when he had tried returning the call this morning, he got no answer.

“Did he say what kind of help?” Larry asked.

“I don’t know. He just said, ‘Jack, I need help. Call me.’”

“What time did you call back?”

“It was twelve oh one, when I took my lunch break.”

“Thanks. I’ll keep you posted.”

Larry called Dr. Boukhardt. He quickly reviewed the events since they had last spoken. Dr. Boukhardt repeated what he had said before. “I can’t be sure, of course, since I haven’t been able to appraise him personally, but I feel he is not suicidal. You made a deal with him. He would’ve told you. He’s been more or less stable for almost a decade; slightly paranoid, moderate depression, as you know, are not indicators of suicide.”

“Panic attacks increase that possibility, and people that commit suicide don’t necessarily keep any promises,” Larry interjected. “There is no guarantee he would tell me, Doctor. He did mention getting rid of everything. Things can change very quickly.”

“Getting rid of belongings could be a sign, but you have to be optimistic at this point. He also mentioned going to a deserted beach. He’ll show up, Larry. You don’t know of any recent stressors that could trigger his delusions or depression?”

“Like I told you, he sounded strange, like he was talking too fast. I had never heard his voice like that. Do you suppose he could have had a manic episode?”

“I thought you said he’d never had one, Larry.”

“As far as I know, and he never mentioned anything that sounded even hypomanic. This is unlike him.”

“Accelerated speech is one of the symptoms of mania.”

“But nothing fits. I am just extremely worried.”

Dr. Boukhardt changed the subject purposefully, “I am almost finished with your theory on unipolar and bipolar disorder. We should get together to discuss it. Keep me informed about your father. For now, try to relax. Try to be patient.”

After he hung up Larry tried sleeping. It was useless. He looked around the apartment. He looked at the drops of blood on the floor and then at the stain on the bathroom-door handle. He better leave it for now. No use cleaning it, it could wait. On his father's desk was an old manuscript his father had sent him a copy of a few years back, when he was finishing his engineering degree, before he went to med-school. On the manuscript was a pink Post-it note in his father's distinct handwriting, "*Follow my stories,*" with a big prominent "F" and underlined. Underneath his father had written, "*It's all a hoax!*" His heart skipped a beat. "What can that mean?" he thought. Larry lifted the Post-it note and without thinking dropped it in the waste-paper basket. He started reading.

GOD

(An Autobiography)

BOOK I

Eugene

(From the Greek, eu=good, gene=origin.)

The First (Or of Nothing).

In the beginning the Stillness is all encompassing. The Darkness engulfing. The Blackness total. The Silence . . . complete. Nothingness reigns supreme.

Then . . . floating, suspending, pulsing, vibrating, approaching ever so slowly, practically indistinguishable. Seemingly twirling, oscillating. Perhaps growing, not approaching, catching My attention. Awareness of a speck in the silence and stillness, blackness no more. The First Experience! Oh, what wonder. The Otherness, separate and apart from the Nothingness.

The Second (Or Time).

As the Creator becomes aware of the Otherness before Itself; then . . . I am. The Second Experience! A succession of events. I have created Time. Before, there was no beginning and no end. The interval between The First and The Second Experience will be the unit of time. I will call it The Second. Henceforth, Time will move forward, never repeating.

The speck shrunk, or moved away and then disappeared. What great loneliness, what Blackness? The Stillness engulfing. The Darkness blinding. The Silence deafening. The Nothingness fighting with Me. I shall prevail.

The Third (Or Space).

I need to disturb the Nothingness, as the Nothingness disturbed My sleep. And now, I know how. An infinitesimally small disturbance of the Nothingness will turn It to nothing. A speck is All it takes. I command to join the Nothingness, shrinking, ever smaller and smaller. As I tend to Nothing, there are throbbing, alternately, wrinkling and extending, relaxing and tensioning, spinning, twirling, faster, smaller, tighter. The Tension is

unimaginable. I Focus, smaller, smaller. Seven dimensions times Three, plus another Three. Twenty-Four in All. Unfold it Seven times Two. I have Ten in All. Subtract another Seven. I have Three in All. I have created Space. Oh, My Self! It is grand as the Nothingness. Now there is God and Time and Space. I have commanded The Nothingness to vanish. And it was good. Stillness prevails. I fill All Space, and it is cramped. The Third was good. I will use The Second and The Third, space and time, and tend to Nothingness once more.

The Fourth (Or Light).

Again, reduced to awareness. Tensioning tighter and faster. Focus and attention. More twirl, and bend the ends! I, God, have to get it right. Exactly right. More rotation, a little more tension there. Let there be light. Oh, I forgot. Space isn't large or big enough. I'll stretch it. It needs boondoggling. Perhaps, more booning than doggling. I need light to help define Space. The Fourth shall be to the Third, like the First to the Second. The light will move at constant speed forever in one dimension. Time will stop at this speed. Light will be twoness times two. When light crosses light it will define the second dimension. And one more crossing will define the third dimension. Three is all that is needed. All other lights will be moving in Space as thus defined, but any three lights can be used to define Space. It is so loud here! Getting hotter and so bright that I'm blinded. This is harder than I anticipated. Stretch The Third. Quicker, faster than the light. The Fourth fills the Third. The Light, present but invisible, like God. Space, The Third, and Time, The Second will produce the light. Light continuously moving at maximum speed, ever self-regenerating, spreading out.

Now I command: Blow up Space! That is better. The light is invisible, but it is good.

The Fifth (Or Matter).

The twirling in one direction cancels the spinning in the other direction. Tension and compression cancel out, as the positive cancels the negative. Always ending with Nothing. The specks canceling the anti-specks. Oh, God, no. Something is wrong; there are more specks than anti-specks. What is to be done? Perhaps I should have doggled more and booned less. Balancing and canceling Everything out is complicated. I can only go forward now that Time exists, even if only for an infinitesimally short time.

Specks grouping in threes, and again in threes, spiraling upwards. Expanding with the speed of light. How can All fit in Space? A big stretch

that is the hand of God. Again, threes on threes on threes, and finally Quarks. The laws of physics will be based on the properties of the boons and doggles that created specks. Everything that will follow will obey the laws of physics. And they are good. Expanding Space cooling All, quarks joining forming electrons, positrons, neutrons and protons. Let the building blocks of matter spill forth.

The Sixth (Or Universe).

I don't need to do anything more. As soon as Space permits, Hydrogen is born, inevitably, following the Laws. Let the swirling clouds gather unto themselves, and then fall into themselves. Matter attracting matter, always separating in space. And thus the stars are created, illuminating the vast darkness of Space, but not Me. The irregular distribution will be a sign of the imperfection of the Universe. All came of Nothingness, and to Nothingness shall return. Only thus can it begin again. Nothingness is forever with no Time. The Universe is not created in My image; it is a reflection of the Nothingness through Time. Irregular and wrinkled, it was, I saw, good.

The Seventh (Or the Rest).

And on the Seventh, as I rested, all the rest followed.

BOOK II

The Cosmos

(From the Greek, Kosmos=Universe)

I'm back from my rest. Inspecting the results.

Everything will be nothing. But . . . This is the broad question To be or not to be. All amounts to nothing. This is the exquisite part of my existence. I am not here! After all the photons radiating, producing, annihilating, there should still be nothing. But I Am Here. My presence has disturbed it all. Matter and Antimatter are not created in the same amounts. Matter, Because, Improbable, Fight, Will, Free, Hope, Impossible, Just, Fair, Exist, Love, Knowledge, Me, will endure.

Neutrons, protons, come forth from the specks, emerge from the quarks. Vanish again. Neutrinos and antineutrinos rule. I behest you, with my help. Match the photons one to one; bring into being the Universe over and over. Electrons, "Fight!" All charges equal zero. Balance Symmetry in the beginning is total, created in My Image. Leave My signature to be traced forever. The Only unsymmetry is Me. Explode forth, and let my

unsymmetry shine for one hundred billion years! Time will continue, and so will I. I am Time.

Stars and Suns are formed by the billions. Inside these starry furnaces, following the Laws, all elements are produced. Out of the explosions of these stars, planets abound and gather in orbits around other stars, eventually finding stable paths.

BOOK III

The Biosphere

(From the Greek, Bios=life, sfaira=sphere)

Under the right conditions, in some of these planets, Life, inevitably appears, following the laws. It's been a few thousand million revolutions of this planet around its star. There were moments when life's continuance was in grave jeopardy. But life goes on. Life is good. All life forms have evolved down specific paths following the Laws. Life on this planet evolved in an interesting pattern, where dominance of a specific biological architecture proved inevitable. The scheme it followed for the evolution of cognition and perception has reached the outer limits of this particular path and a potential disaster lies in wait. This species might self-destruct. They have been able to modify the Universe they inhabit. In many ways for good. However, they kill each other, and more alarmingly, they have the knowledge to self-destruct collectively as a species. And worse, on occasion they self-destruct individually. Something must be done. I need the noblest and the smartest of the radiances to volunteer to shed light on this vexing problem. I need the noblest to inspire; I need the smartest to burn a path. This will be a two-pronged assault: the first, involves gaining the knowledge to help avoid individual self-destruction; the second, involves creating the wisdom necessary to establish the institutions to guard against self-destruction as a species. It is a strenuous task involving great challenges and sacrifices. Do I have some volunteers?

"I'll go."

"And I."

"Me too."

"I with them."

"Yes."

"I also."

"Wait for me."

"I'm there."

"So am I."

“Add one.”

“One more.”

I forgot to mention that it will require a hundred lifetimes. I commend
you! Go forth and shed light!

In a flash they were gone.

This is the story of their efforts.

The Orange Connection

The next morning Larry woke up stiff from sleeping in the chair. He checked the time, it was 9:03. He looked at the manuscript he had read. In red ink, at the bottom of the last page, also in his father's handwriting, "*Book IV.*" Underneath, neatly written, "*Book V The Apostles - apostolic=mission.*"

He wondered what could this mean. It didn't make sense. *Why is God worried about self-destruction, either as war or suicide? Or is his father worried about his own demise, by others or by himself?* He showered, got dressed, set a place mat at the table, a habit he learned from his mother, and made two eggs with cheese. He drank a glass of milk. While he was eating, the doorbell rang. He ran to the intercom, hopeful. "Who is it?"

"It's me, Myrna. Don't you remember we were having breakfast, Lawrence?"

"Ahh," he exclaimed with disappointment, then embarrassment. Larry hesitated. "This is Larry—Lawrence's son. Please come up." He pressed the buzzer that opened the entrance door. When he heard the bells indicating the elevator had arrived, he opened the door to the apartment. Myrna stepped into the hallway. She was twenty-eight years old, five feet eight inches, wearing jeans and Nike running shoes. She had no make up, she didn't need it. Her dark brown hair was smooth, silky and bouncy; her eyes a deep, purplish aquamarine. For a moment they stood looking at each other. Then she smiled, displaying a set of white, not quite perfect, teeth. This small imperfection made her more attractive.

"So you're Myrna, my father's elusive friend."

"Your eyes are green, like your father's," she blurted out without thinking.

Larry nodded slowly. "Yes, they will always be," he answered lamely. After a brief, awkward self-introduction, Larry invited her in.

"And, I am not elusive." Myrna added playfully.

"I just meant elusive to me, because we had never met. My father mentioned you a few times when we talked."

"Yeah, I also heard so much about you. Where is your father? He's not here?" Myrna said as she walked in and looked around. "We're supposed to have breakfast." Larry pointed to a chair, inviting her to sit.

“No.”

“No? We’re not supposed to have breakfast? It was cancelled?”

“No, he is not here. I’m very worried. My father seems to have disappeared. When did you last talk to him?”

“Let me see, we had dinner last Tuesday night.”

“Did he seem all right to you?”

“He seemed fine, as always. What is going on, Larry?”

“I don’t know. I found a few drops of something on the floor.” Larry pointed to one side of the table where his half-eaten breakfast was.

“It looks like dried blood.” Myrna opinionated without reflecting on the impact of her words. “Oh, I’m sorry.” She said covering her mouth, hoping to take the words back, but it was too late.

“It’s all right, Myrna. It could be blood, and hopefully it isn’t.”

Larry quickly recounted his last conversations with his father and the events of the last couple of days.

“He called me Wednesday night, but I was out. He just left a message.”

“His disappearance makes me think the worst things, Myrna.” Larry hesitated about what to share with her.

“What do you mean by the worst?” she inquired gently.

“Well, I don’t know how aware you were of some of his mental problems.”

“He told me about his alleged problems, but he said that the doctors were just insane; that they knew nothing of these matters. He did admit that he was afraid of being in public places in case he suffered a panic attack, but I never actually witnessed such a thing. To me, he seemed just a regular, super guy. I love him.” Seeing Larry’s expression, Myrna quickly added, “Not in that way.”

“In what way?” Larry feigned innocence.

“I don’t know what he told you. Your father is a very handsome man, and yes, I have to confess I am attracted to him, but,” Myrna raised a finger as she paused. “But he is the one that insisted that sex would ruin our relationship. He insisted that I kept him grounded to this world. That my smile, my laugh, my good moods, made him smile, chuckle and feel good.”

Larry nodded, then smiled. “I see what he meant. I was feeling terrible, and now, in your presence, I feel better.”

“And, I must add, he always insisted that I should meet you. That we would make a great couple,” Myrna added coquettishly and Larry blushed. “I like when men blush.” Larry blushed even more. Myrna just smiled. After an uncomfortable silence, she added. “I’m sorry. I understand this is serious and I am just making light conversation. It’s just that I feel nervous. Not about you. About him, I mean his disappearance.

"I have some eggs. I could offer you breakfast." Larry added hopeful, "To make up for my father standing you up."

"I'd love that. Still I won't forgive your father for not remembering our date."

Larry expertly cracked open a couple of eggs over the frying pan. He added a few drops of water and covered the pan with a lid so the steam would cook the topside of the eggs. He smiled timidly at Myrna. He put two slices of toast in the oven and got a small jar of strawberry jam out of the refrigerator. He added another place mat, put a plate on it, a paper napkin and a fork and knife neatly beside it. After a brief pause he took the lid off and slid the two eggs onto a plate.

"Those eggs are perfect," Myrna said as she sat at the small table.

"That's how my mother taught me to cook eggs. She was a great cook."

"Your father loved her very much." Myrna ate in silence as Larry watched following the smooth motion of her fork up to her mouth and her elegant chewing. Larry quickly finished his cold eggs and looked out into the room.

"My father told me you work at the Museum of Natural History. My mother tried to teach me a little about religion and would take me to Sunday School. When I was five she took me to the Museum to see the dinosaurs. I loved them so much, that any chance of me believing anything in the Bible was over. The story of these gigantic creatures that roamed the planet millions of years ago was so much more interesting than the Garden of Eden."

"They have a new dinosaur exhibit. You should go back and check it out. I work in a different department. Perhaps you will let me show you what I do."

"I would love that, just not today."

"No, of course. I didn't mean right now, I just meant sometime."

"I know. I'm sorry, it just that"

"Yes, of course."

When she finished eating, Larry picked up their plates and went to the kitchen sink to rinse and wash them. He spoke without turning to look at her, "Myrna, my father was suffering from depression. Did he tell you about my mother's death?"

"Yes, he did." Myrna nodded.

"He is also suffering from persecutory delusions and panic attacks."

"He told me all about that, Larry. He had a few panic attacks, but I don't think he had persecutory delusions. Your father told me about the doctors he saw when your mother died and they didn't believe his theories. For the

most part, at least for the couple of years I have known him, he seemed fine. I can't even say that he is depressed," Myrna insisted. "Like I told you, the only oddity, if you want to call it that, was he didn't like to be in public places."

"Depressed people learn to hide it. He didn't sound well to me. I fear he" Larry couldn't get the words. He averted his gaze toward the ceiling.

"You're afraid something has happened to him? That blood, if its blood, could be from a small cut."

"I'm worried about a lot worse than a cut. I fear he's done something to himself. I must report him missing." Larry checked his wristwatch, a Cartier his father had given him when he graduated as an engineer. "I need to be at the police station at noon. I need to find him soon."

"I admit his disappearance is strange but there might be an explanation."

"Like what?"

"I don't know, Larry. But we mustn't jump to conclusions."

Myrna smiled at Larry, tousled his reddish hair, and he smiled back. His green eyes, full of light, fixed on hers. Myrna smiled and then wrote her phone number on a post-it note she took from Lawrence's desk. "Let me know what happens at the police station. I live on the West side of the Park, near the Museum of Natural History. I have a few days off. Call me if you need anything. Anytime of night or day." She kissed him softly on the cheek. "I'll check with you later today. If you talk to him, tell him I am pissed he forgot about our date. If I hear from him I'll call you immediately," she said as she closed the door behind her. The scent of her hair remained in the room. Larry took in a big breath.

A couple of hours later, on the way to the 19th Precinct Larry stopped to get his morning coffee. It was overcast, so he checked his Cartier. He didn't have to wait long outside the 19th Precinct. He would report his father missing since the time his cousin Jack had called and got no answer. At precisely 12:01 he entered to file a missing-person report.

After answering a battery of standard questions, he was told to go back to the apartment and wait there on the chance that his father might show up. As soon as a detective was available they would send him over to look for possible leads to start the search.

At 6:45 p.m. Officer O'Malley and detective Ramirez arrived. O'Malley stood quietly behind Ramirez in a blue police uniform. He cut a handsome figure with a mane of thick red hair. Ramirez, in contrast, was almost ugly in an eye-catching way. He exuded great strength, physically and mentally. His movements had an animal attraction. He had a strong neck, as wide as his

head. His facial features seemed briskly chiseled in stone and then transposed into his wrinkle-free skin—impossible to determine his age—with short straight black hair chopped on top to look like a flat brush, with a black, penetrating eye stare, and a crooked smile—his only imperfection—with faultless straight white teeth. He wore a copper-tone suit with a white shirt and a pink tie, all accentuating the color of his olive skin. His dark eyes and warm smile locked reassuringly on Larry.

“I am detective Ramirez and this is officer O’Malley. You must be Larry.”

Larry nodded. “Please come in.”

Ramirez consulted his notes before speaking. “Tell me why do you think your father is missing?”

“It’s unlike him to disappear without a word or a note.”

“Anything else unusual?”

“He left here his wallet, his watch, the coat he normally wears, and his keys. There are those drops on the floor, they seem to be blood,” Larry said pointing to the floor. “Perhaps also on that door-knob.” He added nodding to the bathroom door.

“Joe, get samples of them to the lab.” Detective Ramirez ordered as Joe, another officer, appeared in the door to collect the samples while Larry quickly recounted his last conversations with his father, and briefly explained his father’s moderate depression, panic attacks and persecutory delusions.

“So, we can assume that no one has seen or heard from your father, Lawrence Fogarty, since yesterday noon. Please give us a full description, and a recent picture if you have one.”

Larry walked over to his father’s desk. On it was a picture of the two of them standing together in front of Larry’s apartment in New Haven. It had been taken last fall. The trees were turning yellow and red.

“He’s five feet eleven, about 170 lbs, a couple of inches shorter than me. I kinda look like him, except for the brown, salt pepper hair. He’s fifty-five.”

“Color of eyes? Also green?” Larry nodded affirmatively.

“Do you know who saw him last?” Ramirez intoned.

“I met Myrna, a friend of his, and she said that she had dinner with him last Tuesday. I talked to him Thursday morning. Yesterday.”

O’Malley wrote in his notebook while Ramirez walked around inspecting the apartment. Another officer came to the door. Larry recounted the last phone conversations he had with his father.

“Do you think there’s foul play? Does he have any enemies?” Ramirez called from the bathroom.

“No. None that I know of,” Larry answered. “Yesterday . . . I was hoping, I’m sorry. I mean, I was going to get him to therapy. Now, I’m afraid he might have committed suicide or . . . I’m not making much sense.”

“Take your time,” O’Malley said gently.

“My father liked to go running next to the East River, past York Avenue.” Larry turned to O’Malley to check if he was following.

“We know exactly where that is, please continue,” O’Malley said good-naturedly.

“He told me running always helped him feel better. That would explain why he didn’t take his wallet, his watch or his coat,” Larry said, pointing to them.

“Jerry,” Ramirez said poking his head out of the bathroom, “Check that out. Now. Make a copy of the photo. See if anyone saw him jogging or walking around.” Jerry, the policeman who had just arrived, turned and left.

“Was he taking any medications?” Ramirez called from the bathroom.

“None that I know of.”

“Then, why does he have these two bottles of Paxil? They seem to be foreign, probably purchased in Mexico.”

“He was in Mexico last summer,” Larry added helpfully. “Paxil is an anxyolitic used for depression and panic attacks.” Ramirez raised his eyebrows. “I’m a neurology student at Yale,” he explained. “But my father never mentioned any medications.”

“Vacation trip?” Ramirez asked while he opened the linen closet and inspected it. There was a small toolbox on the floor. He opened it. An assortment of hand tools—pliers, screw drivers, a hammer—and a few nails, picture-frame hangers, screws of various sizes and an electric barbecue-starter. A very faint, sweet smell assaulted Ramirez’s nostrils. He wrinkled his nose as he sniffed the barbecue-starter.

“No,” Larry continued. “My father is originally from Mexico. His mother was American. He still goes back once or twice a year.”

“I see,” O’Malley said. “What about Fogarty, that is Irish, isn’t it?”

“His great grandfather was Irish, went to Mexico as a little kid,” Larry explained.

Ramirez picked up the electric barbecue-starter, put it to his nose and again sniffed twice. He placed it in a zip-lock plastic container and passed it to the officer helping with the evidence. He was already treating this as a crime scene.

“Does your father have a Weber or barbecue of any kind?”

“No. I don’t think so. Not in this apartment.”

“Why would your father have a barbecue starter?”

“I don’t know.” Larry shrugged.

“Let me see if I have this straight,” Ramirez interjected, looking through the towels and sheets neatly folded on shelves in the linen closet. “He is suffering from depression,” Ramirez continued as if he was alone in the room, “He’s delusional, perhaps paranoid; probably had a panic attack; and apparently he is self medicating.” Ramirez looked at the bar. “Does your father drink?”

“Yes. I can’t tell you how much of late. But yes, sometimes a little too much in my opinion.”

“What is too much according to you?”

“I suppose three or four drinks, perhaps five when he over does it.”

“Let me ask you this, and I don’t mean to offend in any way, you really think he is suicidal?”

“Officer, I am afraid the possibility exists. I can’t categorically rule that out. I wish I could,” Larry said defensively, trying to protect his father’s image. “When my father felt a panic attack coming on, sometimes, if he had time, he would jump under a cold shower. The hyperventilation caused by cold water could stop the panic attacks. He insisted the paper bag trick was too slow for him.”

“Do you think he might have gone for a swim in the river if he felt a panic attack coming?” O’Malley asked.

“Unlikely, but possible.”

Ramirez returned to the bar and checked its contents carefully. “Would you say he has a drinking problem?”

“Maybe. Like I told you, he drinks heavily on occasion. I feel his drinking is a form of self-medication to alleviate his symptoms. And yes, sometimes he overdid it. Not in my presence. I know because some of his friends told me. I never heard of him passing out on the street or not making it home.”

“Then alcohol can’t be ruled out at this point.” O’Malley said. Larry nodded half-heartedly.

“Can you tell if anything is missing?”

“No. Not really.”

“So your father doesn’t barbecue?” Ramirez inquired.

“Here? No.”

“Why would he have an electric barbecue-starter? It has a funny smell.”

“Back in California, when he barbecued he always used lighter fluid.”

“There’s a smell to it, as if it had been recently used,” Ramirez asserted, talking to himself.

“What does your father do?” O’Malley inquired, still taking notes.

“He’s pretty much retired. He’s writing a couple of books. I’ve seen or read a few chapters here and there.”

“Is there anything else out of the ordinary that you know of?”

“My mother was killed in a gas explosion in 1995,” Larry hesitated, pondering how much to say, or what could be relevant. “My father . . . let me explain better.”

Ramirez pulled a chair out for him. Larry sat down. Ramirez did likewise, then he gave a meaningful look and a nod to Joe, the other policeman, a signal to stick around and pay attention. “Tell me about it, Larry.”

“Shortly after my father came to America—around the time I was born—he operated a gravel pit near Modesto.” Larry added quickly, “That’s in California. It was a family tradition in Mexico. My grandfather still owns a sand mine near Acapulco.” After a pause, he continued, “Anyhow, you probably remember the OJ trial.” Ramirez nodded. “My father had a theory and wrote a book explaining why OJ was innocent of his wife’s murder. He wrote a small article for the *Modesto Bee*, the local paper, with his theory. Through that he got an agent interested in his book. He was very excited to get it published. Then suddenly, the agent was found dead. His car went off the road into a tree. My father read about it in the *Modesto Bee*.”

“That same afternoon,” Larry continued, “I was away fishing with some friends. As I remember, there was a problem with the jaw crusher at the gravel pit and the foreman came and picked my father up. While he was at the gravel pit, there was a huge explosion at home; destroyed the two cars; the house was blown to smithereens and my mother was killed. It was later determined that the explosion was caused by a gas leak in the basement. Investigators found debris that could have been remnants of a timer, but nothing conclusive was ever found to indicate that the explosion was not an accident. Still, for a time, my father was considered a prime suspect. Both my parents had a half-million dollar life insurance. He was devastated, I mean by her death, not the suspicions.

“My father claimed that at my mother’s memorial a guy walked up to him, and while pretending to give his condolences, whispered in my father’s ear, ‘You’re lucky you weren’t home. We were supposed to get you. Let this be a warning. Don’t try to write, much less, publish anything. We’ll be watching.’ The guy turned and left before my father could look him in the eye. At the time he was too devastated to do or think anything, so he didn’t even get up. His doctor recommended counseling to overcome his grief. In the meantime the police investigated my father but could not prove anything. My father,

because of the comment at the memorial, insisted that his agent's death and my mother's were related. But nobody believed him."

Ramirez turned to the policeman by the door, "Check all this with the Modesto Police. That will be all for now, Joe." Joe left.

"That is what really bugged him. Nobody believed what he said. To make matters worse," Larry went on, "the grief psychologist diagnosed my father as suffering depression, with suicidal tendencies and persecutory delusions. He was considered unstable. My father acknowledged that he felt so bad about my mother's death that he wished he were dead. But, he insisted to me, it was just a figure of speech. A few days later my father claimed the killers called and said that his son, me, would also be killed if he didn't take the blame for the explosion. He refused, but he couldn't prove anything; the police couldn't either, one way or another, and never brought charges against him or anyone. Worse, for my father, was that most of his friends didn't believe him and were certain that he was suffering persecutory delusions.

"A few weeks later the same man who had come to him at the memorial, this time he had a good look at him—he was a Chicano, very Mexican looking, you know, black, straight hair, black eyes, about five six or seven, dark skin—had come back and laughed at him and cynically explained in detail how the explosion had been set up. When my father related the details of how the explosion was set up, though only an expert or the person who did it could have known the details, some considered this was evidence that my father did it. My father was sent to see another doctor—he refused to go back to the first one again. The second doctor diagnosed Posttraumatic Stress Disorder. The doctor explained the trauma was so severe that he was reliving it—the explosion—by seeing in detail how it had been done; and the Chicano was a product of the high stress of losing his wife; that it was a coping mechanism to accept her death. Part of posttraumatic stress is the belief that imagined events take on the quality of reality."

Larry paused, looked into Ramirez's eyes. Ramirez nodded and smiled as if saying, "Go on."

"Charges were never brought against my father. But shortly after, he sold the majority of his business to his employees but kept a small interest. We moved to the East Coast, where he hoped nobody could find us. But he was never the same again. Every few months, something would happen, and he would start with his delusions again. He insisted that they were after him; but now he was certain it was the killers of OJ's wife. He didn't discuss it too much with me, but when he did, I tried to convince him to go to therapy. He would insist, 'They killed my wife and that can't be changed. Therapy won't

bring her back. They are after me, that is the problem. Doctors can't change that.' If I pressed, he would become very agitated insisting that he didn't have delusions or posttraumatic stress; that he knew what was real and what wasn't. So I backed off, I didn't press him very hard. He is my father after all. For the most part, I think he was all right, you know, like any regular folk."

"Do you remember the names of the doctors that saw your father back then?" Ramirez asked.

"I think one was Dr. Green. I am not sure of the name of the other doctor. I was sixteen and not too involved. Today it would be a different story."

"O'Malley, file a missing-person report, and see if you can locate Dr. Green. In Modesto?" Larry nodded. "I'll finish here, I'll see you back at the precinct." O' Malley got up and left. Ramirez turned to Larry. "Was your father seeing someone here in New York?"

"You mean a girlfriend? I wish," Larry added. "He mentioned Myrna, the girl I told you about. He said he wanted me to meet her. I guess she is about my age."

"I meant a psychologist or psychiatrist."

"No, I'm pretty sure of that." Feeling guilty, Larry added, "I was hoping, today actually, to get him to Dr. Boukhardt, but he has never seen my father. That is really why I'm here."

"Do you remember any details of your father's OJ theory?"

"I read it a long time ago, and he discussed it with me over the years. He also insisted that I shouldn't mention this to others because it might endanger me."

Ramirez pulled a recorder out of his pocket and put it on the table, "Do you mind?"

"The night of the murder," Larry began, "The LA police established that OJ had enough time to kill his wife between the time when he returned home with Kato about 9:30, after having a burger, and the time he boarded a limo that was taking him to LAX for a flight to O'Hare at 11:00."

"Refresh my memory, who is Kato?"

"Kato was a guy that rented OJ's guest house. These are facts according to police investigations: Kato saw OJ go into the main house around 9:30, and he saw the limo leave at 11:00; it would take forty minutes to go and come back to his wife's house, ten minutes maximum to do the deed, which left OJ with forty minutes to spare. Their children were asleep and the fact that the wife was killed outside the house was used by the police as proof that it must've been someone she knew; why else would she answer the door and go outside? Kato claimed that around 10:30 he heard a loud noise, like someone

knocking on the back wall of the guesthouse. A bloody glove was found there later that night when the police came. The police determined that a waiter from a nearby restaurant, returning a pair of sunglasses, stumbled into the murder, and became another victim.

“OJ went to LAX, boarded the red-eye to O’Hare—he had a speaking engagement in Chicago the next day—and registered early in the morning into his hotel. Next day, when he was informed of his ex-wife’s murder, he immediately returned to Los Angeles. He volunteered to testify and went straight from the airport to the police station to make a statement. They took a blood sample and the police established that he had a small cut on his right index finger. When asked about the cut, he insisted that he cut himself with a glass that he broke in his hotel room. This was later used by the prosecution as proof that he had suffered a cut while murdering his wife and her friend.”

“Yes, I remember that,” Ramirez combed his hair with his hand. “And what was your father’s theory?”

“My father thought that if a man brutally murdered his ex-wife and a man that accidentally walked into the scene, he wouldn’t calmly board a limo and an airplane and engage people in small talk as if nothing had happened, which is what witnesses reported. My father felt no one could be this cold blooded. The victims showed multiple cuts and lacerations, which indicated a struggle—quite a fight by the number of cuts in their arms and legs, especially the guy’s. In a fight to the death, when the adrenaline kicks in, when people are capable of superhuman efforts, much more damage than a small cut in a finger must be inflicted on the killer, even if they were dealing with a professional athlete. On the other hand, a trained killer would kill quickly and cleanly, unless the intention was otherwise. Perhaps, like my father believed, the way it was done was deliberate. In the drug world, in a system with no courts, a system with its own rules, it was done to set an example of what happens when you don’t honor your debts.

“My father’s theory, in a nutshell, was that OJ’s wife was using drugs, had got herself deep into debt, and they demanded payment from OJ. OJ smugly refused and told them to go to hell. They reminded him of the penalty for not paying, and OJ arrogantly dismissed their threats. They wouldn’t dare, he thought. He forgot about the threat until early in the morning in Chicago, when shortly after he checked into his hotel, one of them—my father supposed—knocked on the door and informed OJ of his ex-wife’s death; a reminder of unpaid debts. He better pay up. He was also told that if he pointed one finger in their direction, his children would be next.

“In an explosion of fury, or recrimination, OJ smashed his fist onto a table with a glass top or perhaps the bathroom washbasin where the glasses

are normally stored. Either way he cut his finger and cleaned up the mess. He thought carefully about his course of action and decided to return to LA and cooperate with the police feigning ignorance about his knowledge or his wife's habits. But how else could he explain his cut finger? He could not admit an outburst of anger—he could only share a half-truth with the police—he accidentally cut his finger. Which is what he said.” Ramirez checked the recorder, there was plenty tape left.

“Unknown to OJ,” Larry proceeded, “A glove, like the ones he had been seen wearing on TV, with his wife's blood was planted behind Kato's house. Footprints were left at the crime scene in the blood pools with a size eleven shoe, the same size of OJ. Blood was smeared on the handle of OJ's Bronco. My father argued that if OJ had worn gloves, then it was very unlikely that he would have sustained a cut on his finger. He argued that OJ would not have returned by the back of the guesthouse; much less drop a glove there. It was his house, and he would've returned through other, more convenient routes, especially if he had driven there and back in his Bronco. Therefore, the blood smear on the Bronco's door handle must've been planted.

“The blood sample that was taken from OJ at the Police Station, instead of being analyzed in the police lab a few blocks away, was sent to another lab on the other side of the city. Records show that some of the blood was missing between the time the sample was taken and when it was received as evidence in the lab. Three days after the murder, one drop of blood was found at the crime scene and DNA testing concluded it was OJ's. My father insisted that the missing blood was used to plant that drop at the crime scene.

“When OJ understood that he was being framed for the murder, my father insisted, OJ realized he had no way out. If he pointed the police in the direction of the real killers to avoid jail, then one of his children would be next. How could he protect his family? He confided in his best friend, and concluded that the best way out was for him to commit suicide. This way the murderers would know he hadn't talked, and more importantly, guarantee that he never would. The argument got heated, and his friend convinced him to go for a ride to talk it over. This is the famous police chase on the freeway. When OJ was taken into custody, the friend told the police that he was taking OJ to the airport, but convinced him to turn himself in and give up his weapon. A weapon certainly didn't make sense if he was going to the airport to catch a flight out of the country. There are transcripts of phone conversations between a police officer and OJ during the chase, and they clearly suggest suicidal intentions. My father argued that the friend talked him out of suicide, convinced him that as long as he didn't rat and paid the drug debt, his children would be safe.

And moreover that since he was innocent, they could not prove him guilty beyond a reasonable doubt. All he had to do was go to trial, stay quiet, and prove himself not guilty. His children would be left alone and he would be a free man. A tainted man, but free. He didn't have to die. Needless to say, OJ had the money to mount a huge defense, unlike most other petty criminals. He went on to be declared not guilty and released."

Ramirez stopped the tape.

"Are you suggesting that your father was on the right track, accidentally, or coincidentally, without any inside information, and these killers thought he knew more than he was letting on? Perhaps, it explains why they were after him?"

"That is what my father suggested, not me. He swore to me that his theories were not based on any information other than what was published in newspapers and on the television. He insisted his persecutory delusions were not delusions, that they were really after him and that it was impossible to convince them of how he had arrived at his theories. These, by implication, meant that there were corrupt elements tied to drug dealers in the police or the Los Angeles DA's office, or both. For that reason he couldn't trust the police, nobody could help him. As far as my father was concerned, he was on his own."

"Let's suppose that what you say is all true. Your father can't ask anyone for help, and these people are out to get him. There is still another possibility." Ramirez leaned back in his chair, "Do you think that he might have, how can I put this, make it look like he committed suicide?" Seeing Larry's expression, Ramirez added quickly, "In order to disappear and protect you from them?"

"Are you suggesting that my father is not paranoid?" Larry searched Ramirez face for a clue, "That they are really after him?"

"I don't know what to think," Ramirez shrugged. "You seem to think he might have killed himself, purposefully or accidentally. He might have disappeared because he was convinced someone was after him, when they weren't. And, maybe someone was really after him and got to him. At this point it's possible he is just hiding from them. My job, at this stage, is to consider all possible options. I need to ask hard questions and maybe we can find him. Have any of your father's writings been published?"

"He had published two books previous to his agent's death. But, like I said, he was paranoid; he insisted they specifically warned him not to publish anything else. So even though he continued writing, he never published again."

"What kind of books did he publish?"

"One was technical, about classification and separation of solids. The other was a cheesy novel. Both tanked. Not too many sales. He was hopeful the OJ book would be a best-seller, but it was never published."

“Is there anything else that I might need to know?” Ramirez asked with raised eyebrows.

“I don’t think so.”

“Call me anytime if you think of something,” Ramirez said extending a card.

“I need to be at Yale tomorrow. I’m taking the train back, but I’ll be here Friday afternoon. I’ll plan to spend the weekend in New York City. Thanks for everything, detective.”

Parallel Universes, Liu, 3432 B.C.

After closing the door behind Ramirez, Larry slumped at his father's desk. He desperately wanted to believe his father was alive, but it just seemed so unlike him to disappear like this. He was trying to collect his feelings; he didn't even know what he was supposed to feel. Something in his heart told him his father was dead—perhaps unintentionally, by jumping in the river—perhaps intentionally. *Did it matter? Was he supposed to feel differently?*

People suffering from delusions normally behaved and emoted consistently with their beliefs. Larry hoped his father had disappeared with a plan, reflecting his own delusions that the “killers” were after him; in that case he would surface soon, shaken that the (imaginary?) drug lords were going to kill him. This was the best scenario; every other one he contemplated was horrific. His father was either dead or he was a very sick man. And more incredibly, as Ramirez suggested, perhaps someone had killed him and he had never been insane. *Am I supposed to feel better if they killed him?* Larry stared at the manuscript on the desk, and was reminded that he hadn't mentioned this to Detective Ramirez. He made a mental note to tell him.

Next day at Yale, Larry had a hard time concentrating; his mind kept drifting back to his father. When he got home, out of habit, he checked his mailbox. A manila envelope with his father's handwriting was there. It was addressed to him. He checked the postmark; it had been mailed the morning of his disappearance, two days ago. He opened it quickly. There were twelve pages neatly typed. Larry sat down to read:

Book IV

Parallel Cosmography

(From the Greek Parallilos=parallel & kosmos=universe)

To assist the lights in their travels to the Universe and back, I create Parallel Universes with different laws. Space will be a twistor where nonlocal objects will be concerned with resonating, vibrating, and expanding. Attunement to the right senses will be perceived as primordial procreative universal drives.

Interstabilization promotes passage to a new life, and reflects back the light, allowing them to return to the Universe. This Parallel Universe is timeless and creatures are perceived as fantasmagorical. Orgasmic resonance will be channeled into reflective pure life energy. This Universe is a way station that can only be reached with the right amplitude and frequency, inaccessible to all but the apostles or enlightened ones.

Book V
The Apostles
(From the Greek apostolic=mission)
The Yellow River Valley, 3432 B.C.

Liu was desperate. He had spent the night watching over his young daughter writhing in pain with a horrendous migraine headache. Complete darkness seemed to diminish the pain, at least she mentioned that, so he had labored the previous day carefully filling in the small windows of his mud hut, but still the pain seemed unbearable. The days had been hotter than usual for the summer, and blocking the breeze that normally came through the windows made it hotter, and the smells from their cooking fire filled their hut, but his daughter didn't seem to mind the heat. She whimpered occasionally, bathed in sweat, she writhed from side to side without finding comfort or a lessening of the pain. Lately, her headaches seemed to be getting worse and more frequent. Liu looked at his wife who seemed to be in more pain than their daughter.

"I can't bear to see her like this. I am going to go look for the old man that can stop pain," Liu said as he gathered together the few things he would need for the journey.

"We have to try anything. If this continues, it will kill her; or me. I don't know how much more she can take. Go. Don't worry, Liu. I will look after her." Liu's wife spoke tenderly in spite of her anguish. She smiled, hoping to improve Liu's mood. His hair was long, straight and black as night. His cheekbones were high, and his skin was light brown. What were unusual were his green eyes.

About six centuries earlier, a mysterious people had come from the west bringing a few pigs and cows and millet. In contrast with the internecine tribal warfare that prevailed now, these people had shared their animals and agricultural techniques and had intermixed with the local inhabitants they encountered as they migrated westwards seeking better lands. These, they found along the banks of the Yellow River where they settled and prospered.

Liu's green eyes were a reminder of these long-ago immigrants. They told of a great flood that had destroyed the world and all their lands about forty-five generations earlier; the flood had forced them to flee in all directions.

Liu looked at his wife through eyes filled with tears.

"I'll be back as soon as I can," Liu said embracing his wife. He leaned over his daughter and kissed her sweaty brow. "Give her water, as much as she can drink."

Following the instructions of different villagers, he moved quickly from village to village. After five days of moving steadily northward, with the rising sun to his right, he turned left towards the setting sun and the hills on the horizon. The old man who knew how to stop pain lived in those hills.

After some inquiries he was told by an old woman, "Yes, the old man still lives, but he has lost his soul. He doesn't remember even who he is or where he lives." Liu's anxiety was clearly stamped on his face. "If you follow that path," she continued, pointing up a small ravine, "You will see a group of three huts. His daughter—she looks very old, much older than she is—lives in the first one."

One hour later Liu approached the daughter of the old man. Her skin was wrinkled and tough, like dry leather exposed to sun and rain for many years. It was impossible to tell her age.

"My father is waiting for you." She spoke in a neutral tone. Her expression did not betray anything. Seeing Liu's surprise, she added, "He is crazy most of the time, mumbling crazy things, mostly about his childhood, but for the last five days he insisted that the man with the green eyes was coming to see him. I thought it was mere crazy talk, but now, you're here. Come," she said turning. She continued speaking as Liu followed her. "I tie him up, so he doesn't wander away and get lost. He forgets everything. Most of the time he doesn't even know who I am. Many have come seeking to learn how to stop pain, but for years he has not been able to help anyone. I hope your journey wasn't a long one. Your disappointment will be less." She pointed towards the entrance of a small mud hut and walked away without further comment.

Liu ducked through the small entrance. The old man sat naked on a dirt floor. He had long white hair and a thin, white beard that hung down his chest and covered his genitals. Tied to his arm was a soft, long, well-worn strip of leather; the other end was tied to a thick branch embedded in the mud wall of the hut. The old man looked up into Liu's green eyes and smiled warmly, showing a set of straight white teeth.

"Sit," he said with a gesture, inviting him closer to him. "What do you want?"

"Your daughter said you were waiting for me."

“She did not believe me,” the old man laughed. “There are many things that I know, but I don’t know how I know them. Some things come in dreams; other things seem to be memories of another life; but then, I am so old that part of this life seems like another life. But the information you seek I learned from another master and many years of trial and error. We should not waste time. You see that little wooden box? Pass it to me.”

Liu was surprised; he had been expecting a senile old man close to death. Instead here was this man, sinewy, tough as leather, with inquisitive black eyes, exuding strength. Liu reached for the box and passed it to the old man. He carefully opened it and pulled out an assortment of copper needles of different lengths.

“Make yourself contented, be at ease, my friend. What you need to learn will take several days. I have passed this wisdom to a few others, but you will be the last one.” The old man took Liu’s hand and proceeded to insert a copper needle deeply into the back of it. To Liu’s amazement, there was no pain and no blood. The old man smiled.

“Don’t worry, whatever I do will not hurt. Listen carefully. As best as I can resolve, there are nerve strands that run from all the body to the spine and from there to the head. Actually, it is easier to trace the strands the other way, going down from the head into the spine and out between the vertebrae. When I introduce needles in certain parts of the body, a signal goes to the spine. Pain is one of these signals; and pain is felt in the head. Pain is an illusion.” The old man placed two needles into Liu’s other hand.¹

“I don’t know how, but the needle must block the pain. The pain might be broken up in the spine, but perhaps the head becomes sterile to pain; maybe both.² Pain has an obvious purpose. It shows that something is wrong: a cut, a burn, a broken limb, venom.” The old man’s voice trailed off, then continued. “On the other hand, under special situations pain can only get in the way of survival. It is easy to observe that animals do not feel pain when escaping or fighting for their lives. The pain of an injured limb would only

¹ *God’s note: What the old man couldn’t have known is that by doing so, endorphins, like enkephalin and dynorphin, are released in the spinal cord and provide local blocking of the incoming pain signal; that knowledge would come more than five-thousand years later.*

² *God’s note: The old man couldn’t have observed this, but when the nerve impulse arrives at the spinal cord, in addition, it is transmitted to the periaqueductal gray area of the mid brain, where a series of neurotransmitters are released and suppress the transmission of pain, normally a part of the fight-flight response.*

get in the way of the more important chore of escaping or of striking back. There is a natural means that stops pain.”³

“The needles somehow activate the natural means that stop pain during powerful fear or anger, but without producing the feeling,” the old man explained.

Liu spent the next three days, every morning until sundown, learning the intricacies of placing the needles in various parts of the body and learning how long and how fast to rotate the needles to produce the desired sedative effects. The sun began to set and the old man seemed to tire.

Liu, hoping to get the most out of the day asked, “Of all that you have taught me, tell me what is the most important?”

The old man combed his long moustache with his thumb and index finger a couple of times as he thought carefully, his long beard hanging, covering his flat stomach. After a brief interlude he clasped his hands tightly between his face and Liu’s; he squeezed them tight and shook them slightly as if he held a pair of fortune bones and was getting ready to roll them on the dirt floor. Looking directly into Liu’s eyes he said, “Love. Love is the most important thing. If you find it, hang on to it tightly.” Again, he tightened his clasped hands between their faces. “Hang on to it, because you never know how long it is going to last.” After a few moments, he let his hands drop. He averted Liu’s gaze and looked out the small door of the hut with a deep expression of longing. The two sat in silence.

“I need to get back to my daughter. I will see you tomorrow before I leave.”

“Maybe, my friend,” the old man answered with a smile.

“Not maybe, I’ll see you tomorrow, at sun’s rise, my friend,” Liu reassured him. He bowed respectfully and smiled.

“Maybe,” the old man repeated, nodded and smiled.

Liu smiled back, bowed, turned and left.

The old man died during the night.

Four days later Liu approached his village with mixed feelings. On one hand, the death of the old man had saddened him greatly, he mourned his

³ *God’s note: The old man could not have known this either: the nerve impulses arriving at the periaqueductal gray release enkephalin and also signal the pituitary gland to activate a stress response—release of adreno-cortico-tropic hormone, which in turn activates the adrenal gland to release cortisol. Cortisol has anti-inflammatory properties. The release of enkephalin, in turn, brings about the release of other neurotransmitters in the spinal cord, serotonin and norepinephrine, which also have a role in suppressing pain.*

friend; on the other, he was excited, to now possess the knowledge that suppressed pain. He smiled as he looked at the small wooden box with the copper needles. His daughter would never need to suffer pain again.

As he approached his hut, he noticed that all were gathered around a funeral pyre outside the village. Everyone was looking at him, but it wasn't until Liu's eyes locked on his wife's that he realized the enormity of his loss. It was too late: his dear daughter, only fifteen years old, was dead. He fell to his knees sobbing, remorseful that he hadn't even been there to be with her the last days of her short life. The old man's words echoed, "Love is the most important thing. If you find it, hang on to it tightly because you never know how long it is going to last." His wife helped him stand and led him to the pyre.

"We were waiting for you," she said kindly. "Now she can rest in peace. She feels no pain. The pain is for the living."

The pyre was lit, and through tears and flames, Liu thought he saw his daughter float up inside the smoke.

The next morning Liu went outside for a walk. He needed to be alone to try to sort out how he could continue living. The sun was shining brightly and felt warm on his face; it was a good feeling and he felt guilty for having it. How could he feel anything good when his daughter just died? Suddenly a shadow fell over him. A huge hawk slowly circled him, almost at arm's length, with its wings spread wide. Liu could nearly touch it. The hawk silently glided around Liu, slightly above his head. Its greenish eyes had a golden gleam to them and locked intently on Liu's. The hawk seemed to smile, the beak barely open, the edges turned upward. He had the sensation that his daughter was staring at him. Liu turned in a circle three times looking into the hawk's eyes, just out of reach. He extended his hand inviting the hawk to come closer, when suddenly, as if his desire to touch the hawk was forbidden, it beat its powerful wings and quickly disappeared over the trees on the hill.

Liu wished with all his soul the hawk would come back, so he could say good-bye to his daughter. He fell to his knees and suddenly the hawk returned, flying over the trees, this time circling high over him. It circled three times again, gliding without beating its wings, and then it flew straight up. It went higher and higher in the sky, growing smaller, until it went so high, it disappeared, never to come back. Liu smiled thankfully, clasping his hands as the tears streamed down his cheeks. He'd been allowed a last good-bye.

When Liu finished mourning his daughter's death, he was thinking about the irony of how he knew how to stop pain, but didn't know what caused headaches. He determined to find out. He took a small pig, and after

immobilizing it, put his copper needles into all the places he had been taught by the old man. With a copper file he methodically cut through the cranium of the pig. The pig didn't seem to mind the procedure. The pig just lay there looking around with its eyes, the only thing he could move.

After much effort, Liu managed to take off the top of the skull to disclose the brain. There was hardly any bleeding. The brain appeared to be a pinkish mass of wrinkled blobs, somewhat more solid than fresh cow dung. However, there were some obvious symmetries. The most noticeable was a division of the brain into right and left halves. Less noticeable were some deeper wrinkles that divided the brain into frontal, side and back areas. The side areas, in turn, were also divided into a top and lower part. At first sight, there was not much else to see; just blobs and wrinkles. He took a long copper needle and poked the brain.

After a few pokes, Liu thought he saw something move. He poked again, and sure enough, he had seen something move; the pig extended its leg. He poked on the opposite side, and the other leg extended. When he poked the left side, the right leg extended. The left side of the brain controlled the right side of the body and the brain's right side controlled the left half.

After long sessions on many pigs over a few years, he had managed to map out a strip that controlled movement for the entire body. The strip lay just in front of the wrinkle that separated the frontal part from the back of the brain. There was an area for each part of the body.

In a similar fashion, he discovered that what was felt in different parts of the body was signaled to the brain's surface. When he inserted and twirled his copper needles in various parts of the pig's body, he could feel a very fine vibration through another copper needle inserted in the pig's brain. This feeling map corresponded and was almost identical to the movement map, but on the opposite side of the wrinkle separating the frontal and side of the brain. A beautiful symmetry.

If Liu followed the strip on what he called the brain's bark,⁴ on both sides of the deep wrinkle, one side corresponding to sensations and one for movement, starting on the inside middle fold of the half of the brain, he found first the genitals, then above it the back legs and feet; then as he turned onto the outside surface of the brain's half, the trunk followed; then, neck, shoulder, and front legs trailed by the hooves; next followed the head from the top down, meaning forehead first, then eyes, nose, and lips, ending with the chin. For the most part, the map was orderly though upside down:

⁴ *God's note: The word cortex comes from Latin, which in those days no one spoketh.*

The back foot was represented at the top end and the outstretched front foot was at the bottom end. Upon closer examination, the map was not entirely continuous. The face was not near the neck where it should be, but was below the front feet, and the genitals instead of being between the thighs, were located next to the back foot in the middle of the fold. It seemed as if the body extended outwards from the genitals. The strip in front of the wrinkle controlled movement of the muscles, and the strip, behind the wrinkle, was responsible for feeling the body.

All this was very interesting, but Liu was getting frustrated. His observations were not helping him understand headaches. Suddenly he was interrupted.

“Liu, Liu!” a fellow villager yelled as he approached running. “Come quick, Maui was hit in the head. They were out hunting and they encountered a *mo*.⁵ Someone threw a stone at the *mo*, but hit Maui in the back of the head.”

“What makes you think I can help?”

“You are always fooling around with pigs’ heads, we thought you might know something.”

With some reluctance Liu went to see Maui. Four men carried him on a harness made of sticks and leather. Liu was able to ascertain quickly that there was a fracture on the left side of the back of the head. There was hardly any bleeding.

“We need to restrain him, any movement might kill him,” Liu stated. Maui was laid unconscious in his hut. His wife cried inconsolably. Liu, reminded of his own wife, was at a loss for words.

“Surely you can make him well, can’t you, Liu?” the young woman implored looking into Liu’s green eyes.

Liu nodded, and then embraced her.

The next morning Maui regained consciousness complaining of a bad headache.

“Don’t move,” Liu counseled. “If you do, you might die. Your head is broken. I can stop the headache. I will insert some needles in you. It won’t hurt. Just relax and don’t move. Your headache will pass.” As soon as the needles were in place, Liu twirled them expertly, and Maui relaxed and eventually fell asleep.

Later in the morning Maui woke up.

“I can’t see with my right eye, Liu,” Maui said with an expression of terror. “What did you do to me?”

⁵ *God’s note: A giant panda.*

“I didn’t do anything.” After some thought Liu remembered that there was a crossover of nerve strands from the eyes, similar to the control of movement. The injury was on the left, and sight in the right eye was affected, even though there was no injury to the eye. *So we see with our brains*, thought Liu.

“Can you see with your left eye, Maui?” Liu asked compassionately, trying to put his scant knowledge of the brain to use.

“More or less, but I can’t see clearly what is on my left side,” Maui complained bravely.

Liu placed his hand to the left of the left eye, “Can you see my hand?”

“No.”

Liu placed his hand in front of the left eye, “And now?”

“Yes, I see it,”

“Close your right eye. Can you see it?”

“Yes.”

“Close your left eye. Can you still see it?”

“No, I told you I can’t see with my right eye. But, wait. I do see something. I think it’s to my left.”

“Keep your left eye closed. Do you see my hand, or don’t you?”

“I think I do, but I’m not sure.”

Liu moved his hand to the right of Maui’s head.

“Now I see your hand! It’s strange, I feel like I don’t see with my right eye, but I can see a little. I can make out your hand.”

Through such questioning Liu was able to discern that each eye is connected to the opposite side of the back of the brain, and also retains some connections on the same side. The damage sustained to the back of Maui’s head on the left side prevented seeing what was to the left half of each eye, but was more pronounced with the right eye. In essence he was half blind; he could see one-half with each eye, the right half.

Liu was intrigued, but he couldn’t restore Maui to healthy vision. Maui’s skull slowly healed as his caring wife nurtured him back to health, but his vision remained halved. Maui continued to blame Liu’s needles for his loss of vision and would only allow Liu to help manage his pain when it became unbearable.

Then, one day Bi, the miraculous-doctor of the village visited. People came from far distances to see her; she was famous for her anwu. Anwu consisted of kneading, stroking, rubbing, pressing and pulling the body in several positions and using various types of breathing to heal and bring comfort.

“Liu, can your needles reduce pain during birth?”

“Yes, I think so, Bi.”

“Come with me.”

Shortly after, Liu and Bi entered a small hut and approached a pregnant woman. She was lying on a bed of hay on the dirt floor. A strong contraction ensued. She gritted her teeth and held her hardened stomach.

Bi made the woman sit, then sat behind her with her legs outstretched, letting the woman lean against her. “Just flow with your body. When a contraction comes, breathe deeply, relax. When the time comes, I’ll tell you to push.” Bi counseled as she massaged both shoulders and neck.

“Breathe deeply,” Liu counseled. “Try to relax and not fight it,” he encouraged while he opened his box with copper needles. He took the woman’s right hand, palm down, and felt for a spot between the thumb and the index finger. He squeezed lightly in several places until the woman complained. He selected a small needle and inserted it a nail’s depth. “That didn’t hurt, did it?” The woman shook her head. Liu repeated the procedure in the woman’s left hand. He twirled both needles and the woman visibly relaxed, even smiled.

“I know of a herb that made into a tea reduces birth pains. But I am out of it. The herbs grow in a valley a couple of days march away,” Bi said trying to impress Liu with her own kind of magic.

A few contractions later, the baby’s head came out, taking deep breaths. “Relax, breathe deep. Wait for the next contraction.” Bi counseled. A short while later another contraction began. “Push, push!” Bi ordered.

Liu smiled, stood and left the miraculous-doctor with the new mother.

A few weeks later, Liu wandered in a steep-walled canyon looking for herbs that might match Bi’s description. He heard some noises coming from above. He could see a shadow on the canyon floor; it seemed to be that of an ox walking at the edge of the canyon on the flats above. Suddenly, a few pebbles came bouncing down the sides of the canyon. Then, unexpectedly, a boulder, the size of a large pig, came tumbling down towards him. He instinctively took a step back, but the wall of the narrow canyon prevented much movement. He raised his arms to protect his head, and managed to deflect slightly the course of the boulder. The boulder pummeled his upraised arms, brushed the left side of his head and shoulder, and as Liu’s knees buckled with the impact, the boulder lodged between two rocks, and pinned Liu’s left arm, smashing his arm from the elbow down. The pain was excruciating. He was on his knees, his left arm extended outwards, palm up, held under the boulder stuck between the two faces of the narrow canyon.

He could not extract himself, the boulder was too heavy for one man to move. His greatest exertions couldn’t nudge it. A wave of nausea swept over him, his mouth felt dry. He instinctively reached down to his side with his

right hand to get his wooden box. Alarmed he discovered that it had been knocked away from him when the boulder crashed into him. It lay on the sandy floor of the canyon, impossible to get to, more than a body-length away. He clenched his teeth; beads of sweat fell down his face.

He tried to stay calm as flashes of pain went from his toes to his head and back. He had sustained a gash on his head and left shoulder. The bleeding in his crushed left arm was only a small trickle. He concentrated on his wife's face, trying to relieve the pain. He yelled out for help, but knew that no one was near; it was useless. Unable to control himself, he screamed with wrenching agony in a futile attempt to diminish the brutal pain. He could make pain go away with his needles, but he could not reach them. He looked at the wooden box intently; if he could only reach it, he could stop the pain, but then what?

He teetered between consciousness and unconsciousness for two days. The pain, the loss of blood and the lack of food and water were taking a tremendous toll. But finally the pain seemed to diminish; death was approaching quickly. Soon, he would be joining his daughter in the land of the dead.

Love. Love is the most important thing. If you find it, hang on to it tightly; the words rang in Liu's mind, something about the old man. ". . . Under special conditions pain can only get in the way of survival. It is easy to observe . . . that pain is not felt when fleeing or fighting for your life. The pain produced by an injured limb would get in the way of the more important task of escaping, or of striking back. There are natural means that stop pain." *How can I escape when my arm is pinned?* The idea hit him suddenly and Liu started laughing, *Simple: I leave my arm here.*

Liu was able to bite into his leather garment and with his good right hand rip a thin strip off. He knotted it tightly above his left elbow. He grasped the copper file he carried with him, and begun cutting his left arm off. Luckily, his experience with pigs had taught him how to go through the articulation.

He felt pain, but it wasn't as intense as it had been at first. He broke into a sweat, but continued cutting with determination, slowly. The pain increased until he passed out again. Shortly he regained consciousness and knew he was quickly weakening because of increased blood loss. He didn't have much time. He resumed cutting frantically through his elbow, it was a race against time—loss of blood against death. The ligaments were especially hard to cut, but he continued with a persistent sawing motion, alternating with a stabbing action until finally, he cut his arm off. He stared at his lost limb, still crushed under the boulder—then at his elbow. His left stump bled profusely where he had cut his arm off. Immediately he started looking for

bits of dry wood. With much effort, as he only had one hand, he was able to start a small fire; he picked up his wooden box, and feverishly pulled out his precious copper needles. He applied them quickly in several places and twirled them between his thumb and index finger. The lack of pain was pleasurable beyond belief, but if he wanted to live he had to act quickly; he could not dwell on the luxury of enjoyment. He checked the fire and waited a little longer for it to be hotter; then he stuck his mutilated bloody elbow into the hot coals, and looked on with detachment as his nostrils filled with the smell of burning flesh. When he was convinced that he had staunched the blood flow, he pulled his stump out of the fire. He inspected it closely for signs of bleeding. Satisfied there wasn't any, he calmly pulled the copper needles out of his body, put them back in the box and promptly passed out.

Three days later Liu returned to his village with the pain-reducing herb. His elbow was literally killing him. His wife took great pains to hide her anguish at the sight of him. "Liu, let me prepare some straw for your bed."

Liu smiled weakly and went towards the hearth in the middle of the hut. She prepared an herbal tea. Liu drank it hurriedly. His pain diminished slightly, enough to let sleep overcome him.

The next morning, when Liu woke up, the pain was hardly bearable. He reached for his needles; to his amazement the pain persisted. The pain was not in his burnt stump; it was in the hand and arm he had cut off!

He came to realize over the next few days, even more astonishingly, that he could feel his left arm, hand and fingers, as if they were there like a lingering phantom. More oddly, he realized that he could feel the missing hand move and even grasp, but his phantom arm was paralyzed, he couldn't rotate his hand in either direction. And, then unexpectedly, he could also feel an itch on the inside of his ghostly arm. His missing arm not only moved, but also ached and itched!

A few days later he was more surprised when his phantom hand clenched involuntarily into a fist so tight that it hurt as if it would draw blood. He could feel his non-existent nails digging into his non-existent palm. His ghostly arm seemed to have a mind of its own; it created the illusion of its own pain. Exhausted, he passed out trying to live with the sensations produced by his missing limb. The worse part was the persistent pain in his absent arm, and the frustration that his needles could not stop the pain. After months of battling with the missing limb and trying to understand if he had lost his senses, he reasoned that the gods might have put him in this predicament to solve a riddle. What did Liu know? He understood that he controlled the movement of his body from an area in his brain, and that adjacent, across the

wrinkle, he felt his body in another small area. The fact that he didn't have his left arm but still felt it was proof that his brain was creating the illusion of an arm. By extension his body must also be an illusion, probably created by his brain for the convenience of control of his movements.

Accidentally, he discovered if he scratched his cheek when his arm itched, the itch would be relieved. Slowly Liu established that if he touched certain areas of his cheek, he would feel, respectively, like he was touching his missing thumb, or the back of his absent hand, or the inside of his phantom arm. Later he discovered that this was also true by touching his upper arm, above his left stump. If he applied warm water to his left cheek or his left upper arm, he would also feel a warm sensation in his corresponding phantom hand. With a flash of insight, he realized that in his brain's map, his cheek, like the pig's face, as well as the upper arm above the elbow where he cut his arm off, were adjacent to the area corresponding to his missing arm and hand. The brain areas adjacent to the missing arm area had invaded it. In the absence of signals from his amputated arm, the signals going to his face and upper arm areas were being delivered to the missing hand area, and thus, his brain could feel his hand as if it was still there.

Liu also knew that he saw with the back of his brain, not necessarily his eyes. The brain created the illusion of seeing and a phantom that corresponded to his body. But what about pain?

He could eliminate real pain, but not the pain of the imagined, missing limb. Imagined—that word—became the clue. The brain created the illusion of the body to control its movement; the whole body was like his missing arm, just a phantom. The brain also created the illusion of seeing the outside world, and this illusion corresponded, for the most part, with what Liu stumbled over, walked by, or grasped—except when the grasping was done by his phantom left hand. Could pain be an illusion also?

Liu proceeded to polish a piece of copper with the finest sand he could find; a finer powder the ancients said was volcanic ash. Slowly the surface became so smooth that it reflected, in a distorted way, the images that impinged on it. With further work he made it flatter and the images more real. Eventually Liu could see his green eyes clearly reflected on the copper plate. He put his two elbows on the ledge of the window on his mud hut. He set the copper plate in such a way that he could clearly see his right hand and arm reflected in it, creating the eerie sensation that he was seeing his missing left hand. He concentrated on instructing his missing arm to rotate. But it remained paralyzed. He concentrated on opening his left phantom hand and felt it move at will, but he could not see any movement in the copper mirror

that was reflecting his immobile right hand. Now he proceeded to concentrate on making a fist with both hands simultaneously. To his surprise and joy, this time he felt and saw in the copper plate his left phantom hand close. He now rotated, synchronously in his mind, both arms. It was magical—he could see his missing arm do what he felt it was doing, it was no longer paralyzed! It felt good to be able to rotate his left arm again. It seemed there was a memory of the paralysis and pain stamped in his brain before he cut his arm off, but with his vision he had rekindled the memory of movement. He closed his eyes and tried again. He could only feel his right arm move; his phantom arm was paralyzed again. He opened his eyes and moved both arms, and he could feel what he was seeing reflected in the copper mirror. He had overcome the paralysis and was exhilarated. The phantom pain diminished but persisted.

A few days later, playing with the copper mirror, Liu tried it again, but his stub came sharply into focus, and suddenly, in a way that was difficult to explain, he stopped feeling his missing arm, he stopped feeling it move. But more surprisingly, he stopped feeling pain in his phantom limb. The lack of pain produced a smile. For the first time since he had cut his arm off, he had no pain! And sadly, he no longer felt his missing limb.

The next morning the pain of his left hand returned but less intensely. There seemed to be some sort of memory of the pain, like an echo, stored in his brain. He could feel his left arm again. So he went back to the mirror; with its aid, he tried to move his phantom, mimicking his right arm motions simultaneously. But with the aid of vision, he was able to see clearly what he could feel; reflecting his good hand in the mirror, his stump looked like it was moving. Seeing his phantom hand healthy, slowly, over a period of time, he was able to erase the pain of the missing arm. His phantom arm would come and go, but by looking at his stump, he eventually convinced his brain that his left arm was not there. Finally, his brain accepted there were no arm, no movement, and no pain.

Liu had solved this problem, but the answer to what caused his daughter's headaches, and ultimately killed her, eluded him. However, Liu began playing with his copper mirror making faces. At first he simply found it entertaining. But then, he discovered that with some practice he could isolate the movement of each facial muscle. He found that there were forty-three different movements. When he had mastered this, he attempted to combine the movements of two and then three muscles in different combinations to see what faces he could make. Combining five muscles, the permutations produced more than ten thousand faces.

Liu realized that most of these expressions didn't have any meaning—he couldn't identify these expressions with the manifestation of any emotion.

But there were about three thousand gestures that he could easily relate to a feeling, to an emotional expression. Wrinkling of the nose denoted disgust. Raising the eyebrows on the inward side, raising the cheeks and lowering the corner of the lips, expressed sadness. If he lowered the brows, raised the upper eyelids, and pressed the lips together, his face reflected anger. More intriguing was that making the expression produced the emotion!

Liu slowly identified many expressions that could generate very fine emotional distinctions. By altering his facial expression slightly, he could go from happy, to blissful, to playful, grateful, safe, relaxed, undecided, uneasy, frustrated, alert, tense, cautious, anxious, afraid, all the way to panicky; or conversely, he could start from lonely, changing to bored, humble, bashful, ashamed, envious, determined, optimistic, joyous, all the way to loved. There was no doubt in Liu's mind: there was an intimate connection between facial movement and emotions. Movement could alter emotions; and emotions automatically produced facial expressions.

Still Liu could not find a link between emotions and what produced headaches. He felt a persistent need to help others in more ways than alleviating pain with his needles. Maybe he would never know what caused headaches or understand how contracting muscles change emotions, but he had been able to fulfill a deeply embedded ambition to understand some of the mysteries of the brain.

When Liu thought he could finally be happy, or at least content, his wife died suddenly. Liu remembered the old man's words and felt there was no longer a reason to keep living. He deliberately reduced his eating to match his lost appetite, a few weeks later he felt very tired and fell asleep. It seemed he was dreaming, floating through the mist falling into a Parallel Universe.

Parallel Universe? Larry wondered. He stared at the small note in his father's handwriting in red ink at the bottom of the last page. It said, *Look in the garbage past the blank pages.* There was only one blank page, and nothing after it. He turned the page over to check if anything was on the back: nothing. The insistent, ringing phone interrupted his thoughts.

"Larry? This is your aunt Minnie. Tell me what is going on?" Minnie was his father's younger sister.

"I don't know, but I fear the worst."

"You have to keep your spirits up. So, there's no news?"

"None."

"It is so unlike your father. I fear you're right, perhaps something terrible has happened. How are you doing, Larry?"

"I'm hanging in there. I don't know what to feel."

"Well, that is natural. Keep me informed. I wish I could tell you something to stop worrying, but I can't. I hoped I could come up with some feasible story, but I haven't. Call me with any news; anytime; night or day. Who loves you, baby?"

"You do."

"Remember that. It's almost three days. I am so worried. What could have happened to him? What are we going to do if we don't find him?"

"What do you mean?"

"I mean, no sign of him in the city hospitals. I called them all. Even the morgue," Minnie commented morbidly. "Perhaps this is a good sign," she added trying to sound more positive.

"I'm sure the police already checked all that."

"I hate to sound so crass, but if you can't find a body, how can we ever be certain? What about a funeral or memorial service? Or a will?"

"I wouldn't worry about that, Aunt Minnie. I'm sure we'll find him."

"I just don't know what to think. I'm at my wit's end. He's never done anything like this. I'm sorry. I don't mean to upset you."

"You're not."

"I'll talk to you soon. Call with anything."

"I'll be at my father's apartment in New York tonight."

"Who loves you, baby?"

"You do, aunt Minnie."

He slowly put the receiver in its cradle. The phone rang again. It was detective Ramirez.

"Larry, have you heard anything?"

"No, but I got a packet in the mail." He mentioned the manuscript on his father's desk and the note about Books IV & V, and then the twelve pages he had received in the mail, followed by a blank page. "I guess this could be considered something new," Larry concluded.

"Do you have any clue as to what 'Look past the blank pages' means?"

"No. Anything on your end?"

"A few things, nothing conclusive, no. What is your father's blood type?"

"I'm not sure. I'm A-negative. So the drops were blood?"

"Yes. And the lab reports it is A-negative. If you're A-negative, at least one of your parents is the same blood type. For now, I'm assuming your father is A-negative and it's his blood. To be sure, we might need to do DNA testing. He seems to have disappeared into thin air. Myrna is the last acquaintance we know saw him. His last phone call was to you. His last purchase with a

credit card was dinner at La Tour the night before he disappeared. The phone number in his wallet belongs to one of your father's high school buddies, in Cuernavaca, Mexico—a Michael Merchant."

"Yeah, I know him well. We've met many times. He's like an uncle to me. He was close to my father. Is close, I should say."

"He hasn't spoken to your father in a couple of months. He seemed very nervous when I called him. Would you have any idea why?"

"Nervous?"

"He seemed to be in a hurry to get off the phone, reluctant to share any information."

"I have no idea why, detective."

"I'll stop by your father's apartment tonight. We can discuss the packet in the mail. I read the police reports from Modesto," detective Ramirez continued, "They confirm pretty much what you said. Your mother's death still is unresolved, and there is nothing new in the case. Dr. Green, according to his records, just confirmed that your father was depressed, suffered from delusions and Post Traumatic Stress Disorder. Would you have a copy of your father's book on the OJ case?"

"No, but I would guess there is one somewhere."

"Try to find me a copy. A colleague of mine has a bad feeling about the OJ case; he has a theory that the prosecution was set up to blow the case. I'm going to look more into this angle. Keep calm. I know it's hard, but keep your spirits up, Larry."

After hanging up, Larry dialed two numbers: his aunt Minnie, who would keep the family informed; then a friend of his father's, who would keep others up to date. Although he wasn't hungry, Larry forced himself to have a meal and a glass of wine.

Friday afternoon, back in his father's apartment in Manhattan, Larry checked the answering machine hoping to find a message from his father. None. He then searched around for a manuscript of the OJ case. He looked in the desk drawers, then on the bookshelves. An orange folder was stuck between *Gray's Anatomy* and *The Complete Tales and Poems of Edgar Allan Poe*. He opened it. Printed on orange paper, he found a 222-page manuscript entitled *The Orange Juice Case*. He put it to one side for Ramirez with the *God* manuscript. Then, he noticed the computer under the desk. Next to it, on the wood floor, was a monitor, a keyboard and a mouse. He plugged them all together and turned the PC on. After a few moments, after the PC booted up, a quaint underwater scene stared at him brightly—multicolored fish swimming around, algae swaying with the tides. There were only a

few shortcuts on the Desktop—My Computer, Recycle Bin, My Network, Outlook Express (for e-mail) and a big “e” for the “internet explorer.” Outlook Express showed the last e-mail he received was a week before, and the last e-mail he sent was a response to the last e-mail he received; just routine stuff. He opened and closed a number of files that looked standard. Then, inside a folder called Miscellaneous, he found another folder called Old. In it were a number of word processing files with roman numerals as names. File I, II, III and IV were blank; he opened file V. To Larry’s surprise *Book V* appeared on the screen:

Book V Parallel Universes

I seemed to be floating through mist. Something was wrong. I felt numb, my senses unfeeling, my brain frozen; I could not remember any details. Fog drifted all around me in the other world. It was impossible to tell whether it was day or night. Perhaps there never was such a distinction. The mist was heavy, it was hard to see, but it felt as if it hid a ghost. A vapid, odorous humidity permeated the ever-present fog. It battered my senses, making them quicken; the humidity felt sticky and sweaty; the smell, in turn, assaulted the nostrils producing a strong reaction in my loins. I felt, more than saw, a presence and I turned. A shadow approached through the mist. The apparition resembled a hairless gorilla, except it was full of deformities; bulges protruded everywhere, on the arms and the legs, on the neck and chest. The face resembled a hawk’s, covered with smooth red feathers; instead of mouth, a beak, and the eyes were golden. The deity came near. It was staring at me. I could clearly read a mask of anticipation. Its nostrils flared as it breathed heavily. It was holding its penis with one hand, close to the base of the shaft. The head of the penis was the size of my closed fist. The shaft was as thick as my wrist and extending the length of my arm, from my elbow to my wrist. The deity was trying to lift his member in an attempt to make it appear erect.

I felt a mixture of revulsion and excitement. The deity slapped his penis against his left hip, then the right side. I felt compelled to grab the penis. My eyes were locked on the penis’s reddish head. I looked into the deity’s eyes and he read my excitement and desire instantly. He let go of his penis as it became fully erect, bulging with blood. The head turned purplish. The deity advanced towards me, offering me his penis, thrusting it at me.

I was enslaved by desire to grab the shaft with both hands. The shaft was warm and soft, but simultaneously, very hard. Both hands barely covered

one third of the shaft. My fingers weren't long enough to reach around it. I stroked it slowly, my own erection so hard, almost painful, feeling like it was going to explode. My excitement mounted, overcoming my revulsion. I could no longer control myself. I looked into the deity's golden eyes and I could perceive that it sensed my own excitement reflected in its black pupils. Suddenly, with his two massive hands, with a cold grip, strong as metal, he grabbed my head and pushed me down.

I was choking with the enormous head inside my mouth. I tried to bite but realized I had no teeth and concentrated on the task at hand. I kept rubbing the shaft vigorously with my hands, up and down. I sucked the head vigorously, concentrating on breathing. My excitement was overwhelming and even with no physical stimulation I started to ejaculate. Concurrently I felt a hot viscous liquid fill my mouth, and I stroked the shaft gently with both hands, as more of the deity's ejaculation spurted into my throat. My own orgasm was devastating and my knees buckled, but the deformity held me by the head with both hands as it tried to thrust his penis further into my mouth. I kept stroking the shaft, drowning but concentrated in swallowing as much as I could, semen coming out of my nose. The taste reminded me of fermented almonds. As my own ejaculation abated, I concentrated on not drowning, swallowing, fighting to finish so I could breathe.

My excitement had been so great I could not control myself and act otherwise. But my anger started rising; I felt raped. The deity pulled his penis out of my mouth and grabbed the shaft with his two massive hands and squeezed hard as he stroked it. Still on my knees, the last of his ejaculation gushed out, and splattered my sweaty face.

The deity pushed my sticky face hard to one side and I fell, lying motionless on my side. I became aware of my enlarged penis and I remembered, trying to control my anger, that with every orgasm our penises grew. In this world the biggest penis commanded the smaller members—the smaller penises, always overcome by an internal drive, would be sexually, irresistibly induced to stimulate the bigger, besieging penises. The trick to become the largest penis was to avoid the bigger penises and find the smaller ones. If this couldn't be done, then the important thing was to ejaculate whenever forced by a bigger penis to produce an orgasm. The more orgasms we have, the more our penis grows. I should not be mad. The secret to success is to control the anger. My penis is now half the size of the deity's. Hopefully, on our next encounter, I would have had more orgasms than him, and the difference in size would be less. The orgasmic energy grows, as the penis grows and eventually this energy resonates with the other, parallel universe and we can return.

As a sign of respect I waited for Horus to leave before I got up. Then I rose and quickly wandered amidst the vapid fog, searching for smaller penises, hoping to find them before the deity. The odorous mist continued, never changing. The after taste of fermented almonds remained deep in the back of my throat. I rubbed my penis, self-stimulating so it would be partially erect, ready for my next encounter, hoping it would not be with a bigger penis than mine.

Suddenly I saw a creature with a good size penis, about half as big as mine. It seemed intent on someone else, as it thrust its erect penis away from me. I followed as it moved away, ignorant of my presence. I could see a smaller apparition and the creature grabbed it by the head and thrust its penis into its mouth. I approached them as I concentrated on reaching a full erection. The excitement of the two creatures thus engaged produced a tremendous reaction in me. My penis swelled, bigger than ever, throbbing. I grabbed the creature sucking the penis and yanked it off. In turn I thrust my own penis into its mouth. I slapped the surprised aggressor on the side of the head. I quickly took the aggressor's two wrists and guided his hands onto my shaft. I looked into its eyes and could read the excitement the encounter with my bulging member produced. He fastened hard onto my shaft and stroked it vigorously as the smaller creature sucked. I could sense the excitement of the two creatures feeding off my own exhilaration. I slapped the one that was rubbing my shaft hoping to avert it from having an orgasm as I ejaculated into the mouth of the smaller one. I pulled my penis out and kept ejaculating on the creature's face as the other one stroked my shaft.

To my surprise, the smaller creature jumped over and started sucking the penis of the creature that was stroking my shaft as I finished ejaculating, spent, and unable to prevent this. The creature, in spite of my repeated slappings, was too excited, and as soon as a hot mouth engulfed its penis, his knees buckled and he held tight onto my penis stroking it, as it reached orgasm. Even more amazing, the smaller creature also started ejaculating onto the floor. A triple, almost simultaneous orgasm! These two had tricked me. They reminded me of myself a long time ago, they were good. Maybe I should return with them, maybe I should help them. Soon they would have a penis as large as mine. For the first time I thought of cooperation, perhaps together we can do more quicker. However, the urge to find more prey was uncontrollable, I felt compelled to stay ahead of them. I must if I want to return. I need to return, as the work is not finished.

I shivered as I walked away. The gray mist continued to envelope everything.

The Love Connection

The doorbell rang. Larry quickly closed the desktop application, not knowing what to think or feel.

“Yes?” Larry spoke with hesitation, even embarrassment, into the intercom.

“It’s me, Myrna.”

“Come up,” Larry said, regaining his composure, pressed the front-door buzzer. He looked back at the monitor; a few fish reassuringly swam by. A few moments later Myrna emerged from the elevator and greeted Larry.

“Any news from your father?”

“No, not really.”

“Larry, This is unlike him. I’m seriously getting worried now.”

“I know,” Larry said.

Myrna hugged him tight.

“Everything will work out, Larry. I’m here for you. What can I do? Is there anything you want to share?”

“I don’t know. It’s strange. A memory keeps intruding. I keep remembering when I was four years old. My father ran very fast, he had been an All-American soccer player in college. One summer, we were at the beach in Santa Cruz, coming out of the waves, and he said to me, ‘I’ll race you to where mom is.’ She was sitting reading some magazines about two hundred yards from us, and I whined, ‘That’s not fair.’ My father laughed and added, ‘I’ll give you a head start. Go and tell me when you’re ready.’ I walked quickly ahead of him, turning occasionally to make sure he wasn’t cheating. He just stood there smiling at me. When I was about seventy-five yards from my mother—I was pretty fast myself—I felt sure that from there, no one, including my father, could beat me in a foot race to my mother. I turned to my father, waved at him, and turned to my mother, running as fast as I could. I was about ten yards from my mother, grinning, feeling I was inevitably going to win this race. Suddenly, I felt more than saw him catching up with me, then passing me, and, with huge steps, digging deep, kicking sand into my face, my father beat me by a few yards. I was seething. He looked at me, saw my expression and broke into laughter.”

“That’s terrible,” Myrna said.

“It wasn’t so terrible, because I quickly understood he was my father, and when I grew up, I would be as fast as him. Actually I was faster. In my sophomore year in college, I also was an All-American, but I broke my ankle in a lacrosse game. Six weeks later, they took the cast off and my father invited me to Cape Cod. The therapist recommended, as part of my rehabilitation, to jog on soft sand. My father took me to the beach so I could exercise. Once we were there my father said, ‘What about a race?’ Before I could answer, he counted quickly, ‘One, two, three!’ and took off running. My ankle was still stiff, and I still limped when I ran, but I took off after him running as fast as I could. Ten yards later I passed him easily and didn’t even turn back to look at him. ‘Boy, you are fast,’ he yelled. I stopped and he caught up with me walking. ‘I had to try to beat you, even if I cheated a little,’ he explained. I looked at him as we walked along the ocean. ‘You didn’t cheat when we had that race in Santa Cruz, did you?’ I asked him point blank. ‘Actually, now that I think of it, I did. When you were walking ahead of me, I slowly moved about ten yards forward without you noticing. I figured it was the only way to beat you.’ I raised an eyebrow and he added quickly, ‘Hey, I’m your father, and one day, like today, and forever onwards, you will beat me. Don’t give me your sad face.’ I laughed and said, ‘I’ll race you back and give you a head start. You tell me when.’ We embraced and doubled up with laughter. It was such a fun day.”

The doorbell rang again. Larry turned to the PC monitor. The fish still swam by.

“Yes?” Larry said into the intercom more loudly than he intended.

“It’s Detective Ramirez”

Larry pressed the buzzer. Ramirez had previously come up the stairs, and Myrna used the elevator. *We seem to be creatures of habit. I wonder if I’m missing some of my father’s habits. What am I missing?* A few instants later steps could be heard running up the stairs. Ramirez appeared in a metallic-olive suit, a black shirt and pink tie.

“You’ve met Myrna, I gather.” Ramirez nodded and smiled in Myrna’s direction. “Here is a couple of things for you.” Larry gave Ramirez the orange folder, the manuscript on God, and Book IV—the twelve pages he had received in the mail. He did not mention what he had just finished reading.

“Are you O.K. if we discuss some things in private?” Ramirez asked politely.

“I don’t think there is anything to hide from her, if that is what you mean,” Larry said, smiling at Myrna.

“Generally these things can be sensitive, I never know how they are going to pan out. But, have it your way. Very well. What are your thoughts on this?” Ramirez asked as he cursorily inspected the three documents thumbing through them.

“My father mentions God’s preoccupation with suicide, he alludes to parts of my brain theory in Book IV. His theory about OJ also mentions suicide. I hate to sound like a typical psychologist, but suicide is a recurring theme,” Larry admitted reluctantly, more to himself than to Ramirez.

“I talked to Dr. Boukhardt. He says you’re some kind of genius in the making, that you have developed some very exciting concepts in brain theory that might change how we look at mental diseases.”

“I have been working on some interesting ideas. I was hoping to help my father, since the doctors he saw hadn’t been able to come up with any great therapy,” Larry said with a tone of bitterness. “I have to admit things don’t look good, Detective. It all points to suicide, and I just feel terrible. I didn’t see it coming. I should have.”

“Don’t be too hard on yourself. You can’t blame yourself.”

“I know, I know, but still”

Myrna put her hand over Larry’s as she sat in silence listening to their exchange.

“Dr. Boukhardt doesn’t rule suicide out but he insists we should keep in mind there are other possibilities. I’m checking everything. I have a couple of guys looking for your father, you know, hospitals, morgues, hit and runs, bars . . . A guy is checking with immigration to see if there are any signs he left the country. I have another agent looking into suicide. He’s kind of an expert.”

“Most experts don’t know too much about suicide. No one does. Current suicide theories are superficial and naïve. Most confuse symptoms, like agitation, sleep disturbances, or sadness with the root causes of suicide. Most of their explanations border on naivety. My own theory is still half formulated.”

“We’re doing whatever we can to try to find your father. You can’t give up yet.”

“I know, I’m sorry.”

“I don’t like to conjecture, but in cases like this I am forced to ask you to speculate as well. I am looking into the possibility of foul play. Most missing persons, statistically speaking,” Ramirez interjected, “involve murder, kidnapping, something. I have to seriously consider these possibilities first. So help me. Let’s assume for the moment that your father’s fears were real.”

“After twelve years? Why would they go after him?”

“As long as he knows, or they think he knows something damaging to them, they might, because of some changed circumstance, suddenly perceive him as a threat. So they put a contract out on him. It happens. I’m just supposing, for argument’s sake, that might be the case,” Ramirez clarified.

“Well, let’s suppose. My father said to me, more than once, ‘In a one-hundred-billion dollar per year business—the drugs sold in America—a business as big as General Motors, we continuously hear about the Mexicans from Sinaloa, or the Medellin or Cali Cartel from Colombia, or the Turks and Jamaicans, or the Afghanistan Poppy Trade, and now even the Russian Mafia, but we never hear about one single American, except for some petty gang wars over turf or a few minor grass growers in Kansas or Big Sur.’ You see my meaning?” Larry said in a cynical tone mimicking his father.

“When it comes to drugs,” Larry continued, “there never seem to be any Americans implicated in the most hallowed past-time in America, the pursuit of money. Somehow, this huge business is always left to foreigners. There is never an American involved; that kind of money is too dirty. Americans, except for a few misguided Hispanics or Blacks, are too good to touch money made in such unethical ways. What I mean, Detective, is, can you mention some huge American organization involved in drug trafficking?”

“Are you suggesting that the drug lords are Americans?”

“Not me, my father. According to him, since no one ever hears of an American drug cartel, by implication, the law enforcement units don’t investigate this mysterious organization; not the police, or the attorney general, or the FBI, or the DEA. Consequently, neither the news organizations nor the media investigate this possibility. By implication the drug lords must have big pull, high up in government, independent of party affiliation. The corollary is that you can’t go to law enforcement agencies for protection from the drug lords.”

Ramirez sat impassively, one elbow resting on the desk, rubbing his chin.

“You’re asking me to think of reasons why someone might want to see him dead. I think someone as powerful as my father believed them to be, would have knocked him out a long time ago. It doesn’t make sense they would wait until now.”

“Perhaps you’re right. But maybe they have already killed over this before. Your father’s agent, your mother . . .” Ramirez let it hang. “We don’t know for certain. I’m going to review all this material,” he said tapping the stack of papers Larry had given him. Ramirez studied Larry’s expression, and then smiled sympathetically. “I can’t rule out foul play or that he went into hiding.

At this juncture I have to keep all my options open until something points me in another direction. Call me anytime. I'll come by tomorrow night."

"Tomorrow is Saturday," Larry pointed out.

"I don't have a set schedule." Ramirez did a half military salute, stood up, turned on his heels and closed the door behind him.

Larry felt torn in two, "Myrna, I hope my father is alive, somewhere, but I have a sinking feeling. I don't know what to make of anything."

"Larry, I have a couple of errands to do. Have you eaten anything today?" Larry nodded no. "Let me get some Chinese for us, I'll be back in a couple of hours. Keep your spirits up."

Book V

Left alone, Larry wondered at the significance, if any, of Book V. Perhaps, he thought, it was just some sexual side to his father that he hadn't ever considered. If so, why should he share this intimate detail with anyone? He returned to the PC. He waggled the mouse to interrupt the black screen in sleep mode. The colored fish appeared swimming happily in the underwater world. He clicked on file "V." He scrolled down and reached the end of the Parallel Universe story where he had left off and continued reading:

I shivered as I walked away. The gray mist continued to envelope everything.

~

Suddenly I woke up. It must have been a bad dream. There was no after taste of fermenting almonds in my throat. I was lying on my back. The sky was black, but there was light. I could see my hands. I reached down between my legs and I could feel my penis, as tiny as a newborn baby's. I could hold it between my thumb and the tip of my index finger. I stroked it and it felt good. To my surprise, after further inspection, I realized, without horror, that I wasn't holding a very tiny penis, but instead, a very large clitoris. As I explored more, I felt my wet vagina.

I was in the netherworld when I felt her presence and turned, somewhat surprised. Hathor, Mistress of Foreign Lands and Turquoise, goddess of music, dance and sex, the mother goddess, stood towering over me. Was she welcoming me into the afterlife? She stared at my pubic hair and I could clearly see the skin on her face flushing, her nostrils flickered as she breathed

heavily. She showed her excitement with the luminosity in her eyes. She stood tall over me.

Unexpectedly, she stepped over my face and squatted down quickly, forcing herself unto my mouth. I could only see her buttocks as she pinned my arms down to my sides and pressed harder onto my mouth. My nose was inside her vagina and I couldn't breathe. I gasped for air, and she took the opportunity to press down and force her clitoris against my tongue. The smell reminded me of something familiar, but I could not quite identify what. Her labia was full, her clitoris was big, easy to suck on. She quivered and started moving around slowly, continuing to press my arms down, against my side. I felt her massaging my legs, but it couldn't be her, because she was holding my arms. My legs were forced apart, as I continued to lick her clitoris with my nose up her vagina, gasping for air. The pressure on my face increased, I stuck out my tongue more, trying to breathe, but she pressed her clitoris harder against my tongue. I felt pressure on my vagina, and something was inserted—hot and soft—it felt good. The clitoris in my mouth shrunk and her labia became fully parted. She pressed harder, as I instinctively thrust forward to meet whatever was being inserted in my own vagina. At that moment, she let go of my arms, grabbed my waist and lifted it up.

I reached down between my legs, and whatever was thrust inside me was pulled out as someone grabbed my hands. Simultaneously, something started licking my clitoris softly, alternately, sucking and licking.

I could barely breathe, my nose still stuck inside her vagina, her clitoris pressing hard, now almost so small as to hardly be felt against my tongue, vigorously thrusting forward and backward, allowing small breaths through my open mouth. Any effort at resisting or protesting dissipated with my mounting excitement, and slowly I became a willing participant, sucking harder as she pulled my hips higher and I was licked harder.

It, she, Hathor, the nurturing mother goddess, had skin smooth and hairy, like a cow's. She let go of my hands, and started rubbing my pubis up and down, pulling my clitoris along, as someone else's tongue moved exquisitely in the opposite direction. The pressure of her clitoris against my tongue increased, as I thrust harder, mimicking the increased pressure and movement against my face. My entire face was wet and sticky, and suddenly, I felt a rising tension, then a relaxation, then increased thrusting, then relaxation again. Suddenly, an overwhelming taste of fermented almonds washed over my tongue as I reached a prolonged orgasm. I wanted to express the beauty of my own orgasm by licking away until the fermented, almond-tasting liquids dissolved completely. Now I remembered where, in another world, in another life, I had tasted this before.

It was in a different world. Now I was in a universe where each orgasm made the clitoris smaller, and a smaller clitoris made for a more intense orgasm proportionately. I was not sure how many cycles I had endured, but for now I was content to lick and suck and be licked and sucked.

Hathor was still squatting on my face, and whatever was licking me was still licking me very softly now. She leaned forward slightly and my nose was released from her vagina and I could breathe again; now the smell of fermented almonds was strong.

She got up and stood to one side. Her body seemed to change, her hands and feet had hoofs, and her head grew horns like a cow's, her snout long and wide. I lifted my head to look down between my legs. A creature, a hairy snake with a big mouth and tongue, with two little hands sticking out of the sides of its head like horns, stroked and licked me. This hairy creature was about as thick as my arm, and longer than me. Hathor lowered her head next to the creature and pressed down with a hoof near the tail, forcing it to lift up, arching over its back. Hathor licked carefully, along the middle, lower parts, with a long, wide purple tongue, what I assumed was this hairy creature's genitals. Instantly the two hands-like-horns locked onto my pubic hair, the hairy snake's mouth, pressing with its tongue, locked tight unto my clitoris. The tongue had suckers like a miniature octopus tentacle and started vibrating and heating up. The sensations were exquisite and soon I was ready to have another explosive orgasm. The creature stopped the stimulation, opened my labia with its tiny hands and thrust its head inside my vagina, one hand stimulating my clitoris.

Hathor continued sucking the hairy creature's genitals, and its slender body snaked on the ground slowly gaining access, the hand let go of my clitoris, its body moving to one side then another, rhythmically trying to gain more access. The snake started vibrating and oscillating simultaneously and I could feel the current of a strong orgasm forming, unexpectedly exploding from my groin extending outwards to my arms and legs. Hathor started spitting a green viscous liquid as the creature went limp. Slowly she pulled the hairy snake out; its hairy body wet and limp. It was dead, its function accomplished. Life could begin now, somewhere else.

Parallel Universe.

Larry sat there staring at the computer monitor. Parallel Universes with copulating monsters? *Is this just another sign of the unraveling of the mind? Another manifestation of disorderly thinking, of incoherence on the road to madness? Perhaps, an attempt to pull back from the brink before going over the*

edge? On the other hand, could it be some clue to a parallel universe where things aren't what they seem to be? All these precautions to hide the pieces of a story—clear symptoms of persecutory delusions. Where was his father?

Larry had to suppress the gloomy thoughts. As long as they don't find anything, he should continue to face the prospect that his father might be dead, but not the certainty. This daily prospect was exhausting. He believed his father was dead, probably by his own hand, but still, he didn't know it. How would he feel if he was certain his father was dead? How much worse could knowing, rather than believing, be?

Larry opened the Outlook Express Icon and then selected the two stories, copied them, and pasted it into a new message and e-mailed it to *doctorboukhardt@psychiatricservices.com*. Using his cell phone he called Dr. Boukhardt's office, advised the receptionist of the e-mail, and asked her to have Dr. Boukhardt call him after he read the e-mail.

Half-an-hour later Larry's cell phone rang. It was Dr. Boukhardt.

"First of all, Larry, I want to emphasize that you can't be too hard on yourself."

"You mean for not getting my father to treatment sooner, that it's too late, Doctor?"

"I didn't quite say that."

"You sounded more optimistic the last time I talked to you."

"You were coming to see your father and convince him to start therapy with me. The first thing we would have done is complete a clinical picture. We would've evaluated him to understand the severity, chronicity and diagnostic complexity. We would've run several psychometric tests to determine a possible diagnosis, both along axis I and II, and then plan out a treatment program."

"Can we cut to the chase, Doctor?"

"Your father has disappeared for a couple of days now. Larry, I can't be certain, but these stories you e-mailed me might be a reflection of some deep-rooted personality disorder based on physical and sexual abuse."

"Are you saying that my father was sexually abused, Doctor?"

"It's possible. If you read the stories carefully, maybe he was abused by a man or a woman, perhaps both, perhaps repeatedly. There is a recurring theme of being forced to perform oral sex."

"I find that hard to believe. I think he was exercising his writing ability; exploring, literarily, a complex, maybe twisted sense of sexuality to create a netherworld for the lights; a sort of purgatory or way station for the spirits between reincarnations."

“You could argue that, Larry. But my interpretation definitely fits in with an increased risk for recurrent disorders, comorbidity and chronicity. And the autobiography of God and the story of the lights with a recurrent theme of reincarnation might symbolize a death wish of some sort.”

“When you are using these terms you are talking about a predisposition to suicidal behavior?”

“Yes, Larry. We need to identify the cognitive triad. What are his beliefs about himself, others and his own future?”

“I have no clue about that.”

“Can we assess his affective system? What was his degree of dysphoria? On a one to ten, ten being intolerable, how would you rate his pain tolerance?”

“I don’t, know. Perhaps a seven? A six?”

“We know he was suffering depression, anxiety and panic attacks. Paranoia. He was agitated. What about insomnia? Impaired attention-concentration?”

“We’re just speculating, Doctor. Besides, that sounds too much like standard theory. You know I am trying to find a better model for behavior, one based on neurology.”

“I know. But now, in addition to an axis I diagnosis, we also have an axis II diagnosis. This greatly exacerbates the situation. Borderline personality disorder patients display recurrent suicidal behavior in seventy-five percent of cases, with ten percent actually succeeding. They suffer sudden and dramatic shifts in self image, sometimes they feel they do not exist at all.”

A chill ran up Larry’s back. He took a deep breath, “Suppose what you are saying is true, and for now I disagree, but I see what you mean: on top of depression, panic attacks and persecutory delusions, now we add along axis II a personality disorder based on some traumatic repetitive sexual abuse suffered in childhood.”

“That’s how I see it now, Larry. We can’t know if his behavioral mode was characterized by behaviors in preparation for suicide.”

“You mean like planning or rehearsing his suicide?”

“Perhaps other actions like making a will, or self-destructive behavior, like substance abuse or risk taking activities.”

“It doesn’t seem he did anything like that.”

“What about bank accounts?”

“Well, I have not had time to check that.” Larry said defensively.

“If he left any substantial amount of money, that would mean he had no use for it.”

“Well,” Larry hesitated, knowing where this would lead. “I haven’t checked it. Like I said, I don’t know he did anything dangerous, or even got drunk.”

“We can’t know that. You told me he drank heavily on occasion. He was feeling anxious, panicky, probably depressed the last time you talked to him. With personality disorder there will be an increased reactivity of mood and marked affective instability. We don’t know if hopelessness was present or if there was suicidal ideation, much less its intensity or duration.”

“You sound like you are convinced my father . . .” Larry let it hang.

“It is an ugly thing to contemplate, Larry. But I definitely see markers for the emergence of a suicidal belief system.”

“Markers are meaningless. We cannot reliably predict suicidal behavior with current theory; particularly at the individual level.”

“I agree, Larry. I’m just trying to identify salient risk factors. As a clinician, your father, to put it honestly, and I hope I’m wrong, could have entered the suicide zone. This is a high-risk situation. Under normal conditions this would require hospitalization and medication.”

“Doctor, you know that most of the empirical suicide prediction models result in inordinately high false-positive and false-negative rates. Proving little, if any, practical utility, especially in a clinical setting.”

“Larry, please bear with me. Let’s try to do a quick risk assessment.”

“With all due respect, Doctor, suicide is an extreme act, it can’t be just measured with statistical devices. You can’t treat risk factors as random variables subjected to probabilistic measures. Probabilities don’t apply to a particular individual. Please don’t tell me that white males over fifty-five, living alone have suicide rates four times higher than the normal population. That statistic doesn’t really mean anything.”

“I understand, but empirical data show correlation between certain risk factors and suicide. So let’s go through this briefly, just to get an idea of how big a risk.”

“You mean low, moderate, and high risk for suicide?”

“Exactly. Lets use the ten point “IS PATH WARM” method.”

“You mean the method where “I” is for suicidal ideation, “S” is for substance abuse, “P” for purposelessness, and so on?”

“Yes. I’m glad you are familiar with this. It will save time. So please quickly answer these questions. Lets start with “I.” Did your father have suicidal ideation?”

“I’m not sure. Perhaps.”

“Was he drinking more than usual?”

“I can’t tell. Maybe.”

“Did he mention anything like, no reason for living, no sense in life?”

“You’re talking about the “P” for purposelessness, right?” After waiting for a very brief moment, Larry answered, “No, I don’t think so.”

“Let’s see . . . “A” for anxiety. We know he was anxious, agitated, and had sleep disturbance. And he did mention he had a bad night, correct?”

“Yes, on all counts.”

“Next, we have . . . “T” for trapped. Was he feeling like he had no way out of his problems?”

“I would have to say, ‘most likely.’ And “H” for hopelessness follows. I know the drill, Doctor. I would also have to answer, ‘yes.’”

“What about “W” for withdrawal from friends or family?”

“He did call me. And he did talk to Myrna two days before his disappearance, so I would have to say, ‘no’ for withdrawal.”

“How about “A” for anger, anything like rage, revenge, or fits of anger?”

“Would frustration count?”

“We could consider that. So is that a yes?”

“Yes, he definitely sounded frustrated. So, now we have “R.” What was “R” for?”

“Recklessness.”

“I would have to say, ‘no,’ not to my knowledge.”

“That’s fine, Larry. What about “M” for mood changes. He obviously suffered mood changes.”

“Yes. I would have to say definitely, yes.”

“So, that gives us five ‘yes,’ two ‘perhaps’ and three ‘no’s.’ So we have between five and seven out of ten risk factors present. This would be considered a high risk suicide case.”

“What, in your estimation, does ‘high’ mean, Doctor.”

“It just means that suicide is possible.”

“But not certain?”

“Exactly. Now we need to look at chronic and acute risk. On the chronic side we have depression, panic attacks, he is slightly psychotic with persecutory delusions and a possible personality disturbance. Pretty serious. What do we have on the acute side?”

“I have to say he experienced recently at least one panic attack, perhaps more. He sounded agitated, depressed, and definitely anxious. His own words were he was in really bad shape.”

“I have to consider him at a high near-term risk for suicide, perhaps within hours or days of when he last called you.”

“So what could’ve been done?”

“This is very serious. I would not forcibly hospitalize anyone like this. But, at the very minimum I would’ve implemented certain precautions to insure the safety of the patient.”

“Like what?”

“Limit access to means, have him check in periodically, work out a plan of action if he felt extremely bad, reduce access to alcohol, bring in family and friends and alert them to potential problems or symptoms.”

“I get the picture, but all that sounds naïve. If you take away his gun, he could find a rope or some high place to jump off of, or throw himself in front of a train. I was on my way here, to begin the process, but now . . .”

“Don’t go there, Larry. It doesn’t help the situation. On the contrary.”

“So, in your professional opinion, my father committed suicide?”

“I want to be clear, Larry. I am just assessing risk, not predicting suicide. I would need to know more to get a better feeling, and a feeling is all you can count on. This is not a science, it is more of an art form. We can’t know, at this point what was, if any, the triggering event for the subsequent activation of the suicidal belief system. Once the suicidal belief system is activated, suicidal behavior is inevitable to gain relief.”

“You’re just talking about the standard suicide cognitive model.”

“I am quite open, frankly, to any of your theories that might throw a better light on this.”

“Don’t get me wrong, Doctor. I greatly appreciate your time and opinions. I’m just extremely strung out, to say the least.”

“I understand completely. You asked my opinion, so I gave it to you. But whatever you think, you must understand this is definitely a high-risk case. Call me with any questions. If I have any new insights I’ll do likewise.”

After hanging up, Larry sat there trying to absorb the conversation. Was his father sexually abused? Repeatedly? By what man or woman? Could his father also suffer a personality disorder? Could Larry have missed so many things? It all seemed mind boggling, but suicide was unbelievable a few days ago, and now a real possibility.

He absently looked at the scroll bar on the right of the Word document, the one of the Parallel Universes. It was only two thirds down, yet it appeared that he was at the end of the document. He scrolled down, and blank pages slowly scrolled upwards. Suddenly a line of text appeared:

“To follow the story the keys are the key.”

Larry was staring at the monitor when the doorbell rang. Myrna showed up, beaming, with white rice, Mongolian beef and prawns and two bottles of beer.

"I'm not very hungry," Larry confessed.

"You must eat. You must stay strong," Myrna ordered as she pulled a chair for him.

"Tell me about you and my father," Larry asked while they ate, trying to avoid talking about the possibility of a personality disorder caused by sexual molestation.

"He is very sexy," Myrna admitted looking at Larry.

"I never thought of him as sexy."

"How do you think of your father?"

"He was a lot of fun, especially before my mother . . . Most of all I think of him as joyous, always trying to have the best time possible given the circumstances. And he was curious; he was a philosopher, a comic . . . He gave me the voice inside my head. I am what I am because of him. Why am I speaking in past tense?" Myrna smiled and placed her hand over his. "'He was—and the past tense is perfect—intense. However, after my mother died, he wasn't."

"With me he was," Myrna contradicted. "He loved science, history, sports, women. He had a way with people. He told me he could walk in a bar and know which women were available just by a glance. He told me men couldn't do that until they were thirty." Myrna giggled. "You think I'm joking?"

"No, no. He told me he knew these things," Larry said. "I just didn't believe him."

"One time I asked him to explain how he could know, and he answered as though he could read my thoughts—I was looking at his hands. I loved how he moved them; oh, and his lips—but your father just looked into my eyes and said, 'You're doing it now.' And he was right; I was thinking how sexy he was and I got caught. I blushed, but he took my hand and said, 'That is all right. It happens. It doesn't mean anything. We're friends.'"

"I wish I could have that kind of intimacy with my father."

"But you did," Myrna smiled. "He thought wonders of you. What is your favorite memory of him?"

Larry looked at the ceiling, then the floor.

"Don't be bashful," she encouraged.

"My grandfather was a Boy Scout, an Eagle scout, the whole thing. He told my father about a huge underground river in Mexico. In the dry season you could follow the river inside a cave for miles. In the middle of this cave, you camped on a sandy beach. This river which seemed a little stream, over eons had carved a cave hundreds of feet in diameter. After spending the night in complete darkness, you would hike the next day until you were forced to

swim into the river. My father told me about this when I was about six. The cave's walls eventually narrowed and you were forced into the river. The cave's roof slowly came down to water's level and with only a few inches to spare, enough for your nose to stick out, you would be swimming underground for about twenty feet, then emerge on the other side. Eventually you would exit the cave below the *Grutas de Cacahuamilpa*. Two underground rivers, the Chontalcoatlán and the San Jerónimo, carved them. These rivers in turn form the head waters of the Amacuzac, a tributary of the Balsas, which after a very tortuous journey, empties into the Pacific near Playa Azul."

"He took you there. I can tell by your eyes," Myrna exclaimed.

"Yes, he took me there with uncle Michael, his best friend. I was fourteen, and uncle Michael invited his then-current girl friend. She was twenty-two and showed up in red high heels. She also brought her mother; also in high heels. My father called them, 'the CMFM shoes, Catch Me Fuck Me shoes.' My father didn't remember the exact location of the cave, but after asking a few people, we found the San Jerónimo River and parked our cars.

The locals insisted that the caves were nearby, just a short walk. Uncle Michael's girl friend and her mother had brought a ton of food—I guess to impress Uncle Michael. We walked to the bank of the river and my father said to me, 'Eat all you can, the less to carry.' When we were finished with lunch, uncle Michael said to me, 'Larry, throw out all you don't need.' We repacked our backpacks to accommodate the women's food and stuff. My father, Michael and I started walking down the riverbank loaded with about seventy pounds apiece. This girlfriend and her mother in high heels tried to keep up with us but couldn't, even though they carried nothing. We walked all afternoon. So much for a short walk to the caves. I would explore both banks of the river to see which was easier, drop my backpack, retrace, and let the girls know if they should continue on the left or the right bank."

"That is so exciting. I wish I could have been there," Myrna exhaled.

"As we walked late into the afternoon carrying a punishing load, the mountain walls closed in around us, forming a deep canyon. The only way to continue was to get in the water and swim."

"There was nowhere to walk?"

"Sheer cliffs on both sides of the river. I was tired, and my father smiled at me. 'I'm sorry. I should have studied this more closely beforehand. We didn't need to walk so many miles and waste so much time,' he said. But I was so excited I said to him, 'Dad, this is the happiest day of my life.'" A tear came to Larry's eye.

"Keep on," she encouraged, squeezing Larry's hand.

“My father looked at me, ‘this is why I brought you here, Larry. You’re a better swimmer than me. Get in the water and swim until you can find a place to tie this rope,’ he indicated carefully placing a rope in my hand. The canyon walls were eighty or a hundred feet high, but the water was calm. It was the dry season. So I jumped in the warm water, swam around the bend, about twenty yards, and found a beautiful beach in this deep canyon. The sun was setting and an orange tinge colored the white sand and gray limestone walls. I tied the rope to a rock, and ferried our backpacks across the river. Uncle Michael followed me on the rope. I gathered some wood and started a fire. Then, uncle Michael sent me back to get his girlfriend and his mother. First, I got their light backpacks across, and then I had to help them. It turns out they didn’t know how to swim.”

“You’re kidding me,” Myrna laughed. “You were heading into an underground river with two women in red high-heels that didn’t know how to swim?”

“Exactly. But the point is, the mother wants, very badly, you can read it in her face, to be included in uncle Michael’s lifestyle. She is encouraging her daughter, hoping that perhaps they will get married. So when the daughter freaks out, because she can’t swim, the mother slaps her, and then orders me to take her across the twenty yards of water. My father winks at me, and with his nods encourages me to take the daughter across. She looked into my eyes, not with sex in mind, not like my father told you about, but with sheer terror. Once we got in the water she wrapped herself around me so tight, that if she drowned, I would drown too. But she was beautiful, I was young, and I took much longer than necessary, claiming caution, hanging from the rope slowly moving her across.”

“So you were feeling her?”

“No. My hands were on the rope, pulling us across; she was holding on to me. So I could only feel her body against mine because she pressed so hard against me.” Larry looked at Myrna and smiled sheepishly. *She didn’t have eyes like you!* He thought.

“Yeah, yeah.”

“You had to be there. But it was beautiful. I had a big, double sleeping bag and clothing in a waterproof plastic bag. We were all wet, but when we went to bed, I had a dry set of everything. In the middle of the night she insisted that she needed to get warm and got into the sleeping bag with me. My father slept on one side, uncle Michael on the other. It was great.”

“So nothing happened?”

“Nothing happened. You asked me about one of my favorite moments with my father; I wouldn’t be telling you about a sexual escapade.” They both laughed at that.

“But then, what happened?” Myrna asked seriously.

“The next morning, I woke up early with anticipation and I decided to explore and see how far away the mouth of the cave might be. It was obvious my father didn’t have a clue. The day before we had walked all afternoon when it was supposed to be near by.”

“So, how far was it?”

“I turned the next bend, and there, as the sun rose, inside this canyon, the mouth of the cave beckoned. The river simply flowed into this huge limestone cliff; the entrance was at least sixty or seventy yards high. I heard some voices high above me, and I saw a trail leading down to the river. Six men with twenty-liter lard-tins as backpacks on their backs were coming leisurely down the trail.”

“What do you mean by lard-tins?”

“These guys had big, square tin cans as backpacks. They adapted some leather strips to be able to carry them on their backs and they had a round, waterproof top that pound shut like the covers of paint cans. They explained to me that in the river, being waterproof, they floated, and didn’t need to be carried—and they were dirt cheap: free, as a matter of fact. They were not affluent guys, but they knew what they were doing. I confessed to them our primitive situation, primarily about the two girls in red high heels.”

Larry looked at Myrna for added emphasis. “The leader said to me, ‘Halfway, there is a big opening in the roof of the cave. Climb up, get out of the cave and go south until you hit the highway. You won’t make it with those girls if you stay in the cave. Don’t carry unnecessary weight. It will slow you down.’ I returned to the beach where we camped. My father was up, and I told him what transpired. Without a word, he went to the huge pans of food the girlfriend and her mother had brought, and dumped them in the river.”

“You’re kidding.”

“My father saw a worried look in me. He just laughed, ‘Pretend this is your last meal. Eat all you can. Better to carry it inside you than on your back. Just calculate your strength to last for the next twenty-four hours. Trust me. I’ll get you home.’ This last thought brought more tears to Larry’s eyes.

“And then, what happened? Myrna asked as she sensed he was breaking down with worry.

“My father announced that I was the leader.” Larry took a deep breath before continuing. “We went into this fabulous cave, where very few people have gone. Like a young goat, I kept jumping from rock to rock, leading them, very slowly because of the high heels. At one point, my father said to me, ‘Let Michael lead them on. I want to show you something.’ My uncle

Michael kept moving ahead with his girlfriend and potential mother-in-law. As soon as they were out of hearing range, my father pointed his flashlight up towards the ceiling of the cave.

“The cave was so high, maybe eighty yards, that the light barely shone on it. Then he focused the light to one side. I noticed a tiny trickle of water. And then I could see, as my father waved his flashlight, all these terraces, outlining a huge dome ascending to the roof of the cave. Water trickled down these natural formations, making them sparkle and dance in the flashlight. I started climbing the huge dome made of small round fountains formed by deposited minerals over eons. Each fountain was filled with crystal clear water that overflowed glimmering to the lower levels. It was a huge silent labyrinth of natural waterworks that formed a huge, domed fountain. When we got to the top of the dome, I tried to see across the cave with my flashlight. The other side was too far to reflect my feeble light back. The floor of the cave was a hundred or more feet below me. The roof of the cave was sixty above us.

“My father pulled out an emergency flare gun. He loaded it, and fired it into the space above us. The flare floated in the air and turned the perpetual darkness of the cave into pink daylight. Myrna, my father showed me something very few people have witnessed. The cavescape was of breathtaking beauty—the size of the cave, the circular fountains forming this huge dome covered with trickles of water shimmering down to the river far below us, reflecting the flare’s pinkish glare. I turned to look at my father, and I realized, for the first time in my life, how a person could be happy through another. My father was so pleased to see my amazement turn to happiness.”

Myrna took Larry’s hand, “I can see your happiness, just thinking about it.”

“My father said to me,” Larry choked and after a short pause continued, “My father said to me, ‘Remember this forever. Whatever happens in our lives, this is our moment. Whenever things get bad—think about this place. If you’re ever alone, think about this river, I’ll be here with you.’” Larry had to stop to compose himself. “These two rivers,” my father said to me, “they seem small, but they feed the Amacuzac, which turns into the mighty Balsas. Most people visit the *Grutas de Cacahuamilpa* with their spectacular stalagmites and stalactites. This is a younger cave, geologically, but it is priceless. Whenever you think of this river that flows beneath the surface, let it remind you of our love.”

Larry’s eyes welled with tears. Myrna smiled again and changed gears appropriately, “He is such a fun man. And what happened to the CMFM’s. Surely there’s a story there, Larry.”

“My father and I caught up easily with uncle Michael and his women in red high heels. They were exhausted and ready to exit the cave when we

reached the mid point. We saw the sky-blue, oval opening in the roof about three hundred feet above us. To reach the opening we needed to climb a ridge inclined about sixty-five degrees. The daughter, it turns out, not only couldn't swim, she was afraid of heights. Uncle Michael and I had to drag-push-hold-pull his girl friend all the way. But I still remember how she looked at me with her almond eyes, terrified with panic, but when I smiled, in some way loved her, she calmed down enough to climb a few more steps. Slowly she became paralyzed with fear again. I would hold her tight and look into her eyes encouraging her. And she would climb again. Eventually we got out."

"And where was Lawrence?" Myrna asked.

"He got out first. He determined which way was south and led us two miles to the road. From there we hitchhiked back to our cars. When we were driving home, I could see his eyes smiling at me through the rearview mirror."

After an uncomfortable pause, "Larry, I don't know what to think about your father's disappearance."

"Tell me about you. What do you do?" This time it was Larry's turn to change gears.

"I got a degree in Biology from Tufts University followed by a Masters at U Conn."

"How did you like Tufts?"

"I got a terrific education, but it was socially strange. I never met anyone that dated someone from Tufts. Everyone's boyfriend or girlfriend seemed to be from somewhere else."

"That is strange. How can you explain that?"

"I still don't know, perhaps it is because the women are part of the old Jackson College, which was absorbed by Tufts, and are accepted through a different system than the men. Perhaps the backgrounds are too different for men and women."

"What about U Conn?"

"The atmosphere is more natural, I imagine it is more like Brown, maybe Yale."

"Probably. So you liked U Conn?"

"Socially it was a lot better, but scholastically I felt there was a lot to be desired. But then, it could've been me. I just felt I was left too much, too often to my own devices."

"What brought you to New York?"

"I was lucky and got a job at the Museum of Natural History. I'm in charge of special exhibits."

"Wow. That sounds like fun."

“Last Year I was put in charge of The Butterfly Conservatory. It runs from October to June. We include live moths and butterflies. It’s fabulous; there are hundreds of Lepidoptera buzzing around in different sizes, shapes and colors. Various plants provide nectar, food, for the adult butterflies, while host plants provide food for the caterpillars. Female butterflies only deposit their eggs on specific plants. It is quite a challenge to get all these different plants to grow to feed the different species.”

Larry was nodding, following Myrna’s excitement.

“I’m sorry,” she said self-consciously. “I know you’re worried about your father. So am I.”

Larry explained his father’s message about blank pages. Then he showed her the computer screen. After moving the mouse, the swimming fish dissolved and the words, “*To follow the story the keys are the key*” appeared in the middle of the screen.

Larry kept scrolling down to the end, a few more blank pages.

“Maybe you can help me here.”

“The keys are the key. What can that mean?” Myrna wondered out loud.

The key ring jumped at him. One key was to his father’s apartment, another to the street-entrance door, and there were two more keys.

“Could my father be referring to these keys?” One looked like an ordinary key, perhaps matching a particular type of lock; the other was less common. He had never seen a key like it. It was short and stubby with a big flat area with a number on it. The key seemed to be some new high-tech key. The teeth, if they could be called that, stuck out in at least six different angles.

“Maybe it belongs to some kind of locker. But where?” Myrna asked. “Can there be any other information filed away? In the drawers?”

Larry browsed through the desk drawers—two served as cabinet files—a Chase Manhattan folder attracted his attention. Ending balance was \$26,539.39. Among the deductions was a Safe-Deposit Box. There was no address on the statement, but Larry knew there was a branch close by, at 72nd and Madison.

“It’s getting late, I better leave. Call me if you need anything.” Myrna smiled at Larry as she picked up her small purse.

“You don’t need to go,” Larry said lamely.

“I know. I’ll check with you tomorrow. Good-night.” She kissed him on the cheek. “Try to get some sleep.”

Next morning, even though it was Saturday, Larry walked into the bank, showed the key to a woman sitting behind a very solid oak desk.

“Yes. It sure looks like a key to one of our deposit boxes,” she answered in response to an explanation of the circumstances. She continued as if she

were giving instructions on how to open a checking account. "In order to open the box, we need a death certificate, and then the beneficiary, whomever that is, can open the box. Otherwise we need to see instructions on a will or a Living Trust that clearly state that an individual or corporation, in the case of death, became the owner of the contents in the box. Then, in the presence of a notary public, the box would be opened, and the contents examined. If cash or valuables were in it, they would have to be inventoried for tax purposes. This is state and Federal law. Uncle Sam wants his share." The woman behind the desk sat there immobile, smiling, waiting for the next question. Larry showed her the bank statement and pointed to the line where a Safe-deposit box deduction appeared.

"Oh, yes. That number pertains to one of our boxes on the premises."

"Could you check who is the beneficiary?"

"That is confidential information."

"But my father might be dead, and he neglected to tell me who . . ." Looking at her expression, Larry decided to change tactics. "I need you to help me. The information that might lead me to know if my father is dead or might lead me to know where to look for him might be in that box. If we don't find him, I do not know when, if ever, a death certificate will be issued; I have no knowledge of a will, much less an estate. I have the key. I can prove I am his son. I can bring a notary, and we will just check the contents of the box, we won't remove anything, but I must see what is there," he begged, surprised at how close to tears he was.

"What is your name?" the woman asked tentatively.

"Lawrence Fogarty, the same as my father."

After typing a few instructions on a keyboard, she looked at a monitor, "Well, if that's your name, I have good news for you. You can withdraw the money in the checking account. If you have a valid I.D."

"What do you mean?"

"The checking account has two co-signers: Lawrence Fogarty and/or Lawrence Fogarty. I suppose that means you." An old memory, of signing some bank documents five or six years before, intruded in Larry's consciousness. "Let me check the authorized signatures," she said taking the bank statement. She typed in some numbers on her keyboard, then handed a blank sheet of paper to Larry. "Can you sign here?" Larry did so. "It is your signature," she said looking at the paper and comparing with the image on her monitor. "I can issue you checks, if you like."

Larry sat there motionless, absorbing this news, but it didn't change anything. His father was still missing. *What would I do with my father's money.*

Where is he? Can't you see that is what I am trying to find out? Then I wouldn't need to open his safe deposit box.

"What is the number on your key?" she added after what she considered a suitable interval.

"3-4-5-3-4," Larry read off the key.

She typed a few more commands, "Well, well. Your name and signature are also on the box. I am so sorry. I should have checked that first. If you will please follow me. Bring your key," as if Larry would somehow forget it on her desk, "and we'll open your box."

Down in the basement she keyed in a password and opened a huge stainless steel vault door. Neat gold-colored drawers filled the vault from floor to ceiling. "Let's see, 3-4-5-3-4, here it is." She pulled a key from her pocket, inserted it and turned it. "Please do the same with your key," she instructed. Larry did so. He stepped back as she pulled the long metal box out, turned and took it to a table inside the vault. "Please ring here when you are done," pointing to a small ringer on the side of the table, "So I can return the box to its place."

"Can I take anything from here?"

"You can take whatever you wish. For legal purposes it is all yours." Larry watched her as she swayed out of the vault.

Larry opened the box. There were two DVD's and a big manila envelope. Inside he found fifteen packets of one hundred, one-hundred-dollar bills, in total one-hundred-and-fifty-thousand dollars in cash. Under the manila envelope, there was a white envelope, sealed, and addressed to him in his father's handwriting. He opened it, his pulse quickened. There was a note, it read, *"Beloved son, you will be wondering where I am or what has happened to me. I can't predict the future, but I can bet that I am in a parallel universe, and it can't be good. They probably, finally came for me. Follow the story. Remember, I love you and my thoughts are with you always, Pop."*

Larry carefully replaced the manila envelope back in the metal drawer. He put the DVD's in his pocket, closed the box, and pressed the ringer.

Back in his father's apartment, he inserted the first DVD into the computer's drive. A series of serious looking documents, ten in all, with names Whyarethepyramids-notinthebible_1 through 10. A quick glance showed them to be serious research on the topic, with extensive footnotes. *O.K., here is the research to one of his books, the one titled, 'Why the Pyramids Are Not in the Bible.'*

Lawrence, Larry's father, had alluded to this intriguing question many years ago. Indeed, how can it be possible that both Genesis and Exodus, the first two books of Moses in the Bible, supposedly the official history of the chosen people, the Jewish people, deal extensively with their stay in Egypt,

and there is not one single mention, metaphor or allegory, relating to the Pyramids.

Their stay in Egypt starts with the story of Joseph and ends with Moses leading his people to the chosen Land. According to the Bible, it all started with seventy people from the household of Jacob who joined Joseph in Egypt. Significantly, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy, the third, fourth, and fifth book of Moses in the Bible, are expanded versions of details surrounding Moses's life. To Lawrence, some of the answers to why the Pyramids were not in the Bible probably rested in these facts or questions. What exactly is the tabernacle of the testimony? Why, in Leviticus 10, Nadab and Abi'hu, the sons of Aaron, each took his censer and put fire in it, and laid incense on it, and offered unholy fire before the Lord, such as he had not commanded them. And fire came forth from the presence of the Lord and devoured them, and they died before the Lord. Why, in Leviticus 18, the Lord your God, commands, "You shall not do as they do in the Land of Egypt, where you dwelt." All these were just some of the intriguing questions. According to the book of Numbers, Moses and Aaron leave Egypt with 603,550 men over twenty years of age, not including the Levites. The Levites were not to be counted. They were to be in charge of the tabernacle of the testimony, and over all its furnishings, and over all that belongs to it, and guard it.

Lawrence's research, with some speculations, reached some interesting conclusions. One of them was that Moses lived about 1500 B.C. With the use of unproven assumptions, but perhaps good guesses, such as a monogamous Hebrew society, a doubling of the population every fifty years, an equal amount of men and women in the population, high child mortality rates, Lawrence estimated, in round numbers, that about 3,000,000 people (excluding the Levites, who, including women and children could be another 300,000 people) went into the dessert with Moses. This means the Jewish people were in Egypt at least 600 years. If the population doubled every seventy years, it would mean they were in Egypt for 1,100 years. If modern Egyptologists have correctly dated the construction of the Great Pyramids, then, in the first scenario, the Hebrews should have been witnesses to the great Pyramids five or six centuries after they were built. In the second scenario they arrived when they were being built. In either case, why are the Pyramids not mentioned in the Bible? The answer to this question was what motivated Lawrence to write, even if he would never publish because of his paranoid beliefs. Larry would have to spend some time thinking about his father's long quest.

The second DVD had a file called 2614. Larry put it into the computer slot and clicked on it.

Nefermaat and Snefru, Egypt, 2614 B.C.

Something was wrong. Nefermaat woke up covered with sweat. The taste of fermented almonds stuck at the back of his throat. He rubbed his chest, and then impulsively, moved his hand down to his groin, an unconscious act to check if his member was still there. He pondered his dream trying to understand the meaning of these strange images—his transformation into a woman, a hairy snake—with such intense erotic content. Most of his dreams seemed experiences from another life, and inexplicable until much later. It all seemed connected to his old wife and son. Somehow, his married life felt like it was another time, another life.

He got up and walked out into his palace gardens. The night was warm and dry with a slight breeze coming from the west, from the Land of the Dead. The moon was three-quarters full, hanging slightly above the horizon, casting long shadows in the clear desert night. He could see the waters of the Nile calmly flowing north. In spite of the light cast by the Moon, the Milky Way was clearly discernible in the night, as if reflecting the Nile's course through the heavens.

He could not understand why as a young man he could never sleep through the night. Yet, after he made love to Merensankh and made her his wife, he could barely stay awake and slept soundly every night. Now, he was back to his insomniac habits. He turned to admire the water works in the courtyard. The movement of water was what he enjoyed studying the most. He smiled with the memories. Everything here was planned to produce a perpetual spring. The sound of a small trickle of water was always soothing. The amount of water, the height from which it fell into the next pond, as well as the depth of each successive pool were responsible for the ululating sing-song of the trickle—from a metallic hollow song broken by dull clucking tones to a quiet shushing sound, dependent on the location in the garden—always alternating, chaotically and unpredictably according to the uneven ripples produced by the trickle in the various ponds.

His thoughts returned to his ambitious wife, Merensankh. She had left him three years before for the most powerful man in Egypt. *I was honorable, free to*

pursue what was best for most. With her by my side, I could dedicate all my energies to the good of all and never worry about my back. She was my only weakness; hence only she could make me lose face. She was the only one that could hurt me, thus my vulnerability, but my trust in her was absolute. My construction skills could change the desert. The waters of the Nile would be my friends. I had been so green. How could I have not seen it? Now I'm filled with ordinary worries. Now, even she blackmails me. To protect my son, I have to put up with whatever is thrown my way. I have to follow the orders of others. Pharaoh believes Khufwey is his own blood. He knew he wasted his time wallowing in these dark views. By the stars he could tell it was past midnight. He returned to bed and dozed off.

Nefermaat felt the thunderous hoofs of many horses approaching in the distance. He lazily opened his eyes. *What does he want now in the middle of the night?* Now he could hear the galloping horses clearly, amidst the cries of men urging them on.

He got up in time to see Snefru's new chariot leading a snaking line of horsemen. This was a spectacle never witnessed before. Obviously, Snefru had been practicing the procedures required to master charioteering. Nefermaat had just finished this new innovative chariot design a few weeks ago. It was the only one in the land. He positioned the driver directly on top of the axle, which transferred all the weight to the chariot and away from the horse. With six spokes, the wheels were much stronger. He covered the axle and hubs with copper to make them quieter. He could see the glint of copper flashing in the moonlight. The chariot might prove to be a great advantage on the flat, smooth plains of the desert.

Nefermaat couldn't help smile inwardly remembering his life-long friend; back when they were young and idealistic; when they had spent many hours talking about how to improve life for all; about the responsibilities of the privileged few; about how lucky they were to have been born into their respective families, instead of having less fortunate parents. But, inevitably, his thoughts returned to the wife that left him, and his smile vanished. *Stay calm, it is not his fault. He is your friend. She seduced him.*

Snefru deftly turned into the courtyard and lurched his chariot to a stop. As he jumped to the ground, he yelled out instructions to tend to his horses and wait for him. Nefermaat went to greet Snefru in the hallway. As they approached each other, they could be mistaken for brothers; both were the same height, almost two cubits tall—a head taller than most men; both were strong and muscular, with hair black as onyx and eyes green as emeralds.

“Dear Lord, what can be so urgent to bring you to my palace in the night?” *Can't you leave me alone, now that you have my wife and my son in your palace? Calm down.*

“Nefermaat, you and I have been friends since we were boys. You are one of the few men I can trust. I can always count on you. Your dreams are always right. I am very troubled. I have disguised myself and been among my people the last few days; in the city, in the country, with the merchants and the peasants. I can’t believe what I saw.”

“Tell me, Lord.” Nefermaat coaxed patiently.

“There is hunger. This shouldn’t be.”

“It shouldn’t be, but things take time. It’s only a few years since you started the Asiatic’s suggestions. Give it a little more time. In a few moons, maybe next year, all the hungry people will be receiving food from your granaries. First you have to build an excess, then the tributary method will be able to compensate for the natural ups and downs of farming.”

“Nefermaat, you are wise. If I can’t feed all my people, how am I going to be known and respected as the great god?” Snefru asked through clenched teeth.

“No one has a chariot like yours.” Nefermaat humored him. Snefru’s brow wrinkled in disgust. Nefermaat quickly changed course, “You crushed the revolt in Nubia and brought back seven thousand prisoners. Are your conquests not proof enough of your greatness?” he added cautiously.

“Certainly not! Even my servants and close worshippers compare me with Zosser behind my back. They insist that his Step Pyramid is confirmation that I am not worthy of the title of Pharaoh. Zosser has been dead two-hundred years, and they still talk about him.”

“We already discussed this. I thought we had put that behind us. You know I could certainly build something bigger than what my great-grandfather Imhotep built for Zosser, but we had agreed, Lord, that this would be a waste of time and men. You control the trade routes to Africa. You have control of the ebony, gold, incense and panther skins. You control the copper, turquoise and malachite excavations of Wadi Nasb and Wadi Maghara in Sinai. We have more important things to do.”

“Well, that was before I was Pharaoh, before I needed to convince my people that I am a god. Things have changed. Do I need to remind you of the favors I have bestowed on you since then?”

You allowed me to continue doing what I did before, nothing more.

“Yes, I am grateful, Lord,” Nefermaat added appeasingly. He needed to be very careful. “The watering canals that I am designing will be better for all, let me continue with my work. Introducing better means to produce food is the best way to gain respect.”

“This is about more than respect. They respect me because they fear me. I need to convince my people that I am immortal! When they believe I’m a

god, then and only then, they will follow my commands blindly. You are the one that knows most about the afterlife.”

“Only in my dreams.”

“But they are always true.”

“Lord, you are a sensible man; you know that my dreams are only dreams. They do not mean that I lived in another life. They are strange dreams, yes, but that is all. Zosser made the afterlife the most important thing in everyday life. He convinced all the people that if he, a god, invested so much effort in the afterlife by building his pyramid, it was only so he would be able to intercede with the gods on everyone’s behalf. Years ago, as young boys, it is what you and I called the politics of fear. Scare them, convince them you can protect them and they will do your bidding.”

“That was then, today my priests think differently.”

“I thought the politics of fear would only be used for the common good.”

“They are smart. As good generals they have managed to outflank Zosser’s ideas. They have taken the afterlife to another level. They extort goods from people, scaring them with Anubis, the jackal-headed god, guardian of the secrets of the funerary chambers. They claim to control Anubis with their rituals, and only he, with the priests’ help can open the Ways of the Dead in the afterlife. I need you to make me immortal, at least in the priests’ eyes. With them on my side, everything will be easier.”

“There are other means to get them on your side. We have all the excess grain and cattle in the earth. We’ve done a good task convincing the people that your dreams are direct messages from the Gods. Isn’t that proof that they think of you as a God? Your dream representing seven good years and seven bad years is a great way to scare people. We’re just in the fifth year. Of course, Joseph’s ideas exploit the people’s fears to greatest advantage. Soon you can take care of all your people.”

“He is smart, that Asiatic. Without force he takes, in my name, one fifth of everything; storing it for the bad years. He ministers the riches very well.”

“The food and cattle that he collects allow you to have the largest army ever assembled. Here lies your power. Scare them, promise them protection and they will do your bidding. What more power do you want?”

Snefru’s green eyes widened, his nostrils flared.

“But if immortality is what you seek,” Nefermaat continued quickly, “true immortality is attainable only through the memories of those that live after you.”

“Then make sure men will mention my name throughout all times. Your life is at stake, so don’t fool around. Ask Joseph for anything you need.”

With that, Snefru turned on his heels and departed. Nefermaat stood on the cool limestone floor in the hot night as the sounds of horses and men slowly became a rumble in the distance. Then silence.

Now the usurper wants immortality, the title of Pharaoh is not enough. My wife and my son are not enough. Perhaps I should tell him about Imhotep's dream, passed down to me by my father. He wants bigger than the Step Pyramid. How about the ziggurat that inspired the Tower of Babel? Is that enough?

A few days later Snefru summoned Nefermaat. He walked up the steps to Snefru's palace, wondering how he was going to react. Snefru had already taken Nefermaat's wife, Merensankh, his son, Khufwey, and with that, part of his life.

What more can he ask of me?

After the initial, respectful greetings, Snefru signaled Nefermaat to sit next to him. "Nefermaat, what good news do you bring me?" he asked sarcastically with a raised eyebrow.

"I will give you the tallest tower ever built. So tall, that the ancients said it reached the heavens." Nefermaat tried to read Snefru's expression. He showed interest.

"I like that. How quickly can you build it?"

"I am not exactly going to build it; we are going to dig it out. It was built shortly after the ancient times of the gods and giants," Nefermaat responded waiting for a reaction. Only raised eyebrows answered his questioning. "Lord, certainly you have seen the tower that lies two days March North from here on the west side of the Nile?"

"You mean the double step pyramid in ruins near Fayoum? The one that supposedly inspired the construction of the Step Pyramid of Zosser? You call that the tallest tower?" Snefru scoffed, waiting for an answer.

Nefermaat didn't need to add that he had been born in Fayoum. He waited for him to press for more information. Snefru, with a gesture of his hand, as if signaling Nefermaat to approach, commanded him to speak.

"What you call 'that two-step pyramid in ruins' was the first ziggurat. It is really 180 cubits high! The desert sands covered it over many years. The pyramid has eight steps, six of them are buried. Only two are visible above the sands." Nefermaat gambled; he couldn't reveal the source of this information. In a dream, he had witnessed, as a laborer, the construction of this mighty edifice, so he added as explanation, "Legend has it that Osiris gathered all the people of the world and built it to reach the skies where the gods live." And his father's stories, passed down from the time of Imhotep, also supported this view. This was a big risk on Nefermaat's part, but his

dreams had always proven true. *Covered with sand, in what state of disrepair is it? Could I fix it?*”

“But it is too far from Saqqara. Why would I dig out a ruined pyramid so far north?”

“First, it is not ruined; and second, because you want to break away from the past, from the old religious superstitions and start a new era. It is all for community use. It is simply a ruse.”

“It is not!” Snefru interrupted with a hiss.

How arrogant. Just a few years ago you jested about the superstitious simple people and gave little credence to Zosser’s status as a God. But now, “You are a new god,” he continued quickly, “You need a new pyramid, bigger than anyone before you. It will take 50,000 men to remove the sand into the Nile waters. You have ample grain and cattle to feed them. We will work during the three months of Akhet, the Nile’s high flood, when our servants and slaves are not needed to tend the fields. The floodwaters will carry the sand far away. It will take some years.”

“How many years?”

“Ten, fifteen,” Nefermaat ventured slowly.

“Not good enough. You have five years. I still need proof that what you say is true. Otherwise you will pay the ultimate price.”

Is my old wife not good enough anymore? I have a bad feeling. If my dream is wrong . . .

“In that case, I’ll need 100,000 more men.” Nefermaat interjected quickly. “I’ll need your strongest fighters. Your armies will be affected. Do I have your permission to request from Joseph that much extra food?”

Snefru snorted in reply. As Nefermaat turned to leave, he commanded, “Wait! I have other things to discuss. My wife, since she came to me,”

“You mean since you ordered her to be your queen.”

“She doesn’t seem well. She never laughs, or sings. She is listless . . .”

“What’s new? Towards the end, she never did with me either. She used to blame me for her sadness. She’s probably trying to upset Snefru. It’s the least she could do. She certainly went out of her way to tell me, in no uncertain terms, in humiliating fashion, how much higher in life she could be; queen instead of a master builder’s wife! When she left me, I mourned her. It seemed the woman I loved died and had been replaced by another spirit; she looked like her, but she no longer was the same woman I fell in love with.”

“Are you listening, Nefermaat?”

“Yes, Lord. What would you have me do?”

“Talk to her.”

“You want *me* to talk to her? After three years?”

“You know her. I don’t know what else to do. I fear for her. Sometimes I think she is getting ready to depart this earth, as if she yearns for the afterlife. Please. My son needs his mother. Please.”

Please? Your son?

“I’ll give you anything you want if you can restore her,” Snefru enticed.

“Anything I want? That is more than even you, Lord, can bestow. Especially after we dig out the tower. I’ll have a word with her, but I am no priest or witch doctor that believes talking or chanting can do any good.”

The next day Nefermaat found himself walking through the garden among the fountains he had designed a few years earlier. He had carved a big pond out of the rock at the highest level of the Nile’s floodwaters. In August when the Nile flooded reaching its highest levels, it filled the pond. By placing a perfectly fitting stone into a slot in the channel as the waters receded, the pond remained full. Its volume was calculated to hold enough water for a year’s supply, including the mysterious daily losses that some attributed to the gods drinking their share. Through a small round opening, drilled with huge effort through the rock, water flowed slowly into the fountains giving the illusion of a perpetual natural spring. The sound of falling water, always pleasing to the ear, filled the dry air and tricked witnesses into believing it was cooler. Everything had been designed with a purpose; nothing had been left to chance: the pathways, the straight lines of the fountains and pools; the vertical lines of the round columns, the decorations on the walls and columns; even the arrangement of the white and blue water lilies symbolizing the union of the Two Lands, the Lower and Upper Kingdoms.

He was startled to find Merensankh alone with no servants. Her sight evoked many feelings, catching him by surprise. He stopped to calm down. She sat on the edge of one of the fountains with her feet dangling in the water; her head hung low, her elbows rested on her knees.

“Greetings,” Nefermaat intoned politely. There was no obvious response. He walked nosily on the gravel as he approached so as not to startle her.

“Stop right there. Where do you think you are going?” a guard shouted, materializing, seemingly from nowhere. He approached running waving a menacing spear.

The trappings of power. Who needs it when you fear for your life at all times and need constant protection from your enemies? Power is worthless if it is achieved through hurting others.

As Nefermaat turned, the guard saw the uraeus, his horned headdress with the cobra in an upright position representing Uadjet, Pharaoh’s defender: a

beautifully carved cobra ready to strike, with a gold chest and beautifully inlaid lapis lazuli and turquoise scales with ruby eyes. The guard froze in his tracks. He believed that a cobra would kill him if he harmed Nefermaat. Only Joseph, Snefru and Nefermaat were allowed the use of the uraeus for protection and as symbols of the extension of Pharaoh's power. In addition, the guard found himself staring into a pair of green eyes, just like Pharaoh's.

"Pharaoh himself asked me to come and speak with the queen." The guard stared with terror at the cobra on Nefermaat's forehead. He bowed and retreated to a safe distance. "I will call you if I need anything," Nefermaat said dismissively.

She sat motionless. She never gazed at Nefermaat, barely breathing. He took his sandals off, sat next to her and slipped his feet in the cool water. When he attempted to put his hand on her shoulder, she stiffened, so he withdrew the hand. She began sobbing, her shoulders shaking violently.

"Do you care to tell me what afflicts you?" Nefermaat asked softly. Only soft sobs in response. *I remember long ago when we made love and you started crying for no apparent reason; your treasure's contractions intensified my own pleasure. Stop! How low and selfish can I be? Or is it that I still love you and don't want to admit it?* He forced himself to think of other things. He sighed and waited. Finally the sobs died away.

"I just feel like dying," Merensankh finally whispered. "I thought if I had it all, then I would be happy. Now I can have anything, but the gods have punished me; nothing brings me joy. Not even my son. I thought that it was a punishment for what I did to you, but I sincerely have no desire to be with you, or see you, or talk to you or do anything with you," she said with no feeling. "Or anyone," she added coldly. She continued staring into the water between her feet. "I used to blame you for my withered soul. Now I can't even do that."

Nefermaat sympathetically placed his hand on her arm and she pulled it away.

"No. Please, leave me alone. Please go," she pleaded, close to tears again. She turned to look at him with a crazed face, as if possessed by some evil forces.

"Talk to me. I am your friend. I have forgiven you. I have not spoken to anyone of our son, as I promised. I want to help you, let me in," he implored sincerely.

After a long pause she spoke, "I tell you this, not to worry you, but because you are my friend and the father of my child. Your silence will ensure his safety. Snefru will kill Khufwey if he finds out he is not his heir. For me, I only wish

death. Every day is a torment, and sleep never comes easy. I fall in and out of the edge of dreamland every night. I can't sleep. Every day seems worse than the previous. I can't concentrate on anything; I can't even get myself dressed without help. I forget to eat if I'm not fed. Other times I lose control and weep for no reason. And the worse part, there are times when I can't feel anything."

He sat in silence absorbing the stillness of the afternoon. She said no more. Her tears sounded like small pebbles falling into the fountain. Finally he spoke, "Would it help if I come back to see you?"

She nodded, but remained silent with her head bowed low.

"I'll see you tomorrow," Nefermaat added after putting on his sandals. The sun was setting as he walked away from the garden.

The flooding would start in a month and last past the summer. Nefermaat's days were spent overseeing the organization of the labor force needed to begin to dig out the tower. All the baskets, skins, and clay vessels that could be bought or obtained were stockpiled. Snefru sent a fleet of forty vessels to bring cedar from Lebanon. Nefermaat ordered ten thousand wooden shovels to be made as soon as the cedar arrived.

In the late afternoons Nefermaat would visit the queen at Pharaoh's palace, but nothing but ironic banter or sad lamentations is all he could coax out of her. He was not able to report anything positive to Pharaoh. *And certainly nothing concerning his heir, my son.* Nefermaat stood there watching Merensankh's beautiful features: the smoothness of her dark skin, and the blackness of her big, almond-shaped eyes.

"I am leaving tomorrow at dawn. I will be two days march north of here. I don't know when I will be back to see you. It depends on how the digging goes, on how well my theories work, and how much the Nile can carry away."

"It doesn't matter. I will be dead before you return." She turned and stepped away from him. Nefermaat stood there watching her back as she walked away until his sad revelries were interrupted by a shout.

"Nefermaat!"

What does he want now?

"Nefermaat! I gather you have everything you need to start building the tower?" Snefru barked as he approached them without formal greeting. Nefermaat bowed and nodded. "The queen is still not well . . ." Snefru let it hang as he turned to see Merensankh a short distance away.

"No. I mean, yes, she is not well. And yes, I think everything is ready. Supplies, tools and men are on their way as we speak. Joseph, the Asiatic, has plenty of food stockpiled in your granaries and will carry it as needed. I should be on my way myself."

“Joseph has instructions to supply you with all you need. Remember what I said. I mean about the queen and about the tower.”

“Perhaps. Even if I don’t build the tower, you get your queen and I get to keep my head.”

Snefru’s eyes bore into Nefermaat as he squeezed his arm.

“Do not worry.” Nefermaat said between clenched teeth. “I prefer to build the tower, keep my head, and have you in my debt. I guess it depends on the queen,” Nefermaat added, looking at her. She stared at the ground. Nefermaat had to uncurl Snefru’s fingers to get him to release his arm. “I’ll keep you informed.”

“Don’t worry. I have my own means. Remember, your head will roll if you can’t deliver,” Snefru snarled.

“Yes, Lord.” Nefermaat turned and walked away. “I will remember.”

Two months later Nefermaat stood observing the progress. Originally about seventy cubits on the south of the tower were exposed. He had decided to remove sand on the east side, making a causeway all the way to the Nile at a level slightly above the high flood marks. This made it easier to drag the sand to the flowing waters. Now about thirty cubits more lay exposed in the bright sun. He needed to find better ways to achieve this. One hundred deaths was too high a prize to pay for so little. *Snefru’s glory is definitely not worth it.* The baskets, pulled with ropes, and the bull’s hides filled with wooden shovels were working well. The clay containers were not; too much time was wasted filling them and emptying them. He needed to find more efficient means to remove the mountains of hot sand.

People were calling it the Meidum Pyramid. Rumors were spread that Huni, the Pharaoh of the last dynasty, Snefru’s father, had constructed it. Nefermaat decided to do something to change this. He immediately designed and started to build a mortuary temple to the east of the pyramid, at the head of the causeway. The diversion of workers from the main work could easily be justified. The mortuary temple would serve two purposes; first, to put Snefru’s name on some real construction related to this digging; second, to keep morale high among the laborers in the face of the specter of death. Servants and slaves needed to know that their needs in the afterworld would be taken care of, even if Nefermaat believed these were simple superstitions.

The removal of mounds and mounds of sand had revealed that the outer layer of the tower at Meidum was made of smooth, limestone blocks with a slope of five/sixths of vertical.⁶ On average, the blocks were about one

⁶ 75 degrees.

cubit high, one cubit deep and four cubits long. A quick mental calculation indicated that this would require twenty-five strong men to lift each block. *How did the Ancients cut, transport and lift these blocks?*

Nefermaat's speculations were cut short. From his vantage point high on the tower he could see a column of dust far to the south on the west side of the Nile, probably one of Snefru's Captains with a team of chariots. *What does he want now?* He climbed down to greet them.

"Nefermaat!" the Captain yelled unnecessarily as Nefermaat stood right in front of his horse. He dismounted with a jump, his face so close to Nefermaat's that Nefermaat could see the dust caking his sweaty forehead and smell his bad breath. The Captain's tone of voice reminded Nefermaat that he was not wearing his uraeus. Otherwise the Captain would be kissing the ground.

"Yes, Captain," Nefermaat whispered sarcastically. The Captain looked him in the eye.

"You are to come with me immediately. It concerns queen Merensankh."
Did she send for me?

"My orders come directly from Snefru," the Captain said as if in response to Nefermaat's thoughts. "You are to come back with me to Memphis at once. We leave after the horses have been watered."

It was hot; the dry air burned the throat. They rode North with the Nile to their right as the sun was setting. Nefermaat had time to wonder what might have changed concerning Snefru's favorite queen. *His living queen, and not my old wife, has to be my concern. I need to accept she has left me and is no longer my wife, just the mother of my son.* They rode all night. The Pharaoh's barge, large enough to accommodate them and their horses, was waiting to take them across the Nile.

As Nefermaat entered the palace, Snefru turned and waved, "Nefermaat, good to see you."

"Lord, is everything all right?" Nefermaat inquired respectfully.

"Stand up. You don't need to be so formal when we are alone. And yes. Everything is all right. My beloved queen seems to be doing well."

"Why the summons, Lord?"

"She is doing so well I wanted you to see her. Well actually, it is she that demanded to see you—in person. Let me call her. I'll leave you two alone. Call queen Merensankh!" Snefru yelled to his captain in the next room. Nefermaat looked at the walls of the palatial hall adorned with scenes of battles. *What battles await me? Will I be victorious?*

"She makes me so happy I have named our son Khufwey my heir."
Merensankh, what have you managed? I might become the father of Pharaoh.

"Is something wrong, Nefermaat? Snefru asked, sensing his disquiet.

“Is Heuntsen’s son not well, my Lord?” Nefermaat referred to Snefru’s first wife, knowing the answer and trying to buy time to digest the consequences of this information.

“My first queen’s son, Meni, is a sickly one. Even if he lives, he doesn’t have what it takes to become Pharaoh. I might as well groom Khufwey. It is always better to start them young.”

He’s only two.

“She thinks I am doing all this for her happiness, but you and I know there are serious considerations to make such a move. Don’t tell her otherwise. Let her believe whatever she wants. To see her happy fills me with joy. Don’t change that. There are other matters that I also wish to discuss before she arrives,” Snefru added seriously.

“What is on your mind, Lord?”

“The reports I get concerning the tower indicate that this seems to be a very big building; bigger than Zosser’s Step Pyramid.”

“As I promised,” Nefermaat interrupted enthusiastically.

“But who built it? And don’t tell me the Ancients when they were gods.”

“Then, I don’t know, Lord.”

“For what purpose?”

“I can only speculate. The first men that saw this tower among the sands of the Desert stood there in awe and tried to explain its purpose. They could only do so within the limited fixed notions of their experience, life, their world and beliefs. They believed in an afterlife, and in a multitude of Gods, which were used to explain everything that was incomprehensible. A pyramid of such magnitude only made sense as an attempt to reach into the heavens—a form of spiritual bridge between this world and the next. Such a huge task only makes sense if eternal life is the purpose. And so it inspired new religious beliefs.

“In their simple minds they believe the pyramid protects the body to live forever in the company of the Gods. Zosser extended this and made a political statement. The explanation for the construction to be of such quality as to seem indestructible, like a god, is it should be related to the only things they understand to be eternal—the gods themselves. The tower only makes sense in terms of burial rites to protect the body, eternally, for the journey into the Land of the Dead. It doesn’t have any other practical use, like storage, and certainly can’t be used for habitation.”

“You are giving me the standard explanation, Nefermaat. You and I know that it inspired Zosser’s Saqqara construction binge and religious ideas. Tell me something I don’t know.”

“Just because you and I know all this, it doesn’t agree with the common people’s beliefs. They believe in the afterlife and the immortality of the soul.”

“Then it will be easy for them to believe that this pyramid will protect my body into the afterlife. But still I am curious, what was the purpose of these huge monument?”

“Several things baffle me, Lord. One, is the incredible placement with the motion of the sun. I have made detailed measurements of the sun’s motion for several months, and as best as I can determine it is truly oriented East-West.”

“Could it have some relation to the stars? If it took you careful measurements over months, why would anyone go to such efforts to line it up?” Snefru asked exploring other alternative explanations, encouraging Nefermaat to go on.

“That is a good question. But I don’t know the answer. Celestial observations for determining the seasons need such exact alignments. Yet, for planting and harvesting we can count on the Nile’s yearly flood, and so could anyone before us. We don’t need precise observations,” Nefermaat answered trying to determine where this conversation was leading. Could it be that Snefru knew more than he led on to? “What do you think, Lord?”

“That whatever the purpose, for now, it is imperative that we continue with the facade that the pyramids are connected to life eternal, especially Pharaoh’s. My connection to an ever-lasting life, achieved only by the immortal gods, gives my authority greater legitimacy. We must promulgate that we are the builders. We can’t allow the idea, even to begin to form, that some other men before us were more powerful than us.”

“I will do everything I can to promote Zosser’s ideas among the laborers. They will disseminate the idea to all corners of the kingdom. The tower is your burial-resting place as far as I am concerned, Lord. The pyramid will last thousands of years; that I can promise you. It might be a good idea to station guards at a respectful distance so the local people can’t inspect closely what we are doing.”

Snefru’s mood seemed to brighten at this prospect. After a small pause the captain of the guard entered, bowed, kissed the ground and announced, “The queen is coming.”

“I’ll leave you two alone,” Snefru said, wheeled smugly on the ball of his foot and silently walked down the long hallway and turned left toward his chambers.

Nefermaat tried to remain calm as she entered the room. Yet, the memories of her smell, her taste, the feeling of her soft skin against his, the gleam in her

eyes, rekindled strong feelings. She could read his expression, smiled, took his hand and led him to a marble bench.

"I don't have much time. Snefru thinks I'm better. The truth is I don't know how I turned from a happy talkative girl into some kind of sad, complaining woman. You know this goes back to when I was your wife. Listen carefully: I need you to think closely about what is important in your life. I don't know why, but I have seen it in my dreams. Don't be afraid to follow your instincts."

"What do you mean, 'You don't have time.' You mean right now, this instant?"

"I have plenty of that time today, just not much of the other time, later."

"Stop talking in riddles."

"Listen, Nefermaat, it's up to you. Your life is destined. I have seen it in my dreams. You have to follow your destiny. Please don't let my sacrifices be in vain. I have struggled as best I could. I am nothing but a phantom. I can't get in touch with my feelings. I have been talking to the witch doctor . . ."

"A fish is smarter than him!" Nefermaat hissed.

"Listen to me! I appear well, but only for a short time and with much effort. Death is near. The next time I won't be able to survive. I don't want to survive it."

"The next time? What are you talking about?"

She silenced him with a kiss; it was long and sweet.

"I can't feel anything, don't you see? Nefermaat, this is the last time you will see me. I have asked the witch doctor to help me."

"He has no power over me."

"It's not that kind of help. I have been the lover of two of the three most powerful men in the world, but you do not stop and listen to what I say."

"I don't listen to what you say? You left me. You took my child to another man's house and made him believe it was his!"

"You go on like children with extravagant ideas. Building temples, palaces, kingdoms, but you do not stop and solve the simple problems of a woman. You are fools, yet you are all I have. I only have one way out. I hope I have the strength to do it. When I join Anubis, you will have no choice but to think about my problems. Today, tomorrow . . . It is time. I can't go on anymore. The witch doctor's potion is ready."

"What nonsense are you talking about?"

"I can't go on living like this. Don't you comprehend?" she said searching into his eyes for understanding. Finding none, she added, exasperated, "Just remember what I told you. Keep in mind what is important."

Nefermaat looked into Merensankh's eyes trying to read what she was trying to convey.

"I believed that time would pass and things would improve. But they haven't. I cannot find in myself a trace of love, not even self-preservation, no feelings. Every day I struggle to keep appearances, everyday less; I have gone from three, to two to one hour a day. I can't do it any more. I don't know how long I will last." She stood and looked at Nefermaat with sad eyes. "Good-by, Nefermaat. I never meant to cause you any pain, but it was my destiny to do so and to do it again. Forgive me. Remember what is important."

"You mean Khufwey?"

"I am consumed to follow the path of death. My son brings me no joy. I only know that you have to solve the problem. Don't think about your son—just remember what is important." With that she turned and left quickly.

What is important? To finish digging the tower of Meidum; that Merensankh be well so Snefru will be forced to grant me whatever I want. I will ask to go back to constructing irrigation ditches to benefit the most. That is important. Surely he cannot deny me when I deliver his tower. Why does she talk in riddles? Does she mean I must protect the dynastic future of our son?

"Nefermaat!" Snefru startled him. He had no idea how long Snefru had been in his presence. "If she continues well while you build, I mean, dig my pyramid, then, I will give you anything you desire. I recommend you go back to Meidum and ask the gods for Merensankh's continued good health. Joseph tells me that you are more than one-fifth finished. This suggests that in less than five years my pyramid can be ready?"

"That might be true if the pyramid is one-hundred-and-eighty cubits high, but if the base reaches to the high-flood level of the Nile, then it will be one or two years more, Lord. If that's the case," Nefermaat added smoothly, "then you will have a higher and bigger pyramid. Let's pray that your queen is well in health as long as this endeavor lasts." Nefermaat turned to leave, but Snefru's hand stopped him.

"Joseph informs me that you have been asking for more food than you had requested." Snefru raised one eyebrow questioningly.

"I was able to find more people to work."

"Good." Snefru always needed to have the last word, "Go! Let the gods be on our side."

Two days later Nefermaat lay down in the construction camp next to the Meidum tower. He fell into a deep, dreamless sleep. He awoke with a jolt. He opened his eyes and looked at the night sky. By the stars he knew it was

slightly after midnight. He was certain something evil had happened. It felt like a spirit was connected to him, calling him; but it was a feeling, with no sound in the night. The air was cool and still. The calling felt like something was pulling his stomach inside out. A persistent, very bad feeling made him nauseous. A whiff of fermented almonds assaulted his nostrils and he started to throw up. Acid burnt the back of his throat until there was nothing but dry heaves. He stood up with weak knees and his skin felt clammy with cold sweat. Something very bad had happened. He turned to look at the tower. *You must remember what is important.* The tower seemed fine. This feeling, like a spirit yelling, kept tugging at his insides. He couldn't discern what could be so bad. *Could it be Merensankh?*

The sun appeared in the east, on the opposite side of the Nile. Nefermaat had been riding through the night. The horse was sweaty from the hard ride, steam coming off its flanks. Nefermaat maintained the steed at a steady canter. A Captain of Snefru's guard with several horsemen approached Nefermaat from the south at a full gallop. He smoothly brought his horse to a stop.

"You have saved me a trip, Lord. Pharaoh just ordered me to go fetch you." The captain had recognized Nefermaat by the Cobra headdress. "Give him a fresh horse," he commanded. As soon as Nefermaat mounted the fresh horse, the Captain reeled his horse around and shouted, "Follow me!"

They arrived at Snefru's palace as the sun approached its zenith. The desert sands shimmered like water. As they dismounted, two guards approached them running. The Captain ordered, "Take Lord Nefermaat to Pharaoh." Nefermaat followed them.

Snefru was sitting deep in thought. As soon as he saw Nefermaat, he leapt to his feet. "What did you do to her?" he yelled at him.

It is Merensankh.

"What are you talking about, Lord?" Nefermaat feigned innocence, he knew Merensankh was dead. *She carried out her threat. What is important?*

"If you don't know, then why were you on your way before I summoned you?"

"I had a bad feeling in the night."

"A bad feeling? And because of that, you decided, suddenly, in the middle of the night, to come at a full gallop to check if something was wrong. I am not an idiot, Nefermaat!" The veins in Snefru's neck bulged, sweat drenched his headgear. "Tell me what you know."

How can I explain this?

"You know perfectly well what happened. You caused it! What did you say to her? You're not dead yet, because first you will beg for your life, and

then you will beg me to end it,” Snefru yelled shaking a fist in Nefermaat’s face. He turned and yelled, “Guards!”

The guards hesitated. They were staring at the uraeus on Nefermaat’s headdress. Snefru’s headdress, at the moment, didn’t have a cobra. He unconsciously lifted his hand to his forehead and realized his mistake.

This was Nefermaat’s opportunity. Symbolically, he had more power, for the moment, than Snefru.

“Do as you please. I had nothing to do with her death. I loved her. I would never hurt her.” Nefermaat tried to be honest and rely on the bonds of friendship between them. Snefru appeared disconcerted by Nefermaat’s answer. They searched into each other’s eyes. Snefru wanted to believe what he saw. He lowered his fist and backed up. At this, Nefermaat took his headdress off, as a sign of respect and offered it to Snefru. Snefru looked at the guards. They approached. Protocol demanded that they obey Snefru’s commands if he sported the uraeus. He could not afford to lose face by wearing Nefermaat’s headgear, so he placed it on Nefermaat’s head. The guards retreated.

“Don’t move. I’ll be right back,” Snefru left the room. Nefermaat stood at attention waiting respectfully. When Snefru came back, he sported his headdress with the uraeus. It was grander than Nefermaat’s. The scales were also lapis lazuli and turquoise, but had gold bezels that joined majestically with the gold overlay of the cobra’s under belly. The eyes were huge emeralds and the fangs were carved delicately from ivory. The two cobras seemed to hiss at each other.

“I’ll find out the truth,” Snefru whispered. He approached Nefermaat to remove the uraeus. Nefermaat calmly acceded. After a pause Snefru snarled, “Take him away as instructed! Bury him alive.”

The guards grabbed him by the shoulders. They expertly coiled a long rope tightly around his body pinning his arms to his sides and binding his legs together. The four guards picked him up like a sack of flour and carried him down into the dungeons. There, two guards lifted the lid of a big heavy wooden sarcophagus. The lid, covered with gold leaf, was decorated with a human effigy with green eyes that could have been either Nefermaat or Snefru. The sides of the sarcophagus were inlaid with turquoise. The quartet roughly dropped Nefermaat into the open sarcophagus. Nefermaat lay on his back and saw the heavy lid slowly erase all trace of light. The lid was close to his face. In the darkness he could hear copper nails noisily hammered into the lid to seal it. The pounding was deafening, the darkness total.

Nefermaat was able to raise his head slightly but his forehead hit the sarcophagus’ lid. A deep fear overcame him, his mouth dried up, his breathing

increased. He tried to calm himself, but the knowledge that his arms were pinned and his legs tied made the fear worse. His heartbeat echoed loudly in his ears, reverberating with the hammering of nails. A huge wave of panic overtook him. The imminent sensation of death increased. He was powerless, overtaken by waves of pure fear. His heart pounded in his ears, louder than the hammering of the copper nails. Suddenly he was overtaken by rage and he attacked the sarcophagus with his head, the only weapon at his disposal, the only part of his body he could move. He banged the lid with his forehead and hammered the bottom with the back of his head. He battered the sides with his temples. The banging went on interminably, or so it seemed to the guards. Finally, silence.

“He must’ve killed himself,” one of the guards muttered to no one in particular.

“Go inform Pharaoh that Nefermaat is dead,” the captain ordered. A guard rushed upstairs. He soon returned.

“Pharaoh wants the sarcophagus taken to his presence.”

The six men labored to carry the heavy sarcophagus up the stairs, down the hallway and into Snefru’s presence.

“Put the sarcophagus down!” Snefru commanded in a whisper through clenched teeth.

They did as instructed and backed away fearfully.

“I hadn’t even started building a mastaba for her.” Snefru spoke with sadness, thinking of Merensankh. Tears welled up in his eyes. “I can’t believe she is dead. She was only twenty-five. She was fine yesterday.” Snefru’s voice cracked. He continued in a whisper, “As required by the priests’ rituals, she will be prepared for her journey to the world of the dead. I have already ordered the priests that embalmed my father to prepare everything for Merensankh.” He paused, and looked sadly at the sarcophagus.

He turned to the Captain, took a deep breath and spoke in deep anger, “I instructed you to scare him. Why do you think I let him keep the cobra headdress? You were supposed to maintain respect for him. Do you mock protocol?”

“You removed the uraeus, Lord. I was simply complying with your wishes,” the captain bowed and knelt. “I didn’t intend to kill him. I didn’t expect this.”

“Captain, pray you are wrong. I need Nefermaat’s building skills to finish a suitable mastaba for my dead queen. Open the sarcophagus,” Snefru instructed.

“Bring a hammer and chisel.” The captain realized his life was at stake. A guard ran out and came back shortly. The captain approached the sarcophagus

and placed the copper chisel between the lid and the sarcophagus, and hammered it in. The wedged chisel, with each blow of the hammer, slowly lifted one side, then the other. The copper nails were pulled out and the heavy lid was raised. The captain moved back.

Snefru approached and peered down into the sarcophagus. Nefermaat's head, covered with blood, rested in a pool of blood. He placed the back of his hand close to Nefermaat's nose.

"He lives. Thank the gods for that. Get him out of there!"

Four guards ran toward the sarcophagus, two on each side. They picked Nefermaat's limp and bloody body up and out of the sarcophagus, and lay him on the cold granite floor.

"Untie him. Clean him up. Do I need to tell you everything?" Snefru yelled.

A while later, Nefermaat opened his eyes with a start. He focused on Snefru. His breathing quickened.

"Help him stand," Snefru ordered softly. Two guards assisted Nefermaat to his feet and held him propped up. "For now, at my discretion you will wear the uraeus," Snefru said. He placed Nefermaat's uraeus back on his head. "I don't want to undermine your authority." He explained. Two trickles of blood came down from under the headdress. "I would use the tower for her burial but there isn't enough time to prepare it. Build the best mastaba possible. You have the allotted seventy days. You will live at least that long. Use Uadjet's protection wisely."

Nefermaat controlled what was left of his rage, and for now, prudence was wiser. He tried to bow as protocol demanded, but it was more to hide his anger; his knees buckled and he fell to the floor. The guards helped him back to his feet. Using his fingers Snefru ran his fingers along the master builder's cheek smearing blood on his headgear and face to show his higher rank and his lack of fear of Uadjet, the cobra, the symbol of a god.

For the time being, Nefermaat would need to accept this situation. "I've already started a mortuary temple, Lord. A suitable mastaba will be ready. I'll direct all efforts to the task. I'll build to the north of the Meidum Tower, in the land of the dead, in the position of honor, next to her husband's tomb as befitting such a loved queen." Nefermaat bowed and departed for Meidum.

A shiver ran down my spine and the scent of fermented almonds was in my nose. Another shiver raced through my scalp. Merensankh, don't worry. Our mastabas will be together, north of the tower. Think what is important! Wisdom is the voice in my head.

And so it came to be: Merensankh's mastaba and Nefermaat's were built north of the dugout tower. Nefermaat was counting on his rank to be buried

next to his Pharaoh and queen at the end of the seventy days. During those days Nefermaat thought deeply about what Merensankh had said. *What is important?* He could not blame Snefru for acting the way he had or for suspecting that Merensankh's death was somehow connected to him. The more he thought about it, slowly, like the rising sun, a glimpse of what was important emerged. With that glimpse, a plan formed.

Sixty days later, Snefru arrived at Meidum for Merensankh's burial. Ten days later, as prescribed by the funerary rituals, the mastaba was sealed. The following week Snefru approached Nefermaat. "The only reason you still have your head on is because the tower is imposing. Digging has moved quickly. I am more impressed than I imagined I could be. I noticed your cartouche on the mastaba next to Merensankh's. I suppose you think we are going to bury you there soon. Not yet. I have other plans for us." He turned to survey the Nile, then the temple. He turned to see the half-buried tower more than an arrow-shot away. "I see my cartouche on the mortuary temple. People are talking about me," and grudgingly added, "And you. I hear rumors that I am building, with your help, a tower to the heavens where only the vultures of Nekhebet, Uadjet's sister, no less, dwell. I have to congratulate you on your cleverness."

"Snefru, my old friend," Nefermaat said seeking rapprochement. He was no longer afraid of Snefru. He needed Snefru's trust if he was going to be of help to anyone, especially his son. "Listen to me. I am truly sorry for your loss. Nobody is sadder than I. The last thing Merensankh said to me was that I should worry about what is important, nothing else. We are standing in a unique place and time. We must seize the moment. We are looking at a great opportunity."

"Merensankh is dead, and you talk of opportunities?"

"She said to me, 'Remember what is important.' That is what we must do, Lord."

"Nefermaat, my priests have confirmed that she poisoned herself. She killed herself. Think about that! That is part of the reason why you still live. She ended her own life."

So she did. But I must tackle what is important.

"As sad as that may be, there are other considerations," Nefermaat pressed on. "Your brilliant idea of your dreams presaging seven good years followed by seven bad years instilled fear in the people. The fear of bad times is fresh in people's minds; it is not too long ago that hunger was very common. It is easy to use fear for a common purpose. Fear commands respect, and fear can't be elicited in a moment."

Snefru remained silent, encouraging Nefermaat to continue.

“Joseph’s tributary system, one fifth of every man’s production, is a great way to take advantage of this fear and create riches. People are forced to work harder when they know that Pharaoh takes one fifth. This increases everyone’s take. But with the riches in the care of Joseph, you wield power to redistribute what everyone gets. This you can do in several ways: you can give it away to the needy or any group you choose; you can use it to pay for armies, whether of conquest, or of peace, or to enforce the laws of the land; you can use it to feed your servants and slaves or as payment to specialized labor for construction in a scale never done before. Our people will see this as love of Pharaoh for them, and love commands loyalty. But ultimately, Lord, men need to stand in awe to give their allegiance freely. Our people should respect you; and respect also commands loyalty. If we convince them that you are the Opener of the Ways, that you are more powerful than Anubis, that you can save them for eternity in the afterlife, then they will stand in admiration of you.”

“Zosser instilled fear of death, but he gained respect because people believed he would intercede for them in this life as well as the next. If I need to choose between love and respect, I choose respect. If I need to choose between fear and respect, I choose fear,” Snefru nodded, giving emphasis to his words.

“Think, my lord. I would choose love, then respect, then fear. Because love commands respect, and respect commands fear.”

“Zosser improved on the old superstitions, the stories of ancient times, when the gods roamed the earth, and made them understandable. People followed him willingly, afraid of the punishments the gods give out to mere mortals, because they believed in his power to influence the gods. People did his will for fear of being imprisoned in the dark side of the netherworld and never being allowed entrance to the kingdom of eternal peace. Zosser could change that, or so they believed. Was it not proof that Zosser, rich and mighty, instead of pursuing worldly pleasures, devoted his life to building the Step Pyramid at Saqqara?” Snefru asked.

“I agree with what you are saying, Lord. There is the politics of fear and dread: of bad times to come; of the afterlife. We will perfect the cult of Pharaoh as the protector against all fears; as Opener of the Way in the afterworld; as Lord Protector in this world, and with the help of Horus, keep enemy nations at bay. And now, thanks to Joseph’s tributary system, you control riches in a scale never seen before. This is the means to express your love; you can have bigger armies to build, to conquer or enforce the law. It is your choice. Use

it wisely. You control who gets the riches in a seemingly benevolent way. You are truly a god, with real life-and-death powers. With the power to decide who is worthy and who is not.

“Death was so frequent from injury, from disease, or even caused by men. But death was even more common through starvation or bad weather; fear of death became paralyzing. The original priests in ancient times helped overcome the fear of death as death knocks at our door at all time. This way people could live a normal, productive life. Extreme dedication was required to give comfort to the living when death was so common. Small, increases in wisdom, fighting fear of death, inevitably promoted a priesthood to pass on their special skills and insights. These special insights inevitably are abused to manipulate others through their natural fears. And the pettiness of men leads inexorably to the exploitation of the weak and ignorant. A benevolent, all-powerful god—Pharaoh—can change this. And that is the mission that needs to be safeguarded and conveyed to all future Pharaohs. Pharaoh must wield tremendous power for the benefit of his people; it is the only reason to wield power.”

Snefru remained silent, absorbing Nefermaat’s ideas. Nefermaat continued, sensing no objections.

“We need to convince any disbelievers; what we will build or dig out of the sands will assure them of your might. To the politics of fear—fear of starvation, fear of invasion, fear of the afterworld—we will add the politics of awe and respect backed by Pharaoh’s affection. The Pyramid of Saqqara is nothing compared to what we will do. For the first time, we have enough riches and enough power to really increase the well-being of our people. This is the politics of love. When you put the well being of your people in your heart, above all other considerations, people will know that you love them; they in turn will love you back, freely give you loyalty, respect, admiration, and even immortality. They will talk about you through the ages.” *I haven’t told Snefru about the other two pyramids buried in Saqqara. That can keep our people happily digging away with food in their bellies, at least a few months a year, until my son becomes Pharaoh.*”

“You forget the blessings the Nile provides every year. That is why we have food in abundance. You forget the natural protection that the deserts afford our kingdom. That is why we have peace.”

“The people don’t dwell on that. Most people don’t care about anything as long as they are happy.”

“And where do your precious irrigation projects fit, Nefermaat? This is not like you.”

“We will get to them; they are necessary to produce more food. I don’t believe seven bad years will follow the seven good years we are having, do you? In a few more years you will own everything that our people don’t need, Lord. We can count on Joseph for that. We have to think in the years ahead. We have to keep in mind how to achieve a better life for the greatest number. We need to consider how to pass all this wisdom to your heir.”

“Nefermaat, but what about the priests? They have control over embalming, over the rituals, procedures and means to the afterlife. They are also using the skills they learned dealing with death. How can we compete with them? They will undermine me,” Snefru protested.

“They will fight to keep us honest. And we will do our utmost to keep them honest. It is not a bad thing. It creates some balance of power. But, Lord, they are cynics. They, like you and I, don’t believe in the afterworld. They, like you and I, enjoy the good things of this world. With your riches, buy them. Pay them what they ask, or even better, exempt them from the fifth they owe you, and they will spread the word that you are truly the Spirit Guide, the Guardian of the Secret Writings, the real Opener of the Ways. If we tempt them enough, they will say anything, even that Anubis is your servant. This will work as long as we have the best interests of the people at heart. If we don’t, then the forces of the priesthood should be unleashed against Pharaoh. They will quickly and naturally expose him for what he is, a self-serving idiot,” Nefermaat hoped he hadn’t overstepped his boundaries. He paused to see Snefru’s reaction. Snefru stood expressionless.

“However,” Nefermaat attempted to soften his words, “in all your life, you cannot spend the riches Joseph the Asiatic is gathering. Or, for that matter neither can your son Khufwey or your grandson or even your great-grandson. The Dynasty you begat will be the greatest. The Fourth Dynasty will be remembered throughout time. What I build or dig out of the sands will ensure that people remember you and Khufwey and his descendants for as long as these buildings stand.” *And they have stood for a long time.* “We need to worry about passing this secret message down the generations.”

There was a long uncomfortable silence. Finally Snefru spoke, “Keep digging, Nefermaat.”

Snefru left as abruptly as he came. Nefermaat tried to keep hatred of Snefru at bay; his son’s future demanded this.

Why do I feel compelled to create a stable social system based on love, fears, personality cults, threats, bribes and architectural awe? Stability promotes work, and riches insure peace and prosperity. There is no better way. Why do I feel so bad about Merensankh’s passing when she left me for Snefru three years ago?

Am I missing something? She said, ‘Remember what is important.’ Surely the stable system we are creating, conducive to create riches and a fair redistribution of them, will lead to peace and a better life for all. What can be more important than saving lives? Isn’t that what is important Merensankh? Or is it our son?

A hawk appeared hovering in the wind, floating stationary above the Nile. Nefermaat took it as a good sign. Horus was watching.

2613 B.C.

As Nefermaat continued directing the removal of the sands around the tower, now known as Snefru’s pyramid, he began a series of experiments. He was trying to understand how the sands could cover such a huge structure. Playing with fistfuls of sand, he made a small pile on his table. As more fistfuls of sand trickled onto the pile, its height and base grew, but the slope of the pile remained constant. By continuing this process, eventually the base of the pile reached the edge of the table and dribbled to the floor. At this point, no matter how much sand was added to the pile, the height of the pile could not be increased. On average, but not always equally, the amount of sand that fell off the table equaled the amount added. Curiously, sometimes less fell; then suddenly, without warning, a miniature avalanche occurred. The longer he did this, measuring what he poured on top of the pile and measuring what fell off the table, the more equal the amounts were. He also discovered that if he made the pile by dropping a big sack of sand on the table, the pile had the same shape as when he added one fistful at a time; either way, the slope of the pile was the same and the height was restricted by the size of the table. With bigger tables he could make bigger piles. The question became, how high could a pile be made on a boundless table, a table the size of the desert?

Nefermaat surmised this action had to be carried out by the wind. To prove this he started a series of experiments. When he blew on smooth sand on the table, the grains bounced and rolled up, moving away from his lips, and as they formed a small ridge, the bouncing sand tended to jump over and produced a new lower ridge. A ripple pattern appeared, similar to the surface of the Nile when the wind blew. The distance between one high ridge and the next depended on how hard he blew.

“There are easier ways to clear your table of sand, Nefermaat,” Snefru interrupted Nefermaat’s experiments. Khufwey was holding Snefru’s hand, his head a little taller than the table. Khufwey came over and blew on the table dislodging a few grains of sand, “Blow harder, son.” Snefru laughed.

“I am trying to determine how long it would take for sand to cover your pyramid.”

“Why would you want to do that?”

“For two reasons. First,” Nefermaat had to massage Snefru’s pride, “so I can know how long people will talk about you before the pyramid is buried again. Second, it could be a way of calculating how long ago this pyramid was built. I sent natives of several oases—Faraфра, Kharga and Bahariya—into the desert, as they do not fear the western desert because it is the Land of the Dead. I ordered them to report to me on various questions. Their findings are interesting. One reported that near Bahariya the tallest dunes, coincidentally, are one-hundred-and-eighty cubits, the same as my estimation of the tower and varying in width thirty to ninety times that.”

“How could they measure such things, Nefermaat?”

“I have invented methods with imaginary lines and proportions. Standing in one point, one imaginary line is set level, traveling horizontally; the other imaginary line is set from the same point upwards toward whatever height you want to measure. From that same point you make a man move away until his head seems to be touching the top of the object you want to measure.” Nefermaat drew a diagram in the sand with his finger on the table. “Then the height of the man is proportional to the height of the object in the same measure that the distance that separates the original point from the man is to the distance between the point and the object.”

“I see. Very clever. But how can you be sure?”

“My Lord, I have performed some rigorous measurements to test it and it always bore right!

“Farther west, I have reports of dunes that reach heights about four to five hundred cubits above the surrounding desert. More curious is the report, from one fellow from Faraфра, of thundering dunes. He reports that when there has been an unusually long dry spell—two or three years without rain—the dunes become very dangerous. Suddenly, without warning, they tumble down in huge sandslides, making a sound similar to thunder. He also reports that sometimes a very big dune will cascade slowly downhill, producing a high-pitched sound, similar to the whistling of the rigging lines in the sails of a felucca. He told me that he has climbed to the top of these dunes and his weight precipitated a small avalanche. And not only that, he rode the avalanche down, ankle-deep in the sand, as if transported by the hand of an invisible god, moving as fast as a galloping horse.”

“We must go and see this for ourselves. Wouldn’t that be fun, Khufwey?”

Khufwey continued to blow sand off the table. *How strong and handsome he is. And look at those green eyes . . .*

“A fellow from Kharga reports that the dunes bear down on walls,” Nefermaat continued, “and can easily push them down if you try to fight the sands. It starts with a few grains of sand accumulating against the wall. One day, inevitably, the villagers find themselves shoveling sand, standing on sand; sweeping it away is no longer enough. Over weeks or longer, the sand grows. They fight back and manage to keep the walls clear. But the grains never let up, and one day the dunes have moved closer. They enlist their sons’ and brothers’ help. But still the sands grow around their dwelling. Eventually the dunes tower over the house, with sand sheets cascading down their advancing faces.

“But their houses are their heritage, and in order to prevent the dunes from pushing the walls down, their only defense is to accept destiny. They have prepared for this. Having lost the fight against the sand, they now invite it in. For years they have slept on the sand covering the floors of their dwellings. Now, they open the windows, take off the doors, and knock holes in the roof. They let the wind do their work. If it is successful, the wind fills the house with sand and the walls will stand. Then in a hundred years, or when the winds decide, the dunes will move on and uncover the village. The descendants of such a man will remember him as a rich man, because he left them a house, and more importantly, as a man at peace with the world, because he accepted destiny.

“But the most important observations concern accurate measurements of the movement of the dunes. A typical dune is about twenty cubits high and can move about forty cubits a year.”

“The Nile flows north, and the winds blow south. Everyone knows that boats can drift north with the current and sail south with the wind. Does that mean the dunes move continuously south?” Snefru asked intrigued by the subject.

“In general, yes. Dunes, seemingly, have many shapes, but the most elemental one is wandering. It is crescent-shaped with a gentle windward slope up which grains slowly creep, and a steep face away from the wind that those same grains eventually cascade. These dunes advance by avalanche, sending shallow horns in the direction of the wind on each side. They are solitary by nature and they retain their shape and bulk by constantly turning over their sands. But, when sands are abundant, they gather in increasingly denser groups, and eventually form chains perpendicular to the wind. As the sands thicken, the ridges become higher, with smaller secondary dunes that begin to wander on top of the ridges.

“When the winds are fickle, the sands assume different forms. The wind pushes first from one side, then from another slightly different direction, slowly organizing them into long vacillating formations that stream downwind in parallel ranks. They seem like snakes in the way they hump and crawl across the desert.”

Khufwey had fallen asleep on Snefru’s lap. Nefermaat smiled. Snefru, with a wave of his hand, indicated he wanted to hear more.

“An elemental dune twenty cubits high, moving at the rate I mentioned, when it encounters a solid wall such as the tower, begins to accumulate sand and slowly climbs up the walls. According to some rough calculations, in about ten years it could climb to forty cubits high. If you consider horizontal as having a slope of zero and vertical a slope of one, I have determined that the maximum slope of a sand dune is about one-half.⁷ At this point, the dune can’t climb higher, because the sand starts to fall around the pyramid. For the next sixteen years, if the wind holds steady, the wind will start filling in the sides of the pyramid. After this, the dune would start to climb up the tower again, but the increasing height requires, in a volumetric ratio, an increasing amount of sand. The volume of a dune with a height of 180 cubits is roughly ninety times that of a dune with a height of forty cubits. To reach this height, it would take ninety times longer or about fourteen hundred years. At this point, the pyramid is less than half covered. To cover the pyramid, the dune has to increase in height to about three-hundred-and-twenty cubits. This is roughly, a little more than five times the volume, and it would take a little more than another seven thousand years. This would mean that the tower is about 8417 years old.” Nefermaat paused to let this sink in.

“It can’t be,” Snefru finally said.

“Well, I have to admit that about seventy cubits on one side of the tower were exposed. Taking that into consideration, the volume of sand required is a little less than 3 times, so only about four thousand years more are required, instead of seven thousand years. That gives us the pyramid’s age somewhere between 5,400 and 8,400 years.”

“Can that be possible?” Snefru asked. “We know that farming didn’t even exist three thousand years ago.

“As I discussed all this with Ikram, the fellow from Khargra, he told me that there are other old ruins in Qasr el-Sumayra with a similar shape to the tower, but smaller in scale.”

“That is about a two-month journey south of here. Can there be a connection?” Khufwey opened his eyes, stretched, then fell asleep again. The men watched him.

⁷ 45 degrees.

What is the meaning of these buildings? Who could be such great builders so long ago? Questions . . . without answers . . . for now.

Snefru stood up, placing Khufwey's head gently on his shoulder. Nefermaat felt like tousling his son's hair but refrained.

"I'll leave you to your studies. Keep up the good work," Snefru said as a farewell.

The mysteries would grow. Nefermaat continued removing sand for two more yearly flood seasons. On the north side, where the most sand had accumulated, with a little less than five sixths of the tower exposed, and as Nefermaat had seen in his dreams, an entrance to an inclined shaft was exposed. Two huge slabs of granite had to be painstakingly removed to permit access.

Nefermaat descended into the shaft followed by Hemium, his very young chief assistant. The shaft's slope was a little less than one third of vertical,⁸ and according to Nefermaat's calculations, it leveled off lining up with the center of the tower. If his dreams were correct, and so far they had been, this level was below the base of the tower. He could see it had been cut into the solid rock base. After some twenty paces, a vertical shaft led to another chamber. This chamber was level with the base of the pyramid. It had a corbelled roof, made of seven steps of huge slabs of limestone, about two cubits thick. Nefermaat marveled at the roof, rising to about ten cubits high.⁹ Seven steps on each side staggered towards the middle as they went up, joining in the center at the top. Noticing a small crack in one of the corbelled steps, Nefermaat had to breathe deeply when he remembered how much weight this roof supported.

Hemium always paid attention to the smallest details. In spite of his youth, he was Nefermaat's second in command. Nefermaat treated him like a son.

"Hemium, make some measurements and cut some cedar wood beams to prop this ceiling up. We will be squashed like ants if this comes tumbling down."

Nefermaat looked around. It reminded him, slightly, of the stories his great great-grandfather Imhotep had told concerning the underground burial chambers of Zosser's Step Pyramid. The halls, shafts and chambers of the Step Pyramid had been profusely adorned with art telling of the glories of Zosser's life. In contrast, here, there were no inscriptions of any kind. The walls were devoid of any decoration or indication of who the builders might have been. Overall, the quality of the finish of the rock was similar to the

⁸ 26 degrees

⁹ 5 meters

outside of the tower. If Nefermaat's calculations were correct, he was the first human to visit this place in several millennia. Yet, could Imhotep have carved underground burial chambers copying old mastabas, or were the similarities to these underground chambers coincidental?

Nefermaat felt certain this could not be a tomb. If he were Zosser and wanted to ensure that his deceased body remained inviolate for eternity, it didn't make sense to announce to all, by building an impressive structure, where his body rested. It would make more sense to choose a secret location in an unknown area in the desert for this purpose. Creating fear of life after death and punishment eternal was a different matter. It would be easy enough to convince everyone that this was Snefru's burial chamber. The people would certainly be impressed with his tomb, the Meidum pyramid.

Egypt, 2609 B.C.

In the fifth season of sand removal, Hemium, Nefermaat's chief assistant came running, "Nefermaat, come quick, there is a problem."

"What now? How many more dead, Hemium? I'm sure the mortuary temple can handle the load. Don't tell me that they are still complaining because we haven't finished it."

"No, this is different." Hemium's tone told Nefermaat this was serious. He followed him around to the north side.

On the north face, a little below the level of the entrance to the tower but higher on the south, east and west faces, another mystery was exposed.

"I didn't call you until I could be certain it was on all four sides."

Huge stones, polished on one side, were clustered all around the base of the Meidum tower. After a detailed inspection of the perimeter of the Meidum Pyramid, Nefermaat could only conclude that an additional external layer of stone had collapsed or crumbled to the ground. After attempting to remove a few of these massive stones, it seemed futile to continue the removal of the sand, as it was interspersed with these ruins. *Snefru is not going to like this.*

A few days later, Snefru's entourage arrived. After inspecting the colossal ruined boulders lying in heaps all around the Meidum Pyramid, they stopped for a mid-day meal under a white cotton tent erected to protect them from the fierce rays of the noon sun.

"Nefermaat, how is this possible?" Snefru asked trying to control his temper.

"I have a few ideas. Perhaps they were attempting to add another layer and it collapsed. Perhaps the interior corbelled roof was not strong enough to hold the weight, I saw a crack and—"

“—I am not asking how the old builders failed. I am asking, how could you not know?” Snefru interrupted.

“Lord, contrary to what most people think, I can not see what is buried. There is no way I could’ve known this.”

“Then, how did you know all the other things you told me?”

“My father told me that Imhotep, his great-grandfather, had mentioned ancient building methods that could be copied if they were dug out from the desert sands. The information, was incomplete, it was just bits and pieces. I did see the tower in my dreams. I told you. In my dream I was a worker participating in the construction; there was nothing concerning these crumbled stones surrounding the tower. Maybe it collapsed after I worked here. Maybe,” Nefermaat added attempting humor, “in that other life I was already dead when that happened.”

“You might die very soon,” Snefru whispered, “in this life. Today!” he added for effect as he pushed his face into Nefermaat’s. The two cobras, their uraeus, seemed to lock into each other eyes.

“I have a couple of other options,” Nefermaat spoke slowly. Snefru stood waiting. “Closer, a lot closer to Memphis. On the western side, across the Nile.”

Snefru stood silently.

“At Saqqara.”

Snefru raised an eyebrow, “Are you joking, Nefermaat?”

“I dreamt it last night, Lord,” Nefermaat lied smoothly. He had been keeping this information to himself. He had hoped that he could have used one of the buried pyramids near the Step Pyramid for his son Khufwey. Now, he was forced to give this information up. “I can order the work force back to Saqqara. We could start work in two or three days.” Snefru glared at Nefermaat. Nefermaat smiled, and then broke into laughter.

“I don’t see anything funny!” Snefru shouted.

Nefermaat could not stop laughing. Hemium began laughing also. The laughter was infectious. Nefermaat was trying to speak, “We,—”

Snefru was not amused in the least.

“We,—”

“Speak up. Stop laughing.” Snefru’s entourage started laughing. “I don’t have patience for games, Nefermaat.”

“We,” finally able to stop laughing Nefermaat proceeded. “We just start again, Lord. There are two more pyramids that I can dig up. One is north and one is west of the Step Pyramid. The dunes covering them can be seen from there.”

“Are you serious? Are you implying that the tiny pyramid west of Saqqara is really another big pyramid buried in the sands?”

“If my dreams are correct, they are almost twice as tall as the Step Pyramid, about 200 cubits¹⁰ high.

“Your head will roll, Nefermaat, if this is a delaying tactic. You better be telling the truth.”

Nefermaat started laughing again.

Egypt, 2607 B.C.

Nefermaat had been telling the truth. After two years of digging, what seemed like a small pyramid at the top of a massive sand dune had proven to be another huge pyramid swallowed by the desert sands. The digging went slower, even with more men, because the Nile was farther away. This construction was very different from the Meidum Tower, now known as Snefru's Pyramid. This was a true pyramid with its four sides showing a slope slightly less than half.¹¹ Curiously, when the height of the unburied pyramid was 102 cubits, the slope of the sides changed to slightly more than one half.¹² The sides appeared to be bent, and this gave the pyramid its name: the Bent Pyramid.

Nefermaat could only begin to speculate as to why the Ancients built it with this change of slope. He could only surmise that the top part, with a slope less than one half, was approximately equal to the naturally occurring angle of repose of piles of sand, which allowed sand, with only a certain amount of humidity, to stick and accumulate in thin sheets on the sides of the pyramid. Whereas the bottom part, with an angle greater than one half easily shed sand, irrelevant of whether it was bone dry or not.

The outer stone casing was in very good shape. In parts it seemed to have just been laid out.

One day, Nefermaat saw a small contingent of Pharaoh's guards on horseback approaching from the banks of the Nile. They carefully avoided the mass of men and beasts that transported the huge amounts of sand, following the causeway that was built for this purpose. But Snefru was not with them; his chariot was not in sight. Then he realized who was coming. It was Khufwey! He was riding a black stallion. Nefermaat felt like running down the dune to greet his son, but restrained himself. He was happily surprised to see Khufwey

¹⁰ The Bent Pyramid is 101 meters and the Northern Pyramid is 105 meters high.

¹¹ 45 degrees (43 degrees 21 minutes to be exact).

¹² 54 degrees 31 minutes.

galloping towards him waving. At that point he felt that protocol demanded that he meet the young boy, so he started walking regally toward the galloping horse. All eyes were fixed on the two of them. Pharaoh's guards made sure to keep up with the young heir. Their lives depended on his well-being, but they seemed confident about his riding abilities. Nefermaat felt very proud. His young son stopped his horse just an arm's length from Nefermaat.

"Nefermaat!" Khufwey yelled as he dismounted and ran and jumped into his startled arms. This was very un-Pharaohnic, so Nefermaat looked around to see what people might be thinking. Hemium was the only one who seemed to be watching closely, most other respectfully avoided looking directly at them. And most were too far to be able to read anything. The Pharaohnic guards smiled tolerantly. "It is so good to see you," he said, "And Hemium," he added waving at Hemium. Hemium walked over, sinking to his ankles in the inclined sands. "Now, maybe I can learn something useful from the master builders," Khufwey chortled in a high-pitched voice.

"Now, Khufwey, why do you say that? Is riding a horse not useful? I can see you ride like a captain of the guard."

"Oh yes, Nefermaat, I agree they teach me many things; perhaps too many. They teach me about warfare; about shooting an arrow true; even how to drive a chariot. Imagine, they tell me that when I go to battle, I will ride in a chariot. I remind them that you and my father are building a nation that will never go to war. Building is what I need to know, that is why I have come. I think I convinced my father that this is true."

"Hemium can show you around. This is the best place to learn," Nefermaat said as he lowered the young Khufwey down to the sand. "This is truly a remarkable construction. Come with me to the north face. We have been digging down its center hoping to find an entrance."

Nefermaat walked northward with the Eastern face of the pyramid to his left. Khufwey took Nefermaat's hand. Nefermaat felt that this was un-Pharaohnic, but did not do anything to discourage this. When they turned the corner, there were clearly more men working on this face. The sands dropped at an angle from the corner towards the center of the north face. There, about another fifty cubits had been exposed. From this vantage point, the steep bottom of the face could be appreciated better, and the change in slope on the top part could be clearly discerned. It was breathtaking.

"Khufwey, most men have never seen anything like this."

"Where did all these stones come from?" Khufwey squealed in delight. "How did they cut them, Nefermaat? And move them? And place them?"

“Young man,” Nefermaat said patiently, “all in good time. Come let me show what we have so far.”

Khufwey took off running towards the bottom of the depression produced by the digging. Hemium was close behind him. The captain of the Pharaohnic guards gave a silent order and three guards ran down to join the young heir and make sure that none of the laborers got close to him. The laborers knew, without being told, to move to the side. From Nefermaat’s perspective Khufwey and Hemium looked like ants on the sand next to an elephant lying on its side. Along with the captain of the guard he followed the young boy down the sloping sands.

“The high flood of the Nile is almost over. In two or three weeks the work must stop as the mighty river can not take the sands away, and we’ll need to transport it even further. We just uncovered an entrance to the Pyramid. But there is no guarantee what we will find inside.”

“Can I climb to the top?” Khufwey said as he climbed slowly, trying to find a hold on the smooth stones of the inclined slope.

The captain of the guard immediately moved to get to Khufwey, but Nefermaat held him back. Hemium was right next to him, making sure that the boy didn’t hurt himself.

“Not this time, Khufwey,” Nefermaat yelled good naturedly, looking up at Khufwey. “It is dangerous, even for an experienced climber like Hemium. I will make preparations for an ascent on another occasion and set a rope to assist us. But now, please come back down before you slip and cause the captain to lose his life,” he said in jest, looking at the captain. The captain was not amused.

“We certainly don’t want that,” said Khufwey. He turned and jumped straight into the captain’s arms knowing that the captain would die rather than let him suffer any injury. “Do we, captain?” he added with a laugh as the embarrassed captain put him down back on his feet.

The digging proceeded for another two weeks. Nefermaat was glad to see that the social benefits of this huge effort were reaching many who otherwise would have a hard time feeding their families. Joseph’s food storage programs had proven immensely successful. It was no longer difficult to find the labor to carry out the project. Men came from afar, with the knowledge that not only would they be fed, but also they would receive a stipend to feed their families as well as receiving selected seed to produce more food in the coming season.

Nefermaat was surprised to find two entrances to the Bent Pyramid: the typical one on the north, and another on the west side. He explored the passages

with Hemium and Khufwey. Each entrance lead to a separate chamber with corbelled ceilings. The north entrance lead to a chamber below the bedrock, the west to a chamber at ground level and slightly southeast above the other. The corbelled roof of the northern chamber was 34 cubits high, and at 25 cubits a narrow passage reaching the chamber at ground level was roughly hewn, suggesting that treasure hunters and not the original builders might have carved it. A crack could be seen in the corbelled roof of the west chamber.

“Hemium, look,” Nefermaat said pointing to the crack.

“Do you suppose that when the roof cracked the slope of the pyramid was changed to reduce the weight on the corbelled ceiling?” Hemium asked.

“It could be. But it’s hard to tell. Get some cedar posts and reinforce the chamber so it can’t collapse inwards. You might want to reinforce it with some of the white limestone.”

When Snefru heard that the pyramid’s chamber had cracks, he ordered Nefermaat to begin work on the northernmost pyramid.

Nefermaat sent word that he would await Pharaoh’s arrival. He felt that it would be best to continue this season on the Bent Pyramid and begin work on digging out the Northern Pyramid one year later. Pharaoh’s presence was necessary to shift work, with fewer explanations to the laborers. They were always excited to see their benefactor.

Two days later, Snefru’s barge, with sails fully extended, and a full contingent of rowers to increase speed, was seen fast approaching on the Nile from the north.

Nefermaat met Snefru on the western bank of the Nile.

“Greetings, Lord.”

“I have never seen my people so pleased to see me. As soon as word spread that I was coming, the people rushed to the banks of the Nile to see me pass by. In some places the crowds were huge, the cheering was loud and continuous. Nefermaat, our building projects must continue. It is a perfect example of how to provide food for the starving. It is a good pretext to keep digging and moving sand, with the advantage of being seen as a good, and great god. Your canals have employed the extra people showing up for food; and more to the point, have increased the food production. It is a self-sustaining process. You are a genius. The crack in the roof is just an excuse to move work to the Northern Pyramid. So, please, Nefermaat,” Snefru said appeasingly, “don’t argue with me. Finish this season here: build a mortuary temple, bury the dead workers. Give them what they expect. Distribute extra food. I will tell Joseph. Next year we will start on the Northern Pyramid.”

“I am grateful for your understanding, Lord. I will finish digging the small pyramid to the south of the Bent Pyramid and prepare for next year.”

2598 B.C.

The Northern Pyramid was being called the Red Pyramid because of the reddish limestone used in its construction. The slopes of its sides were similar to the slope of the top of the Bent Pyramid.¹³ This pyramid, just like the other two, bore no inscriptions of any kind. The casing stones were in much worse shape than the Bent Pyramid's. About 150 cubits of the pyramid had been exposed, when an entrance was discovered on the center of the north face. Nefermaat sent word to Khufwey, now eighteen and proclaimed successor of Snefru. Khufwey had specifically expressed the desire to be present when they first opened the pyramid. Nefermaat gave Hemium the instructions to remove the granite blocks in the entrance. This was a slow and arduous process of alternately heating with fire and cooling with water to crack the granite. Khufwey needn't rush.

“Nefermaat, we are ready to remove the last pieces of granite blocking the entrance. Should we wait for Lord Khufwey?” Hemium asked politely of Nefermaat who sat in the shade of two big date palms.

“No need to wait, Hemium. Khufwey will be here shortly,” Nefermaat said as he stood up looking north into the Nile. A few minutes later the sails of the Pharaohic barge appeared in the horizon. “There he is,” Nefermaat smiled anticipating the excitement of seeing his son. “Open the passage way, but do not enter. Wait for us.”

A few hours later Nefermaat walked towards the Red Pyramid with Khufwey, followed a short distance behind by the ceremonial guards.

“How is your father, Khufwey?”

“You know him. He is always strong as a bull,” Khufwey answered shyly.

“I see you are wearing the uraeus. Does that mean someone no longer is?”

“I see your meaning, Nefermaat. But no, my father still wears his. He'll wear it until he dies. Joseph has been forced to give his up so I can wear it,” Khufwey explained.

“Whose idea was that?”

“My father's. I had nothing to do with it. People must learn to respect the father, the son and the builder. A trinity provides more stability, particularly

¹³ 43 degrees 36 minutes.

aiding in the succession of power. Power flows from the father to the son. He insists that I should begin to learn the true dimension of what Pharaoh is.”

“It is a heavy responsibility. It’s a good idea, but your father should have consulted me. I don’t really need the symbol of authority, which the cobra confers. Everyone at the digging site knows who I am. I don’t need, as you can see, to wear the uraeus. My authority and the respect of my people have been earned.”

“But that forced you to follow protocol and bow before me,” Khufwey said with a laugh that warmed Nefermaat’s heart, referring to their first meeting that morning. Nefermaat had not been expecting Khufwey to wear the royal headdress until Snefru’s death.

“That I do gladly, anytime, for you.”

“I am grateful for your friendship. I have always felt a strong bond between us. Sometimes I wish you were my father. I feel I can talk openly with you about any subject.”

Nefermaat blushed and turned so Khufwey could not see it. At that moment a hawk flew right over them and turned into the wind, hovering immobile at arm’s length above them with wings fully extended.

“Look at that!” Khufwey exclaimed excitedly. “It is just floating in the air, playing with the wind. This is a good omen. The Red Pyramid will bring us luck, Nefermaat.”

High above, barely visible, several vultures circled lazily in the summer sky.

“All the royal birds are out.” Nefermaat pointed high into the sky. “This is certainly a good day to go into the Red Pyramid.”

The hawk glided lower and lower, floating, until it was at eye level. Khufwey reached out for Nefermaat’s hand. The two held hands mesmerized as they stared into the hawk’s eyes. Suddenly the hawk shrieked loudly three times and flew upwards straight towards the summit of the pyramid, extended its wings and landed at the top, releasing another three piercing calls.

“I take the hawk’s presence as a symbol that the time has come to let you into our small brotherhood. Your father and I have been compiling guides for ruling. A code of behavior for all future Pharaohs. We have set it all down in stone and in scrolls and deposited it in a safe place. It is our duty to preserve, enforce, and if possible improve these rules. You have been instructed in some of these. As you know, there are three separate codes. There are rules for wealth, the creation of riches and its redistribution and their underlying economic forces. This is Joseph’s and, to a lesser extent, my area. Further refinement, can lead to more checks and balances. There are rules for imposing a national set of beliefs, which need to follow their own timetables and continuity.

Common beliefs make it easier to move entire populations to desired ends. The priests need to be given direction by Pharaoh, but it should be their area. And lastly, there are rules of governance, supported by military force. This is the area of generals and Pharaoh.

“To ensure peace and prosperity all three have to be carefully balanced. The forces on each side of this triangle must be in equilibrium. Otherwise the general will exploit the people with his military force, or the merchant will set exorbitant prices for his wares, or the witch will exploit the natural fears and superstitions of the common people. The general can threaten the use of force if the merchant or the witch doctors charge too much for their services. Likewise the merchant can hide the goods needed by the general or the witch. And the witch can scare the people and make them overthrow the general or the merchant if they aren’t perceived to be fair. The role of Pharaoh is to intervene on behalf of any of these forces if they are weakened.

“The pyramid digging is just a way, one way, a good way, to promote this equilibrium. The pyramid itself inspires awe of the powers and wealth of Pharaoh. It is a way to redistribute the riches efficiently and keeps the priests in line. Always keep that in mind, Khufwey.”

“My father has talked to me about this. It all makes sense, Nefermaat. What I worry about is when my time comes to be Pharaoh, what are we going to do when we finish with the Red Pyramid?”

“Don’t worry. I have reserved the best for you. The biggest pyramid in the land will be mentioned next to your name through all ages. I will show you where it is, and you will dig it out of the sands. You must learn as much as you can. Then perhaps we can learn who built these wonders. The ancient texts talk about some things that make sense only if you are an astronomer like yourself. As you know, Osiris is linked to the constellation of Orion. It is intriguing.”

“Can you tell me more?”

“Sometimes I wonder whether the ancient texts are utterances of half-crazy priests or symbolic recollections of real past events. Could it be written in a language that we can’t understand anymore? Or maybe they are talking about concepts we can’t even begin to understand.” Nefermaat pointed towards a pitched tent. “Let’s go sit in the shade, we can talk at length while we have a drink.”

Nefermaat’s consorts, all beautiful women, served them quickly and maintained a respectful distance allowing them privacy.

“The ancient texts seem to be concerned mostly with rituals and procedures to achieve eternal life. This is a beautiful passage, but perhaps

it could have other meanings, Khufwey: ‘O Pharaoh, you are a Great Star, who traverses the sky with Orion . . . you ascend from the east of the heavens being renewed in your due season, and rejuvenated in your due time.’ It could be nothing more than poetic language, relating to the eternal resting place among the stars. But, I wonder, perhaps they are talking about actually going to the stars. Listen to these lines,” Nefermaat recited from memory, “The gods who are on earth assemble for you, they place their hands under you, they make a ladder for you that you may ascend on it into the sky, the doors of the starry firmament are thrown open to you.” Nefermaat paused to check whether Khufwey was following. “Osiris, always linked to Orion, was the first to climb the great ladder made by the gods. The interesting part is that this ladder is described as a rope-ladder hanging from an iron plate suspended in the sky. Can it be possible that men knew how to fly?”

“Birds fly, why not men? I mean, it is possible, we just witnessed the hawk’s abilities.” Khufwey’s green eyes shone with excitement. “But how could you fly with an iron plate. Is there more about flying?”

“In another part, the texts mention, ‘The Pharaoh is a flame, moving before the wind to the end of the sky and to the end of the earth . . . Pharaoh travels the air and traverses the earth . . . there is brought to him a way of ascent to the sky.’ What can you interpret, Khufwey?”

“It certainly sounds like flying.”

“And there’s also this conversation in another section: ‘What ferry-boat shall be brought to you?’ and the answer, as best as I can read it, says, ‘Bring me *it-flies-and-alights*.’ A little bit later, in the same passage, Pharaoh himself confides, ‘I am the one who has escaped from the coiled serpent, I have ascended in a blast of fire having turned myself about. The two skies go to me.’ And there is more.”

“Ascending in a blast of fire, what can this mean?”

“The priests say that it is just fancy imagery, but there are more references to flying. Further on the texts ask, ‘How can Pharaoh be made to fly up?’ And this is the answer, ‘There shall be brought to you the *something*-bark and the *something*, *something*, of the *something*-bird. Then you shall fly up and alight.’ The ‘something’ are hieroglyphs whose meaning no one seems to know, Khufwey. However, the priests’ interpretation of some of the hieroglyphs is a little suspect to me. They come up with things like, ‘The aperture of the sky-window is opened,’ or, ‘The door of the sky at the horizon,’ and utterances like, ‘That I may embrace you in the sky,’ and ‘The sky reels at you, the earth quakes at you.’ And they keep talking about iron, as if it could be had in great quantities. Not only the iron plate in the sky, but interpretations like

the following, 'May you remove yourself to the sky upon your iron throne.' The iron throne is repeated a number of times; there is also mention of an iron scepter and even iron bones for Pharaoh."

"The iron throne sounds like something that can fly!" Khufwey noted excitedly. "And obviously, iron comes only from the heavens, that is why we call it divine metal."

"You're catching on quickly, Khufwey."

"I must learn all the great wisdom of the ancients. Then I could be the greatest builder. Like you."

"You will be known through all ages, like your father."

"But I want to be like you, not my father, Nefermaat," the young man beamed with admiration. "A master builder."

"You are more like your father than you'll ever know, Khufwey. Any man who visits Egypt will remember your name for millennia, and your firstborn's and his firstborn. Your names will be linked to the greatest buildings ever built. You will be remembered as a builder, Khufwey." Nefermaat smiled thinking of the huge task ahead to rescue the three Great Pyramids and the Lion-Sphinx from the sands of the desert.

The Five W's

Larry sat pondering the story. His father implied the pyramids were already there, built by some other mysterious people for unknown purposes. In this story, the suicide mentioned is a woman's. She died by poisoning. Does that have anything to do with his father's disappearance? Could he have overdosed? The doorbell chimed interrupting Larry's reverie. It was Sergeant O'Malley.

"I guess you also work Saturdays," Larry said as a form of greeting.

"No rest for the wicked," O'Malley smiled. "I'm checking up on a few things. Detective Ramirez asked me to look more closely into the possibility of suicide." The sergeant added tactfully, "We don't believe that, but I need to find out more about what I call the five W's. Who, where, when, why and how—with a 'double-u' at the end—people commit suicide? You're supposed to be some kind of expert. What can you tell me?"

"I'm a neurologist and I am working on a neuropsychological model of human behavior. That is quite different than being an expert on suicide. Yet, suicide is part of human behavior and response. How much time do you have, Sergeant?"

"Don't worry about that. I have as long as it takes."

"The who, the where, the when and how are somewhat known," Larry said inviting O'Malley to sit down. "Why people commit suicide, is a more elusive question. Let me start with some facts. The rate of suicide among the young is increasing but there is no consensus as to why this is so. The reasons proposed are varied, going from the threat of nuclear extermination, terrorist attacks, MTV, peer and parental pressure, child abuse, promiscuity, increased affluence, excessive freedom, boredom, Watergate, too much choice, increased rate of technological innovations, take your pick."

"Your father is older, so none of this applies to him."

"Not necessarily. Suicide is suicide," Larry responded. "There are approximately thirty thousand deaths by suicide per year in the United States and almost half-a-million suicide attempts serious enough to require emergency room treatment."

"That's amazing."

“Underreporting of suicide is estimated at between ten to twenty percent. However, some experts believe that suicide rates could be three to five times higher. The numbers vary enormously. Many drug overdoses and one-car accidents that could be suicides are reported as accidental deaths. Doctors are a conservative group.”

“I can see why.”

“As far as answering the question of who or when: most suicides are related to depression, either unipolar or bipolar. Suicidal behavior can be linked to other mental disorders, such as schizophrenia, personality disorders, panic attacks and anxiety disorders. I feel that suicide should have a diagnosis of its own, because most that suffer these ailments do not commit suicide.”

“So most suicides are related to mental disorders? Do you know if your father suffered some form of mood disorder?”

“He had been diagnosed as Moderately Depressed, with occasional Panic Attacks and on top of that Persecutory Delusions. This means the doctors felt that he was also slightly psychotic,” Larry said derisively.

“By your tone of voice, you lead me to believe that you don’t believe much in doctors.”

“I don’t believe they can help in many cases, which is different than not believing in doctors. When it comes to mood disorders, they operate by trial and error at best, mostly error. Part of the problem is there is no great correlation between suicide and the severity of depression. Some suicides occur during mild depression while others cling desperately to life under the worst imaginable conditions: loss of loved ones, work, freedom, and even loss of country or home, even when sometimes all these losses happen simultaneously.

“Suicide rates increase with age,” Larry continued as O’Malley took notes. “Among men, suicides peak and continue to rise after age 45; among women, the greatest number of suicides occurs after age 55. The elderly attempt suicide less often than do younger people but are successful more often. When they decide to do it, they use more lethal means. Interestingly, the rate of suicide of the elderly has gone down while the rate of suicide for young, meaning 35 years old or less, has gone up. I suppose that has to do with better retirement plans and health care, and a speeded up world.”

“So are the young making up for the lessened rate of elderly people?”

“Yes, and this is alarming. The elderly are enjoying a much better material life, greater financial security, better diet, better medical care, higher quality of life, so it is not surprising that suicide has gone down. And yet, the young are committing suicide at almost three times the rate of the 1950’s.”

“Can it be possible that kids are left alone more often? I mean, with working moms making up a big part of the labor force?”

“That is definitely possible. But, it can also be that the suicide rate went up with the advent of TV, or the introduction of the pill. With TV, the average number of hours spent sleeping decreased by two hours. Suicide could be related to sleeping problems and not TV. In the case of the pill, we see a reduction in family size. Suicide could be related to lack of socialization caused by smaller families and working moms. I don’t think anyone knows for sure yet.”

“I see these factors could be complicated and interact in complex ways. Your father obviously fits into the demographic of the advent of TV and the common use of the pill.”

“Yes, that is why I mentioned these particular ideas.”

“But from what you told us the other day, whatever might be bothering your father is related to losing his—excuse me for saying it so bluntly—wife in an explosion.”

“Initially, yes. His depression was caused by my mother’s loss. His persecutory delusions are probably related to some post traumatic stress symptoms, which would be natural under the circumstances.”

“What about his panic attacks?”

“That, I am not sure of. It could be his attacks are independent of everything else, but they would certainly increase the risk of suicide.”

“Do you have any clues as to how?”

“No, not really. As far as answering the question of how, the method of suicide varies from place to place and from time to time. Yet, only a few methods account for all suicides: gunshot, jumping, poisons, gas, hanging and drowning. I feel it’s obvious that if guns are easily available, there will be more suicides by the use of guns. In the United States, not surprisingly, guns are the leading choice of death by suicide.”

“Did your father own a gun?”

“Not that I know. In England where the use of guns is highly restricted, guns rank fifth as the method of choice. Hanging, strangulation and suffocation are lumped together in the United States and are the second leading cause of death involving suicide.”

“You still favor your theory that your father jumped into the East River?”

“Yes, because it could mean that it was partly an accident. Perhaps he only wanted to help relieve a panic attack, but died of hypothermia.”

“That sounds more feasible to me.” O’Malley nodded sympathetically. “So, why do people kill themselves?”

“Suicide motives vary tremendously and cover a wide spectrum. On one end, we have people with a terrible chronic disease like cancer or multiple sclerosis, where they face a continuously worsening quality of life and/or pain. Rational suicide is a frightening idea, but this type of decision is generally understood. Yet, most people that are faced with these terrible illnesses *do not* commit suicide.”

“Really? I would think they would be the biggest group.”

“In the state of Oregon they have twice approved the Death with Dignity Act, which allows doctors to write lethal prescriptions for terminally ill patients who want to control the time and place of their death. Patients only qualify if they are fully conscious and able to administer their own overdose. It is understandable that terminally ill patients facing a diminishing quality of life would take this route. However, in seven years, according to the Oregon Department of Human Services, two-hundred-and-eight people took legal lethal overdose prescriptions—out of 64,706 Oregonians who died of the same diseases.¹⁴ In other words, 99.68% of people facing a terrible death chose life over suicide, even when this kind of suicide is comprehensible by most. This translates as a suicide rate of 320 per 100,000, only about one tenth of the suicide rate of people who suffer severe depression.

“The most common cases of suicide involve people suffering from mood disorders like depression, manic depression and schizophrenia. Almost 90 per cent of those who commit or attempt suicide have a diagnosed mental illness. Roughly 75 per cent involve depression and manic depression, with schizophrenia accounting for about 10 per cent, and dementia, delirium and personality disorders for about 5 per cent. Panic attacks and anxiety disorders are generally diagnosed alongside these other conditions and greatly increase the chances for suicide. Severe anxiety and severe agitation are portent predictors of suicide. One in five people suffering from major depression and nearly half of people suffering from manic depression will attempt suicide. This is the group that is at highest risk.”

“You make it sound like there is a ton of people killing themselves.”

“That’s a good way to put it. Among people without psychiatric illnesses the suicide rate is about 8 per 100,000. For people with moderate depression the rate escalates to 220 per 100,000, and to 3,900 per 100,000 among people with severe depression. Depression and manic depression are associated not only with completed suicides but also with serious attempts at suicide. The risk of someone making a second suicide attempt is highest within three months of the first attempt.”

¹⁴ Margot Roosevelt, *Choosing Their Time*, Time, April 4, 2005.

“It is very tempting to look at the life of someone who has committed suicide and attach to it a huge complex tangle of issues.” O’Malley interjected.

“No one illness or event causes suicide, but psychiatric illness is almost always present. Each case of suicide is ultimately unknowable in the sense that we can’t ask them what they were thinking or feeling when they killed themselves. It is a very private and terrible act.” Larry realized he was walking around, lecturing, as if at Yale. Slightly embarrassed, Larry pulled out a chair and sat down next to O’Malley.

O’Malley looked at Larry thoughtfully. “I see what you mean. The mind is inaccessible. Any clue we might infer has to be indirect.”

“Was your father under the care of a doctor?”

“No. I was supposed to take him to therapy. I had requested Dr. Boukhardt to help me with this. But I was too slow. Now its too late.”

“Your father was a grown man. If he didn’t seek help, perhaps he didn’t feel he needed it. You don’t need to blame yourself. You did nothing wrong.”

“His experience with doctors, psychiatrists and psychologists alike, was not positive. He insisted they were always looking for traumas, which in his case was quite clear, the loss of my mother. But, more importantly, he insisted the doctors didn’t believe they were after him.”

“You mean, the drug people?”

“Exactly. This, in his mind, made the doctors superfluous. Since the doctors diagnosed him as suffering from persecutory delusions, the police didn’t take him seriously either. According to my father, what he needed was protection or a plan to hide from the drug people, not therapy or medications. Since the police didn’t believe him, he couldn’t expect any help from there.”

“Do you believe he was delusional?” O’Malley clarified.

“I have to admit I do. The stress of loosing my mother was too much, and perhaps as a means of coping with posttraumatic stress, he became delusional and believed they had killed her, and were seeking to kill him. He blamed himself for her death, for coming up with his theories, and this only made everything worse. He certainly was afraid to publish anything, which proves that he believed their threats, whether they were imaginary or not.”

“So why would your father wait so many years to do himself in? If he did indeed do so.”

“I don’t know. Some have proposed that suicide is a life career. That people slowly and inexorably move towards suicide. In my opinion that is only partially true. Suicide is not necessarily a very awful way to die, but the path that leads to it generally is; the mental suffering is prolonged, intense and relentless. The

suffering is inexpressible. Love, friendship and understanding are hardly ever enough to counteract the pain and destructiveness of mental illness.”

“What do the experts say?”

“The experts have all kinds of theories, but they miss the boat all the time. They are just stabbing in the dark.”

“What kinds of theories?”

“Some approach suicide from different perspectives.”

“Forgive my ignorance, but what perspectives can there be?”

“Sociological, biological, psychological, and even philosophical. Believe it or not, some approach suicide as if it was a philosophical problem, probably stated unintentionally by Shakespeare, ‘To be or not to be.’ With this in mind, some have tried to explain suicide as a lack of relationship with society. Freud said that suicide was hostility aimed at the self. Some attribute suicide to a lack of self-esteem.

“Others have tried to categorize suicides depending on which unsatisfied needs are seen as the cause, as if suicides were really a rational, even though highly, distorted behavior. Following this logic, first, we have suicides related to thwarted love, acceptance, and/or belonging; second, suicides related to frustrated needs for achievement, autonomy, order, and understanding; third, suicides related to assaulted self-image and avoidance of shame, defeat, humiliation, and disgrace; fourth, suicides related to loss of important relationships, grief and bereftness; and fifth, suicides related to excessive anger, rage and hostility.”

“People don’t kill themselves because their girl-friends left them,” O’Malley said, and sensing encouragement from Larry continued, “Or because they lost their jobs, or because they are misunderstood, or lost a game or money. Most all that grieve when they loose loved ones, don’t shoot themselves.”

“That is my point, Sergeant. Many of these theories are too simplistic and naïve and confuse symptoms with causes.”

“I’m not sure I follow you, Larry.”

“What I mean is that symptoms of a much deeper state of mind, which causes suicide, are confused with the causes of suicide.”

“Can you give me an example?”

“The suicidologists propose several reasons for suicide: lack of problem-solving skills, a sense of not belonging, continuous pessimistic points of view, lack of confidence in one’s self, inability to control emotions, distorted thinking, or feelings of burdensomeness, to give you a few examples.”

“We all feel those things at one time or another, and it doesn’t mean we are going to jump out the window. There has to be more to it.” O’Malley agreed.

“A lot more. In most cases, suicide is a part of a disease,” Larry continued, “Mostly, depression, manic-depression in the depressive phase, or schizophrenia and personality disorders. According to my theories these mental disorders produce a diminished sense of self or even a total loss of self, and it is only under such conditions that suicide becomes possible. With a loss of self, the possibility of self-harm becomes a logical consequence of distorted thinking—what some experts call cognitive constriction.”

“Cognitive constriction?” O’Malley smiled weakly, and then scratched his head.

“Some report that they can’t remember or think about anything when they are suicidal. They can’t even put into words what they were feeling or thinking when they attempted suicide. It is like they lost themselves. This is what I call the loss of self.”

“I’m beginning to feel like I know what you mean, but I admit it is vague. Some of these ideas are quite heady.”

“As to the question of why, the loss of self is only one part. Hopelessness and helplessness are also related to suicide. I am still working on the other aspects. I am close to figuring it all out, but I need to do more. My brain theory needs to address the question of suicide; otherwise it would be incomplete. And of course, now I have a huge motivation to figure it out, even if it is too late for my father.”

“Don’t blame yourself, Larry. And, it could very well be that your father didn’t commit suicide.”

They sat in silence. O’Malley finally stood up and looked at Larry. “Do you lean to the theory of suicide because you know so much about it?”

“It’s the other way around. Because I know so much about it, I lean towards suicide. Sadly, I believe in my father’s case it’s true.”

“Percentage wise, how certain are you?”

“I would say 95 percent.”

“That is very certain. Larry, I am so sorry.” O’Malley commiserated sincerely. “But, in my line of work, in my experience, people disappear because they don’t want to be found, or more commonly, people have done very bad things to them and don’t want the body to be found. I have hardly encountered suicide. To me it doesn’t seem a very real issue.”

“That’s because most people who commit suicide are quickly found. They are not missing, like my father. I hope these stories my father left me will lead me to figure out where, or how . . .” Larry made a fist and pressed it against his lips. He scratched his left ear, then rubbed his nose. An uncomfortable silence hung between the two men.

“Have you ever had any suicidal thoughts, sergeant?”

“No.” O’Malley looked directly into Larry’s eyes. “Never. Have you?”

“No, ever.”

“So, why do you ask me this?”

“Supposedly, slightly more than one in ten adults have experienced suicidal thoughts. I was just curious.”

“Does suicide run in families, Larry?”

“There is definitely a genetic component to mental illness, they tend to be more frequent in families. So, indirectly, yes, suicide would run in families, sergeant.”

“Forgive me for asking, but now that we touched on this, are there any suicides in your family?”

“No. This would be the first one.”

O’Malley nodded and smiled sympathetically.

“Is there anything else I can try to answer, sergeant?”

After a pause, “Not for the moment. I’ve learned more about suicide talking to you than to the experts in the department,” O’Malley finally said. “I hope we can find something real quick. I know how something like this eats you, like a rat from the inside out. I’ll give you a call as soon as I know anything.”

“Thanks, sergeant.” Larry shook his hand sincerely.

The Vampire

After O'Malley left, Larry's sight drifted to his father's desk and saw his address book. He thumbed through it and the name Michael Merchant, his father's closest friend, almost like an uncle, jumped at him. He had married late, twice to younger women, and was twice divorced; never had children. Right after high school, he had entered flight school and become a pilot for Aeromexico. Today he was one of the most senior pilots.

Their friendship went back to high school. Larry smiled remembering his father's description of the day he was introduced to Michael. The annual school Rally was taking place their sophomore year. Freshmen were not allowed to enter. Each car was allowed a maximum of five people to help with the various tasks involved. The Rally was a contest of wits, trying to decipher clues about objects you needed to get, as well as clues as to where you had to go to deliver them, and answering a questionnaire. Points were given according to degree of difficulty of finding things and points were given for minutes shaved from the allotted time to get to the finish point of a stage. The fastest times were the most important aspect of the rally in the eyes of the racers, even though it was not necessary to win. Having the fastest time in each stage, through the maddening traffic of Mexico City, was considered a badge of honor. Each stage would get an honorific mention for points achieved for time, and points achieved for delivering all the objects required. There would be typically 5 stages, each one involving, with luck, an hour and a half.

On the southwestern side of the high school was a small, three-blocks long, one way street that ran northwest at a forty-five degree angle into Diagonal San Antonio, a big two-way, four lane avenue. Diagonal San Antonio, as the name implied, ran at a forty-five degree angle with the streets around it, yet it ran closer to a true north-south axis than those streets. More than 200 hundred cars entered the Rally every year. At the start of the race, all the cars parked perpendicular to the sidewalk with the hoods facing into the street, and away from the high-school wall, with all the team members inside each car, except for the driver. The driver, in the fashion of the Twenty-four Hours of Le Mans, stood on the opposite side of the street and when a flag

was dropped, would run to his car, start it and, with luck, take off without crashing into everyone else trying to get to Diagonal San Antonio. The trick was to get out fast, without getting bogged down by all the cars jumping out and turning right. This meant that the closer you were at the start to the large avenue, the better. The only problem was that seniors were assigned the first block, juniors the second, and sophomores the third. However, there were two small, one-block streets running perpendicular to the high school and southeast into Diagonal San Antonio, also at forty-five degree angle. The first small street was on the left of the sophomores, next to the last starting slot, and the second one to the right of them, between the sophomores and juniors.

Lawrence, Larry's father, had borrowed a blue 289 Shelby-Cobra-equipped Mustang with 320 horsepower from his father's manager. This was easily the most powerful car in the Rally. The only other car in the same category was Michael's yellow 289 Mustang with a competition-balanced engine with a double barrel, Holly carburetor with unknown horsepower. But, at least by Michael's bragging, with a top speed of 145 miles per hour, the yellow Mustang was the fastest car.

Michael was the leader of the most prominent group of sophomores, while Lawrence, who had come from a different secondary school, was considered the leader of the outsiders. Among the sophomores, this was the biggest rivalry. Who won between them was what mattered, even if they didn't win the race. Sophomores had never won the Rally, they were considered to have a double handicap: brains and their starting position. The two Mustangs might prove to be the edge in changing this. And, as Lawrence had recounted the story, his own ego and Michael's discounted the lack of brains, and both, with their Mustangs, were sure the winner was going to be the one who got out to Diagonal San Antonio first. Once there, it was over. Neither considered that anyone could catch up with them during the course of the seven-and-a-half hour Rally.

In Lawrence's eyes, to achieve the desired advantage at the start of the Rally, they would need to park their blue Mustang facing the small street between the sophomores and juniors. Lawrence's foot-speed would be the factor that would guarantee they would shoot out the alley and reach Diagonal San Antonio before anyone else. Accordingly, they planned to show up at six in the morning to park the car in the desired spot, and wait until nine when the Rally was scheduled to start.

There was only one problem with the plan. When they arrived at six in the morning, there were ten guys staking out the desired starting slot. Lawrence had not anticipated that Michael would have so many friends reserve the spot

so aggressively. Lawrence had only showed up with his friend Fats Morales. Two against ten didn't add up very well. Lawrence quickly decided they go to the last slot, the one in front of the other little alley. Because of the diagonality of the streets, the distance to Diagonal San Antonio was less, his foot-speed would give him an additional short head start, and with a little bit of luck, as they turned right onto Diagonal San Antonio, they had a minuscule chance of beating Michael to the avenue and end up in front of him. He told Fats to cheat by turning the ignition on, a few steps before Lawrence jumped in the car, saving Lawrence another second or so. Lawrence knew the just-tuned V-8 of the blue Mustang would start immediately at the turn of the key and be ready to jump. This was going to be a contest of meters. The worst-case scenario was they would end up just a few meters behind Michael as he turned right onto Diagonal San Antonio. But, for sure, no one would be in front of either of them. Then it would become a question of driving skill and horsepower. In Lawrence's opinion, none of the other cars had drivers or horsepower to be a threat.

According to Lawrence, at exactly eight-thirty, a guy came running up the alley in front of Michael's reserved, starting slot yelling, "Merchant is coming! Get ready!"

Two guys ran to the left and two to the right of the starting slot in a neatly choreographed move, waving flags, blocking the street, and making sure no traffic moved in front of the alley from either direction. Screeching tires and the powerful rumble of a V-8 engine was heard coming down the alley. Lawrence knew this was Michael's car. The yellow Mustang shot out of the alley sideways, all four tires burning rubber. The guys that had been protecting the reserved slot simply moved onto the sidewalk and acted unconcerned as the car skidded sideways toward them at full speed. But, the yellow Mustang continued in an elegant and controlled roll, slowly turning and sliding, with tires screeching and burning, until the back of the car was facing the wall. Once the Mustang, now moving in reverse, was properly aligned to fit into the starting slot, Michael stepped on the gas, and with a bigger roar of the engine and more smoke from the tires, perfectly brought the car to a stop two inches from the sidewalk. Michael killed the engine, jumped out and started high-five-ing his friends. It was at that moment that Lawrence knew, he didn't have a chance to win. Not against Michael.

When the Rally started, as Lawrence predicted, he was the first one to Diagonal San Antonio. He turned right burning tires and skidding. He burnt more tires as he shifted to second gear, when suddenly, Michael, also burning rubber turned right into the avenue just in front of him. They got to the corner

and had to stop—the traffic light had turned red. Michael stopped on the left lane, Lawrence on the right. They looked at each other and laughed, as they gunned their engines. They had beaten the seniors out into the avenue. That was a big for the two sophomores. Cars from the Rally piled up behind them. Lawrence anticipated a drag race to show clearly which car had more power. When the light turned green, Lawrence released the clutch and lurched ahead burning tires. He looked into his left rear view mirror, and surprised, saw Michael tear left in a cloud of burning, screeching tires, across the oncoming traffic and disappear into a small side street.

There wasn't going to be a race. Not that day. Lawrence arrived at the first stage in first place, and as he took off, never even saw Michael. At the second stage they were behind Michael, and stayed there all day, without ever seeing him. As it turned out, Michael's team ended in fourth place, and Lawrence's in sixth. To Michael's and Lawrence's chagrin, brains counted more than brawn. Even though they had the best points regarding times, and showing up at each stage ahead of the others, the others got more points by completing more of the questionnaire and gathering more of the required objects. In their Junior and Senior years, Michael organized the Rally and Lawrence won it. But they didn't compete head on.

Their rivalry, in the eyes of all, continued through their Junior year. In Lawrence's mind, there was no rivalry. Michael was the better driver as he was competing in professional races, except that Michael's father would not pay for air-pilot's school if he insisted on driving, which is why eventually Michael quit racing. In their Senior year, during the long weekend of Labor Day (in Mexico, May 1st) and Cinco de Mayo, a big group of guys from the high school planned to go to Acapulco. They decided to meet at 3 o'clock, after school, at the tollbooth of the highway to Acapulco.

Lawrence was driving the blue 289 Shelby-Cobra-modified Mustang. Michael had a brand new, wine-colored Mustang GT-351 rated at 300 horsepower. When Lawrence arrived at the tollbooth, he saw Michael calmly leaning on the Mustang GT-351 with his arms crossed. Four other cars were parked in front of Michael: a 6-cylinder, sky-blue Javelin, a white, 318-Barracuda, a red 325 Camaro, and a black Fairlane 500. Lawrence parked behind Michael and got out. Every car had a driver and a co-pilot. Michael was with Arturo, another close friend. Lawrence was with Fats Morales, his co-pilot and dear friend since sophomore year.

"These clowns think they're going to have a race." Michael said as they shook hands. "At the very least, they think you and I are going to have a race and finally settle who is the best driver."

“You and I know who is the better driver.” Lawrence said vaguely for the benefit of Fats and Arturo, and hoping not to be rebutted by Michael, added, “We don’t need to have a race. These guys can only hurt themselves or worse. They have no chance against us.”

“Exactly my point.” Michael said, also glad to leave it vague as to who was a better driver because he knew Lawrence was very familiar with this road. Lawrence’s father had a gravel-pit near Acapulco and Lawrence drove to see his father often. On this day, the advantage was Lawrence’s. “We will just take it easy all the way, Lawrence. Let them race if they want to. You and I don’t need to prove anything.”

“Sure, Michael.”

The co-pilot from the red Camaro yelled, “We’re all here, let’s go.”

With that as a signal, the Javelin burnt tires and stopped at the stall to pay the toll, followed by the Camaro, the Barracuda and the Fairlane in other stalls. Like horses in a hippodrome, all of them left the tollbooths simultaneously with screeching tires, smoke drifting everywhere.

As the smell of burning tires reached them, Michael turned to Lawrence with an anticipatory smile, “Are we really going to let those clowns get away with that?”

“I guess we can’t,” Lawrence laughed as he ran back to his blue Mustang. Fats had already started the ignition.

A few miles down the road, the two Mustangs going 130 miles per hour passed the four cars. Lawrence’s car had more power, but Michael’s superior driving ability closed the distance on the winding road as they moved through the curves in the never-ending mountains. For the next 100 miles they stayed neck and neck. Coming down from the mountains into Iguala on the two-lane winding highway, Lawrence gunned his car into a straightaway pulling away from Michael. Lawrence braked hard and cut into the next turn. As he came out of the curve, Lawrence looked into his rearview mirror, and saw, as usual, Michael’s teeth grinning as he caught up, close to his rear bumper one more time. Once again, Lawrence floored it down the straightaway and pulled away from Michael. As he pumped his breaks to slow down, Lawrence realized they had overheated in the long downward slope. He was approaching the curve too fast. He couldn’t slow down the blue Mustang.

“Fats, we have a problem.” Lawrence told his co-pilot between clenched teeth. The only thing he could do at this point was rely on the brute power of his car. He downshifted to third, stepping on the gas to equal the expected RPMs as he let the clutch out expertly to avoid locking his tires, then quickly to second. The engine howled, and growled wonderfully as it strained to

slow down the Mustang. Lawrence checked his tachometer. As expected, the needle was in the red. *Better to blow the engine than be dead.* He went, with tires screeching loudly, into the curve.

"I'd say, that Michael has a problem," Fats responded, enjoying the thrill of the moment, looking up from the newspaper he was reading.

Lawrence let the back of the car slide imperceptibly outwards, turned the wheel sharply into the curve, and pressed the accelerator to the floor. *Who cares about needles in the red, just don't blow the engine.* The car responded beautifully, and went into a guided slide around the curve. As he came out of the curve, he straightened the car into a long straightaway, as he shifted back to third to relieve the engine, then floored it again, then shifted to fourth gear. Lawrence looked in the rearview mirror and for the first time today he could not see Michael close by ramming into his bumper.

Fats just grinned through the entire curve admiring the driving skill and the performance of the car. For the first time he turned to search for Michael and didn't see him. "I thought you said he was right behind us. That will show him."

"We almost got killed, Fats. I lost my brakes. I'm slowing down." Lawrence replied as he slowed to 100 miles per hour. The rush of adrenaline made both his knees shake uncontrollably. He put his right hand down on his knee to stop it, or perhaps just to hide the shaking from Fats. "You don't know how close we were. I lost control of the car for one instant. We can't afford that, not for one second." He looked in his rearview mirror and saw Michael quickly gaining on him on the long straightaway that led to Iguala. Michael pulled alongside them and made a gesture with his hand to slow down.

Arturo, Michael's co-pilot yelled out the window, "Let's cool it, someone could get hurt." And waived with his hand palm down, up and down out the window. "Slow down! Do you want to get us killed?" he laughed. Lawrence's eyes locked with Michael's. Michael nodded.

Lawrence nodded back. He tested his brakes and they worked as they had cooled sufficiently. He let Michael pass and arrive at the gas station in Iguala a few yards ahead. They were 110 miles from the first tollbooth, exactly one hour and five minutes later, and as Fats Morales dutifully recorded, twenty-two minutes ahead of the other four cars.

While the other four cars fueled up, Michael's and Lawrence's Mustangs were ready to roll out the gas station, as a 425 horsepower, brand new, red, 1970 Hemicuda-426 with California license plates roared past the gas station. Michael turned to Lawrence, they both grinned and jumped into their cars. A few miles later, maintaining a speed of one-hundred-and-twenty-two miles

per hour, the top speed at 5200 RPM's, the limit before going into the red according to the tachometer needle, Lawrence flashed his high beams and fog lights as he moved into the left lane to pass the Hemicuda, with Michael close behind him.

Lawrence turned to look at the driver of the Hemicuda as he passed it and his jaw dropped. In the car were two girls. She turned to look at Lawrence, smiled, down-shifted to third and her Hemicuda lurched forwards quickly catching up and then passing Lawrence on his right, as she shifted back to fourth gear. Michael flashed his high beams so Lawrence would get out of his way.

Lawrence, careful not to put his engine in the red, obliged and let Michael pass. Michael pushed his car into the red and got it up to one-hundred-and-thirty-two miles per hour, but the Hemicuda kept going and slowly left them behind in the long straightaway. Michael slowed down to put his engine back in the yellow as Lawrence caught up. Lawrence knew the long open curves of the Zopilote Canyon would begin soon. This was the best part of the road where speeds could be safely maintained above one-hundred miles per hour. The road followed the slow meandering river that ran along the bottom of the canyon, and the curves were long, open and more importantly, you could see oncoming traffic almost a mile ahead, which allowed you to pass on the curves. He knew they would soon catch up with the girls. Michael, knowing that Lawrence was very familiar with the road, let him take the lead. Soon they had the Hemicuda in sight a few curves ahead of them. Lawrence planned his move. There was a long curve coming up, and in the middle of the curve there was a slight dip in the asphalt, so when you came up the dip, if you didn't anticipate and correct, the car would shoot outwards into the oncoming, outside lane. If there were no cars coming in the opposite direction, this was an ideal spot to pass the Hemicuda. The girls would probably correct inwards and slow down slightly, as Lawrence would let the car shoot outwards as he floored it. Michael, he felt, sure could follow this maneuver close behind him.

Lawrence timed his speed so he would be approaching and gaining on the Hemicuda when he hit the dip. The girl corrected inwards and slowed down, as Lawrence floored it, let the car jump sideways, and then corrected. To add insult to injury, he downshifted to third as he blasted past the Hemicuda. Both girls, good-naturedly, gave first Lawrence, and then Michel, the finger. Lawrence looked in his left rearview mirror. Michael was close behind him driving one-handed, and with his left hand gave him a "thumbs up" signal. They never saw the Hemicuda again.

About fifty miles later, in what was dubbed the curves of Chilpancingo, because of the extremely winding section of road, Michael was once again

trying to pass Lawrence, but the straightaways were too short. Finally exasperated, he decided to pass him on the outside of a curve. Lawrence saw him make his move. He could see a slow truck oncoming and immediately down shifted, slowed down and gave Michael the right of way. Now, Lawrence made the motion to slow down. He yelled out the window as the Mustang GT roared past him, "Cool it, Michael! I don't want to get killed chasing you."

Michael didn't slow down, so naturally, Lawrence tried to keep up with him. Now, with every curve he lost a few yards in spite of gaining in the short straightaways. He was losing more in the curves than he gained in the straightaways. He was being careful not to overheat his brakes. But still, no matter how well he traced his path into each curve, he couldn't make his car slide like Michael's, even with the extra power at his disposal. He down shifted into third, heard a slight grinding noise, and nothing happened—he was still in fourth gear. A synchronizer had broken. There was no chance to keep up with Michael anymore.

Michael waited at the gas station in Acapulco. Arturo dully noted there was a four-minute difference. Michael clocked, not counting the stop in Iguala, 3:05 and Lawrence, with a crippled transmission, clocked 3:09. Michael knew Lawrence's previous record from toll-booth to gas station, not on a heavy trafficked highway like that day, but on a deserted highway in the middle of the week, was 3:24 in a 1500 cc, four-cylinder, beetle VW with 50 horsepower, which was very impressive driving.

Michael walked over to Lawrence and hugged him. "Thanks for letting me pass. It was stupid on my part. But, after seeing how you took that curve as we came down into Iguala, I knew it was the only way to pass you."

"I have to confess I only did that because I overheated my brakes. I had no choice, I would never do it voluntarily." They looked into each other's eyes and smiled. "But, I know that once you passed me, I could not keep up your pace, Michael. Every curve widened the distance a few feet, even with a more powerful, faster car. And then, when I knew I couldn't catch up, I lost my transmission."

"You're modest. Believe me, you're good, Lawrence. I had to push very hard to keep up with you, and I could tell you had your car under control at all times. You never got reckless, that's the key to a good driver. By comparison, I lost my patience, and I am here to tell the story, only because you let me pass." Both had a deep respect for each other's abilities, confirmed and tested through an informal race. "Let's make a deal, Lawrence. We should never race each other again on the open highway. It is too dangerous."

"Let's shake on that." Lawrence extended his hand with a smile.

This time, more than thirty-two minutes went by before the other four cars arrived at the gas station. That was 4:11, quite behind Lawrence in his beetle—of course with very heavy traffic, as both Michael and Lawrence pointed out. But Fats also knew about the 3:24 record and made sure that all heard about it. It was during this long weekend that the friendship between Michael and Lawrence blossomed. It was on this trip that Michael got his nickname, the Vampire, due to the fact that he never saw daylight and partied all night every night. It was on this trip that Lawrence got the nickname Flash, due to the fact that he was fast on his feet as well as behind the wheel, according to the Vampire.

The name Michael Merchant kept jumping out at him from his father's address book as Larry finished his reverie. Larry dialed impulsively. It was time to talk to the Vampire.

"Hello?"

"Vampire?" Now, only Larry and his father called Michael by this name.

"Little Flash!" Michael immediately recognized Larry's voice. Larry was 'Little Flash,' because of his father's nickname "How are you? There is so much to talk about. I've heard about your father. Your aunt Minnie called me. What do you think has happened? The last time I talked to him he told me he was doing well."

"You mean, his panic attacks?"

"Yeah. Flash told me he hadn't had one for months."

"I hate to be pessimistic, but I think he might have killed himself, Uncle Michael." Larry said soberly.

"I don't know about that. I would bet against it."

"He left his coat, his wallet and his watch. For some reason it was set one hour behind. My father wouldn't go out without them. Would he?"

"I am one hour behind New York. I wonder if that means anything? Could he be telling me something?"

"I have no clue. Your guess is as good as mine."

"I'll have to think about that. Maybe it's a message."

Larry quickly recounted about the manuscripts, the safe-deposit box, the CD and the stories, Ramirez and O'Malley.

"It is strange," Michael said and after a small pause continued, "Ramirez called; I have to confess I was very rattled after I talked to him, but there's something you must know. Shortly after your mother's death, your father came to Mexico. Remember? When you went to live with your aunt Minnie while you finished your senior year in high school? That is when he started having panic attacks."

“Yes. I remember he was in Mexico for almost three months, and came back in the summer. I talked to you almost every day. He was not his usual self after mom’s death. That’s when he sold his business and we moved to the east coast.”

“Exactly. We had a mutual friend, a high school buddy, Fats Morales. Do you remember him?”

“Yes, of course.”

“Morales was the President’s secretary at the time.”

“You mean the President of Mexico?”

“Yes. He was the equivalent of the Chief of Staff. At any rate, while your father was staying with me, Fats Morales called out of the blue. Neither of us had seen him for a few years. And this is the curious thing; he explained to me that your dad’s name had come up through an informal underground channel that was kept open between the President and his counterpart in the United States. They were requesting that the Judicial Police, the Mexican FBI, locate him. But what was really unusual, Fats Morales explained, was they requested the information be sent back through this informal channel instead of through any other police communication. They requested that all this be kept unofficial, i.e., that it hadn’t really happened. Fats Morales wanted to know if I had any idea of why someone so high up would be looking for your dad.”

“And, do you have any idea, uncle?”

“Maybe it’s best if I e-mail you. You never know who might be listening.”

“Now you’re sounding paranoid like my father.”

“I have a strange feeling since Ramirez called me. They could be watching and hearing.”

“Who are they?”

“Well, Fats Morales, back then, implied that if your dad’s name was sent through this channel it was very serious and it involved very high-up levels. So believe me, Larry. Both your dad and I took this seriously, irrelevant of whatever a bunch of crazy psychiatrists said.”

“If someone is really after my father, why would they wait so many years?”

“Who knows? Fats Morales warned us to be on the alert. Three days ago I received an e-mail from your dad. What was strange was he sent it from a hotmail address—*freedomforlarry@hotmail.com*—not his usual e-mail at AOL. Attached was a story called ‘1486.’ I’ll e-mail it to you right away. Check your e-mail in about fifteen minutes. Keep your chin up, Larry. Let’s hope for the

best.” Michael changed the subject, trying levity, “You know, when we were seniors in high-school, your father and I and an American we had met took a trip along the Pacific Coast of Mexico. We ended up at the mouth of the Balsas River. There, on a deserted beach, an old fisherman served us great seafood and played the marimba. The three of us talked about how simple life could be, about how little is needed to lead a satisfying life. A few years before your mother died, your father and I joked about simplifying our lives. He said to me, ‘Michael, let’s go play the marimba on the beach. Let’s dispose of all our assets and go live under the palm trees—no electricity, no running water, no phone. No expenses. Why encumber our lives with mortgages, car payments, maintenance, insurance, and keeping up with the Joneses? If we ever need a beer or something, we pull out the marimba, play it until the tourists drop enough money into the collection tray and we go buy it.’ The idea of selling everything and going to play the marimba on a deserted beach became a private joke of ours. And Larry, the last time I talked to your father, he still joked about this. Don’t think the worse yet.” Michael tried to sound optimistic.

“Thanks for trying, uncle, but I can’t help being pessimistic. The last time I talked to him he sounded very down and out. I’ll e-mail you what I have. We’ll talk later, uncle Michael. I’ll keep you posted if anything new develops.”

After getting lunch down the street, Larry returned to the PC, clicked on the AOL icon and checked his father’s e-mail.

From: mmerchant@yahoo.com.mx

Larry: Fats Morales told me to tell your dad, if I talked to him, to keep a low profile. He knew about your mother’s death, and implied that “big guns” were after your dad. A few days later your father returned to California, and a day after, the Judicial Police were at my door looking for him. I lied and said that I talked to him after your mother’s death, but I hadn’t seen him and I thought he was in the United States. Shortly after, I could hear strange clicking sounds on my phone, and I had a persistent feeling of being followed. Everyone thought I was paranoid, like your father. I believe foul play is involved. We kept our communications at a minimum. Your father insisted it was the murderers of OJ’s wife. The question was what could be the connection between these guys and the President of the United States. Of course, Fats Morales explained, this channel could be used without the President’s knowledge; so minimally there was a connection at a high cabinet level or less probable, the drug people.

He also implied that the drug people, on the Mexican side, were very well connected in the Mexican Army. They had clout, but served at the President's discretion, so their powers were limited. If I wanted to know more about the drug trade, he recommended I talk to Arturo Molinares, another high-school buddy. He ran the Narcotics Division and had just recently retired. I met him for lunch. Arturo told me he retired because he was tired and frustrated. Every time their investigations would start to yield results, his bosses or the drug bosses would cancel them. In Mexico, unofficially, the Narcotics men were untouchable. This was enforced by the rule of an eye for ten eyes, and a tooth for ten teeth. If one agent was killed, they killed ten suspected drug people. Yet, he was tired because too many of his friends had been killed—tired of killing too many men and nothing to show for it. He was well off financially, but now had to live with constant protection. After lunch, while I waited for the valet parking to bring my car, three black-armored Mercedes Benz drove up. Arturo smiled and got into the middle one. Arturo was killed about six years ago.

A few months after this, maybe a year, I ran into Fats Morales at San Angel Inn. After lunch he confided that a CIA agent that knew us, or had talked like he knew us, had interceded in your father's behalf, and that the whole thing was over. For years I didn't hear anything more on the subject, even though I suspect that your father never got over it.

Attached is the story your father sent me. It includes another suicide. Keep in touch only by E-mail. Please forgive me for being paranoid, but since Ramirez called me, I have a feeling I'm being watched. Again. I don't know whom to trust. Be careful. Love, MM.

Larry pressed the "Download" button and then clicked the "Open now" button. *What information relating to his father's disappearance could he gleam? Why was his father dispersing these stories in various ways? Were there more stories?* A Word document appeared on his screen "1486.doc."

Amun Ra and Tuthmosis III, Egypt, 1486 B.C.

Moluk, the only son of Hashepsowe and Tuthmosis II, rode a camel lazily at the head of the small column advancing in the desert afternoon. With him were a stepbrother and two half-brothers. Moluk had just turned twenty. His father Tuthmosis II, Pharaoh of the Upper and Lower Kingdom, had died six years earlier. Since then he had been feeling extremely sad, with a few periods in between of what he considered normalcy. Hashepsowe had been Pharaoh since then, sharing an uneasy co-regency with his half-brother, Tuthmosis III. Their father, Tuthmosis II had publicly proclaimed Tuthmosis III, when he was only eight years old, to be anointed Pharaoh by none other than the gods in person. So Moluk's half brother was recognized by all as Pharaoh, but had no power. Real power rested with Hashepsowe. It was a joke among the brothers, as they all knew where total authority rested.

Intense novelty always seemed to make him feel better. Thus, he had organized with his mother's blessing an expedition to check the western borders of their kingdom. The western borders were a ring of oases that paralleled the Nile about five days march following the setting Sun. The party that had been ordered to accompany him included his older stepbrother Moses and two half brothers, AmunRa and Tuthmosis III. Hashepsowe had felt that it would be a good experience for the four young men.

Tuthmosis III had been trained in martial arts and warfare tactics. AmunRa had been prepared to be the High Priest, representative of Amun and Ra. Concerning religion, this was also a joke among the brothers because they all knew that his training was mostly in calculations, astronomy and building. Moluk's training had been mostly in tributary systems: the collection, storage, distribution and redistribution of goods. Some of the communities in the western oases were behind in their tributes to Pharaoh.

When it concerned Moses, the oldest, none joked about him. He had been trained in everything but martial arts. He was probably the most intelligent of them all, and luckily could not be a threat to the throne because of one small detail; he didn't have the right blood. Now this was a joke among the brothers, as they had all seen Moses' blood and it was the same color as theirs.

The main population of the oases didn't amount to more than a few thousand souls that made their living herding sheep or by engaging in camel caravans moving commercial goods through the desert. Occasionally, as was the case now, they refused to pay the one-fifth that was due Pharaoh. They normally paid tribute in the form of dates, grapes, wine and ochre, greatly valued as a dye.

Half a day's ride behind them, the small army that accompanied them, a few hundred handpicked warriors, rode in an orderly column. It was the middle of winter, the cold season, and the heat was not so bad. Moluk turned back and through the shimmering, hot waves of air rising from the sand could see the dust raised by his protective custodians.

The borders of the desert, after passing the Land of Death, were pockmarked with water holes, oases, and a few stinking wells sunken into the desert ground. These oases were found in depressions in the desert floor where water sprung out naturally. The oases' route runs almost parallel to the Nile between four and seven days march west from the mighty river.

From Luxor they had drifted on Pharaoh's fleet down the Nile to el-Minya, a small village on the east bank of the Nile. Then they rode five days west into the desert to Bahariya. It was a small town, with a very small necropolis, reflecting its recent origin. After a friendly welcome, they replenished supplies, mostly water and headed south to Farafra.

Farafra had not paid their tribute and would not expect them to come from the north, so Moluk was confident that they would ride without incident.

Tuthmosis, trained in military tactics, rode up quickly and caught up to Moluk. "It is not a good idea to be riding alone in hostile desert, Moluk. It is getting late. We should stop and camp for the night. We should order the Captain and his guards to set up a defensive border around the camp."

"Tuth is right," Moses interjected.

AmunRa, without further comment, made his camel kneel and jumped off. He pulled a small tent out, erected it and then proceeded to unsaddle his camel. The camel spit noisily, grunted in approval and lay next to the tent.

As the sun was setting, the captain's column reached their campsite, and spread out in pairs to form a defensive perimeter around the brothers.

The next day, as they approached Farafra, strange, white, chalky, rock formations butted from the white sands like loafs of bread. The formations were wind-eroded at the base and seemed to rest in bowls shaped in the sand by the winds. Each formation was about the size of a small house.

"Look at the waves in the sand. It is so beautiful. This makes the whole trip worthwhile," AmunRa exclaimed as they rode, zigzagging through the strange formations.

Moluk smiled at his younger brother and continued in silence.

“Not one single blade of grass can be seen anywhere. Who would want to live here?” Tuthmosis asked no one in particular. “What do you think, Moses?” he turned to Moses who was the most experienced in desert travel.

“You are right, nothing grows between here and the Nile, five days’ march away, but to the west of the oases, there are occasional rains and in certain areas you can graze cattle,” Moses intoned, swaying his body with the rhythm of the camel’s gait. “Some of my people—”

“—When are you going to stop talking about your people? We are your people,” AmunRa interrupted good-naturedly.

Moses laughed heartily. “AmunRa, I am not going to argue with you. Just remember that my blood isn’t the same as yours. We are getting close to Farafra. If I remember correctly, these formations are just a couple of hours ride from the oasis.”

“We already decided that it is red like ours, Moses,” Moluk interjected, referring to the blood.

“Captain, send ten men ahead to prepare our arrival,” Tuthmosis yelled out to change the conversation. “Give instructions to be careful and retreat if they feel threatened.”

A few hours later, they could see the palms of Farafra. Two guards waited patiently sitting atop their camels. The sun’s setting rays turned the desert to a glowing pink.

“Any news?” Moluk asked them.

“They are not friendly, but they are not hostile either. They are not happy with our presence. However, as soon as they see the tributary ring, they will prepare their share of tribute. I will organize a caravan to take it to Luxor.”

“How about some hot food and some good wine,” the young AmunRa said as he made his camel canter forward.

“How about some good women,” Tuthmosis said, cantering after his brother.

“Captain, make sure they don’t get in trouble. Stay with them,” Moluk ordered.

As the column marched forward to enter Farafra, Moses and Moluk lingered behind.

“Moluk, what is worrying you?”

“I thought that the excitement of this trip would help heal my spirit, Moses. But it hasn’t. I feel broken inside. I feel that whatever ails me, will never heal,” Moluk answered. After a pause he attempted to change the subject, “Moses, tell me, when are you going to be with a woman? I bet you

we could get one in this stink-hole that won't object to your maimed penis," Moluk said without malice.

"Moluk, it is not maimed, it is circumcised," Moses answered with a laugh. "And it works fine."

"How would you know if you have never been with a woman?" Moluk asked seriously.

"I know. I am still waiting for the right one to show up. Then all will be much better for the rest of my life. Don't worry about me, Moluk. Worry about yourself." Moses, turning serious, added, "Our Great Mother of God Pharaoh has ordered me to watch out for you, with my life if necessary. I am not worried about external threats. Your internal demons are what worry me. I have seen them before."

"I don't have demons. I simply don't feel well, but not in a physical way, mind you. My spirit is broken, but please don't be concerned, Moses. I will never do anything purposely to harm you."

"I appreciate that, Moluk. But I am not talking about what can be controlled purposely."

After uneventfully collecting the tribute, two days later, on their way south to Dakhla, the oldest of the oases settlements, dating back to the times of Snefru, Moluk rode at the back of the column instead of his customary position at the front.

AmunRa stopped his camel to one side of the column, and waited for all to pass alongside him, until finally Moluk caught up. AmunRa stroked his camel's neck with a soft leather whip and stepped in alongside his brother. The two brothers rode in silence all day.

When they set camp at the end of the day's journey Moluk dismounted and quickly set his tent.

"I am not hungry. I need a good rest. That's all. Good-night," Moluk said to his brothers as a group. Then he retired to his small tent. AmunRa took some food to Moluk's tent and set it to one side without a word.

"Thank you, AmunRa. I love you," Moluk whispered.

AmunRa scratched his forehead and sat cross-legged outside the tent. *He seems to be failing again. I haven't seen him this bad for a couple of years. What does he mean with "I Love you?"*

"It's getting late, AmunRa," Tuthmosis called out. He closed his tent and retired for the evening.

AmunRa walked over to his small tent, crawled in and fell asleep. The next morning, while he was dreaming that a naked young maid was bathing him at the palace in Luxor, Moses voice intruded in the dream, "Tuth, Amun.

Tuth, Amun, wake up! He's gone. Wake up! He's gone." Instantly AmunRa woke up and was alert. *Moluk! Moluk is gone.*

"There are tracks heading northeast," the captain yelled from the edge of the camp.

"But there is nothing in that direction," Moses stated the obvious. "Get me two camels ready! I need to find him quick!" he yelled at the nearest guard.

"I will go with you," Tuthmosis said.

"And I," AmunRa added.

"It is bad enough if something happens to Moluk. I promised our mother he was my responsibility. I will pay with my life if something goes wrong." He turned to the Captain, "Make sure they stay with you," referring to Tuthmosis and AmunRa. "Use force if necessary. Give me your best tracker."

"Get another two camels ready for Aruna," the Captain commanded in response.

Moses and Aruna, with two other camels in tow, trotted northeast following Moluk's track into the desert.

"We will wait here for two days. If it takes longer, you are better off to head to Farafra," the Captain yelled after them.

Two days and two nights later, as dawn approached, AmunRa sat outside his tent facing east waiting for the light to erase the stars. Tuthmosis III put a hand on his shoulder.

"What are you thinking, AmunRa?"

"Moses is not back. That means he didn't find Moluk the first day. I don't think he was carrying any water. My heart is heavy, Tuthmosis."

"I fear his demons have taken over him again."

"We don't believe in demons."

"It is just a way of talking. What would you want to call them?"

"I don't know what to call them. When I look into his eyes, a great sadness overcomes me, and so I try to avoid it. I tried to be close, but I wasn't strong enough to do so all the time. He tries to hide his bad feelings for that reason; he knows they make me feel bad. I echo his moods, but I shunned Moluk too many times. I let him down and avoided feeling what he feels; there is something bleak and broken in his spirit. I couldn't let it break me. Now, I feel I should have done more."

"Don't blame yourself. We must get on to Dakhla soon. Our water is already too low; we will need to ration it."

As in answer to Tuthmosis's thoughts, the camp came alive. Everyone began to get ready for the two-day journey south to the nearest oasis. The disciplined column marched before the sun rose.

In the afternoon of the second day, they marched through the high fields and overlands of Dakhla. The distant escarpment to the west rose majestically. The vegetation in the high fields was a welcome sight against the backdrop of the escarpment, where the sands and rocks were devoid of plant life. It truly seemed the Land of the Dead.

AmunRa thought about Moluk. He had been denying the obvious: Moluk must be dead by his own choice.

Tuthmosis, riding next to him, as if reading his thoughts spoke, "Maybe Moses caught up with him on the second day and headed back to Farafra."

"Maybe," AmunRa answered in a whisper.

Suddenly, a large depression in the ground ahead appeared. The lower terrain was invisible from a distance. They had arrived at the oasis of Dakhla. The deep depression in the desert, about 60 cubits lower than the desert floor, housed the oasis. All around it palms swayed in the afternoon breeze. A small village, maybe housing several hundred people, could be seen.

The captain interrupted their gloomy thoughts, "As per your instructions, we have set a small camp outside Dakhla. We will not inconvenience the local inhabitants. However, Haberu, the local chieftain, insists that you be his guests tonight."

"Not tonight," Tuthmosis III ordered. "Send apologies. Explain we are expecting bad news."

As they entered the small military camp on the fringes of the palm trees, AmunRa dismounted and set his small tent. He lay down. Tuthmosis III joined him. They slept fitfully through the night. When first light broke, AmunRa got up and walked to the fringe of the camp to relieve himself. As he did so, he heard someone walking behind him.

"I fear the worst," Tuthmosis III said softly. "I am stunned to experience so much pain about the uncertainty of Moluk's fate. I realize now how I always took him for granted; how much I loved his company."

"I share your feelings, Tuth, but we must be hopeful. Moses will give his life before giving up Moluk. Hashepsowe will kill him if something happens to Moluk. Moses won't let this happen."

"There is only so much any man can do. What I fear most is what Moses will try. Then, surely, we will have lost both."

They returned to the center of camp, each with his own gloomy thoughts.

"Haberu insists on inviting you to breakfast," the captain said cheerfully, trying to improve the somber mood. "It smells good."

“You go. Apologize in our mother’s name. Tell him that we are preparing a funerary message for Hashepsowe, one or perhaps two of her sons are dead. We are only waiting to find out the number.”

Late that night Avurna came cantering down the slope from the high fields into Dakhla. After dismounting the captain led him quickly to the tent of the two half-brothers.

“Give him food first,” Tuthmosis III ordered. There was no hurry to hear the bad news. Avurna’s face said it all.

“Eat calmly, you deserve it, Avurna,” AmunRa said. The small group sat in silence in the desert night. The shouts of children at play from the nearby town could be heard. Avurna finished eating and bowed.

“Thank you for the meal, Lord. I have awful news. It is so bad I would prefer to kill myself than to deliver it.”

“I appreciate your feelings. But don’t even think about it. Just tell us,” AmunRa said looking into Tuthmosis eyes.

“On the second day, we found Moluk’s camel at the base of a cliff; dead. A deep cut into the neck bled him to death. First we thought this was done to drink the blood, to alleviate thirst, but a few steps away . . .” Avurna couldn’t go on speaking.

“A few steps away . . . what? Continue, Avurna.” Tuthmosis ordered impatiently. AmunRa placed his left hand on his brother’s right arm in a restraining gesture.

“A few steps away we found Moluk, his head crushed into the ground.”

Both half-brothers strained to maintain their composure. Tuthmosis squeezed AmunRa’s hand as it rested on his arm.

“Moses spoke thus, ‘He must’ve jumped from there,’ pointing to an outcropping of rocks high on the cliff.” Avurna continued, “I replied, ‘You mean he fell from there.’ ‘No,’ Moses answered, ‘I mean he jumped from there. Tell AmunRa and Tuthmosis that I said, ‘Moluk jumped and killed himself.’ And that is what I am reporting, Lords.”

“Isn’t there more?” AmunRa asked.

“I don’t understand, Lord.”

“Where is Moses?”

“He ordered me to come here, through Farafra, to inform you of Moluk’s death. Lord Moses said he had other things to take care of and continued north.”

Thank the gods that only one death need be reported to Hashepsowe. But one is one too many. I feel like the gods have kicked me in the groin and dragged me through all the rocks of the desert.

Neither Tuthmosis nor AmunRa would see their stepbrother Moses for the next eighteen years, not until their stepmother's death. Senenmut built Hashepsowe's Temple. As her builder and consort, he made sure that all her titles as Tuthmosis II's wife, King's Daughter, King's Sister, God's Wife and King's Great Wife were subsumed under her last title: Pharaoh Ruler of the Lower and Upper Kingdoms. AmunRa would learn more building skills from Senenmut.

1458 B.C.

Ten years had elapsed since Hashepsowe had been put to rest in the Valley of the Kings. All Egyptians continued to practice the belief "that to speak the name of the dead is to make them live again." Starting about one hundred years before Hashepsowe's death their great-grandfather Amosis, founder of the XVIII Dynasty had started the practice of cutting tombs into the cliffs in the area known as the Valley of the Kings near Thebes.

After many embarrassing attempts at pyramid building that never rivaled the pyramids claimed to be built by the Fourth Dynasty and after the squandering of wealth in these futile gestures, the Pharaohs had abandoned the old practice of burying their dead in Pyramids. Another, more pragmatic reason—if the tomb were hidden, it would be much less probable that it would be plundered disturbing the sleep of the dead—also contributed to this shift of traditions.

AmunRa was the undisputed High Priest. Tuthmosis III, the undisputed Pharaoh. The messengers alerted AmunRa that Pharaoh, his half-brother, was traveling fast, ahead of the armies that had defeated King Mitani, north of the Euphrates River. Tuthmosis III was the title he adopted after their father Tuthmosis II died. For the first twenty-two years of his reign, their stepmother, Hashepsowe, for all practical purposes had been Pharaoh.

Hashepsowe had ensured that all of Tuthmosis II's children, including her adopted favorite son, Moses, were instructed by the best of the land. However, she had made sure that each one of them specialized in different areas of the sacred Pharaohnic knowledge passed down since the times of Snefru and Khufwey.

AmunRa had been instructed in religion to become the High Priest AmunRa. Yet most of the knowledge imparted to him was the calculating methods developed a thousand years before by Nefermaat. These made him a Master Builder and Astronomer. His knowledge of building is why he was made High Priest AmunRa. His calculating methods also allowed him to

master the movements of the skies, particularly of the sun and moon—both very important for the illumination of temples, the tricks of his trade. His innovations in temple building allowed Pharaoh, perhaps in a greater way than the old pyramids ever did, to continue to awe his subjects and followers. AmunRa's role was to make Pharaoh the equal of the gods in the eyes of the people.

Tuthmosis, trained in all martial arts, was a master at assuming the role of god protector against all other nations. His last campaign, lasting almost two years, had shown that Tuthmosis III's armies could defeat the most famed warriors. Mitani was the last one left.

AmunRa's main problem at present was Moses. He was spreading rumors among his people, the descendants of Joseph the Asiatic. Even though Moluk was the only child of their stepmother, Hashepsowe, she had treated all her husband's children as her own, including a few adopted ones. Moses, even though adopted and charged with Moluk's safety, had clearly continued to be her favorite. As often happens, the favorite son doesn't see that he is favored, and Moses felt that her constant demands on him were proof that she didn't love him as much.

After Moluk's death, a light seemed to have gone out of his stepmother, in part because Moses had disappeared in the desert. Shortly after Hashepsowe's death, Moses reappeared. Before her death, Hashepsowe had publicly proclaimed that Moses had the right to wear the Cobra, taking the place of Moluk. Moses had spent eighteen years in the desert falsely fearing for his life.

In Tuthmosis' absence, Moses had been inciting the Hebrews against Pharaoh. He was using all his knowledge to convince them of their old traditions, that they were the Chosen People. Openly, there was not much AmunRa could do to counter his efforts, as Moses was untouchable; he was one of three that could wear the cobra on his head by public decree.

To increase his own standing and not lose ground against Moses, AmunRa was forced to use a few tricks. He ordered a few barges of haematite from Aswan. He gave instructions to grind the red ochre into fine dust. Then he ordered his maid servants to crush enough barley to make 10,000 jars of beer. The beer was not allowed to ferment and the red ochre was mixed in, so it would look like blood. He brought one thousand slaves from Nubia and placed them in front of the temple of Karnack among the processional way designed with ram-headed-Sphinxes, representing Amun, the king of the gods. During the night he freed the slaves under the condition that they went back to Nubia and never come back. This they did immediately and without argument. Then he ordered all the red beer poured in such a way

as to appear to have dribbled out of the rams' mouths. The next morning, the people woke up to see the avenue of the criosphinxes covered with blood without a trace of one single Nubian; the word spread: the gods had devoured them! The people would come and seek AmunRa's protection

Moses was up to the challenge. He counter-claimed that had he asked his own god to show his powers over Amun; his god obliged by making it rain blood on top of Amun's criosphinxes. Moses maintained that Amun didn't devour anything. God had freed the Nubians.

AmunRa believed Amun was the winner in the eyes of the people, but he had to be very careful with Moses. Moses' knowledge was great and it showed.

Most of the time the locusts came in cycles of seventeen years. Normally the western desert, the Land of the Dead, would halt them and limit their destruction. The average lifespan of people was short enough so it was uncommon to live to see two or three of these cycles. Indeed, it was possible to live a long life and never see a really bad cycle. Two years earlier, just as soon as Tuthmosis had left on his last military campaign, Moses attributed a slightly worse than normal cycle of locusts to his god's anger against the Egyptians—mainly his stepbrothers AmunRa and Tuthmosis.

One thing was a fact: his people were almost as numerous as the Egyptians.

AmunRa continued the Beautiful Feast of the Valley, in honor of Hathor. Sacred boats carried Amun, Mut and Konsu from Thebes to the sanctuaries at Deir el-Bahri. AmunRa had endeavored to make Hathor more important than his stepmother Hashepsowe as her mortuary temple's columns were capped with the image of the goddess. Hathor, Mistress of the West, welcomed the dead into the Afterlife. Her face, coincidentally, was the living image of Hashepsowe, except for the ears, that are pushed to the sides and could be part of a hair-dress. In another wall of the mortuary temple, the goddess was depicted as a cow that both suckles and protects Hashepsowe. At the very back of the sanctuary, Hathor, along with Amun are seen consecrating Hashepsowe as Pharaoh. Yet, AmunRa had a strange chill every year when he organized these festivities. He thought back to Moluk. Hashepsowe had refused to embalm him; accordingly, Hathor would not protect him in the Underworld. Moluk's punishment, according to the priests, would be to wander forever in the fog of the Underworld.

AmunRa saw the Pharaohnic barge sailing up the Nile. Although the sun was shining, the mid-winter air was cool. The level of the mighty Nile was almost as low as AmunRa could remember. He gave orders to receive Tuthmosis at his palace. After closing the Temple of Karnack, he proceeded to go to greet his half-brother.

Tuthmosis walked in flanked by his guards. He was tanned and even more handsome than usual, if that was possible. His green eyes shone clearly. He seemed very relaxed. He was not wearing the Pharaoh's cobra—that allowed him to dispense with many formalities and thus travel faster. Since AmunRa was wearing his headdress, Tuthmosis was required to salute him formally in front of his guards.

“Greetings, AmunRa. May the gods be with you,” Tuthmosis said mockingly—a joke among the brothers—as Hashepsowe had taught them when they were seven or eight years old. Since the royal guards were out of earshot, he turned to dismiss them with a shout. “You have all done a great job. Take a deserved rest.” As they retreated, Tuthmosis laughed and embraced his brother. “It is a pleasant sight for my travel-weary eyes to behold you. Let's have a drink while you bring me up to date with Moses's latest maneuvers to gain ascendancy.”

After AmunRa took off his headdress, he offered Tuthmosis coconut juice, fresh dates and fish. They conversed the same way they ate; slowly, relishing every moment.

“I wonder how much Moses knows of the secret Pharaohnic knowledge. He is trying to undermine me by telling his people that ours are the rituals of inferior people. That only inferior people believe in many gods. Does he forget that ethnic hatred should be avoided at all cost? Ignorant people can easily be led to believe that others are the root cause of their problems. It is one of our basic tenets, to embrace others. Having a happy, prosperous people is the easiest way to achieve cooperation. But Moses is striking at some of the fundamental values that allow us to help others. He is spreading the rumor that there is only one true God. Of course, neither you nor I, by implication, have a god status. We should never underestimate him. Our dear Hashepsowe trained him well. I hope I can keep him under control,” AmunRa reflected calmly.

“He's probably the best trained of all of us. I wish our father had lived longer to pass the Secret Codices directly to us. Hashepsowe, our dear mother, ensured that we only had fragmentary knowledge, each one had access to one or another Codex, but not all. Moses, her favorite, received much more instruction than we. She kept power by keeping knowledge compartmentalized. The old principle of divide and conquer. She made sure that each one of us could only act against her if we all joined together. She well knew this was highly unlikely. We know the Secret Codices must be stored somewhere. She couldn't have kept it all in her head.”

“Are you talking about who really built Snefru's and Khufwey's and the other pyramids?” AmunRa clarified.

“Yes, the information on the pyramids and how religion got started, but also, we don’t know what else might be included. In part, that is why I ordered my son, Tuthmosis, to rescue the Sphinx. Sands covered the entire body; only the head can be seen. We need to keep our image as master builders.

“The problem is we can’t know for sure what Moses knows. It seems likely that he mastered what Moluk knew—a good working knowledge of the tributary system. But we aren’t even sure if Moses knows what we know. It is obvious he knows some of your magical tricks, he is a master at creating illusions.”

“We’ve discussed this before. If we knew where, we would go look it up. Ultimately, even if our people knew that Pharaohs didn’t build our fabulous pyramids, we still have perfected the art of impressing the people—I’ll show you some of the improvements I am making—to provide the best life possible for them under our guidance. We must continue on our sacred duty to improve life for as many as we can. But I agree with you. I have the suspicion that Moses knows more than he lets on.”

“I just wish that Moses would stay in line with us,” Tuthmosis added.

“We’ll deal with him later. For now, I will disregard any ethnic slaughter that might be part of our army’s behavior. We are supposed to carry a clear sense of mercy and forgiveness, not an avenging force that will promote revenge. Tell me about your exploits. I hear that you displayed great personal valor during battle,” AmunRa asked, truly interested.

“I’m sure that you have read all my military messages,” Tuthmosis said dismissively, trying to show humility.

“What I mean, dear brother, is that it is not necessary, not even for a god to have great valor during combat. It is most important to protect your life and command your troops. You needn’t lead your troops personally into battle.”

“AmunRa, no less than three-hundred-and-thirty princes engaged in a huge alliance against us in Megiddo. These petty Asiatic princes always pursue their personal enmities with disregard for their own people. However, when they knew I was coming, they put all their personal hatred and ethnic differences aside and somehow joined together against us. They forced my hand. I was happy to use a threat of strength and peaceably embrace most of these little fiefdoms. Anyhow, we captured all their horses, took all their chariots decorated with gold and silver. Their capability to fight has been greatly reduced.

“I have to talk to Moses about these Asiatics. He keeps having delusions of the grandest kinds concerning his people. He insists in outdoing me,

claiming to be their leader. With my triumphs, perhaps, things will change. I had to show leadership of the finest quality, not godly leadership, but the kind that is forged in the heat of battle—the kind of leadership that is won by example. My troops fought valiantly and prevailed, even though they were outnumbered. I captured many family members, children and brothers of these princes to ensure their obedience, and, of course, that they pay the one-fifth that is rightly Pharaoh's. In some cases, they refused, and left me with no alternative—death to their families.”

“I'm not sure that is the best course of action. It could breed adverse feelings to say the least,” AmunRa said, raising an eyebrow. “I fear that we have compromised the principle of ethnic tolerance and opened up the possibility of retaliation, which as you know, leads to instability.”

“I understand what you mean. As a sign of appreciation,” Tuthmosis continued letting the remark slide, “I named my Captains princes. They, in turn, will gladly collect our one-fifth. There is great respect for us. I received great gifts from the kings of Ashshur and Sangar, and even from the less dangerous Great Khatti. A display of power is necessary sometimes.

“I turned over the fields around Megiddo to Egyptian farmers. Fruitful districts provided a welcome contribution to the army's rations. But we did not take all. I made sure that there was enough for them to live well if they work. The ships we built in the great waterfront of Memphis performed admirably. As planned, they moved along the coast supplying us all the way. My strategy worked better than I anticipated.”

“Tuthmosis, I wish I had been there to see it all,” AmunRa interjected honestly.

“I swore I would ride at the head of my troops,” Tuthmosis continued. “In an effort to surprise them I chose the direct and more difficult route. After three days of forced marches we arrived at the mouth of the wady. On the south, the enemy had their forces at the edge of the plain at Taanach, while the north wing was deployed nearer Megiddo. They had not expected me to come this way. I halted my troops until noon when the sun's shadow turned. This would put the sun on our backs, and we marched south against Megiddo, along the bank of the brook Kina. The vultures flew ahead of me on my chariot of gold. Suddenly two hawks appeared in front of the marching columns. You should have seen it, AmunRa. They seemed to lead with panoply of arms like Horus, Brandisher of Arms, Lord of Action, and the Mount of Theban. The enemy forces were on both sides of us, but we routed them. They fled with frightened faces, and left their horses and chariots behind. The long siege started. That was an ugly affair. All the princes of the northern countries

were cooped up. The capture of Megiddo was like the capture of a thousand towns. You will be pleased to hear that I thanked Amun profusely.”

“That was a good public display. I like that touch. I just hope you did not offend the vanquished.”

They talked calmly, late into the night. There was a pause in the conversation, the palms rustling in the night breeze as their reflections in the shallow court fountains multiplied among the ripples. AmunRa turned to Tuthmosis; he was finally sleeping. It was good to have his brother home again.

The next morning Tuthmosis said to his brother, “I had a strange experience during the battle. I am told, as I can’t remember the events, that close to the end of the day, when the battle had already been decided, as I charged in my chariot at a full gallop, my horse kicked up a stone and it hit me right in my cheekbone. I probably lost consciousness for a moment and fell backwards with the blow. I smashed the back of my head against the ground. I got up quickly, and walked over to my chariot. My captains encircled me and we slowly retreated. My gaze was unfocused and they asked me if I was all right. I felt fine, and said so. I felt tightness around my right arm and saw that I still had the necklace that my queen gave me for good luck wrapped around it. You know, and everybody knows, that she stayed here in Egypt.”

“Yes, of course. What are you getting to?”

“I turned to my captains and asked them, ‘Am I meeting my fair queen?’ I was tied to the belief that I was soon to see her. ‘No, they explained. She is in Egypt, safe at the palace.’ ‘Then let’s go to the palace,’ I responded, thinking we were nearby. Naturally, they looked at me, wondering what was going on. Shortly afterwards, when we got to the camp, I asked, ‘Why am I on this chariot?’

‘Because you led your army into battle. You a had a great victory today.’

“I nodded and got off. I felt the pain on my cheek, rubbed it and asked, “Why does my face hurt?”

“As you led your army, a rock was kicked up by your horse and hit you.”

“I never have been hit in the face,” and I added, as a joke, ‘What is the purpose of leading my army if I can’t even remember doing so.’ I thought it was so funny that I laughed.

“Later, the feeling that I needed to see my queen kept intruding. I said, ‘I need to see my queen.’ And again they told me the necklace had just reminded me of her and that she was not around. I asked again why my cheek hurt. Again, they explained what happened, and again, I joked about how funny it seemed to lead my army and not remember. I was delighted with my own joke. AmunRa, I could not form new memories, and I forgot everything that

happened more than a few moments earlier earlier. Consequently I would return to the same subject, ‘Why did my face hurt? And the same joke.’

“My captains patiently recounted, over and over, the events of the day. Realizing that I could not remember anything recent, they queried to see what else I could have forgotten. They quickly determined that I could not remember anything relating to the last two years. However, I knew the names of soldiers I had just met. Faces and names were unaffected, in a separate memory arrangement. I also remembered places, I knew where I was and could easily describe the local layout. My orientation was completely untouched. Yet, I could not remember how I got there. I could only remember very recent snippets of conversation before they faded as if they had never occurred.

“A guard was instructed to be with me at all times. He was told to respond over and over, if necessary, to my repeated questions. I soon came to realize, by his expressions—because he was annoyed—and knew this meant that I had already asked the question before. I realized that something in my head had been rattled. My ability to move events from a working memory—relating to the recent past, lasting a few breaths—to a more permanent memory, had been disrupted. Yet, I could remember many other types of things, and obviously I could read emotional expressions quite well.

“My common sense and thinking seemed intact, and slowly through the night, I could remember more of the recent past. By the next morning, I could remember the previous night. But still, I couldn’t remember events of the day before and perhaps the last three months. Slowly, during the next two days, I began to remember more. About a week later, the only thing I could not remember was the battle. And even today, I can’t remember the rock hitting me in the face and tumbling backwards off my chariot. It is strange, but true: an injury of the cheekbone or the back of the head eliminates the capability of shaping new memories, yet other types of memories were intact. The experience made me think a lot about the fragility and the nature of our memories, about who we truly are. It made me think about Moluk.

“I asked my captains to bring to my notice any cases of head injuries that produced any odd behavior. They brought me a man who had been impaled with an arrow right above his left eye. The surgeons did a great job of pulling out the arrow and sewing him up. Weeks later he still had no specific memories of his past and therefore was completely uncertain about who he was. He remembered the name of his wife and children, but not much else. He also had poor memory for ongoing events, similar to what happened to me. His sense of well-being evaporated. It was eerie. He expressed no desire to live. He reminded me of Moluk and his dark moods.

“A couple of months later, he sniffed the odor of a tea, apparently a tea his wife made all the time, and in a stunning moment he remembered the tea and his head immediately filled with memories. At first it was a tumble of ideas, but slowly they rearranged themselves into a comprehensible whole. It was amazing to see someone who had lost all his life recover it in an instant. Not all his memory problems were resolved, but he recovered his sense of self and his melancholy lifted.

“One of my captains suffered a similar injury, but on the other side, an arrow above the right eye. He insisted that his wife was waiting for him and he needed to go home. He couldn’t remember ongoing events or hardly anything from his previous life. He seemed to be stuck in one time and place. His life was dominated by anxiety about needing to go see his wife. Unable to remember any other periods of his life, he was emotionally trapped, he could not escape the persistent feeling that he needed to return soon to his home.

“A soldier was hit on the right side of the head, and in contrast with me, he could not remember places he had been; he even had trouble getting back to his own tent in the camp. He simply forgot everything relating to finding his way through familiar places. Another man suffered serious injury to his left side, slightly above and in front of the ear. He forgot how to speak, and could only utter incomprehensible gibberish. However, he seemed to act normal, and apparently thought that when he spoke he made sense. Another man was hit behind the ear, and he seemed to be practically normal, but he could not remember answers to specific questions, like how long ago we left Egypt or whether we had been in battle in the morning or afternoon, things like that,” Tuthmosis recounted.

“I sense that you have stumbled upon some important knowledge.” AmunRa nodded encouragingly.

“We use memories to help our senses identify things,” Tuthmosis continued. “Hearing memories form words out of sounds and eventually language. Language in turn is used to think with voices inside our heads. Visual memories are used for imagination or to maneuver objects in our heads. Visual memories can be another method of thinking. Our memories are stored as echoes of our experiences. They are always there—not necessarily accessible, but under the right conditions, sometimes with much effort, we can remember almost anything. There are three different types of life memories: life period memories, like our childhoods; general event memories, like when we went to Farafra, and particular event memories, like Moluk’s death. These levels provide a structure to our life-memories. This leads to the idea that there is no single echo in our memory that has a one-to-one connection with the rational

experience of recollecting the past. Instead, memories are always constructed by combining echoes from each of the three levels of our life memories. Just as memories for particular events are formed from many pieces like a puzzle, so are the stories of our lives,” Tuthmosis said philosophically.

“That is a lot to think about, Tuthmosis. Occasionally I felt Moluk fall into a condition where he could not remember certain things, especially happy memories. Didn’t you?” AmunRa asked.

“Now that you mention it, yes. But how can memories relate to suicide?” Tuthmosis said after a small pause. The two brothers parted with that thought.

A few days later, AmunRa joined Tuthmosis in the garden.

“I keep thinking about Moluk and what we are doing,” AmunRa said.

“What do you mean?”

“This was your eighth military campaign, successful like all, but at what cost? Life is hard enough, unpredictable enough, without the vagaries of war. How great was Moluk’s suffering to lead him to end his life? We have eradicated hunger. The suffering of disease should be the only other torment that any man should face. Yet, what we do to each other is very often worse than any agony life has to offer. There is hunger in other lands and disease everywhere. The uncertainty of the weather can cause death, especially if at sea or in the desert; that is in the hands of the gods. The killing and persecuting that men do is indefensible.

“We have followed the principles set down by our ancestors, from the time of Snefru and Nefermaat, and perfected by the ones that followed. We have always been guided to do what is best for most. The naked ambition of a few men led to some predictable diversions, but our strength is based on the preservation of Secret Codices in the service for all. Our greatest success is eradicating hunger. In all the lands of Upper and Lower Kingdom there is not one hungry person. With abundant food, our numbers increase, and our people become stronger.”

“Still, I wonder if some of the Pharaohnic secrets were lost during the Hyksos’ rule. They took over the delta region in the north for more than a hundred years, disrupting parts of our stable kingdom,” Tuthmosis commented.

“The Hyksos are a good example of what ethnic hatred does. Moses is trying to use it now. It is a cheap way to misguide ignorant people. Their ingenious lies turned our people against us.”

“Only for a century, and only because they had better weapons. People went hungry and it was easy to blame us for that. Eventually the Secret Codices prevailed. Food distribution was reenacted.” Tuthmosis countered.

“I know that that part of the knowledge is safe. But we can never know what she hid from us, especially since Hashepsowe divided some of the knowledge among us. I can only guess. In general it would not have mattered, as we were all united as she had planned. But then Moluk died, Moses disappeared and everything changed. Now, he insists on being the leader of his people and agitates the Hebrews. What a nightmare. He is blaming all their problems on us.”

“AmunRa, all other nations fear us—”

“—And respect us,” interjected AmunRa.

“Those Asiatics must respect us.”

“But more importantly, they should love us. That should be the goal.”

“I have pushed our borders so far away that many generations will live without fear of invasion. There will be peace, if not love, for many years.”

“But we have the Asiatics in our midst. A nation inside our nation.”

“It is unavoidable. We still have borders, and those living near them will live in fear: they from us, and we from them. They, from our powerful armies. We, from their thirst to have what we have. How can we make sure neighboring nations aren’t jealous of us?”

“That is simple. They won’t be jealous when they have more.”

“What do you mean, AmunRa?”

“Well, that is the answer, Tuthmosis.”

“We give them more than to our own people? Are you proposing that we also give the Asiatics more? We have given them the same as our people. That would play into Moses’s hands. He has been trying to control the Pharaohnic tribute. He thinks he is some reborn-version of Joseph.”

“No, no. We need to keep a tight control. But we must insure they have more to gain from cooperating than fighting us.”

“And how do you propose to achieve this?” Tuthmosis asked sarcastically. “How? Moses already has his hands on some of the tribute the Hebrews owe us. He is even reviving the old myths of the great flood and that they are the descendants of Noah, some god-chosen character whose children will populate all nations.”

“We can deal with that, but the most obvious way is through trade. We eradicated hunger with more food and better distribution. We stamp out men’s jealousies of each other by constructing more dwellings, by making more cloths, more of everything. We then trade all our surplus goods fairly. To be able to do this, we need to have a well-fed population, free of war and sickness. We need our people to respect other people. We cannot have our people thinking that the Nubians, because they are dark skinned, or the

Hebrews, because of their language or god, are any less than us,” AmunRa argued passionately. “I see a nation where all men, of all races, of all languages, of all religions, can congregate in peace; a nation where all people have the right to freedom, food and happiness; a nation where disease is the only enemy to be conquered; a nation that can put its strongest and smartest to relieve misery, instead of leading armies that cause it.”

“Nice words, AmunRa. But first you would need everyone to be more educated than us. Petty princes, from time immemorial, exploit anything for their personal gain, especially old racial rivalries. We have reached this standing because we trade in fears: fear of the next life; fear of bad times; fear of invaders. We provide happiness in the next life; in this life, protection from starvation and security from imaginary enemies. History is the story of how a few take advantage of the most. The raw, naked ambition of men to control others cannot be changed.”

“Tuthmosis, think about us. We are not here to take advantage of others.”

“Yet, we live better than all, like gods. Just look around you,” Tuthmosis said pointing at the fountains and gardens.

“We have attempted for over a thousand years to maintain stability and redirect our people’s resources to where they are needed. Eliminating hunger has been the best means for peace and prosperity. Our authority might stem from fear, but the projection of this rule is always with the best interest of our people at heart. That is the key. Never have so many enjoyed such security with a full stomach.”

“I understand what you mean, and I know you would add that Moluk would tell us best how to do this. But it is different with our neighbors. How exactly do you think we can do this?” Tuthmosis asked seriously.

“At the moment, we are the strongest nation. We are unchallenged. Our granaries are bursting; there is no danger of hunger. Our armies are strong; there is no danger of invasion. If we send some food to our neighbors, there will be less cause for them to want to raid our borders. Moluk was the one that knew most about storing and distributing all these matters. I still miss him. I wish he were here to help us,” AmunRa said lowering his gaze sadly.

“AmunRa, as things stand, our neighbors must pay, just like any of our people, Pharaoh’s one-fifth. Are you saying that we should use the resources of our own people to feed others?”

“Our people voluntarily pay their one fifth, Tuthmosis, whereas conquered people perceive this as a severe war tribute. But, as Moluk would remind us, the main purpose of having excess food is to be able to redistribute it

to whomever, where or when needed. The main reason for doing all this is to avoid hunger and maintain stability. And we know that well-fed, happy people are also healthier. We need to convince neighboring princes that their best interests are served by paying tribute; include them into our distribution plans, and show them the wisdom of our ways.”

“That is the problem. Petty, brute chieftains don’t care about their own mothers, even less about their people. We can easily grow more crops than anyone because the Nile floods replenish the good earth every year. The Nile makes hauling, even over long distances, easy. We can sail south against the current, and row north with it. The mighty Nile is what makes our Kingdom strong, and the deserts protect our borders, AmunRa. Other nations are nothing more than shepherds wandering around the Asiatic wilderness to the east. They can hardly feed themselves.”

“We need to convince our people that they can afford to give to others without due burden on them. And I have a plan for that. What is more, I have already started construction of new sections for the temple of Karnak and Luxor. Come, let me show you.”

AmunRa and Tuthmosis walked together. Their cobra uraeus reflected the sunlight off their golden bellies. Everyone they encountered prostrated himself or herself as they passed by.

“Moluk hated all this. He insisted that we should do away with these greater-than-Horus-is-Pharaoh rituals,” Tuthmosis said as he looked at the several hundred people lying on the ground all around them as a sign of respect.

“Now you are talking my specialty,” AmunRa responded. “They will only obey us if they think we are their protectors and have special powers. Believe me. We need all the I-am-greater-than-Horus demonstration we can create.”

“You could be right, AmunRa. But one thing is true. I, militarily, can protect my people from all our neighbors, even if they formed a coalition. We are more powerful than all combined.” Tuthmosis smiled at the thought.

They approached the vast complex of Karnak. It was built on two axes and spread outwards from the shrine of Pharaoh Senusert I. For half a millennia, successive Pharaohs had added, sometimes destroying one part and using the materials to build another hall, to the size of this religious center. Amun, the Sun-God was venerated here. One theme, one main god, Amun, the all-powerful sun had been equated with Pharaoh.

“I will build the Hall of Records. The walls will be decorated with all your military glories, but I will make sure that the goods sowed from these

campaigns are shown. In relief, in much detail, I will show all the exotic plants and birds that you brought back from your travels.”

They walked outside to the big courtyard flanking the great rectangular pool. Hashepsowe’s huge obelisk, made of one, single, pink granite slab from Aswan, loomed over them. They both looked up.

“You will notice,” AmunRa began, “the obelisk is wider at the base and ever so gently tapers toward the top. This is done for two reasons: first, stability, as the base weighs more than the top; and, second, for ease of shipping. A tapered shape allows for a greater portion of the obelisk to be hanging out, lessening the possibility of cracking it while moving it. Now look carefully at the hieroglyphs. Look at them from here,” he said pointing to the base in front of them, “upwards to the top,” waiving his hand in an upward swing that ended pointing to the tip of the obelisk. After a pause, for dramatic effect, AmunRa asked, “What can you tell me about the hieroglyphs, Tuthmosis?”

“Well, it tells the story of our dear Great Mother, Hashepsowe,” he responded sarcastically.

“No. I don’t mean that. What can you tell me about their size?”

“Size?” Tuthmosis asked perplexed. AmunRa waited. “All the hieroglyphs are the same size, from the bottom to the top. That is obvious.” Tuthmosis said impatiently.

“That is an illusion,” AmunRa laughed in triumph. “They only seem so. The truth is, as you move up the obelisk, the hieroglyphs are bigger and bigger, so they appear to be the same size from the point of view of the person on the ground. It is a question of viewpoint. If you were a vulture, and looked down from the top, the hieroglyphs, from top to bottom, would appear to be diminishing in size faster than they truly are. The point of view is the clue, Tuthmosis.”

Shortly afterwards, Tuthmosis and AmunRa walked among a long causeway communicating Luxor and Karnak.

“I will line this avenue with criosphinxes, the same as the entrance to the complex at Karnak. Amun, the sun god, will walk down this pathway every morning as the sun rises and come visit his mistress in the temple of Luxor. Using perspective, with the methods invented by Nefermaat, I will give all the people a unique point of view. It is all about illusions; people see what they want to believe. I will add two temples, one in Luxor and one in Karnak. The main entrance will be taller than ten men standing on each other’s shoulders and wider than three men with their arms extended. Consecutive entrances, like layers, will allow access ever closer to Amun. The innermost sanctuary is where the Gods, and of course Pharaoh, reside.

“All the entrances will be perfectly aligned with the movement of the sun. Each successive entrance is made smaller, but proportionately to the bigger one preceding it. The final entrance will only be slightly bigger than a normal door. But this is the whole point; just like the hieroglyphs of the obelisk, with the proper viewpoint, appear to be the same size by making them bigger as they recede, the consecutive entrances, with the proper perspective, though smaller and smaller, will appear to be the same size. The people standing outside the temple with the right point of view will be tricked to see all successive entrances the same size by tricking the viewer to think that the entrances are farther and farther away than they really are creating the illusion of a huge temple, many times bigger than reality. The interesting thing, is that you, or anyone for that matter, who is placed under the last entrance, when seen from outside, will seem to be taller than ten men standing on each other’s shoulders, because the last door, the only frame of reference, appears to be the same size as the front entrance. The people will see Tuthmosis III, the God-Pharaoh, talking to Amun in his sanctuary. They will even see Hathor with Tuthmosis. People will come from all over to see Pharaoh and the Gods.”

“Very ingenious. But how, tell me, can you keep all this building, and its construction details, a secret?”

“I will build in sections and I will use our troops to keep people away. I have already told many of my dreams where Amun instructed me to make the new temples.”

“Who is your builder?” Tuthmosis asked.

“Well, I am. You forget that my training is in building and calculating.”

“No. I didn’t forget that. But you are the High Priest. You worry me. You could be a real challenge to my titles, AmunRa.”

“All my plans are to undermine Moses, not you. He is our only threat. If we are to succeed, we need the support of his people, the Hebrews. They have become too many.”

“Some say they are more numerous than the grains of sand on the banks of the Nile. Our people believe you are more powerful than Moses. But how powerful is Moses in the eyes of his people? The illusion and the belief is the important thing.”

“You are right. Moses doesn’t let his people mingle with us. He has told them that his god curses us and that anyone who mixes with us is twice cursed. He is receiving part of Pharaoh’s tribute. Most of what I can do has no effect on the Hebrews. They believe in their God. They don’t come to our temples.” AmunRa shrugged frustrated.

1448 B.C.

Ten years later the Upper and Lower kingdoms continued to prosper, but Moses continued to separate his people from the Egyptians.

“Moses is doing the same things you do,” Tuthmosis spoke amiably with his half-brother, AmunRa. “But his people still stand in awe of Pharaoh. Everyone does. We have been doing this for too many centuries. Pharaoh is still Pharaoh. Pharaoh is a god.”

“Still, it is his God against Pharaoh. Pharaoh is real and his God is intangible. That is a smart move. Soon I will make Pharaoh more god-like. The floors in front of the temple entrances, built with white, highly polished marble are almost finished. According to my calculations, at the right time of day and year, the sun’s light will be reflected into the farthest recesses of the temple. I will bring daylight into the darkest corners of the temple. Very soon, the people will see the gods that live in the temples, and Pharaoh commingling with them.

“The temples are the dwellings of the gods. How can Moses counter that?”

“He disinterred the bones of Joseph from the necropolis next to the Great Pyramid. He told his people that Joseph’s remains don’t belong next to Pharaoh’s; that they need to be taken to the Promised Land. Moses has convinced his people that he is to God the same as Pharaoh is to God, and that his prophet is his brother Aaron. He’s always finding ways to increase his own importance.”

“Do you remember when Moses came and threw his walking rod on the floor in front of me and it turned into a cobra? Remember how I laughed and called the wise men and sorcerers to perform the same trick? Do you remember, AmunRa, when all the magicians, with their tricks, threw their rods on the floor and they all turned into serpents? You have to give Moses credit; he calmly called Aaron, who came running in and threw his rod on the ground and it turned into the biggest serpent. Then he had the gall of demanding from me, Pharaoh, ‘Let my people go, that they may serve me in the wilderness; and behold you have not yet obeyed.’ I wish that Moses had died in the desert and not Moluk! He’s like a thorn on my side.”

“Don’t even think like that, Tuthmosis. Hashepsowe proclaimed Moses First among Equals, even with Moluk. Our father compensated that by proclaiming you Pharaoh as a young boy. But our Great Mother of God made sure that Moses continued to be First among Equals. Even after Moluk’s death, even though Moluk was her own blood and Moses was adopted, even after he vanished in the desert, Hashepsowe continued to rain praise on Moses. She

enhanced the Moses' aspect of the trilogy of cobras: instead of the Father, the Son and the Builder, she changed the Mother for the Father, and proclaimed Moses and Tuthmosis, in that order of importance, as the new trilogy. She used all possible elements to weaken your position and strengthened her own. She had prepared the way for the return of Moses, and to the eyes of many, after her death, he should have been her successor. We can't harm him. Whether we like him or not, he is for practical purposes, like his God, untouchable."

"You are right. We can't kill him, and he is, after all, a brother to us. But we can't let him take control either."

"We should negotiate with him. Perhaps we should do as he says, 'Let his people go.' That way, we would have less to worry about. Let them go to Sinai. Why would we care if they went to the desert?"

"We can't let him go. Moses' knowledge of the Pharaohnic Secret Codices must never leave Egypt. It shouldn't even be spread beyond a few family members. Only the Enlightened Ones can share in it."

"Tuthmosis, Moses thinks he is one of the Enlightened Ones and that his children have more right to this information than yours. But more important is: how much does Moses know? And does he know more than us?"

"Continue with your plans, AmunRa; let's hope that we can reach an agreement with him. Summon him."

A few days later Moses arrived in Luxor.

"I demand to be the leader of my people. I have already said that," Moses spoke vehemently to his stepbrothers as soon as they were alone. "Do I need to repeat myself?"

"I don't even understand why your people would want to go to some forsaken desert and leave these rich lands. Your demands are not only unreasonable, Moses, but you go to your people and tell them that my heart hardened and it is I that didn't let them go," Tuthmosis complained. "I understand you can't tell them the truth, but don't blame it on me. AmunRa has come up with some suggestions. Perhaps we can find a way to work this out to everyone's satisfaction."

Tuthmosis paused for effect, looking for Moses' reaction, then continued, "You know I can't let you reveal the Secret Knowledge, the governance principles and rules of behavior that have been passed down for more than a thousand years from Pharaoh to Pharaoh. Especially all the information related to the pyramids. Our power rests on the immortality of the soul and the pyramids that protect the worldly body."

"I understand your meaning, Tuthmosis. Would it be acceptable to you if I found alternate ways to disseminate such ideas among my people? Let's

say I wrote a set of rules on stone, and you could check them, of course, and I told my people that our God gave them to me. These would be the only rules we would use. Would that satisfy you?" Moses was looking for a way out of the impasse.

"Perhaps. You would need to modify some things, and still not mention others," Tuthmosis said. Hoping to get some indication from Moses about what he really knew of the secret Pharaohnic Codices, he added, "Obviously, things like, 'Thou shall not kill, or thou shall not steal' are fine."

"Thou shall not commit adultery."

"That's fine."

"Would you have anything against 'Thou shalt have no other gods before me'?"

"Moses, this is what I mean! The first thing you want to do is take my place," Tuthmosis objected.

"I don't mean that I am a god. I mean that our God shalt not accept other gods before him," Moses tried to clarify. "I have explained that the idea is to have one God and only one. My people will not be idolaters. That will be forbidden. That way, they will not look into any of your customs and it will be less probable that anyone can make connections between the pyramids and Pharaoh."

"Remember, Tuthmosis," AmunRa interjected, "that Moses is trying, not very convincingly, to transfer the concept of Pharaoh as god to another much greater, omniscient, omnipotent God. One God that lives in the heavens and created earth and doesn't need help from anybody; nor even company or sex," AmunRa joked.

"Let's try to keep this going forward," Tuthmosis added placatingly. "For argument's sake, let's suppose we can accommodate such ideas and work out the details. Still, you clearly understand that you can't be allowed to go and tell anyone, today or in the future, that our ancestors did not build the pyramids. This would surely challenge our entire system. Our political and religious beliefs stem from the original pyramids and the explanations proffered for their true purpose."

"I promise you, on the memory of my forefathers, on the memory of Joseph and Jacob down to Abraham, that I will make sure that nothing relating to the pyramids will be carried or mentioned by my people."

"I can't enforce this when I am not around," Tuthmosis said. He looked into Moses' eyes, searching for dishonesty and finding none, continued, "So listen carefully: If I hear, or any of my successors hears of anything relating to the pyramids coming from your people, now or ever, Pharaoh will personally lead his armies and destroy you or your successors. And you must consider these last words as information added to the secret Pharaohnic Codices that

will be passed on down. Future Pharaohs will enforce this. It is not an idle threat, and it is as much as I can grant you, Moses. It is up to you.”

“None of my people know anything pertaining to the secret Pharaohnic legacy. I promise you I will ensure that no one with any of that knowledge will be among my people. Let’s make a Covenant, you and me: I will build a system, like the Secret Codices; let’s call it the Ark of the Covenant, to pass on the knowledge that we agree. This includes the commandments on stone, the history of my people and our God, but most importantly, and this will be shared with only a select few, instructions to ensure that none of the information pertaining to the pyramids or Pharaoh will ever be disseminated or made public, under penalty of death.”

“I think we are getting close to an agreement so we can let Moses go with his people,” AmunRa smiled. “We can work out the details.”

“And one more thing, Moses.” Tuthmosis said, still harboring doubts. “Your people must voluntarily agree to leave. No one can be forced.”

“They want to go to the Promised Land.”

“All of you must be crazy.” Tuthmosis shook his head

“I’ll bring the carved stones with the allowed commandments, along with papyri denoting our official history, and more importantly a scroll instructing in detail what can not be divulged, ever, and the consequences. I will give up the Pharaohnic uraeus. You must trust me, Tuthmosis. I will put my brother Aaron and all his descendants in charge of the Tabernacle that houses the Covenant. They will ensure that no one, under penalty of death, divulge your Egyptian ways.”

“I trust you, but you must trust me, as a brother. But more importantly, Moses, trust that my successors will extinguish yours if you do not observe the Covenant. As further incentive for you to observe it, I will not demand any tribute from the lands that your refer to as the Promised Ones. I will leave you in peace. What will you tell your people?”

“About you? I will say that God softened your heart and allowed them to leave. I will tell them that God demands that they never speak of Egypt. That they never do like they did when they lived in Egypt. Then, I will tell them you changed your mind, that God hardened your heart and you sent your armies after us, but they should not worry—because you were all drowned by our God in the Red Sea.” Moses smiled and nodded. Then he embraced his two stepbrothers.

“We will work out the details and prepare everything. You have nothing to fear as long as you and your people keep your word, Moses. Go in peace with all your people.” Tuthmosis spoke thus to his stepbrother.

A Disappearing Act

Sunday morning aunt Minnie was on the phone with Larry.

“Do you know anything? How can I say this?” Larry asked cautiously.

“Just say it,” Minnie encouraged.

“Is it possible that my father could’ve been molested?”

“What do you mean molested? Sexually?”

“Have you heard anything like that?”

“Why are you asking me this, Larry?”

“My father left a few stories. I think they can be a clue to what happened to him. Two of them relate to very graphic sexual encounters, mostly about forced oral sex.”

“Your father is a creative, intelligent man. Just because he wrote about sex, doesn’t mean he was sexually traumatized.”

“Dr. Boukhardt has a theory.”

“Is he a psychologist?”

“No. He’s a psychiatrist.”

“What do psychiatrists know?”

“Could this be possible, Aunt Minnie?”

“I don’t think so.”

“Why do you question psychiatrists’ knowledge?”

“Did you know that I suffered from anxiety attacks, Larry?”

“No.”

“Well, I did, for years. They were so debilitating that for months I wouldn’t dare leave my house.”

“That is called agoraphobia.”

“Whatever. The fact is I was afraid of having an anxiety attack in a public place. I saw a psychoanalyst for two years; a complete waste of time. Then I went to see a psychologist, for therapy, you know, hoping she could help. She kept asking me about my sexual life. She wanted to read all kinds of significance into my relation with your father, and my father, and even my grandfather. She insisted there had to be some traumatic event that was causing my anxiety. Finally, after much prodding, I remembered I got lost

in the supermarket once and they had to call my mother over the public system. Unable to find any traces of sexual abuse, the psychologist blamed my attacks on this. The truth of the matter is that my anxiety attacks didn't abate. Whether they were caused by my being lost at the supermarket or not. I spent four years trying in vain to improve my situation."

"Did your anxiety attacks just go away?"

"Not exactly. One day, at a party, I met a doctor who heard me talking about my anxiety attacks. He gave me his card and invited me to go see him. He explained that in many cases this is a chemical imbalance. He prescribed Tagamil and my attacks were over. Slowly, he diminished the dose, and eventually I was off medication. One little pill solved my problem. There was no traumatic event, Larry. Not in my life, not in your father's. Whatever happened to him has no connection with his childhood. He had a pretty normal past. There were no beatings, or tying up in closets, or burning with cigarettes. We had good parents that loved us."

"I agree with you, but I just wanted to make sure."

"Your father did suffer a traumatic loss. Your mother's terrible death was a huge blow to him, as you well know. And of course, to you also. If the psychiatrists want to look at traumatic events they should look there."

"Aunt Minnie, don't you remember that they did. The doctors diagnosed him as suffering persecutory delusions, moderate depression and panic attacks. It was my father who insisted that they were truly after him, and that he was not delusional. And yes, he insisted, he grieved terribly for my mother, but that he was not depressed. He insisted his grief was normal. But, he did accept he suffered panic attacks. He never denied that."

"Tell me, Larry, do you believe the doctors or your father?"

"I think the doctors were on the right track, even if they could not help him. And my father is partly to blame, because you can't help someone who refuses help."

"I disagree with you. But, what do I know? You're the expert. Remember, in this life nothing is for sure. The longer I live, the more I experience things that I never thought were possible."

"Like what, Aunt Minnie?"

"Well, like your father's disappearance. Keep your chin up, Larry. Just keep in mind who loves you."

In the meantime, on the second story of Precinct 19, O'Malley sat with his feet on his desk sipping stale, hot coffee from a paper cup. O'Malley, as usual, wore his navy blue NYPD police uniform. In contrast, Detective

Ramirez was wearing a sky-blue suit, a navy blue shirt, and a different pink tie. He saw O'Malley and turned into his small cubicle. He carried a manila folder, which he laid on the desk.

"These stories keep bugging me. What does a Chinese acupuncturist, and two Egyptian Pharaohs have to do with Fogarty's disappearance? And here," Ramirez tapped on the manila folder, "is another one. This story is more . . . I wouldn't know what word to use, more revelatory about Lawrence's beliefs, more revelatory about how he thought outside the box, more revelatory about how he could offend some people."

"Have you found any evidence that someone would want to hurt Fogarty?" O'Malley asked.

"I hate to admit it, but no, I haven't found anything yet. I'm still fishing, just possibilities. That is why these stories keep bugging me. I don't have anything else to work on. You got anything new on your disappearing theories, O'Malley?" Ramirez asked as he poured the last of the stale coffee into another paper cup from the stained glass pot on the old coffee machine.

"Yes, but also, nothing conclusive," O'Malley said reaching for a file in his desk drawer. "But, is there anything useful in the stories Lawrence left?"

"I'm not sure they mean anything even though Larry insists these are the clue to what happened to his father. He thinks more stories are going to turn up and lead us to his body, or at minimum tell us how he did himself in. You and I know that someone killed most people who disappeared, and great effort is done to hide the evidence, hence it is hard to find a body. A few others disappear under their own volition, mostly criminals, or people avoiding an ex-wife or the IRS."

"Did you know that when a body isn't found, seven years have to elapse before you can dispose of the person's estate?"

"That's a long time, but what has that have to do with this case?"

"Pay attention, Ramirez. Lawrence Fogarty has not filed an income tax return for the last five years. He had a very nice income—reported assiduously by Norton Tax Service for the six years previous to that—and as best as I have been able to ascertain, he continued to receive, up till last month, his quarterly profits from the sand pit in Modesto."

"What about his bank accounts?"

"I found only one, in Chase Manhattan. The balance is about \$26,000.00. From what he spent, there should have been more, especially since he didn't pay his taxes for five years. Every month there was a \$7,000.00 cash withdrawal. I haven't been able to figure out where that went."

“What do you guess his back taxes might be?” Ramirez asked with a raised eyebrow as he sipped his coffee.

“A hundred-and twenty, maybe a hundred-and-fifty-thousand max, plus penalties and interest.”

“That’s significant, but it doesn’t seem enough to disappear and retire.”

“Maybe he had other incomes that I haven’t discovered. Larry said his father was from Mexico. Perhaps he has businesses down there. Remember he mentioned that his grandfather had a gravel business in Acapulco?”

“I see what you mean.”

“I talked to Pankau, the private investigator who specializes in finding missing people. He told me the best way to disappear successfully, is to break with your past and not communicate with anyone from your past life. If you do this, it is almost impossible to track you down. Ideally, there should be no links between the old and new lives. Even better if you can fake your death.”

“I have to concede that if this is the game Lawrence Fogarty is playing, he is being extremely successful. What else did Pankau tell you?” Ramirez asked clearly intrigued by this line of reasoning.

“Let me see,” O’Malley said, stringing Ramirez out, checking some old notes. “It is easier to create a new identity by leaving the country. All you need to obtain fake papers is a deceased person’s birth certificate—preferably someone who died young, within a few years of your own birth. And, of course, Fogarty could have bought a stolen foreign passport. Pankau even told me that there is a company called Scope International, based in England, that sells passports for \$550.00 with whatever name, address, date of issuance and profession you wish.

“If you were born around the early forties, one of the favorite passports issued by this company, is from the country of Gdansk. The city of Gdansk only existed as a country for a couple of years, between the time the Nazis over ran Poland to invade Russia and the time the Russians pushed the Germans back and pulled down the Iron Curtain. And conveniently, all records of Gdansk were burned shortly after. Nobody could prove or disprove any claim of a citizen of Gdansk.

“For about \$100.00 each, this company offers a variety of guidebooks for the man who wants to legally avoid taxes or government interference.”

“Have you checked with the Airline Reporting Company and IATA?”

“Of course. No record of Lawrence Fogarty flying nationally or internationally.”

“Just for travel purposes, couldn’t Fogarty simply have had a Mexican passport?”

“I hadn’t thought about that. I’ll check it. But still, if it wasn’t a forged passport, it would have his real name.”

“I take it you have done the routine checks.”

“Yeah.” O’Malley flipped a few pages of his notes and read, “No speeding tickets, he didn’t leave the country on a U.S. passport, no DWI. Actually, he didn’t even own a car. His driver’s license expires next year and was in his wallet. No credit card activity since the day before he disappeared.”

“Did he have any debts?”

“Just small, credit card stuff. Nothing big.”

“The IRS after him?”

“Curiously, but not surprisingly, no.” Returning to his Pankau notes, O’Malley continued, “If you plan to disappear, the best thing is to pay cash for any expenses, so there can be no credit card traces. We do have missing cash, so that fits. Pankau recommends to transfer assets to loved ones before disappearing. Again, Fogarty had assigned Larry as a principal in his checking account. So, we could conclude, that yes, he did transfer his cash to Larry.”

“What about his apartment?” Ramirez raised an eyebrow.

“Same thing, Larry is on the deed of trust as co-owner. There is no mortgage. All paid for.” O’Malley returned to his notes.” Pankau said that the easiest way to find someone is through their women, or woman. Here, it seems like a dead end. Myrna is the only woman that seems to have visited him with some regularity, but she’s Larry’s age.”

“We can’t discount her. She’s a very good-looking woman, and Fogarty was not a bad sort. Twenty-seven year difference is big, but not insurmountable.”

“So far she says she doesn’t know anything. To her, it’s all a mystery. But remember, the number one rule for those with something to hide is, three can keep a secret if two of them are dead.”

“What are you trying to tell me, O’Malley?”

“That to disappear effectively, means telling no one; not about your dreams nor your plans—unless you plan to kill them. All it takes is one person’s slip of the mouth and the best carefully crafted plans will go to hell in a hand basket. I don’t think we’re going to find any written clues, no e-mails, no letters. Even less can we expect Tricky Dicky tapes to reveal us Fogarty’s inner most secrets.”

“He did leave some stories. Perhaps, there is something in them. Wait till you read this one here.” Ramirez said pointing to the manila folder on the table. “Definitely not like a written confession or a tape of a conversation, mind you. Maybe we should have the experts read the stories; they might

have a point of view different than ours. Obviously you don't lean towards Larry's suicide theory."

"No I don't. There seems a lot of thought put into the transfer of assets. I don't believe people that are irrational enough to kill themselves can do that. These things take time. For practical purposes, Larry is the real owner of his father's property and bank account."

"Well, he is his only son."

"Well, there is your motive. He is the one that benefits from his father's death. Maybe he killed Lawrence." O'Malley sarcastically kidded Ramirez.

"If there was more money, maybe. But, I really doubt it. He is less than two years from graduating as a neurologist, and he seems truly worried about his father. And yes, generally someone close is the most logical suspect in a murder. But we don't even have a murder yet, O'Malley."

"It just doesn't fit with a sudden suicide, that's all I'm saying."

"It fits with persecutory delusions. If a man were paranoid, it would be perfectly normal to transfer his assets. If you truly believe someone is going to kill you, or you're going to die soon, you would try to pass on to your loved ones as much as you can."

"That is true, but if he was planning to disappear for whatever other reasons, it also makes sense to transfer assets you can't take with you."

"Money would certainly be easy enough to take."

"There is cash missing."

"Were any of his services cancelled?"

"No." Consulting other notes, O'Malley recited, "Verizon current—no cell phone; Time-Warner Cable, Current; Con-Ed, current; Maintenance, current. No water bill, it is included in the maintenance."

"Of course, if he was planning to disappear, this has no significance. Any life or health insurance?"

"None. But remember, when no body is found, life insurance would take seven years to collect, whether it was a suicide, a murder or a staged disappearance. If anything, this seems to indicate that Lawrence didn't expect his body to be found."

"We can't be sure of that. What about the lab tests?"

"The drops were blood type A-negative. I haven't confirmed Lawrence's blood type, but Larry's mother's was also A-negative. And the lab says that traces of human skin—burnt, human skin—are attached to the electric barbecue-starter. All fingerprints can be explained and accounted for. I haven't asked for DNA testing."

Ramirez nodded taking in the information, then added, "What can you tell me about his medical records?"

"Besides the psychological records, there is none. I've never seen a guy so healthy."

"Wouldn't stress be a major contributor to health issues?"

"You would think so, but I haven't even found dental records. Can you imagine never experiencing the dentist's drill?"

"Maybe he was seeing a doctor in Mexico," Ramirez guessed. "Did he have a will?"

"I haven't uncovered one."

"What else do you have?"

"Pankau told me that ideally one should seek a place that offers anonymity, has a disorganized and foreign record-keeping system, a lower cost for comparable living, amenities comparable to previous lifestyle and legal protection. Only rarely will people settle for less than they are used to. On the minus side, there exist language and cultural barriers if you choose a foreign country."

"But not in Fogarty's case. He is from Mexico, he is bilingual."

"Brilliant deduction, Ramirez. Now you are thinking along the same lines I am. Yet, Pankau mentioned Belize as the better place to disappear. The official language is English."

"They also speak Spanish there. So looking for Fogarty, with a new identity, in all of Mexico, might not be enough. We should also look in Belize?" Ramirez chuckled. "Very well, I'll keep that in mind, O'Malley."

"Well, it fits. He has cash missing; he owes back-taxes; his money is not in the bank, probably abroad; his assets were assigned to his son; he leaves some clues that he might disappear—he called his son and suggested he was not doing well. He left his wallet, driver's license, credit cards, checkbook—because he wasn't going to use them; he's getting new ones. And Fogarty believed that they were after him, whether imagined or not; it could be a strong motivation to disappear. The profile matches. It all fits," O'Malley insisted. He paused to see if Ramirez was following, but he was staring out the window. "It's not so hard to get into Mexico," O'Malley continued. "A border crossing in Texas could be done with a minimum of ID—and a fake ID is also easily obtainable. He might be on his way there, right now."

"Have you checked if Fogarty set up any trusts?"

"I haven't uncovered any."

"Check to see if the gravel pit in Modesto might be sending money abroad or engaging any foreign services. Check the buses and railroads going south

from New York. Contact Mexican Immigration. It's a long shot, but if we find something, then we can narrow this one down."

"You still think it was foul play, don't you, Ramirez?"

"I do, but Larry doesn't. He believes that the stories his father left will help us figure out exactly what happened."

"You mean they are clues as to where and how he killed himself. The psycho guys might be of help in kidnapping cases, but I don't think that reading Lawrence's stories is going to give them or us much of anything,"

"Lawrence's stories talk about suicide and allude to memory problems, mood disorders. I'm sure the psycho department would have a field day with them. I'm less sure they would help us find him."

"If professionals did him in, we'll never know unless we get very lucky and find a body," O'Malley said.

"I did send the psychos copies. Who knows when someone will be able to evaluate them. It is very frustrating. Suicide, foul play, or a magical disappearing act. What other possibilities?"

"He had an accident? He drowned in the East River?" O'Malley said sipping his old, now cold coffee, trying to needle Ramirez with some brevity. "That's Larry's theory. He would accept that."

"I've listened to your theories, now let me be the devil's advocate, O'Malley," Ramirez pressed on, thinking out loud. "Consider for a moment that Larry's father's theories are correct."

"You mean that the killers of OJ's wife killed Lawrence's wife and are still after him?"

"No. What I meant are the implications of that."

"You mean that the drug trade is controlled by Americans with big pull?" O'Malley raised his eyebrows.

"Exactly. No, don't shake your head in disbelief. Hear me out." Ramirez chuckled. "The U.S. government spends sixty billion dollars a year on the war on drugs. The one thing this guarantees is that the price of drugs stays artificially high—very high, compared to the cost. The drug dealers use the Catholic liberals and the Christian right with equal effectiveness to assure that drugs remain illegal. Politicians find it easy to argue this case on moral grounds, and publicly seen to be doing good. You know, keeping the streets clean, and drugs out of children's hands. But, what they are really doing is driving the price and the profits of the drug dealers through the sky."

"Yeah, Ramirez. I've heard that argument before."

"Think about it. What is the DEA?"

"The Drug Enforcement Agency," O'Malley intoned sarcastically.

“What I mean is that it is not a special-operations unit,” Ramirez continued unfazed. “What they really do is compile information. They maintain a network of paid informers—with tax money—to produce detailed reports on all kinds of activities related to drug trafficking. They infiltrate drug organizations to keep tabs on who are producing, distributing, wholesaling, retailing. They put names on all the players. What they are doing is providing management information to the real bosses of the drug business. They report who is the competition or who is getting the idea of becoming independent. When the DEA acts, it is simply to curtail the activities of drug dealers low in the chain who are perceived as disobedient or disloyal to the drug lords. All paid by the taxpayer. If anyone gets out of line, the bosses simply have them arrested and prosecuted.”

“That’s all I need to hear,” O’Malley laughed good-naturedly.

“Not only that. Listen to me, O’Malley. Remember I worked in the Narcs Division. Most drug dealers, the ones on the street, live with their moms. What does this tell you?”

“That they love their mothers?”

“No. Seriously, what does it tell you?”

“That they can’t afford to live alone, because they hardly make any money.”

“Exactly. As best as I was able to determine, considering the number of hours they stand around on a street corner, they make about \$3.30 an hour. That is the worst paying job in the world, and if you add the risks, it is plainly insane. That’s why they live with their mothers. These guys report to a few bosses above them. And they only make about \$7.00 per hour. Along with bad pay, they stand on a corner all day and deal with a bunch of crackheads. They risk arrest as well as violence. There is a one in four chance of being killed.

“The head of the gang, that’s a different matter, he probably makes about \$100,000.00 a year, tax free. That’s more than you or me. At a level above him, there are some, called the board of directors that make up to half a million a year. This is one explanation of why these young men are easily recruited; they hope to move up the ranks to become members of the board of directors. On the downside, the members invariably are imprisoned at one time or another.”

“And who is on top of the board of directors?”

“That is the thing. We never get higher than that. This is when we are told that a bunch of foreigners run the drug business, there are no Americans ever involved. The President doesn’t know who these men are, neither the FBI nor the CIA. The fact remains, that only the very few men that we know of

make a substantial amount of money, but certainly not the billions related to the drug trade. So who does? Somebody must be making billions.”

“I’m hoping you’re going to tell me, Ramirez. I’m hoping you know more than the President, the FBI and the CIA.”

“Obviously I don’t know, O’Malley,” Ramirez said exasperated. “Back in the seventies, most laws, especially pertaining to marihuana, were weakened. But in the eighties, under Reagan, these laws were radically strengthened. The comprehensive Crime Control Act of 1984, the Anti-Drug Abuse Act of ’86, and the Anti-Drug Abuse Amendment Act of ’88 raised federal penalties.”

“Now I’m impressed, Ramirez,” O’Malley chuckled. “You love to show off your erudite knowledge, but please spare me, just give me the important details.”

“Some of the laws that were passed, especially in some states, are so bizarre that they only make sense if you see them as tools that can be used to eliminate the competition. Imagine this—penalties for a first marihuana offense range from probation to the death penalty. This means we can legally kill someone the drug bosses don’t like. Moreover, it is illegal to use the U.S. mail for the advertisement, import, or export of roach clips, water pipes, and even cigarette papers and can lead to imprisonment and fines of up to \$100,000.00. Penalties for dealing with radioactive waste aren’t that bad.”

“I think you’re going over the deep end, Ramirez.”

“There is a lot more,” Ramirez continued ignoring the jab. “Under civil forfeiture statutes, real estate, vehicles, cash, securities, jewelry and any property connected to a marihuana offense are subject to immediate seizure. You don’t need to prove that the goods were bought with drug money, only that they were involved in the commission of a crime. A yacht can be seized if a single marihuana joint is found on it. A house can be seized if a single marihuana plant is grown in it. Even after a defendant is found innocent, property may be seized and forfeited since the burden of proof that applies to people—beyond a reasonable doubt—does not apply in accusations against inanimate objects. Property can be forfeited without the owner being charged of a crime. Don’t you love it?”

“Yeah, I can see it is really easy to put someone, anyone, out of business. But you’re stretching it.”

“And on top of fines and incarceration, a convicted drug offender may face the revocation of up to 460 federal benefits like student loans, small business loans, farm subsidies and even professional licenses. Forget about welfare payments or food stamps. Murderers, rapists or child molesters remain eligible for all these benefits.”

“It can’t be,” O’Malley interrupted. “You gotta be exaggerating.”

“Well, a bit. Things vary. Here in New York possession of an ounce of marihuana brings a \$100.00 fine. In Louisiana, it could lead to a prison sentence of twenty years! In Montana a pound of marihuana could lead to a life sentence, contrasted to New Mexico where selling ten thousand pounds of marihuana could be punished with a maximum incarceration of three years. In some states, you can be subject to criminal charges for just being in the same room as someone who smokes, distributes or cultivates marihuana.”

“I remember reading about the guy in Oklahoma who was given two life sentences plus ten years for buying fifty pounds of marihuana from undercover agents in a reverse sting. Jesus Christ!”

“Speaking of Jesus Christ, glad you reminded me.”

“Reminded you of what?”

“You’re Catholic, right, O’Malley?”

“All Irish are Catholics. Aren’t all Hispanics?” O’Malley responded, wondering where this was going.

“What I mean is, do you believe in the Virgin Mary and that Christ was the Son of God? That kind of thing.”

“It is a little bit hard to believe in a virgin birth, and even harder to believe that Christ was the Son of God. But I do think there is a God and I go to mass with the wife and kids every Sunday. I was baptized and I did my First Communion. Didn’t you?”

“Yeah. My mother made do it. But I am not a churchgoer. I’m not even sure I believe in God. When I was a little kid, and my mama took me to church, I would stare at the image of the Christ, half-naked, crucified with nails through hands and feet, with a crown of thorns on his head dripping blood all over his face, with a big gash on his side, and I would think to myself, ‘If he is the son of god, I don’t want anything to do with that god. My own father would take better care of me and never allow me to be crucified.’ Of course, I never said that to my mama. She would probably have smacked me on the head.” Ramirez chuckled, picturing his mother admonishing him physically with a slap.

“My mother and my wife take it all very seriously, but personally, I don’t. It isn’t something important for me. My father-in-law says that we need someone to marry and bury us. The Catholic Church is part of the glue that holds society together, especially for the women. And most of their precepts are also held by all religions, so it isn’t all bad. But, why are you bringing all this up?”

“Do you believe that Jesus Christ existed?”

“Yes, of course. I believe that there was such a man, even if he wasn’t the Son of God.”

“I just want to make sure you could keep an open mind. My mother took me to see the dinosaur display at the Museum of Natural History, and I was more impressed with the fossils and the story of evolution than with the Genesis of the Bible. I could never buy much of what the Bible said. Since I was a kid I was always questioning religion. I need to see hard evidence to believe something. In Fogarty’s case, so far I have not seen any hard evidence. It’s all circumstantial. You have read the various stories that Fogarty wrote, the ones that Larry insists are clues to his suicide, haven’t you?” O’Malley nodded. “Since we don’t have any hard leads, perhaps we should pay some attention to that idea,” Ramirez said tentatively. “Here,” he tapped the folder on the desk, “is a really interesting story, one with a very different twist. Its about a manic-depressive.”

“Yeah, I’ve read them. But, personally, I don’t think they’re connected to anything. They are simply stories the guy wrote. It reminds me of the joke about the drunken guy looking for his car keys in the middle of the night by a lamppost. When they asked him if he had lost them near there, he answered, ‘No.’ When they asked him, ‘Then, why are you looking here?’ The drunk answered, ‘Because there is more light.’ What I mean is just because we have all these stories, doesn’t mean they are connected to anything at all. It doesn’t mean we have to read all sort of meanings into them. Yes, I must admit Larry knows quite a bit about suicide. Which reminds me, I’m meeting with Dr. Boukhardt tomorrow at noon.” O’Malley added with emphasis, “Don’t let me forget. I need to learn more about psychology. Maybe then I can find some parallels between the stories and Fogarty’s disappearance.”

“You keep checking the possibility that Fogarty disappeared voluntarily. I’ll continue to check if someone did him in. And both of us should look more seriously into the possibility of suicide. Not because of the stories, but because it is a possibility. And, for the record, read this story. It is very interesting,” Ramirez said as he opened the folder he had placed on the desk. “I just sent a copy to the psychos to see what’s their opinion. Tell me what you think. Love to hear your take on this.”

J.C., 10 A.D.

The three-tiered tower of the Lighthouse of Alexandria soared above the city. Built almost two and a half centuries before, it still was one of the wonders of the world. The tower was almost three hundred cubits tall. On land, it could be seen almost from five leagues away; approaching from the Mare Nostro it could be seen from farther away. The young boy, almost a man, stared at it through emerald green eyes. The lighthouse was a reminder of what could be achieved when you set your mind to it. His ancestors were kings; he could trace his lineage, through his mother Mary, down to King Solomon and David, and from them back to Moses, back to Joseph, Jacob and to Abraham. And from there, according to some, even though he knew the truth, it could be traced all the way back to Adam.

On his father's side, an even more impressive genealogy could be constructed, but for obvious political reasons, was a closely guarded secret. For now, in the event that the truth became public, he was rumored to have been born of a virgin mother, and his real father was only a legal guardian. His father, known in Rome as Caesarion, had returned to Egypt as a young boy with his mother after the murder of his father, Julius Caesar at the steps of the Roman Senate. And later, when he was fourteen, after his mother Cleopatra's demise, following her instructions, Caesarion went underground. Fortunately, Octavian, Julius Caesar's successor, publicly announced he had killed Caesarion in order to end political speculations as to a new Caesar in order to proclaim himself emperor with the title of Caesar Octavian. Cleopatra had cleverly arranged the marriage of her son into the Royal House of David. At the time of the arrangement the Hebrews viewed this positively. Many thought that the connections to Egypt and Rome were a great asset, but these ultimately proved to be a huge liability, thus Caesarion emerged in Galilee with a new identity as Joseph, a Jew.

The marriage was delayed as much as possible, but in the end it could not be reneged on. Caesarion/Joseph, as a mature man, almost thirty-five years old, married Mary, daughter of Heli, in Nazareth. Together they had six children—two daughters and four sons. Mary's descendants were heirs to

the crown of the house of David. The marriage had been eagerly accepted, but the blood connections to Cleopatra and Caesar remained a fiercely protected secret. For extra insurance the Hebrews not only claimed Joseph was just a legal guardian, they also invoked a virgin birth by divine Immaculate Conception. The fact that kings and gods played similar social roles made this whole concept palatable to the masses, if not learned men. This removed Jesus' from his father if his true background became public. However, a whole ancestry was needed and quickly established to ensure Joseph's acceptance among the Jewish communities.

Ten years before Cleopatra's death Herod had persuaded the Roman senate to give him the title, "King of the Jews." In return he pledged allegiance to Rome after he wrested control of Judea from the Parthians almost three years later.

From the time of Moses, political and religious leadership were hereditary titles moving down through Moses and his brother Aaron's descendants, respectively. Naturally, these two families would intermarry occasionally. The title of Messiah was given to anyone, who because of his lineage, had the right to be both, political and religious leader. When Caesar Augustus decreed a census and demanded that all people register at Bethlehem, it confirmed Caesarion's suspicions that Herod also knew about fears of his own continued existence. Herod would also know about the Jewish expectation of a Messiah and heir to the kingdom of the Jews who would free the Hebrews. Any Messiah would be a direct threat to Herod's power. The Romans had multiple reasons to find Mary's children, chief among them, because of the problems potential Messiahs could generate bringing an end to Roman control of the region. And, Caesarion, the son of Julius Caesar, the first Caesar, would naturally be seen as a direct challenge to any man who held the title of Caesar. This made it extremely urgent for the Romans to find Caesarion's children. Shortly after, because of that, Caesarion under the name of Joseph escaped to Alexandria to protect his growing family.

Jesus was taken to Alexandria, because there, his father had access to the best intellects of Egypt to tutor him as if he were a future Pharaoh. His cousin John, born to Mary's cousin Elizabeth and Zachariah, was tutored by the best of the Essenes. When Jesus was still an adolescent, he joined John in his studies. Also, if that was not enough, the best rabbis, the best of the Levites, taught both what they knew from the Torah. They played together as young boys, in Alexandria, living anonymously for their protection. Herod, and later Herod Antipas, had been searching ruthlessly for them. Both, through their bloodline, could claim the title of the hereditary Messiah; both had the right to be the political as well as religious leader of their people. As such, they

were educated in the deepest traditions of their religion and history, going back to Solomon and David; back to Moses and everything that he brought from the land of Egypt. It was no coincidence that Jesus' father was renamed Joseph. Jesus' grandmother, Cleopatra, had carefully planned his education and marriage, leaving nothing to chance.

However, after the death of Jesus' youngest sister, Joseph fell into a well of sadness that eventually killed him. He could not recover from her loss. Joseph had suffered of melancholic fits continuously ever since their arrival in Alexandria. He would refuse to eat or sleep for days at a time. At other times he raved against the madmen that had killed his parents. Yet, when Joseph had been well, he had been Jesus' most close friend, teacher, mentor, and protector, everything a father could be.

Jesus' grandmother, Cleopatra, was still revered in this city, in some quarters, as a goddess. In spite of Egypt's becoming a Roman outpost, Cleopatra's close associates, through Caesarion, secretly oversaw Jesus' education and made sure that he had access to the best minds of Alexandria and the Pharaohnic knowledge. Under the tutelage of his mother's sources, Jesus had been trying to compare the secret knowledge imparted down the generations through the House of Levi from the time of Moses and Aaron, with the Secret Codices passed down the Ptolemaic Pharaohs on his father's side. Since both sets of secret knowledge had a common origin, he hoped that by comparison, he would learn the contents of original knowledge. Two questions burned most in his mind: on the Hebrew side, "How much had Moses known originally and passed down to Solomon?" On the Egyptian side, the question was, "How much was lost through the last fifteen centuries or inadvertently destroyed by Alexander's invading forces three centuries ago? How much of the original knowledge reached Cleopatra? How much was preserved in the Temple on the Hebrew side?"

Jesus had access to the treasures and information hidden in the Temple of Jerusalem as well as to some of the Pharaohnic treasures and Codices hidden by his grandmother. He was comparing all information in the hidden scrolls to determine how much the secret knowledge had been corrupted. What was common to the two sets of information, mostly rules of behavior, was obviously part of the original. The discrepancies between the two sets would reflect deviations after the time of Moses, but could also reflect the incompleteness of each set. Jesus was completely lost in his thoughts, oblivious of the crowds around him, when a booming voice interrupted his reverie.

"You! Don't pretend you don't hear me. Everyone knows my voice!" The tall man yelled, towering above the crowd in the street. "Jesus, it is good to see you."

“John! You seem to never stop growing. Every year I hope I will become like you, and every time I see you, you just seem bigger, and rounder than before,” Jesus yelled back laughing.

“Come with me so we can talk quietly,” John said amiably as he approached opening a path through the people, and led him to an open field through a side street. “I hear you have impressed all with your wit and understanding. Considering who your teachers are, this is a high honor. They say your knowledge surpasses all, even me.”

“John, I also hear from my teachers that you tower above all; intellectually, that is.” John lifted his brows trying to read Jesus’ meaning. “Don’t get me wrong; you know I always wanted to be like you when I grew up,” Jesus chided. “I’m just following in your footsteps. I am trying to reconcile the Pharaohnic knowledge with the history of our fathers; trying to figure out exactly what the original message was.”

“But look at you, talking about the secrets of Moses and Pharaoh,” the tall pre-maturely bearded man said as he hugged his younger cousin and then proceeded to pick him up as if he were weightless. “You know, that according to the Mosaic Laws, speaking of anything Pharaohnic is punishable by death. We are almost grown men. From what I hear, soon you will take over. Everyone marvels at your knowledge, and how much you absorb. I see what they mean. Your curiosity leads you relentlessly. I always said you were the one,” John boomed as he put him down. He stared into a pair of identical green eyes. The eyes smiled back as a set of straight teeth flashed in a grin. “You must be very careful in how you use this knowledge, whatever you think it is.” They sat under a tree in a corner of the field so they could talk freely.

“I really feel like my interests lie elsewhere, John. But with this knowledge we should be able to take on the entire Roman Empire. My father insisted that some of the Pharaohnic knowledge that was lost to us Jews was maintained orally, in Egypt, over the centuries. How else could Cleopatra have achieved all that she did? She obviously knew something we are missing,” Jesus added laughing good-naturedly.

“Don’t laugh about it: ’Tis serious business. And what is more important, I can’t stress the relevance of this—some of this information might have been passed on to the Romans. Don’t forget that Cleopatra’s two husbands were at one time, the most important and powerful citizens of Rome. Cleopatra, logically, probably confided in Caesar and Mark Anthony.”

John, out of habit never mentioned any connection between Jesus and his paternal grandparents. “Following your story, her husbands, inadvertently or otherwise, might have shared something with others. For all we know, the

Romans might know that Moses took some of that information with him and it is safely guarded in Solomon's Temple. The Romans are our enemies, the obstacle to the freedom of our people. The question becomes, how much was Octavian able to learn? If some Romans in high places know a little of what we know, our situation is proportionately worsened. They will come looking for it."

"And us. My grandmother's instructors have been teaching me very interesting knowledge. Well, at least they want to call it knowledge."

"You shouldn't mention your grandparents, or your father. Get used to that!"

"For all I know they are making it all up. But I have seen the power of Cleopatra's name on the streets of Alexandria. They truly revere her as a god, as Pharaoh. Julius Caesar, following Cleopatra's lead, was likewise revered as a god in Rome."

"Shush, Jesus. You cannot speak of these things lightly or in public," John reminded the young man. "You must keep in mind that Roman Senators are not so easily fooled as the common man."

"And that is the point. He was stabbed in front of the Senate because he was claiming to be a God and the people revered him as such. He was a threat to the Senate. John, I haven't seen you for months, but do I have to remind you of what we—you, me, Lazarus—are required to do? We are all the oldest of first cousins, all with the same rights, responsibilities, duties and moral obligations."

"Hold it. You are more equal among equals."

"We are all one in the eyes of my father."

"And my father."

29 A.D.

In the town of Capernaum, just north of the coastal town of Magdala, Jesus was lying on a mattress stuffed with barley straw. A dirty cloth, serving as a curtain, blocked the light that otherwise came in through the window. He lay staring at the wall, with his back towards the dim lit room. Mary Magdalene walked in and quietly lay beside him, his buttocks against her lap. She tenderly massaged his back, then his arm. She kissed the back of his neck, then sat up and massaged his leg. She was about to turn him over, when he turned to face her. He looked at her, his light green eyes almost yellow, glimmering for the first time in days. He smiled and raised his hand to caress her face.

“You will never know how much your touch helped me get through this torment. Sometimes it was the only thing that keeps me rooted to this life. The torment has finally lifted,” he whispered.

“I feared for your life,” Mary Magdalene answered softly, holding his hand between hers.

“This is definitely the worst I have ever been. The ache, or the unpleasantness, or the tortures, there really are no words for it, Mary. It is worse than any physical pain imaginable. Could you tell?”

“No, there is no way for me to understand what you were going through. Of course, I know it is very bad. You hardly even moved, occasionally you moaned.”

“I am glad you can’t experience my suffering. That would only make it harder to bear. I felt like a ghost, wandering alone in the desert, in the darkness. For forty days and forty nights I struggled with demons. The content of my life drained away. Nothing could reach me, except your love. The devil was my only companion. He prepared a berth in hell for me. He tempted me day and night to kill myself, to end it all. If I did that, he promised the agony would end, peace would come swiftly, eternally. Somehow I kept the evil thought from overpowering me. I relied on my training by the Essenes. It took great effort and discipline but I clung to our beliefs, and they saved me. We are the light, which shines in the darkness. We are the light, which invites the darkness to change itself into light. We set in motion a process of awakening of the soul. Some souls are sleeping; some, drowsy; some, awakened. Our task is to help, to comfort, and to relieve the sleeping souls, to try to awaken the drowsy souls, and to welcome and guide the awakened souls. In this way, a path of evolution begins that can’t be stopped through the cycle of our incarnations. I feel I am growing stronger with each new test, but each test is getting worse. My father warned me. He went through the same thing. Eventually it killed him.”

“Don’t talk like this. You scare me, Jesus,” Mary Magdalene said.

“How are the children?”

“They are fine. Of course, they worry. They want to see you, and as much as I try to shield them from seeing you when you are in such a sad state, I don’t think it is good for them, but they insist and do see you once in a while. It can’t be helped,” Mary said sympathetically.

“I know. It wasn’t easy when I had to see my father go through this. He warned me, and taught me what I needed to know to survive this. Now I understand fully why he was so adamant that I train so hard. This time I was barely able to keep the devil away, Mary. Forty days and forty nights in

the wilderness,” he whispered, his eyes moistened and his face pained at the memory of his very recent ordeal. “How is my mother?”

“I can’t be helping you and her at the same time. She has already suffered through the loss of her husband. She has told me she is prepared for the loss of her son.”

“I have tried to console her, Mary, just like I tried to console you. Every time that I survive through this I emerge a better man. My sense of self is stronger. I am more motivated to help others.”

“But at what cost?”

“It is my privilege to have been born into the house of David coming from the Ptolemies.”

“Must I remind you that no one should know that you’re the grandson of Caesar? You’d be killed immediately!”

“Having riches and education gives me enormous duties. It is time for me to take my rightful place and lead our people. John was chosen because of my infirmities, but I have managed to endure.”

“Endured for what, Jesus? Do I need to remind you that sometimes you only had enough strength to live an hour at a time? It was as if daily your inner strength was sapped, so you could barely manage four, then three then only one more hour. Please explain to me what can be more important than your children? What is it that you have told me, the few times you are well, that you will dedicate yourself to freeing your people? Let John be their savior!” Mary Magdalene implored.

“He has carried the full weight for the last few years. It is time to go and proselytize my people, starting with the poorest. I need to lead my people to everlasting freedom and peace. I have to resume my role, even if it kills me, as surely as it will kill John. We have already discussed all this, Mary.”

Mary Magdalene tried to smile. She knew how much Jesus loved John.

“I feel confident we have a chance to emerge victorious against the Romans. My father’s marriage was carefully orchestrated to allow me to rediscover the ancient knowledge by having access to both the Mosaic and Pharaohnic information. Herod Antipas’ messianic aspirations need to be put in line. He thinks he has legitimate power in the eyes of the people because he married a Maccabean princess. He is like a pig wallowing in slime,” Jesus’ face contracting in a wild gesture of hate.

Mary looked at him and with a trace of a smile nodded slowly and then looked at his hands.

“The Roman emperors will inevitably stumble.” Jesus continued, “and at the right moment, if we set the stage properly, we can overthrow Herod

Antipas and eventually take over Rome. Minimally, and I will settle for that, we will become a strong nation again, free of Rome's authority."

"Jesus, I just want to tell you that I am glad that you have emerged from your fight with the devil. You know I love you. The children and I will stand behind you; always, no matter what. But what scares me the most is when you start speaking faster, with all your ideas flying around, when you get that look in your eyes and you feel that you are invincible. When you say you feel the Lord in you. I don't know what gets into you, but always, eventually you fall back into the battle with the Devil. I don't know who is going to get you first: the Romans or Antipas. But perhaps, your own demons will be the death of you as surely as they killed your father."

"I love you so much, Mary. You should know that whatever I do is never intended to hurt you, much less our children. And you know what I must do. And if something happens to me, you have to do what my brother Joses asks. He has been carefully instructed to insure that the line is not broken."

"I know, my love. You in turn must know that I will abide by what you say, but if you die, I will do what is best for my children and not necessarily what is best for the house of David. I am a mother first."

Jesus smiled, sat up and held Mary Magdalene tightly, stroking her hair.

A few days later, early in the morning, Jesus sat outside, bare from the waist up. He let the rays of the early sun bathe his body and face. He kept his eyes closed, relishing the pleasant feeling of the sun's warmth on his skin. He couldn't remember the last time he could enjoy something, anything.

Mary Magdalene came up behind him and put her hand on his shoulder. He, in turn, covered her hand with his and stroked it.

"Your skin feels so soft and cool," he said, pressing his cheek against the back of her hand with his eyes closed in rapture.

They remained in silence, enjoying the sunrise. After a short pause Mary Magdalene spoke, "He has been baptizing people in public. They are calling him John the Baptist."

"Yes, I know. I told John it was dangerous to be recruiting people in the open. He said, 'If we are ever going to rise against the Romans, it must become an open struggle. Sooner or later we will have to show our hand. The greater our numbers, the stronger our cause, and the safer from retribution our people will be.' You know what that means, Mary. The time has come for me to join the fight and take my rightful place. I must go and be baptized by John. This will make it easier for more people to openly declare in favor of us."

"There are rumors that it won't be long before John gets arrested and killed. He's been denouncing Herod Antipas' incestuous union with his

niece Herodias. And even worse, John is claiming that Antipas also has carnal relations with Salome, his stepdaughter.”

“The Romans can’t arrest him for ducking people into the river or telling the truth. That is not a crime or a sin. It is not illegal in any of our laws either.”

“It is one thing to criticize his marriage to his niece, it is quite another to say that he is fornicating with his wife’s daughter.”

“I have warned John, but he insists that it is true.”

“And you know that since the time of Herod, before we were born, the Romans have been on the outlook for the Messiah.”

“And Caesar’s son.”

“Any excuse will do to have you killed.”

“Or John,” Jesus added. “I understand, Mary.” He opened his eyes and turned to look up at Mary Magdalene. Her blue eyes shone in the morning sun as she looked out into the flat horizon. “And John is still alive and well. Antipas is afraid of him.”

“I fear for you. The Messiah, grandson of If it ever becomes known.”

“It won’t,” Jesus interrupted. “I won’t let it happen. Only a handful of people know, and they would die before divulging this information.”

“I fear for John. What he is doing will be considered a clear provocation.” As she rubbed her fingers through Jesus’ hair, she added, “But I fear even more for you.”

“Whatever they will do to me, in the end, is nothing compared to what I have endured. The only reason I haven’t yet ended my own life”

“Don’t talk like that!” She squeezed her fingers, pulling his hair.

“ . . . Is because my people need to be led to the kingdom of my father, and the kingdom of his fathers. Our people deserve to be free.”

“The Romans allow our people to be judged by our laws, by our people. Isn’t that enough?”

“My people need me, Mary. John needs me. It is time to fulfill my destiny. I will join John at the Jordan so he can baptize me publicly. The Romans won’t dare arrest me after that.”

“Jesus, how naïve can you be? The Romans can do whatever they want. If they ever found out the true identity of your father, they would pursue you mercilessly until your death.”

“Their legitimacy is based on law. If they do something against it, we will have won. The people will rise and we will be delivered. Fear not, Mary Magdalene.” Jesus looked up at her, stood up with a swift agile motion,

turned to face her and held her small shoulders in his strong hands. “Always remember this,” he said looking kindly into her eyes, “I fear not. Whatever they can do to me, physical punishment or mutilation of any sort, I fear not. It is nothing compared to the torments of fighting the devil to stay alive. And even when the Lord is with me, when I can’t sleep or rest, I’m afraid my heart will give out as it pounds mercilessly for days inside my chest. Whatever they can do to me pales in comparison.”

Mary Magdalene’s eyes moistened as she tried to smile. She reached out to touch his cheek.

“And, Mary,” Jesus continued softly, “My people are my motivation for staying alive every time evil has confronted me. Every time the Lord has confronted me. John knows this. He has forced my hand. It is time for me to come out into the open. Now the Romans will have to contend with John the Baptist and Jesus the Nazarene.”

Mary Magdalene’s hand dropped to her side, she turned and left Jesus standing with his back to the sun. He slowly turned, closed his eyes and raised his arms outward, palms facing upward. He took a deep breath and enjoyed the morning sun. He wondered when next, if ever, he might enjoy anything. The time had come. His destiny was out of his hands, and whatever happened would be up to the Jewish people, his people. They were his flock and he was their shepherd.

A group of men stood at the bank of the Jordan. One man towered over the group. He had a thick beard that perfectly matched his long brown hair. His eyes appeared as two emeralds in the sun. His voice roared and his laughter sounded more like a bear’s than a man’s. As the men became silent, he turned to follow the men’s gaze.

A lone man in a white robe, clean-shaven with shiny green eyes approached them. John moved away from the bank of the river, and walked directly towards the lone man. They stopped and looked into each other’s eyes. John placed his hands on Jesus’ shoulders.

“Finally!” John spoke quietly, so no one else could hear. After a moment, for all to hear, “I am glad to see my soft spoken cousin has come to join the fray!” he bellowed and laughed hoarsely.

“It is good to see you, John,” Jesus answered in a whisper. John hugged him and picked him up by the shoulders.

“Likewise,” John responded. He put Jesus back on the ground. “These are dangerous times. Where are your brothers?”

“You know they do not wholly agree with me in what I am doing. So I think it is a good idea that they stay in hiding, in case we fail. There is no

need to put them at risk now. James knows most of what I know and he is prepared to follow in our footsteps, even though he disagrees with our strategy. At least you and I are of the same mind that we have a good chance if we use the knowledge of the Secret Codices judiciously.”

“That is the reason why our forefathers went to such pains to preserve the Ark of the Covenant. We need to convince our people they are the chosen ones.”

“And, John, the salvation of their souls has to be a central theme. They need to believe that only through me they can get salvation and life eternal. I hope you remember that on my Egyptian side, Pharaoh, the leader must be perceived as a god.”

“Don’t mention Egypt. Remember, it is forbidden to speak of Pharaoh or the Pyramids.”

“Of course I won’t mention I’m the son of Pharaoh. I’ll just convince them I’m the Son of God. If I can achieve this, the people will rise against the oppressor. They will gladly give up their lives. We can become invincible with a group of men that don’t fear death.”

“Centurions are watching me every day; counting how many people I baptize. Yesterday, a pair came over and announced loudly that I was nothing but a rabble-rouser. Imagine that! Me, John the Baptist, a rouser and our people a rabble. The nerve of that camel dung eater! I felt like crushing their skulls in my hands.”

“You must turn the other cheek, John. Remember, we must give them no excuse; we are not ready. Whatever provocations, we must turn the other cheek. Remind everyone of that. We should never respond with open aggression. The kingdom of heaven will belong to the meek, eventually, if we can recruit them. And keep quiet about Antipas.”

John’s laughter made everyone nearby turn to look at them. However, all eyes settled on the thinner, smaller, white-clad man with a matching pair of green eyes; this was enough for the crowd that had gathered there this morning to know who it was. The two of them together walked to the bank of the river. A roar of approval followed.

“It is time to baptize you,” John shouted. The crowd answered with another roar.

“I think it is best that you concentrate on the South. I’ll work in the North.” Jesus spoke softly with a confident smile.

John tried to smile back and then walked into the Jordan. Jesus followed. John stood slightly to one side of Jesus, placed his left big hand on Jesus’ lower back and with his right hand pushed him back until his head was underwater and held him there for a short moment.

“In the name of our forefathers I pronounce you baptized,” John bellowed as he pulled Jesus back up on his feet. John turned to the crowd. “Look at this man, for he is the one who will lead us to the kingdom of eternal peace. Tell all you know that he is here with me. Tell all you know to come to me.”

“Every one should be cleansed of their sins through baptism, just like I have done. Go and tell all.”

Jesus walked out of the river and the people gathered round him, kneeled and kissed his hand. He walked among them and let all who were there see him and touch him.

33 A.D.

Pilate sat in silence, head tilted to his left, resting his chin on his left knuckles. He looked up at the chained man standing in front of him. He stood up and walked slowly around him. Finally he spoke. “Jesus, help me and I’ll help you. There are some in Rome, Caesar Augustus and Tiberius included, who believe the Jews have some special knowledge dating back to the time of Moses. They have been after me for years to get it. Antipas denies any knowledge of this. Of course he is not a Hebrew.”

Jesus’ green eyes bore into Pilate’s but he did not speak. Pilate approached Jesus. Jesus was obviously unafraid, but Pilate could sense an immense sadness in him.

“I thought this was some fanciful myth,” Pilate continued. “But now the chief priests and the assembly of the elders, your own people, are sending you to me. Publicly they are insisting that you have participated in insurrections, and riots, avoided paying tribute, and threatened to destroy the temple. Personally, I feel it is all slander. Yet, the assembly, in private, claims you have been corrupting the official scriptures. They insist, imagine this, that you are surreptitiously weaving Egyptian knowledge into their scriptures; and that their scriptures specifically forbid any Jew, including you, to divulge any information relating to Pharaoh.”

Pilate was hoping to get some clue from this man, but Jesus just stood there impassive.

“To top it off,” Pilate pressed, “They claim the penalty for this is death. These scriptures sound like some special private knowledge. This has to be more than a coincidence.”

“Our history is public record.”

“Are you the king of the Jews?”

“Do you say this or are others saying this of me?”

“You understand the political undertones, don’t you?”

“You say that I am a king. For this I was born, and for this I have come into the world, to bear witness to the truth.”

“What is the truth?” Pilate asked kindly. Jesus didn’t respond, he stood staring emptily at the floor. “The chief priests say that they have a law, and by that law you ought to die, because you have made yourself the Son of God; some say, the Son of Pharaoh, and that is forbidden.”

“You are an educated man, Pilate. Tell me what you think?” Jesus probed calmly to find out what Pilate knew or believed.

“Many years ago, when I was in Rome, Caesar Augustus told me that Julius Caesar had learned a code of governance from Cleopatra. He insisted that Julius Caesar believed that if he followed the code, he would be a great ruler, loved by all Romans. That he was, even when he challenged the Senate. Whether Octavian knew of this code or not is unclear. But if he did, he obviously didn’t follow it.”

Pilate scrutinized Jesus’ face for clues. Jesus stood expressionless, apparently detached. “Caesar Augustus also told me,” Pilate continued letting the famous names hang hoping for greater impact, “that Octavian hadn’t killed Caesarion as he had claimed and believed that Caesarion survived. As best as he could determine, Caesarion had gone to Judea. As long as Caesarion didn’t surface, he wasn’t a problem. But shortly before you were born, there were rumors that he had married into the royal house of David. Caesar, under the guise of a tributary system, set up a census. Do you remember?”

Jesus continued impassive.

“You couldn’t remember, but you know,” Pilate continued. “It was all a screen. Herod was given very specific instructions to locate any heirs of the house of David, and more specifically, heirs of Caesarion. Do you know anything about this?”

“It is not a crime to be the son of a thief anymore than it is a crime to be the son of a king. A man can not be judged by his father’s actions.”

“I agree. But try to see my position. Give me something so I can help you.”

“I don’t know what you mean.” Jesus feigned. “I have spoken openly in the synagogues and in the temple; I have said nothing secretly. Why do you ask me? Ask those who have heard me what I said to them. They know what I said.”

“Where are you from?”

Jesus gave no answer.

“You will not speak to me? Do you not know that I have the power to release you, and power to crucify you?”

“Pilate, what do you want from me? If I tell you, you will not believe; and if I ask you, you will not answer. But from now on the son of man shall be seated at the right hand of the power of God.”

“Are you the Son of God, then?”

“You say that I am.”

“The priests shout publicly that if I release you, I am not Caesar’s friend; that everyone who makes himself a king sets himself against Caesar. Privately, they said that you are the son of Caesarion. They say that you are forbidding the Jews to pay tribute to Caesar.” Pilate waited for a reaction. Jesus just nodded sadly. “Your own people want you dead. If you are the son of Caesarion, I can protect you.”

“You mean you would have more reasons to see me dead. You know you have no power over me unless it had been given from above. Therefore he who delivered me to you has the greater sin.”

“Forget about who is the greater sinner. I want to help you, but you leave me little room to maneuver.” Pilate paused, weighing his alternatives. Finally Pilate called out, “Guards! Have him scourged and bring him back to me.”

When the soldiers had finished doing so, they dragged Jesus back to Pilate. Small, superficial cuts with tiny rivulets of blood covered his entire body. A crown of thorns had been placed on his head, blood mixed with sweat dripped down his face and neck.

“I said scourge him, not kill him,” Pilate barked angrily when he saw Jesus. “This man is guilty of nothing!” he yelled at the guards.

“I have suffered much in my life. There is not much you can do to hurt me,” Jesus whispered softly, barely audible.

“You have been punished for all the imagined transgressions you might have committed. I hope the scourging is enough and your people will let you go. As a symbol of my respect, and the possibility that you are whom I think, I bestow upon you the purple robe, symbol of Caesar. Let the Jews and everyone see the significance of my opinion concerning your identity.”

Jesus remained silent, appearing unconcerned.

Pilate, with Jesus alongside clad in the purple robe, the symbol of Roman power, headed outside the praetorium to face the Jews. He shouted to the crowd, “You brought me this man as one that was perverting your people, and after examining him before you, behold, I did not find this man guilty of anything. Here is your king!”

“We have a law, and by that law he ought to die, because he has made himself the Son of God,” the priests yelled.

“Here is the man! Behold, he wears the purple robe,” Pilate yelled back.

“Away with him, away with him, crucify him!” The Jewish crowd chanted loudly.

“Shall I crucify your King? Take him yourselves and crucify him, for I find no crime in him,” Pilate roared out defiantly.

“We have no king but Caesar,” the priests answered.

Then Pilate, fearing a riot, handed Jesus over, clad in purple, to be crucified.

The Search for More Stories

Larry kept making searches on his father's P.C. He had found some of his father's writing in the recycle bin. "Look in the garbage can," reverberated in his mind. The documents seemed to be made of endless blank pages, but when you scrolled down or did a search for a common word like "the", a story would appear in the middle of the huge document. He looked at his watch, it was just past noon. He expected Myrna any minute. He found another manuscript. Made a search for "the" and the search stopped on page 234 on the first sentence of the story entitled &%@, which without caps translated to 752.

He opened the next blank document and did a search for "the". Once again, success; the search stopped on page 191 on a story entitled !#)&, which, without caps, translated as 1307.

The front door buzzer rung.

"It's me Myrna."

Larry pressed the buzzer to open the street door and a few seconds later Myrna stepped out of the elevator. Larry smiled at her awkwardly. She smiled back.

"Your eyes are still green." Myrna couldn't help saying.

"For you, always." Larry responded.

Someone could be heard coming up the stairs two at a time. Ramirez appeared in the hallway and flashed his crooked smile. Larry and Myrna looked at him surprised. He was wearing a sky-blue suit, a deep purple shirt with pink lines and a pink tie. Myrna exchanged glances with Larry, and seeing the sky-blue suit, they both laughed.

"I can tell you like my suit." Ramirez said, obviously pleased. The three of them laughed.

Once in the apartment, Ramirez brought Larry up to speed on the lab tests, O'Malley's findings and ideas. Larry couldn't elucidate on the lack of tax returns, and chose to remain silent about the cash for the time being. Because his father might be dead, he felt a strong need to be protective of his image.

"I suppose the blood is his. Who else's could it be?" Larry asked no one in particular.

“I never saw or heard Lawrence mention anything about barbecuing. There is no place to do this in this apartment.” Myrna interjected helpfully. “And, why would he even have an electric barbecue-starter? Skin on it? That is easy to explain. Someone could have grabbed it while it was hot. But it simply doesn’t make sense.”

“Well, I keep finding more of my father’s stories.” Larry added dejectedly. “What he wrote probably holds the clue to what happened to him. We just have to get to the end of it. I have to find all the stories.”

“Larry,” Ramirez smiled, “we see this all the time. People disappear only to reappear, but other times people get killed and their bodies are hidden. I don’t mean this in a cruel way.”

“Detective, with all due respect, you sound like most of the doctors that saw my father. Even when they had no clue as to what was happening to him, even less about what to do to correct it, they inevitably had an answer—and they got paid for it. It was impossible to argue with them, they are stuck in their paradigm. It’s the same with you!”

“Try to keep calm, Larry,” Myrna interjected softly.

“I’m trying to have an open mind, Larry.” Ramirez added gently, “But if you want me to take the suicide idea more seriously, I’ll need your help and guidance. I mean, why would your father, why would anyone commit suicide?”

Larry just pressed his lips and remained silent.

“At this moment,” Ramirez continued, “To be honest with you, I feel that your father was murdered. I’m sorry. And yet, O’Malley makes a good case about a paranoid man that feared for his life and decided it was time to disappear.”

“Well if he was murdered, then he was not paranoid,” Myrna commented. “And if someone wanted to murder him, it’s perfectly reasonable for him to go into hiding. In both these scenarios, he definitely is not paranoid; he is just being reasonable. On the other hand, he could’ve died accidentally, but we have no proof of that either,” she continued doggedly.

Larry took a deep breath. “I still think its suicide. I’ll dig up my research on the brain and try to summarize so it is more accessible to a lay person like you,” he said to Ramirez. “No insult intended.”

“None taken.”

“You don’t believe in suicide because you don’t understand it? And you need me to explain it to you?” Larry asked without hiding his irritation.

“Your father mentioned you were working on a new advanced theory of the brain, a neurological model that would explain human psychology. He was pretty smart, and he told me he found it quite complicated.” Myrna

interjected to smooth out things between the two men. "You think we can understand it? Is suicide a part of it?"

"I need to iron out a few things regarding suicide so I can make it fit into my brain theory," Larry conceded. Ramirez was going to interrupt, but Larry held up his hands and proceeded quickly. "Bare with me for a moment. I found more of my father's writings. Look in the garbage beyond the blank pages, meant, look in the recycle bin in the apparently blank-pages documents." Ramirez raised his eyebrow again. "Wait, detective, Myrna. Let me finish. These stories are examples of my father re-writing my research on the brain in lay terms. It is obvious he has been studying and paying attention to my work."

"Larry, that is only logical. Every father pays attention to his children's work. He was very proud of you," Myrna explained.

"Yet, he wasn't going to publish this. This was intended for me. Why else would he leave some of it in a safe deposit box that only I have access to?"

"Was there anything else in that box that you omitted to tell me?"

"Larry wouldn't be hiding anything from you, Detective. Can't you see how concerned he is about his father?"

"It is all a coincidence," Ramirez insisted. "I mean Lawrence's writings. I have to agree with O'Malley. There is no major relationship between his stories and his disappearance, which he spent months, if not years writing."

Myrna could sense Larry's exasperation and put her hand on the young man's shoulder.

"The story is the clue," Larry persisted.

"You need to keep an open mind, Larry," Myrna interjected. "Your father's writing might be stories, part of a bigger book. That is the impression he gave me. He was doing research to explain why the Pyramids are not in the Bible. He had some theories."

"We need to get some hard leads quickly. When someone disappears, the track gets cold awfully fast. I have people working on different angles, so I guess it wouldn't hurt me to see more. And," Ramirez added sympathetically, "For your information, I have made all the principals in this investigation read the different stories that you have found. I have even sent them to the Psychology Department for evaluation. I want to remind you that I am taking all leads seriously. But at some point, we have to be realistic."

"I want you two to read this. Then, tell me what you think. Let me select the relevant parts of these two and make copies. One is entitled '752' and the other is '1307.'" Larry selected the text parts then clicked on 'File', then 'Print' then 'OK'. The printer spewed out pages.

“Your father told me he was writing a novel about the autobiography of God and some souls that keep reincarnating. I wasn’t aware he had written this much,” Myrna said.

“It sounds more like a novel, with no relevance to his disappearance,” Ramirez insisted as Larry handed them a hard copy of the stories. “So, you want me to read novels?”

As an answer, Larry turned to the monitor and read scrolling down the screen.

“We better start reading, Detective,” Myrna said.

“Alright. Just because I don’t believe in this line of questioning, doesn’t mean I won’t pursue it. Both of you need to understand that.”

Illiam and the Hermit, 752 A.D.

Illiam approached the peak of the scraggy hill. He could see the vultures flying lazily in circles around the summit. He turned to see the view to the west; the red Egyptian desert extended far into the horizon where it contrasted sharply with a green strip next to the Nile. Still early in the morning, the air was crisp and fresh.

The hermit sat on the ground at the entrance to a small cave close to the top. He was painfully thin. Next to the hermit, Illiam deposited the pita bread and a small terracotta water-jug as he had been instructed. The hermit would not speak otherwise.

The hermit's intense green eyes settled on Illiam. The beginning of a smile flickered and then the hermit's expression turned serious. His gray hair and black beard seemed to cover his entire body, except for the mouth, nose, eyes and ears. The hermit nodded acknowledging Illiam's offering. The hermit pointed to a rock in the shade.

"Sit," the hermit commanded.

"I came to see you," Illiam spoke after sitting down, "because some say you are the wisest man on earth."

"Others say I am just an old fool," the hermit answered amiably. "Tell me what you seek and perhaps I will know if I can help you."

"Why do you sit here?"

"Is that what you really seek?"

"No, but I was curious."

"My wife and children were killed. I have no purpose among other men. I can only spend my life seeking the truth. Otherwise, death would be preferable. If I don't move, answers seem to come to me. Meditation brings me peace and puts me in resonance with the creator. He sends me visions at night. I find answers in my dreams."

"I seek the truth. Who are we?"

"I assume 'we' is you individually. But we are in relation to others as well, we do not exist in isolation."

"What about you?"

“Try to open your mind. We are only what we remember. Our memories are stored as echoes of our past experiences. The echoes are in our head, but we can't always hear them. If we heard them all, we would be overwhelmed by too many memories. It would be like the noise of a thousand voices in the market. Many categories of echoes exist. Some are used for recognizing faces, places, or tools; others are procedural and help us perform many tasks like talking or wielding an ax. Other memories are echoes of our biographies arranged in a hierarchical order. At the highest level we have lifetime periods, measured in years; like your childhood or your married life. In the middle we have echoes of general events that last days, weeks or months, like the time spent learning a craft, learning masonry, or the courtship of a woman. And at the bottom of the hierarchy we find specific events lasting seconds, minutes or hours, like remembering what you ate for breakfast.

“As a small child you live in the present. You are not concerned with what happened yesterday, and you do not worry about the future. The present is a very short period of time; all else is anticipation and reminiscence. Childhood is so precious. You enjoy each instant, precisely because you live in the moment. Slowly a sense of time emerges as the echoes begin to connect places and events to a sense of self.

“However, what we remember is a reconstruction of the past, it is not a reliving of it. What we remember is not always accurate, and over time we even remember it differently. We are changing all the time, and we are what we remember. The echoes of the past are ghostly reflections; they are not exactly the same as the actual events. When we remember the distant past, we always do so under the influence of all our lives, including the most recent experiences.

“Our memories are stored as echoes with similar characteristics. Echoes that share the same color will activate other memories that share the color—apples, sunsets, blood. Echoes that share the same place will do likewise—home, wife, children. Echoes that share the same context follow suit—greetings when we meet people, farewells when we depart. And most important of all, echoes that share the same emotion. Echoes are stored and remembered according to characteristics, contexts and emotions.

“We, like all animals, need to move through the world. For this we have our senses. Any changes in our bodies or the external world have to be tracked so we can adjust accordingly. When a change is detected, it automatically commands our attention. Attention focuses our senses on whatever changes. Our eyes center on the butterfly or the bird that is moving. Our ears focus on the voice, our eyes on the lips. Attention constructs the present interpreting what we see and hear using the echoes of our past experiences. Attention

involves each one of our senses separately or jointly. If attention is focused inwardly, we construct a different reality; we think or we remember. We construct new ideas or we reconstruct old memories. The difference between experiencing the present and the past is that when we experience the present our sensory signals are part of the constructive process; when we experience the past, when we remember, the echoes of past experiences and their emotions are the main part of the constructive process.”

“If we are what we remember, then we change as we grow older,” Illiam commented, seeking clarification.

“Yes and no.” The hermit said without hesitation. “Yes, because we construct our past when we remember according to our experience. No, because emotions are more important than memories. We continue to be pretty much the same, emotionally, after about seven years old. All memories have an emotional component and a contextual component. The basic emotional make up of each one of us is established from a combination of what we learned, mostly from our parents, with what we were born with, certain tendencies we inherited. Emotions serve to guide our behavior. When we pay attention to our body, we say we feel our body. When we pay attention to an emotion, we simply say we feel. Each emotion produces specific physical changes and feels different. Each emotion is associated with specific memories, procedures and behaviors that become accessible when the emotion is felt. Otherwise all those memories remain stored as unheard echoes. To forget something is different than only to remember something when you need it, when you feel the pertinent emotion. We only remember what is important, and only what is important triggers an emotion. In other words, we only remember what is tied to an emotion.

“We learn to interact or hide our emotions better as we mature and grow old, but essentially we feel and therefore are the same throughout our lives. But memories and emotions are not like a boat without a sail on the Nile, where it moves always in one direction, from higher to lower, from south to north. When emotions activate memories, they are like a boat with a sail and can go in both directions; memories also activate emotions. When we experience something similar to a past emotional incident, the echoes of strong emotional events will automatically produce the same emotion.” The hermit fixed his eyes on Illiam to see if he was following. The hermit smiled.

“Every person I knew as a small child, remained essentially the same after we grew up. The kind ones remained kind, the vicious ones stayed vicious, the shy kept shy and the happy ones continued to smile on me and enrich my life,” Illiam interjected with satisfaction. “As we mature, we modify slightly our behaviors to fit in better and to cooperate more with others.”

“We are born with our most basic emotions,” the hermit expanded. “But we also learn to regulate them. Fear is one of the easier emotions to understand. Imagine walking through the desert. A hissing sound occurs; the sound is either running water nearby or a cobra rising to strike. The fear response is automatic. Once we determine that the sound was produced by water and not by a cobra the fear quickly dissipates. The emotional response to the sound was appropriate, it can save us before the cobra strikes, but our memories can quickly show that water that produced the sound is no threat. We learn to prevent the inappropriate response while the appropriate response was automatic.

“Alternatively, suppose there is a slender, curved shape on the path. The curvature and slenderness signals from the eye are matched to echoes of curvature and slenderness of a snake. If it is a snake, the fear response is automatically activated. If it weren’t a snake, then we are only startled, and probably laugh to defuse the fear. The cost of treating a stick as a snake is less, in the long run, than the cost of treating a snake as a stick.

“We can think of fear in a simplistic way: danger is sent by the senses to our head. If a match is made between a dangerous sign and a dangerous echo, a signal is sent to start the emotional reaction. Further thinking determines what it is, how much of a threat it is or isn’t. If we determine it is not a threat, a signal is sent to dampen and stop the fear response. If we determine it is a threat, we will confirm how much of a threat and run or fight accordingly.

“We also assess a context in relation to what produces fear. A cobra in a basket in the market is no threat, whereas a venomous snake out in the open is.”

“So we do not feel fear automatically in the presence of the cobra. It also has to happen in a certain context.”

“Anything resembling a cobra can start a fear reaction, but in the wrong context, even the cobra itself should not produce fear. A context is not a particular echo, but a collection of many. I have seen the rabbit that escaped from the lion when it went to drink. It will have learned to fear not only the lion, but also the time of day, the location where he went to drink, and even the smell or colors of the plants in that location. All of these echoes in the rabbit’s head can produce fear in the future. It is better to be safe by feeling fear than to be unafraid.”

“We can’t control what we feel,” Illiam said tentatively. The hermit raised both eyebrows questioningly, so Illiam asked swiftly, “Are you implying that we can learn to change what we feel?”

“Certainly. The best example of this is routinely done in military training. No one should be unafraid or stupid enough to run to meet a huge assembly of

men intent on killing you. Repetitive training, sometimes as simple as hearing a particular sound when you charge or chasing after a moving emblem, might be enough to produce behavior that would normally be contrary to common sense and experience. Only young men do this. Some type of training only has effect during specific time frames of life. The emotional response we call “belief” is ingrained in us. At each stage in our lives there are slightly different beliefs that can be stored as emotional echoes. Some beliefs need constant repetition and conditioning; others, at the right time need only one or two exposures. The fanatical beliefs of some of the Muslims that have taken over our lands can only be inculcated in childhood. Yet, the same holds true of the Christians. The difference is that the Muslims reinforce these beliefs at different ages. Thus they join the concept of religion with nation and warfare. The Christians have no problem of going to war among themselves, because each belief can coexist along side the other. There is no conflict between the religious belief that one should not kill and the national belief that one should kill another of a different nation or religion. The beliefs are part of separate emotional systems, not logical. It is a system that leads people to feel good about what they do without necessarily thinking about it.

“The opposite of fear is anger,” the hermit continued. “Anger is to fighting as fear is to fleeing. Under normal conditions, when a threat is present, at some point we determine that fleeing is impossible or useless or that direct action can remove the threat. When this happens, the fear automatically is changed to fight mode. When, we determine, according to the emotional sum of the echoes that removing the threat is a better alternative to fleeing or the only alternative, we turn and fight to the death if necessary. Fear is discarded. Anger is a state that hopefully leads to the avoidance of fighting by activating the fear response in the menacing animal or man. Anger serves as a warning signal. Anger is a preparative state to a fight response as opposed to fear as preparative to flight. However, the bodily changes involved in preparation for fleeing serve us equally well for fighting.

“Our true state can be detected by our emotions. When we are asked how we feel, we consult on this state. The fact that each emotion produces certain physical changes allows us to feel the various degrees of our emotional responses. Our language reflects these physical changes as we use them to express our emotional state. We speak of a shudder down our backs when we are surprised, of our stilled heart when we hear bad news, of our clammy hands when we are nervous.

“Our emotions are accompanied by subtle bodily emotional expressions and even the prosody of our voices. In the course of social interactions we

detect these emotional states as subtle facial expressions, body postures and changes in speech and can evaluate the overt behavior of others as well as try to understand one's self. There is a nonverbal transfer of emotional information through these complex expressions. We communicate our most intimate feelings to others without speaking. Equally, when we detect an emotional expression, we automatically pay attention and tune into it, match it with our echoes, and thus, we feel what others feel.

"Under normal conditions, every emotional transference elicits a countertransference that confirms the emotional communication. These reactions are very fast, occurring outside of our awareness, reflecting the physical emotional changes. Positive emotions generate positive changes in the receiver, just as negative emotions produce negative changes in the receiver. These emotional transfers are very valuable in a society to quickly spread information about how good or bad an event is, to ease coordination of actions among a group as a response to an outside threat or opportunity, and to facilitate adaptive behaviors such as attachment, bonding, fleeing or attacking."

"But what makes us feel our a sense of self so strongly? Surely it isn't a belief," Illiam interrupted.

"Whenever we experience strong emotions, we inevitably return to a state of neutral calmness," the hermit continued patiently. "We possess an internal balancing scheme that attempts to produce the right emotions for all changing conditions and as soon as possible return to calmness, but never quite achieving it. Meditation helps. The fact this balancing system is close to neutral, but not quite ever there, allows us to generate a whole range of emotions in response to very small changes in the world or even our bodies. This greater range of emotions gives us access to a greater range of the echoes of our experiences. The quick emotional changes also generate the maximum number of contexts. Thus we achieve the greatest possible number of responses to any situation. We are in a state of maximum adaptability. When we feel this state, it is perceived as a sense of self.

"The wider the spectrum of emotional responses that can be triggered, the more intense the sense of self is felt. Conversely, the narrower the spectrum, the less intense the sense of self is perceived. This translates into a feeling that many memories can be quickly activated because we can flutter like a moth around a flame, changing from moment to moment, ever so slightly from emotion to emotion."

"There is more to the self. The self is embodiment, as it is deeply rooted to our bodies. We are born with a sense of free will that allows us to feel we direct our actions."

"Is it possible to lose your sense of self?" Illiam asked.

A History Lesson

Ramirez put his reading down, stood up and went towards the refrigerator. “Do you mind if I take a beer? Do you want anything, Larry? Myrna?” he said as he opened the door. He pulled out one of the two Coronas, and twisted the cap off. He took a sip, and then put the beer on the table. He took his blue coat off and neatly placed it on the back of the chair. He sat down and placed his hands behind his head, stretching his feet. “I don’t see how any of the story of Illiam can help us find your father. Explain to me a little about this other story, the *1307*, Larry,” he said, tapping on the printed pages.

“According to my father’s other book, *Why the Pyramids Are not in the Bible*—and all these stories tie in with that book—Mary Magdalene was the wife of Jesus.”

“Yes, I saw that in the Jesus story,” Ramirez nodded, taking another sip of his Corona.

“I’m not sure I remember all the details,” Larry added good-naturedly.

“I think I can fill in here,” Myrna said helpfully. “Lawrence discussed this with me. He tried to follow the path of the secret Pharaohnic knowledge, hoping to get more insight as to who might have built the pyramids. Obviously, this secret knowledge could’ve been passed down the Pharaohs all the way to Cleopatra. And if Moses were privy to this knowledge, it also would have been passed down through the Jewish line all the way to Jesus. The question is how much of it could have been preserved in Egypt after her death, and how much did she transmit to Julius Caesar.

“The Pharaohnic knowledge, according to Lawrence, concerned three separate areas. The first was religious. A whole religion was created in an attempt to explain the existence of the pyramids. The fact that they seemed built to last forever, made sense to them only if they were related to the afterlife, which was eternal. Pharaoh was seen as a bridge between this life and the next. A common religion also helped to create social cohesion. The second area had to do with rules of governance, probably a benevolent dictatorship based on Pharaoh’s god-like qualities, which were derived from the religious

area. And the third area, was economic, having to do with the creation and distribution of wealth, derived from the first two.”

“In the Bible this would correspond to the story of Joseph and how he came up with a tax system where Pharaoh collects one fifth of all, of saving during the good years, and distributing during the bad years.” Larry explained.

“The Pharaohic knowledge in these three areas properly applied becomes the sound principles of social stability, of nation building and the creation and redistribution of wealth based on religious practice.” Seeing Ramirez’s raised eyebrows, Myrna added, “According to Lawrence.”

“Now we are going to have a history lesson. Thank God it’s Sunday and it’s supposed to be my day off,” Ramirez said playfully.

“The Jews in Judea, mostly around Jerusalem controlled all commerce that passed through there and was their means to wealth. About a hundred years before Christ, before Julius Caesar, the Romans formed new political alliances in the area and took control of Judea.”

“You’re doing great, Myrna. I’m impressed. Please continue,” Larry prodded.

“Cleopatra managed to marry two of the most powerful men in the world, Julius Caesar and Mark Anthony. There is no doubt that she was extremely intelligent and very savvy politically. It becomes incomprehensible that she would not have considered her children’s fate when the Romans attacked Alexandria. She knew that Mark Anthony’s three children didn’t pose a threat and would be taken care of by Mark Anthony’s sister, who had strong political connections in Rome. But Caesarion, Julius Caesar’s son, was a different story. He would surely be killed because he could claim rightfully the title of Caesar. What better way to hide him than to send him underground to the neighboring kingdom and marry him into the royal house of David.”

“So Caesarion becomes Joseph, marries Mary and thus Jesus becomes the grandson of Cleopatra and Julius Caesar.” Ramirez exclaimed impatiently. “Yes. That is clear in the Jesus story. Let’s get on with it!”

“Octavian himself declared he personally had slain Caesarion and pronounced himself Caesar. He was a senator, not a general, and it is highly unlikely that he would have killed anybody himself. So, unofficially, the Romans continued to look for Caesarion and any potential descendants he might produce because they could claim hereditary rights to the title of Caesar.”

“The Bible clearly recounts how the Romans were looking for the first born. According to my father, they were secretly looking for Caesar’s descendants.” Larry interjected.

“Mary Magdalene,” Myrna continued, “married Jesus and bore him several children.”

“Yes, yes. We know that,” Ramirez interjected.

“She knew who her husband was, and his goal was to eventually claim the title of Caesar. However, after his death, she knew the Romans would continue to look for Caesarion’s descendants, now her own children. And so she went underground and went to live in Southern France. Her descendants would gain control of southern France and be known as the Merovingians.”

“The followers of Jesus split into three groups. Leadership of one group passed to James, the brother of Jesus. This group would continue to try to achieve independence from Rome. Another group, composed of the Apostles, split out to teach the word of Christ and take over Rome. This is why Peter went to Rome. It was in the interest of both these groups, for the time being, to protect the third group, Mary Magdalene and her children. It was a question of protecting, first the bloodline of the House of David, and indirectly the descendants of Julius Caesar and Cleopatra, who would be perceived as a threat to Roman power.

“From this perspective, the persecution of the Christians in the time of Nero makes more sense. The search for potential Caesar’s descendants among the followers of Christ continues throughout the empire and unofficially is part of the Jewish problem. After the death of Nero, Vespasian becomes emperor and sends his oldest son, Titus to deal with the Jewish problem once and for all. In the year 70 he destroys Jerusalem. James and his kin are all killed. Titus returns triumphant to Rome along with forty thousand Jewish slaves. These Jewish slaves, originally followers of Jesus, and later followers of James, built on the fragile political structures established in Rome by Peter and Paul, who had been executed a few years before. Ironically, it is these slaves that strengthen the Christian movement in Rome. The few Jewish survivors of the debacle against the military forces of the Roman Empire slowly gained some political ascendancy as Christians. Because of the destruction of the Temple and the possibility of the loss of the Secret Knowledge, it is at this time, according to Lawrence, that the Gospels are written—clearly an attempt to put down in writing the tumultuous events of thirty-five years earlier when Jesus was crucified.”

“So what does all this have to do with the Pharaohnic secrets and more to the point what does it have to do with 1307?” Ramirez asked.

“Lawrence’s theory claimed that some of the Pharaohnic knowledge, primarily the area relating to economics, was passed down to Moses’ descendants. This included some aspects of governance. Let’s call this

information the Messianic secret. It could not be made public, but it was privately passed down. Possibly, it was written down and kept in the Temple of Jerusalem. After Titus destroyed the Temple, the Jews that dispersed throughout the Roman Empire, carried with them the economic knowledge, which allowed them to control commerce and the wealth that went with it. It is possible that some of the Messianic secret, primarily the knowledge relating to governance, fell in the hands of Titus. Titus applies this knowledge and sets up a system of carefully choosing and grooming a series of successors. A truly benevolent dictatorship was installed and ended after the death of the Antonines. This period lasted one-hundred-and-twenty years and it is the high-point of the Roman Empire.”

“The early Christians in Rome, the followers of Peter and Paul,” Larry interjected, “later reinforced by Titus’ Jewish slaves, knew about the religious aspects of the Messianic secret. These they applied, and eventually, through religion, won over the Roman Empire. Mary Magdalene’s descendants now became a big problem for both groups for different reasons. For the Romans, descendants of Caesar could still be a political problem. For the Christians, Mary Magdalene represented a different challenge: the Son of God is divine and therefore has no wife or children.”

“Are you Catholic, Ramirez?” Myrna asked.

“I was baptized, but not really. I don’t believe too much. But I see what you mean. To us Catholics, Jesus didn’t marry or have children, and Mary Magdalene is seen in a negative light, almost like a prostitute.”

“The Roman Empire slowly fell into Civil War. In the year 313 Constantine I declared himself the first Catholic Caesar and Pope with his capital in Constantinople. He hoped he would be recognized as the indisputable leader. Rome, with her ambitious generals, would challenge him over the next few decades.

“On the fringes, the Goths, Visigoths and the Arabs, all hungered for control of disputable territories. The appearance of Mohammed in 622 and the Muslims ensured their control of the Middle East. The mixture of religious fanaticism with political goals is a natural development, copied by and exploited by Mohammed’s followers. The rise of the Muslim culture was closely linked to control of Palestine. It was all about controlling commerce and the wealth. They quickly expanded across North Africa. Then they wrestled control of the Iberian Peninsula from the Visigoths. It is no coincidence that they stopped at the Pyrenees. They knew the Merovingian dynasty could lay a legitimate claim to the crown of Judea and were planted on the other side of the Pyrenees. They certainly could not afford to offend

this powerful group of Jewish ancestry. Eventually, the most powerful group to emerge on the Christian side was the Templar Knights, whose leaders were direct descendants of Merovingians, John the Baptist and Jesus Christ.”

“Nice piece of World history,” Ramirez smiled.

“While the Christians are slowly taking over Rome,” Myrna continued patiently, “Mary Magdalene’s descendants in southern France, through marriages and political alliances eventually control France and become the Merovingians. One of the Merovingian princesses married Isabel the Catholic’s great-great-great-grandfather Alfonso VI who rebuilt the Cathedral of Santiago where the remains of Santiago (St. James) are supposedly buried. The Cathedral was built in the fourth century. According to Lawrence, it was built to send a message that the true history of Christianity was being covered up by Constantinople, and that the followers of Jesus, after his death, should have followed his brother James.

“The crusades really start in Spain where Christians and moors began fighting as early as the ninth century. Alfonso VI, with Merovingian help, conquered the Alcazar of Segovia in 1088. In quick succession, Avila and Toledo fell. He built the walls that protected these cities and was able to hold on against continued pressure from the Moors. Contrary to what most people believe, Alfonso VI, in Spain, started what is truly the first crusade! Christian against Muslim.

“Even though the Merovingian kings ended with Dagobert II’s murder in 754, and Charlemagne was of Merovingian blood, in 800 declared himself to be the Holy Roman Emperor, a title that was supposedly reserved only for Merovingian kings. Thus the Merovingian bloodline mixed with the Franks, who eventually unified France as a country.

“A direct descendant of Mary Magdalene, Godfroi, Count of Boulogne, resigned to his titles and wealth in France and embarked on the re-conquest of the Holy Lands. He established himself as King of Jerusalem in 1099, one year before his death. An incredible feat, the Merovingians, descendants of Jesus from the House of David, returned 1000 years later to reclaim the throne of Jerusalem. That same year the Templar Knights were officially formed. They were a monastic order, according to the Pope, but really a fighting army to secure the domination of the Holy Lands as well as to guard the security of the roads to the Jerusalem.

“According to Lawrence, all this was done to locate the secret knowledge that had been left buried under the Temple of Jerusalem.” Myrna paused to see if Ramirez had fallen asleep, as his eyes were closed. Larry smiled at her.

Without opening his eyes Ramirez said, “I’m listening. I’m visualizing. Please continue, Myrna.”

“At the same time—the twelfth century—another order was created in Spain, The Knights of Santiago, whose original purpose was to protect the routes to Santiago Compostela. They were a mirror image of the Knights Templar. It was no coincidence that Santiago Matamoros (St. James the Moor Slayer) was their holy leader.

“Whoever controlled the Middle East controlled the commerce that moved through that area, which for practical purposes, in those days, meant controlling world trade. As a direct consequence of the re-conquest of Jerusalem, Fernando III, great-great grandson of Alfonso VI, was able to re-conquer Cordoba and Seville in the 13th century. At that time the Moors were weakened because the wealth that flowed from the control of commerce in the Middle East had shifted from the Muslim to the Christian side.

“It seems logical that the Templars found parts of the Messianic secret, at least pertaining to the creation of wealth, as they became immensely wealthy. Their wealth could be explained naively by the fact that all who joined the order would give up their worldly goods, and the accumulation of these goods and lands was the base of their extraordinary wealth. On the other hand, just like the Pharaohs controlled commerce up and down the Nile, now the Templars controlled commerce through the Middle East, which was definitely part of their riches. But the real problem for the Pope was that the Templar Knights were descendants of the Merovingians and their allegiance was to James, St. John the Baptist and Mary Magdalene, and not to the Son of God, Jesus Christ. They knew the truth.”

“I see,” Ramirez interjected. “The Pope couldn’t tolerate the idea that Jesus was a man, just like John the Baptist or James.”

“Exactly. The Church was built around the principle that Jesus is the Son of God,” Larry added.

“In France, in the fourteenth century, Phillip IV and Pope Clement V destroyed the Templars. A few managed to escape and the Knights of Santiago took them in. The Knights of Santiago remained an integral part of Spain’s rulers’ fighting forces, a vital force in any campaign against the infidels.

“Phillip accused the Templars,” Myrna continued, “of heresy. This, of course was a pretext. What the king was really after was their wealth in France, particularly in the area of Languedoc. With the Pope in his pocket, Phillip arrested the Templars on the night of Friday the 13th, 1307 and tried and executed most of them. As a piece of trivia, that is why Friday the 13th is considered bad luck. However, the few that escaped went into hiding and allegedly their descendants are still running around, today, under different names and secret organizations. The net result is that the Merovingian line

was preserved through Spanish royalty, which was a potential threat to the Pope's legitimacy as leader of the Christians."

"I see why Christ's descendants could be a real threat to the pope." Ramirez said, sipping his Corona. "What I don't understand is what all this has to do with Lawrence's disappearance."

"Indulge me for now," Larry exhorted. "I trust—hope is a better word—things will slowly begin to make sense." Larry handed Ramirez the next story. Myrna smiled and nodded encouragingly.

Ramirez took another sip of his beer and began reading.

Imbert and Jacques, 1307 A.D.

Philip IV, known as “the Fair”, was the king of France. France at the time was virtually bankrupt. The economic burden to service the loans through Jews and Templars was unsustainable. He had become king at the age of seventeen in 1285 and had tried to exploit, ever since, the pious image of his father Louis IX.

Philip had levied extraordinary taxes on the Jews, following his father’s lead in 1292, and then again in 1303. With little political backlash, he then ordered the seizure of all Jewish property in 1306 and the deportation of the Jews. His father and grandfather had used the financial services of the Knights Templar, but he decided to install his own treasury staff at the Louvre. He recalled all the coinage, had it melted down, and in one of the first recorded instances of currency devaluation, cast new coins with a lowered precious metal content. By systematically debasing the coinage, he was able to raise several million pounds sterling.

In a desperate move, Phillip reinstated the right to levy taxes on the Church. To prevent Phillip from doing this, Pope Boniface VIII issued a bull, in 1302, forbidding the clergy to give financial assistance without Rome’s permission. In retaliation, Phillip gave orders to stop all commerce with the Vatican. The Pope ordered the French clergy to return to Rome to discuss potential strategies. Phillip confiscated the Church’s assets. The Pope responded by publishing the bull *Unam Sanctam*, which asserted that everyone summoned to Rome by the Pope should appear if so ordered.

The Pope, Boniface VIII was bisexual, having had a woman and her daughter as his lovers, as well as having seduced a number of handsome young men. He certainly practiced adultery and sodomy, and perhaps he did not go as far as Phillip asserted when he accused him of simony, sorcery and specifically of maintaining a demon who would appear at night and conduct indescribable depravities with the Pope in the papal chambers.

The attacks and counter attacks mounted. Eventually Phillip called a meeting of the States General in Paris to try Boniface *in absentia*. The charges included heresy, not believing in life after death, and murdering his

predecessor, Pope Celestine V. Shortly after, Boniface, in Rome, died of a seizure at eighty-four. The Roman Catholic Church fell into disarray. Pope Benedict XI, Boniface's successor, was poisoned, as he did not meet Phillip's approval either.

After some political maneuvering, Phillip convinced archbishop Bertrand of the abbey of St. Jean d'Angely that it was in his power to make him Pope. Naturally, there were some conditions attached to this: the archbishop would have to stay in France; there would be a reconciliation between Phillip and the Church; admission to the communion for himself; the French clergy would pay for the war in Flanders; the persecution and destruction of the memory of Boniface VIII; James and Peter Colonna would be made cardinals; and support to his right to arrest the Knights Templar on grounds of heresy and to seizure of their immense funds. Thus Bertrand was crowned Pope Clement V at Lyons in December 1305 and the "Auvignon Period" with two Popes (the other in Rome) was initiated.

A little over a year and a half later, after much maneuvering, on Friday the 13th in the autumn of 1307 Phillip issued the order to arrest all the Knights Templar under charges of heresy. Only a few escaped to Spain.

Jacques de Molay, after being the Grand Master of the Temple in England, became the Grand Master of the entire Order. When Phillip's officers took possession of the Paris Temple and its contents, de Molay and other high officials were taken into custody. The Knight Templars offered no resistance, as they had no forewarning and believed they had a deal with the Pope, the one in Rome, the wrong Pope.

William Imbert, the Chief Inquisitor of France and Phillip's personal confessor, was deeply versed in all inquisitorial arts and practices. He was charged with de Molay's interrogation in the building that housed the financial center of the city, the Paris Temple itself. As such, this building did not house the implements of torture used by the Inquisition. Imbert, resourcefully, had come equipped with the materials for the task at hand: two ropes, three big nails and a mallet. He intended to subject de Molay to the same torture as the Romans applied to Jesus.

"Take de Molay to the secret room," Imbert pointed down the hallway. "That is where they perform their obscene ceremonies. It should be fitting," referring to the chamber where he had found a chest containing a shroud, a skull and thighbones used in the Templar resurrection ceremony, a rite where a candidate takes the role of a murder victim, only to be resurrected from the grave.

"Proceed," Moller, the Chief Interrogator, a man with a barrel chest and arms and legs as strong as a horse's, calmly intoned. "I'm sure you will tell

us more than the honorable Templar Preceptor,” referring to their previous interrogation. De Molay certainly had heard the man’s screams. He seemed calm and collected on the outside, at best resigned to the terrible ordeal ahead of him. Imbert smiled, anticipating the pleasure of breaking the man’s spirit.

“Most Templars don’t know too much. That way they can’t reveal what they don’t know,” Jacques de Molay said calmly.

“We’ll soon see how much the Grand Master knows,” Imbert responded sarcastically.

Jacques remained silent. Suddenly his clothes were unceremoniously stripped off. If they presented some form of resistance, they were quickly cut with a sharp knife and violently ripped. The process completely disregarded all humanity and honor. His shoes and socks were the last to be taken off after ripping his under garments and he was left completely naked. Expertly, a rope was attached to each wrist with a tight knot and pulled outwards by two assistants. Imbert was surprised by the fitness of the sixty-three-year old Grand Master.

“My dear, Jacques,” Imbert spoke softly in his ear, standing behind him as he reached around de Molay’s naked body and grabbed his scrotum. Imbert played with the man’s testicles, pinching and moving from one to the other, applying enough pressure to let Jacques know that real pain could be inflicted at any moment. “We are going to have a pleasant conversation.” De Molay just stared forward at the wall past Moller.

“First, tell me about your meeting with Boniface, back when he ascended to the Papacy.” Not getting any immediate response, Imbert tightened his grip. Jacques involuntarily gasped, but he remained silent, attempting to stall. More pressure was applied slowly.

“What do you mean? We talked of many things,” de Molay answered through clenched teeth trying to hide his pain.

“We have all the time in the world. Tell me everything,” Imbert squeezed again. Beads of sweat appeared above Jacques’ lip.

“It had to do mostly with the huge losses sustained by the Templars after the fall of Arce against the Saracens.” A pause—another squeeze, tighter. “We hoped to get some support from the Pope to strengthen the Order’s weakened finances. He suggested that we combine the order with the Hospitallers.”

Imbert moved back and signaled with his eyes, and Moller brought a multi-tailed whip tipped with bone fragments swishing through the air over de Molay’s shoulder, making five small cuts on the back with a loud crack. Beads of sweat appeared on de Molay’s brow.

“When you discussed that meeting with Phillip the Fair, you said that Boniface rejected your proposal. So what is it?”

“I was able to convince Boniface to issue a bull granting the Templars the same rights in Cyprus as we had enjoyed in the Holy Land,” de Molay answered, thinking that this line of questioning would not lead to anything substantive.

“Why did you, shortly after, travel extensively through England and France?”

“I’m not sure what you—” Imbert moved back again. This time Moller brought the whip swishing low towards de Molay’s side, and with a loud slap made another five cuts on his right buttock. De Molay’s legs gave way, but the ropes attached to his wrists quickly lifted him up.

“Try again, Jacques,” Imbert prodded sarcastically.

“I was only trying to raise funds for another Crusade to ensure the Order’s legitimacy.”

“Why didn’t you go to Phillip?”

“Because he owes us too much money! Surely you know that.” De Molay intoned sarcastically.

Another swish of the whip indicated in no uncertain terms that de Molay was to refrain from insolence.

“What treasures were brought back from Jerusalem?”

“I can’t help if you aren’t more specific,” de Molay pleaded through clenched teeth.

“King Godfroi, Hugh de Payns?” Imbert whispered tentatively, fishing, guessing.

“You mean our first Grand Master?”

“Yes, precisely.”

“That was more than two hundred years ago,” de Molay wailed. “How could this be of any relevance?”

Another swish of Moller’s whip, this time wrapping around a thigh, indicated that he was to abstain from being impertinent.

“You are aware, are you not? About the secret treasure buried under Solomon’s Temple brought to France by the Templars? We know the founders spent years digging. Tell me where is it!” Imbert hissed.

“I don’t understand your question. Treasure?”

“You know well what I mean,” Imbert interjected gamely, squeezing de Molay’s scrotum, hoping that the pain might confuse de Molay and inadvertently help reveal something.

“Are you talking about the myth of Solomon’s gold?”

Imbert slapped both de Molay's ears, leaving him momentarily deaf. He circled around to the front and backhanded de Molay across the face. De Molay spit blood from his lower lip.

"Be careful with his lips, Sir. We want him to be able to talk," Moller cautioned respectfully.

"Do you really believe in the existence of the Ark of the Covenant or the Holy Grail?" de Molay asked trying to read where Imbert would like to take this interrogation.

"Are there other kinds of treasures?"

"Knowledge?" de Molay taunted with a sarcastic tone.

The taunting produced another lashing out with the whip. De Molay's legs collapsed again.

"Take him over by the door," Imbert pointed to the heavy wood door that gave access to this chamber. The door, two hands thick, was attached with strong iron hinges to a stout wooden doorframe. De Molay was dragged over, blood barely dribbling from his many cuts. "Get that stool!" Imbert roared.

One of the assistants threw the rope attached to de Molay's right wrist over the door. Another quickly went behind the door and pulled at the rope until de Molay dangled off the floor. De Molay gritted his teeth as his right arm was almost vertically above his head. Imbert couldn't help himself and slapped de Molay's inert penis with a laugh, as he reflexively pulled up his knees to protect his private parts.

"Pull his feet down to the stool!" As they did so, Imbert laid his hand out, palm up. "Pass me a nail and the mallet. Hold his feet steady." Imbert reached up with the nail in his left hand and the mallet in his right.

"Do you want me to do that, Sir?" Moller inquired respectfully.

"No. This will be my pleasure." He placed the nail feeling for a place between the radius and ulna bones of the wrist, below the hand. De Molay struggled to move his feet. "Hold him still!"

Imbert moved to one side. The whip swished again, first on the left side, then on the right, striking de Molay on his left flank and then under his upright outstretched arm. A small whimper escaped de Molay's lips as the two assistants struggled to keep the feet from moving. Quickly, Imbert placed the nail back in the middle of de Molay's right wrist careful to avoid the arteries and with one blow of the mallet drove the nail through the wrist into the wood. Another two solid strikes insured that the nail went deeply into the door. Imbert turned to enjoy the pain on de Molay's expression, only to be frustrated as he had passed out and his head hung unconsciously to his left.

“Bring some water. Loss of blood is minimal. That’s good. It won’t be hard to keep him conscious,” Imbert expertly surmised. It was not his intention to kill the man. “Take the rope off his wrist.” A few instants later de Molay opened his eyes alertly.

“Have you, at any time, practiced any abominable sexual acts?”

“I don’t understand the term abominable.”

“Pass me another nail,” Imbert said coolly as he opened his palm facing upwards. “Pull his wrist towards the edge of the door. Tighter! Hold it steady. Hold his feet!”

De Molay’s left arm was stretched out at right angle to his right arm, towards the edge of the door. Expertly, another nail was quickly driven through the left wrist, again, without drawing too much blood. De Molay broke into a sweat, his eyes rolling in their sockets but remained conscious.

“You do not understand abominable. How about homosexual? Tell me about your depravity.”

“I never indulge in sex with other males. The Templars are righteous men! We do not practice the vice!” de Molay screamed indignant.

“Is Jesus the Son of God?” Imbert expertly changed tactics.

“The Templars do not believe that Jesus, or any other man for that matter, is a god, because there is only one God. And the Pope knows that.”

“The Pope?”

“Yes. He knows that we have proof of Jesus’ genealogy, and more importantly, of his descendants to this day. We have kept our end of the deal; we have not made this public. Most of the Templars don’t even know this. Surely you know that.”

“Stick to the question. Is Jesus the Son of God?”

“You are incompetent to carry out this interrogation. You have no idea of what we are about.” De Molay answered contemptuously.

“Lend me the whip,” Imbert instructed Moller. He brought the whip expertly spreading the multiple tails, each one cutting across the abdomen and continuing down the left side. Then expertly, in a continuous motion circled around and came down on the right side, producing marks that made it look like a lion, with both paws, had clawed the man.

“Is Jesus the Son of God?”

“No.”

“What is the Templars’ connection with John the Baptist?”

“The same as the Hospitallers of St. John.”

“And what might that relation be?”

“He’s a saint, that is all,” de Molay tried to lie smoothly between gasps. “Everyone knows that.”

“Do you reject the cross as a symbol of God?” Imbert changed direction trying to confuse de Molay and get enough to burn him at the stake. But it was obvious de Molay was not going to fall that easily into the trap. More punishment was needed. Moller let out with the whip once again; this time across the neck and the right side of his face. De Molay spit more blood through his clenched teeth. His two last answers could ensure his death as a heretic, but it didn’t matter at this point. He couldn’t control himself any longer.

“We deny Jesus and the cross, yes it is true,” de Molay whimpered, knowing that this was a death sentence, but added defiantly hoping to retaliate in some small measure, “But we are not homosexuals like your kind. We are not perverts like the Pope. We are the defenders of truth, not cynical exploiters of the people like the Church.”

Imbert smiled and opened his palm again. Another nail was handed to him. He stooped down and expertly drove a nail into Jacques’ right foot between the second and third metatarsal. As soon as the point of the nail was through, Imbert placed the right foot over the left and with one strike of the mallet drove the nail through both feet. Another swing of the mallet drove the nail into the door. Imbert moved back to enjoy his handiwork. The blood loss was minimal, but de Molay was sweating profusely and could barely breathe because of the way he was hanging from his right arm. The man would not be coherent much longer. The pain inflicted was beyond normal endurance. Large amounts of lactic acid were accumulating in de Molay’s bloodstream due to the huge trauma. Imbert could literally smell the effects of the pain. When he got close to de Molay, he could perceive the odor of sour milk. De Molay’s body temperature soared and more sweat poured out releasing more lactic acid and his muscles started cramping in small continuous spasms. His breathing came in short, quick shallow breaths, trying to catch up to the rhythm of the pounding heart that was clearly visible pushing against the ribcage. Time was running out.

“So you are not going to tell me about the hidden treasure . . .” Imbert let the sentence hang.

“You have all that is here in the Paris Temple, there is nothing more,” de Molay whimpered. “It’s too late. The knights of Santiago will carry on. Spain, not France, will rise above other nations because of your treacheries.” de Molay whispered weakly, “I confessed to all you need to burn me. There is nothing more to say.”

Imbert knew that he would not get more from this man. Yet, this was the time to let de Molay know that his mocking use of the shroud had not gone unnoticed.

“Take him down, and put him on the shroud.” The shroud was extended on the cold marble floor. As they laid him on the cloth Imbert added, “Wrap him up with the excess.” They did so covering de Molay’s bruised, cut, steaming and sweaty body and face.

“Should we place him back on his bed?” Moller asked respectfully as four men picked the inert body using the shroud as a guinea sack.

Imbert nodded and before turning on his heels added, “Get someone to nurse his wounds and take care of him. He needs to stand trial. I can’t afford his death.”

“But his only friends have also been arrested, Sir, and he has no family in Paris,” Moller protested lamely.

“Call the family of the Templar Preceptor of Normandy. They can take care of the two of them,” Imbert called without turning back as he walked down the hallway.

A Neuropsychological Theory

Detective Ramirez took a deep breath. Myrna looked up as soon as she finished reading. They both turned to Larry.

Ramirez spoke first, “Can we say there is some fascination—perhaps fixation is the psychological term—with torture in this story? Can I, or anyone of you two, read some possible physical abuse inflicted on the author of this story?”

“I see what you mean, Detective. And some psychiatrists would probably concur with your thoughts. But, I don’t think this is the case.”

“What do you think this means, Larry?” Myrna asked.

“I think my father is exploring the depths of mental suffering using physical pain as a metaphor.” Larry explained vainly with a faint smile. “The suffering in depression is beyond words, beyond metaphors. Very talented writers who have suffered depression complain that there is no terminology, no words to describe it. At best, they use metaphors that touch only the surface. Depression is a very complex state, unrelated to the normal experience of people that haven’t suffered through it. It is a very disorganized state, emotionally and intellectually. In my readings on depression I have come across some adjectives that, perhaps, convey the sense of what depression is like, as well as the individual differences that it can manifest.”

“Can you be more explicit?” Ramirez asked.

“In some people, depression manifests a sense of disconnectedness. For example, some describe this as: the self is a fiction, reality becomes ghostly, I felt like an outline of a person, like a ghost, a shadow, emptying of the soul, and think ceaselessly of oblivion.

“Others describe depression as a confluence of bad feelings. Like, loneliest, or I thought I would never recover or die; pounding around, utterly confounding, immensely disturbing, a fidgety restlessness, intolerable grief; agony reached a deafening pitch, panicky, crying inconsolably, died of sorrow and dangerous.

“Also common to many that try to describe depression, is the use of some of the physical symptoms that accompany bad feelings, like the dread of the

clammy chill, a knot in the throat, awful heaviness, sadness in the cheeks, and drained rapidly. Frequently, many portray depression as a form of exhausted state: stayed quiet, stalled, throttled back, deep trough, weary and fatigued, desperate prolonged, insidious, and a relentless torture.

“My father spoke ‘of a blackness in his head.’ I have seen allusions to the darkness very often.”

“The darkness? What do you mean?” Myrna said.

Larry paused to think, and then added, “Some describe it like a skittering blackness, or downwards into hell’s black depths, or darkness crashed through the dread.”

“How can you remember all that?” Myrna spoke in admiration.

“According to Dr Boukhardt, he is some type of brain genius,” Ramirez added, smiling at Myrna.

“Let’s say I have studied the subject and given it some thought,” Larry continued unfazed. “Intellectual confusion during depression is expressed as aggrieved, pitifully small, ramshackle structure, memories are a huge minefield, exaggerated ills and threats, and a cage without a key.

“Ultimately, depression is akin to an unspeakable torment where the individuals lose touch with themselves. Because depression manifests itself differently from person to person, and can be different from one depressed episode to the next, it is confusing to the sufferer, and it is hard to diagnose correctly.”

“This is pretty intense. There is plenty of food for thought,” Myrna whispered, but added in Lawrence’s defense, “Your father was a complex man. He was smart and well read. Surely he told you that writing helped him keep his panic attacks under control. You don’t need to read anything between the lines regarding his writings. I, for one, just don’t think he was depressed.”

“Perhaps. But he also stopped doing any engineering work because he claimed that analytical processes triggered his panic attacks.” Larry counter-argued.

“You mean, logical, rational thinking?” Ramirez inquired.

“Yes, something like that.”

“What does writing or thinking have to do with anything?” Ramirez insisted, giving Larry an opportunity to explain.

“Emotions, or the chemicals released in the brain when emotions are triggered, produce a destabilizing activity between the two hemispheres of the brain. This motivates certain responses. There is a circuit whose natural tendency is to restore balance between the activities of the two hemispheres and return the organism to neutral calm.”

“The organism? We are talking about your father,” Myrna protested, slightly indignant.

“In my father’s case, actually in all of us, emotions help regulate our biology. There are structures in the brain that perform various functions triggering or regulating emotions. These structures, directly or indirectly, cause the release of neurotransmitters, peptides and hormones that literally change the functioning of the brain and the body. Each emotion produces a change, a different state. It isn’t only emotional, the change is physical; I could say, spiritual, if you prefer. Typically, but not always, a certain asymmetry exists in which the right side is more involved with negative emotions than the left.”

“Do you mean that more activity on the right side, relative to the left, is perceived as a negative emotion?” Myrna clarified.

“Exactly. This circuit, which I call the isorropic circuit—from the Greek, *isorropia*, meaning balance—tries to balance the activity of both hemispheres through a series of feed-back loops using both inhibitory and excitatory neurotransmitters, and also signaling through several commissures . . .”

“Hold it,” Ramirez said lifting his left palm up, then just his index finger, “Go back. Commissures?”

“Commissures are specific connections between the two hemispheres,” Larry explained. “When one side is slower than the other, and this is a gross simplification, it signals the other side, through a commissure, to speed up slightly,” Larry lectured.

“Writing, reading, and all this, you are going to tell us, happens on the left side of the brain. So, in your father’s case, by writing he increased the activity on the left side, and helped restore a natural balance,” Myrna said smugly. “You see, even I can get that.”

“I wish it was that simple. Positive emotions are associated with a slight increase in brain activity as a whole, and activation of a small area on the left, relative to the right. Conversely, negative emotions are linked to a small decrease in brain activity, and activation of the same small area on the right compared to the left side. Writing and speaking are controlled on the left side, but singing, prosody and the emotional contents of writing are on the right side. If this small area on the left is activated, it helps restore balance, and makes the individual feel better.”

“Individual is better than organism, but remember we are talking about your father,” Myrna corrected. “I always thought that reasoning and logic were on the left side also. You know, the left brain versus the right brain.”

“Typically, yes. But these regions in the human cortex are not always on the same side, there can be individual variations. Now that you mention it, in my father’s case, it could be that reasoning, logic and analytical thinking were on the right side, which when activated, would increase activity in the small area of the right side, and therefore be perceived by the isorropic circuit as a negative emotion. It would thus interpret the brain had slowed down, when in reality it hadn’t. To counter balance this, the isorropic circuit, erroneously, would tend to increase activity dramatically on the right hemisphere. The quickest way to do this is by using the fear circuit, which is on the right side. In the extreme, like in my father’s case, a panic attack could be triggered for the simple, but wrong reason of trying to restore balance between the two hemispheres when there wasn’t any imbalance to begin with.” Larry, almost as an afterthought, added, “The opposite of fear is anger. Anger attacks happen on the left side.”

“So in this case, we should think of fear as negative and anger as positive?” Ramirez clarified.

“Yes, definitely. In essence the isorropic circuit modulates the activity in each hemisphere, mostly through inhibitory neurons that go to the hippocampus and the habenula from the thalamus.” Larry noticed Ramirez and Myrna’s perplexed expressions. “Just try to get the gist of it. These inhibitory signals slow down certain structures having to do with both overall activity in the cortex and context of memories. On the other hand, this circuit, through other excitatory connections, can increase activity in the entire cortex. It is like a tug of war, where slowly, but inexorably calmness is restored.”

“So?”

“Calmness is a desirable state. Emotions are about violent transitions leading to actions, hopefully to restore neutrality. The isorropic circuit, because of the various signals it receives, determines the emotional state, the context of the emotion, and by comparing activity in each hemisphere resolves whether the emotion is positive or negative.”

“Thank god it’s Sunday,” Ramirez said, accompanied by Myrna’s laughter.

Myrna, seeing Larry’s reaction, quickly added, “I’m sorry, I know this is serious. I’m sure Ramirez meant no insult. Didn’t you?” She asked Ramirez.

“Of course not. I just meant it’s Sunday, meaning I have more time than usual.”

“I apologize, Larry. I thought that was funny.” Myrna tried to appease Larry.

“Please go on.” Ramirez said.

“You’re the one that asked me to explain mood disorders and suicide, detective,” Larry admonished.

Myrna reached to hold Larry’s hand.

“Please bear with me, Larry.” Ramirez said quickly. “I truly didn’t mean insult. This is difficult for me to follow. I am trying my best.” Ramirez looked down at the floor and loosened his pink tie. “I’ll try not to interrupt. I’m just trying to understand.”

Myrna nodded encouragingly, “Go ahead.”

Larry smiled, “This is very important. Try to imagine that we could represent the activity of the entire brain, of all the billions of neurons, with a single point. Now think that the isorropic circuit’s job is to keep that point close to zero, which represents neutral calmness. The complexity of the brain, of the interactions of billions of neurons, is such, that this point, under the best of conditions, is always moving,” Larry seemed to be drawing imaginary small circles in mid air. “Wandering around zero, but never setting on zero. In mathematics we would say that it tends to zero.” Larry paused to check his audience. “Yes?”

Myrna smiled and turned to Ramirez. He nodded, indicating he was following.

“Now imagine,” Larry continued without losing a beat, “whenever this point is slightly off zero, no matter by how little, it represents an emotional state, a state different than neutral calmness. This perpetual fluttering,” he continued drawing small circles rapidly in the air, “Permits the generation of myriad varying emotional states. Each emotional state, in turn, potentially can activate all the memories associated with it. In this way a huge pool of memories can be accessed by very small emotional changes. The speed at which the emotional changes can be generated also determines the potential number of contexts. The more emotional changes possible, the more contexts possible and the greater number of memories accessible. In this way the brain generates the maximum variety of behaviors in the shortest time possible as response to changes in the environment.” Larry paused to catch his breath. “This places the organism in a state of maximum adaptability. When the brain detects this healthy state of maximum adaptability, it is perceived as a sense of self!” Larry beamed triumphantly.

“That’s very profound, Larry,” Myrna said admiringly. Noticing a slight negative reaction in Larry, she added, “Seriously. I am smiling because you are referring to the organism again. I thought we had moved to the individual.”

“So we now have a scientific theory of the self, and a mathematical basis to measure the intensity of the self,” Ramirez said enthusiastically in amazement.

“You can say that, yes. When the spectrum of emotional responses that can be triggered is wider, the sense of self will be felt more intensely. My father got it right in the story of Illiam. In other words, this produces a nonverbal knowledge that many memories can quickly be activated because the brain flutters, like a butterfly, from emotion to emotion in almost imperceptible ways. The closer to neutral calmness, the higher the degree of self-esteem. This point, what I call the isorropic attractor, generally wanders inside a range that maintains homeostatic balance.”

“Hold it,” Ramirez interrupted. “Homeo-what?”

“Homeostatic balance; meaning balancing all the requirements of all the organs. You know, like supplying sugar, oxygen, everything necessary for a healthy life. Keep in mind that the brain exists inside and as a part of the body. It is not independent of it. It is intimately connected to every part of the body.”

“But,” Myrna put in, “Larry, I’m asking, as Illiam asked, ‘Can you lose your sense of self?’”

Larry nodded slowly. “In extreme cases, when the isorropic attractor is pushed far enough from the range of homeostatic balance, the brain no longer perceives a sense of self; the organism can no longer adapt.”

“You mean death? Suicide?” Ramirez whispered delicately.

Larry smiled faintly. He looked at Ramirez, then at Myrna. He tried to control the tears, and finally broke down sobbing.

Mexico City, 2006

Michael Merchant quickly left Benito Juarez International Airport after landing Aeromexico's new Boeing 777. He loved flying the new jets. This was one of the perks of being one of the most senior pilots. He'd been a pilot for Aeromexico for thirty-four years since he was twenty-one.

He had flown to Paris a few days before, seen the museums and enjoyed the restaurants of the city of light, and returned to Mexico City. He crossed the street over to the Pilot's Association parking building. His silver BMW 325 was parked on the first floor. He smoothly accelerated into the ever-present airport traffic. He'd be happy to get to his house in Cuernavaca, an hour and a quarter drive.

As he took the exit to head down Viaducto Poniente, unnoticed by him, two unmarked black Ford Mustangs followed closely. Michael was in the left lane when one of them smoothly moved in front of him and the second Mustang moved up on his right. The lead Mustang slowed down. Michael turned to see if he could pass on the right, but the other Mustang slowed also. He leaned on his horn, but the two Mustangs slowly moved to a crawl. The cars behind started beeping their horns. Then he was quickly forced to stop. One man jumped out of each Mustang. The man from the Mustang in front ran to the BMW's driver's door and yanked it open brandishing a gun. He immediately hit the unlock button; the man from the other Mustang opened the right back door and jumped in the back seat.

"Move over. Now!" the man commanded, pressing the gun to Michael's left temple. Michael held on to the steering wheel. "Don't be foolish," he yelled. Michael stubbornly held on, his knuckles turning white.

"Take my watch," Michael said referring to the gold Rolex he sported, extending his left wrist out, thinking they were car thieves.

The man hit Michael hard on the top of the head with the butt of the gun. He passed out.

"Pull him over," the man instructed the other in the back seat and jumped into the driver's seat.

The two black Mustangs accelerated amid a cacophony of impatient horns followed by the silver BMW. Michael recovered consciousness almost instantly.

“Take it easy, buddy,” the man in the back seat said, pressing a gun to Michael’s head. “Just be a good boy and nothing is going to happen.” The BMW took the first exit and headed north on Isabel La Catolica, made a left through a red light and stopped.

The driver smiled at him. “Just be a good boy, Michael. Listen to my friend.”

Michael was trying to assess what it meant that they knew his name. At first he thought they were small time car thieves, in which case they would take him to some deserted place, kill him and use the car for spare parts.

The driver, thinking that Michael got the message, stepped on the gas pedal. Without thinking, Michael opened the door and flung himself out head first, hitting the pavement with his right elbow. He heard screeching tires as he stood up to run.

“Get him,” the driver yelled as he slammed on the brakes. The man in the back seat jumped out put his gun in his pants, and wrapped his right arm around Michael’s throat. Michael squirmed and elbowed the man hard. The man grunted, let go, pulled out the gun from his pants, and for the second time knocked Michael unconscious. The man caught him as he fell and dragged him back to the BMW. Once both were in the car, the driver accelerated, turned left and got on the Viaducto again.

“Why did you stop?” the man in the back seat asked between clenched teeth.

“I thought he would be more cooperative,” the driver shot back.

Michael regained consciousness, felt his face wet, touched it, and his finger turned red. A small rivulet of blood ran down his face. He had a small cut in the top of his head.

“So, what do you want?” Michael said as he slowly inspected his head wound with his right hand.

“We need some information. Everything was fine until Fogarty vanished. Now, suddenly, Detective Ramirez—you know him, don’t you?—Calls you. The NYPD called Modesto asking about Fogarty’s wife, they called L.A. about the OJ case. The cat is getting out of the bag. We warned Fogarty not to publish anything.”

“What do I have to do with any of that? Where are we going?” Michael added as he saw them turning south on Viaducto Tlalpam.

“We are taking you home,” the man in the back seat said with heavy sarcasm.

“We know you talked to Larry, Fogarty’s kid. You told him you received a story from Fogarty and e-mailed it to Larry. We have it all on tape so don’t deny it. We want a copy of the story, we want everything Fogarty wrote,” the driver said in a matter-of-fact tone.

“I deleted it.”

“For your sake, let’s hope that isn’t true. The General wouldn’t like it,” the driver threatened.

“What General?”

“Shut up, idiot. Just drive,” the man in the back seat said. “Let me do the talking.”

They drove in silence. On the toll highway to Cuernavaca, as they were dropping from ten thousand feet through the mountains, moving through lava fields with scarcely any vegetation, they approached a curve on the highway known for its shape, *The Pear*; the city of Cuernavaca could be seen in the valley thousands of feet below, the city light’s shining in a mosaic reminiscent of the Milky Way.

“Listen carefully, Michael. Call your house and tell Adela that you are having some guests tonight. Instruct her to go to the market and get some *chiles poblanos*. Tell her you’d like *chiles rellenos* for four tonight. Tell her to take some cash from the drawer in your desk.”

Michael turned to look at the man in the back seat. They obviously knew many intimate details of his life—his cook’s name and even his cook’s expertise, not to mention the contents of his desk’s drawers.

“We don’t want her home when we get there,” the man in the back seat explained with a smile.

Michael pulled out his cell phone and speed dialed without further argument. He turned to look at the man in the back seat as he pressed the send button. He instructed Adela as told. “Don’t argue Adela. It doesn’t matter who is coming for dinner. Just do it. I’ll talk to you later.” Michael made it seem like he hung up and put the phone down.

“Pass me the phone,” the man in the back whispered. “Very smart.” He took the phone and closed it “I don’t want to see any more little tricks.” He tucked the phone in his pocket.

About twenty minutes later they arrived at Michael’s house. The remote control opened the left heavy paneled garage door. A Porsche Boxter was in the middle slot of the three-car garage. After parking the car, they pushed

Michael quickly up the staircase that lead to a garden. To the right was a paddle tennis court—artificial grass with sand.

“Maybe we can play a couple of sets,” the man who had been in the back commented.

Michael shook his head incredulously. They obviously knew his house. To the left was an extensive terrace in front of the guest bedrooms. Straight ahead was a square swimming pool and Jacuzzi. They ushered Michael to the right of the swimming pool—with a big white “M” in the middle of the bottom of it—pushing him towards his office and the side of the house that lead to the master bedroom.

“You guys seem to know quite a bit about this place,” Michael commented.

“We know a lot of things. More than we care to know,” the driver answered.

“I told you to keep silent.” Then to Michael, “I really hope, for your sake, that we can get that story you e-mailed.”

“I told you I deleted it.”

“Let me see.” The man sat down at the PC console. He hit *Start*, then *Search*, and instructed to look for all files with “doc” extension.

“How do you know it’s a “doc” file?” the driver asked. He kept his gun pointed at Michael.

“Fogarty used Microsoft Word for all his writings.”

Nothing came up. He opened a cell phone and used automatic dialing. “It’s me. Is he there?” He closed his cell and added, “Larry is home. E-mail him to send you a copy, Michael. Now!” the man instructed. The driver pushed Michael into the seat with his gun.

Michael did as he was told, typed a short concise message and pressed the “Send” button.

New York, 2006

Lawrence's computer came to life as per its settings. When the e-mail arrived, the computer chimed a warning, the screen turned on and a butler with a tray filled with mail appeared on the bottom right of the screen. Larry, surprised, turned to Ramirez and Myrna.

"What can that be?" Larry asked himself as he clicked on the butler.

There was a message from: *mmerchant@yahoo.com.mx* flashing. Larry clicked on it and the screen changed:

Larry, do as I say. E-mail me a copy of the story I sent you. The one about the Pharaoh. ASAP. Uncle Michael.

Larry turned to Ramirez.

"It can't hurt," Ramirez responded. "Why would he want it back?"

The PC chimed another warning. Another e-mail. Larry clicked on it again.

Larry: they say you are watching your monitor. Acknowledge by clicking on the link below to activate a live chat.

Larry turned to Ramirez. Ramirez nodded encouragingly. Larry clicked on the link; a small box appeared titled "mmerchant Conversation." At the bottom a message appeared, "mmerchant is typing." Suddenly a message appeared:

I am with two thugs that demand the story I sent you. They insist you are there, someone is watching you, and as far as I can tell, according to the chat box—Lawrence—meaning you, is on line. Please type something and respond.

"Can you authenticate that it truly is Michael?" Ramirez looked at Larry. Larry nodded. "Tell him you are e-mailing the story."

Larry typed back. "*What is your nickname?*"

"Vampire."

"*And mine?*"

"*Little Flash.*"

"*When is your birthday?*"

"*May 20.*"

"*And mine?*"

"*January 28.*"

"It's him." Larry, convinced of the authenticity of the sender, proceeded to send the e-mail with the file attached.

"The story is loading." Larry typed, *"You'll have it soon."*

The PC answered. *"They say that Ramirez and Myrna are with you. They know you gave Ramirez some papers. They want copies of that now."*

Ramirez ran to the window, "From where are they watching us?" He added, peering into the street below, "I don't see anyone obvious down there. They must be somewhere in the buildings across the street."

The PC answered as if hearing Ramirez question: *"They are on a cell phone talking to someone. They say to tell Ramirez, 'Nice shirt. They like his pink tie! He should smile as he looks out the window.' Apparently they have someone observing you right now."*

"Who are these people? What do they want?" Ramirez asked no one under his breath. "Call Michael on the phone. Tell him you will e-mail whatever he instructs, but you want a guarantee that they won't hurt him."

Larry opened his father's address book, dialed and immediately heard it ring.

"Bueno?" Michael answered.

"It's me Larry. I'll e-mail whatever you need, uncle Michael, but I need a guarantee that they are not going to hurt you."

"Larry," the man's voice boomed over the phone line as he grabbed the receiver from Michael's hand. "You don't give *us* conditions. You just do as we say."

Ramirez put his ear close to the earphone. A small pause ensued. Larry and Ramirez could hear another voice talking in Spanish in the background.

"Larry, put Ramirez on. We know he's listening. He's standing right next to you," the man said through the phone.

"The story you asked has been sent," Larry insisted, checking the monitor. Larry passed the phone to Ramirez.

"What did you do with Lawrence?" Ramirez asked.

"We ask the questions, Ramirez. Explain to Larry we are not amateurs; that bad things happen if he doesn't follow our desires. Now be a good boy and pay attention to the instructions on your screen," the man's voice intoned and hung up.

"Damn it!" Ramirez said. Myrna looked out the window at an angle into the windows across the street.

"They must be somewhere in those apartment buildings," she said pointing out across the street.

Another message appeared on the PC: *They want everything on OJ and all else that you have. EVERYTHING YOUR FATHER WROTE. EVERYTHING! These guys mean business. Do it now!!!!*

"They want the OJ story. I don't have it. I gave it to you," Larry addressed Ramirez.

"Just tell them so. I'll get you the OJ book back. Send them whatever you do have. We have to figure out who these guys are. We need to buy some time."

"I'm e-mailing what I have. It's just a bunch of short stories. I don't have the OJ story!!!!" Larry typed furiously. *"But I will get it back."*

Larry began attaching the files to the e-mail, and then he pressed the "Send" button.

"Why on earth do they want stories about Chinese peasants, Pharaohs, hermits and the Crucifixion of a Templar?" Larry said staring at the monitor.

"And Jesus Christ," added Myrna.

What should I do about the sex stories? Could they know about them? Larry wondered.

"They're just fishing," Ramirez explained. "This is great, don't you see it?"

"What's great?" Myrna parroted.

"They don't have him."

"Who?" Larry asked.

"Your father. They don't have him."

"Not if he committed suicide. On the other hand, they could've killed my father and disposed of him and now they have Michael!" Larry spoke tensely.

"Perhaps they think your father has more writings, which they believe lead us to stir up old questions and issues. They didn't ask us where he was, because they know," Myrna added somberly. "And if they know, then he didn't kill himself."

"Its more likely they know we are looking for him. They know better than to ask us where he is, or even have us believe they killed him." Larry reasoned.

"At this point, only two things are true: they feared your father, and your father's fears were well grounded. These people are dangerous and have means."

"What are you saying?" Myrna asked.

"Big bucks," Ramirez rubbed his thumb over the middle and index finger as if counting money, "They can coordinate guys in New York with some

blokes in Mexico in just three days,” referring to the last day Fogarty was seen or heard from.

“We don’t have any proof that someone was threatening or looking for my father before his disappearance. The first threat we heard of is against Michael. Today.” Larry insisted, “It’s still possible my father suffered persecutory delusions and disappeared.”

The phone rang.

“Hello?” Larry picked up on the first ring.

“Larry,” it was Michael recounting what had just happened.

“Have they left?” Myrna asked worried.

Larry continued listening into the earpiece, covered the mouthpiece, “Yes, they are gone. I’ll tell you everything in a sec.” He raised his hand with extended fingers, palm towards Myrna, indicating patience.

“They want the OJ manuscript,” Michael said on the phone. “They gave me twenty-four hours. They calmly said that it would be very easy to kill me. Twenty-four hours, Larry. Can you get it?” Michael’s voice came loud through the phone.

“Yes, but who do I give it to?”

“They’ll tell me tomorrow at noon,” Michael responded.

“I’ll get it tomorrow morning, don’t worry, uncle. Sorry about all this mess.”

“It’s not your fault. I warned you it was dangerous. No news about your dad, is there?”

The silence said it all.

“Keep in mind that my phone is tapped. I wouldn’t be surprised that yours is too. Take care and be careful, Larry. Say hello to Myrna and Ramirez.”

“Myrna and Ramirez?”

“Ramirez is the one who called me, Larry. From what they said, it sounds like his calls started this nightmare. I can’t say much. I’ll keep in touch.”

Larry hung up and sat down thoughtfully.

“Michael says to say hello, to both of you,” Larry said after a pause. “Detective, Michael thinks your calls are the reason why they are after him and us.”

“Detective, Larry,” Myrna spoke, “are you now convinced that someone was really after him? That Lawrence didn’t suffer Persecutory Delusions?”

Ramirez nodded. “Well, perhaps. But if not, then what did he suffer of?”

“I’m not convinced yet, Myrna,” Larry quickly interjected. “Please bare with me. I still think my father killed himself.”

Myrna shook her head. “Perhaps no one was after your father, but he thought so. So he disappears. Then Ramirez starts asking questions, and

because of that, old issues are re-opened and they are after him again. He disappeared quietly and now they want him. It is a paradox.”

“I don’t care about paradoxes. Perhaps they asked him for something and he refused to give it to them.” Ramirez said.

“Like what?”

“Probably his writings because they included some incriminating material. Maybe he hid these different stories, so they wouldn’t get them and when they realized this they killed him.”

“I find that hard to believe. My father would have said something to me. He seemed extremely agitated when I last talked to him,” Larry countered.

“Let’s get to the bottom of this insanity notion. I need to know exactly what your father suffered of, if anything. What would be a true description of his state of mind?”

“Minimally, my father was depressed and he suffered Panic Attacks, perhaps anxiety attacks,” Larry raised his voice exasperated. “Possibly, he also had persecutory delusions, and was paranoid, but now I’m less certain.”

“Larry, your father was not depressed. Of that I’m sure. You are making it sound like he was crazy.” Myrna insisted.

“The threats to Michael put a different note on this. It definitely can’t be all imaginary. They are really after something. I need to communicate with California.” Ramirez looked at his watch as he got up from his seat. “Modesto and Los Angeles,” he explained straightening his pink tie. “We need to get moving on this.”

“Hold your horses.” Myrna pushed him back into his seat. “It is Sunday. You won’t find anyone having to do with court records or Larry’s mom’s death. Sit down, detective. Larry thinks the stories are the clue to what happened. There’s more reading.” She turned to Larry. “Can you print the 1486 story?”

“It is Sunday, and I have no one to go home to.” Ramirez sat down, grateful for the company of the two young people. He smiled. “Like I told you, I will consider all possible leads. Pass me this other story.”

Juan and Isabel 1486 A.D.

Queen Isabel sat in the Throne room in the Alcazar of Segovia. Looking out from the heights, she admired the views that extend below her. She was lost in thought, thinking how much had been achieved since her accession to the throne. She thought of Fernando, her husband. The sound of running feet in the hallway interrupted her thoughts. “How many times do I have to tell Juan not to run?” she said to herself. She got up and called out, “Juan!” No answer, so she moved quickly, following the receding footsteps.

As she walked down the hallway, she heard Juan’s clavichord. He was practicing his scales, up and down with both hands simultaneously. She stopped at the door, looked at Juan, her oldest boy, her second born, with affection. He was playing his scales very fast and he moved his head following his keystrokes. She smiled, remembering the incident of the day before.

The fire alarm had sounded; huge plumes of smoke streamed out the windows one level below the Throne Room on the opposite side of the Alcazar. The smoke that streamed up the staircase reduced visibility to nil. The Captain of the Guard, the first to reach the basement, called up the stairs, “Hurry. It looks like a big fire.” Then he heard coughing. “Who’s there?” he yelled into the cloud of smoke.

“It’s me, Prince Juan, Captain,” came the reply amid much coughing. “I’m fine. There is no fire. It’s just a smoke bomb. There is nothing to worry about.”

More guards came running down the stairs. Juan emerged from the smoke. Between bouts of coughing, Juan addressed the Captain, “The smoke bomb was bigger than I expected. I didn’t mean to produce so much smoke. It was awesome.”

“Make sure there is no fire. Don’t take his word for it. Take the Prince up to the Queen,” the Captain ordered.

“That won’t be necessary, Captain,” said Isabel as she calmly approached the group. “What is going on?” she asked no one in particular. Juan continued to cough, trying to clear his lungs. “Juan, for God’s sake, what is going on?”

“Your highness, I must take the blame. We were discussing the uses of smoke in the battlefield. Yesterday I taught Prince Juan how to make a smoke bomb using gunpowder. I never thought he would try to make one. If there is any damage, it is I that should be held responsible.”

“I am sorry, mother,” Juan said between coughs.

“Young man, you and I will talk about this later. In any case, Captain, if anyone’s to blame, it is I. The day before yesterday, I was conversing with the young prince, and I told him that some day he would take over his father’s responsibilities and it was his duty to learn all he could about military matters. So, he obviously followed my advice.”

The curtains in the general vicinity of the basement were permeated with the acrid smell of gunsmoke. They would need to be replaced. In the future, Isabel thought, she would be more careful with what she said to her son.

As Juan continued his exercises on the clavichord, Isabel walked in quietly and sat down, waiting for Juan to finish. When he did, he turned, looked at her as he did when he was about to put a question forward that he felt might challenge his mother’s intelligence.

“Mother,” he started tentatively.

“Yes, Juan?”

“You haven’t mentioned the smoke bomb.”

“You already know that it was irresponsible. I don’t need to beat a dead horse to death, do I?”

“Then, why don’t we jump into our weekly philosophy session? Let’s talk about success.” Soon, Juan would be instructed in the Secret Codes passed down their Merovingian ancestors. For now, it served her to begin her son’s education.

“Very well.” After a short pause, Isabel continued, “What is success?”

“It is doing whatever you want.”

“Then, to be successful, you need to know what you want?”

“We all know what we want. We just have to set a goal and do whatever it takes to get there.”

“Do we? How do you know the way to the goal? How can you be sure that what you are doing will eventually get you there?”

“What do you mean, mother?”

“Think of the captain of a ship. He knows where he wants to go. He could draw a straight line, on a map, between where he is and his destination. However, especially when he is moving against the winds, he will be off course all the time, except on those few moments when he tacks and crosses the line he drew. Each time he crosses the line, he will be closer to his goal, but he is

always moving in a different direction than the straight line he drew. The sum of all directions will eventually get him to his destination, after many turns. The difference between a good and a bad captain is just how many turns it takes each one of them to reach his destination.”

Juan nodded pensively.

“There is also success before the captain reaches his destination. With each tack, the angle chosen against the wind will determine speed, and will also determine how much he really moves in the desired direction. It is a combination of the best angle and the best speed that will get you to your destination sooner. If you had two captains in a race, after each tack, you could easily see which one was most successful. So success is relative. Every step adds to the ultimate success.”

“Of course. That is very interesting, mother.”

“And what about who is more successful, the captain of a ship, or the captain of the Guard?”

“That depends.”

“On what?”

“You just said it was relative. So it depends on what you are measuring. If two captains are racing, we measure distance. In this case we need to decide what we are measuring. How much money they make, for example.”

“Very good, Juan. But what about who enjoys more what they do?”

“In that case, they both could be equally successful.”

“What about who has a more beautiful wife or more children?”

“Beauty is subjective, and all women can be equally beautiful. Beauty can't be measured, so it has no part in success. The children are easy to count, but the love for them can't be measured. So I don't think the children are part of success. Conversely, it could easily be argued that both could be equally successful.”

“What about how many successful children each has?”

“It depends on how you define successful.”

“That is a circular argument, Juan. Can you say that either captain is successful if his children and his wife don't love him?”

“I hadn't thought about that. I guess if you are not loved, you can't be successful.”

“Success shouldn't be measured by how much money you make or how quickly you get to your destination, but by how many people love you. Success is gaining and maintaining the respect and love of family and friends.” Isabel tried to read Juan's expression to see if he was following. She added, “And like the Captain tacking against the wind, carefully considering the angle of

each turn, you need to take one day at the time. Friends are made one by one. Every morning, set out to accomplish something, even if it is something small. Ask God to give you the strength to finish the day. Every day, pray that you will be kind to all around you. This way, at the end of the day, there is always one more accomplishment, one more friend. You will be surprised by how much you can do, by how many friends you have, at the end of each day, day after day.” Isabel smiled.

Juan smiled back and kissed his mother on the forehead.

A few days later Juan started tentatively, “Mother, why is the Moorish art better than the Castilian?”

“What do you mean by better, Juan?”

“Well, you are the Queen of Castille, but we live in the Alcazar built by the Moors. If Castilian art were better, we would live in a Castilian Castle. We would have our own music and architecture. I mean music and architecture that was better than theirs, but we don’t.”

“Our paintings are better, don’t you agree?”

“Well, yes, Mother. But I respectfully have to remind you that Moorish paintings don’t show human figures, for religious reasons, so painting is a different matter. I am talking about the beautiful architectural patterns, the tiles and rhythms we have.”

“I already explained that painting, and architecture and music are arts; and they always develop within a context. There is always a previous influence as we strive to improve things. A better palace, a better city; music more pleasing to the ear. There is always a continuous exchange of influences between the past and the present. Keep in mind that in our land, the Romans achieved the highest levels of civilization twelve hundred years ago. Later, in the last four hundred years or so, whatever differences we have with the Moors, they achieved the highest level of culture and civilization. If we strive to the highest levels possible, in culture, arts, economics, there should be no embarrassment when we use the best of what came before us. It is rightfully ours, in that it existed in our land. It is always our duty to adopt what is best. Through our schools we can share all this with our people in order that we live better. This is a King’s duty. Do you understand me, Juan?”

“Oh, yes, Mother!” he answered, humoring his mother with a grin. “It is just that music is what I like the most and my tutors never fail to mention the Moorish origins and influence on the music I like.”

“Why would they forget such a thing, especially when some of them are Moors? Always keep in mind, Juan that the best teachers don’t necessarily have to be Catholics. There are other cultures and religions.” Isabel always

marveled at her son's inquisitive and gentle nature. She felt confident that her son would make a splendid King sometime in the future. He would be tutored in the Secret Codes of knowledge. His father adored this boy, and in many ways Juan always reminded her of all the good qualities of her husband, Fernando. She felt sure that if something ever happened to her, Juan's father would be there to make sure that he would continue in the quest to make her people the best in the world.

1492 A.D.

That day as Queen Isabel sat in the magnificent Throne Room of the Alcazar of Seville, her husband, Fernando was of little help. A great warrior, he commanded the armed forces. He was her greatest supporter. She wished that she could spend much more time with her children, educating them, nurturing them. But today, she was facing the biggest decision in her life. She had to face it alone.

Hardly anyone understood how much more desirable it was to join Castille with Aragon, instead of subjugating Castille to Portugal. Not to mention how much Isabel and Fernando loved each other. Seventeen years had elapsed since Fernando and Isabel started up the re-conquest of the Iberian Peninsula. Someday they would still have to deal with Portugal. And Navarre and Granada. Navarre, though Christian, remained independent. Granada, Moorish, was the hard nut to crack. She would deal first with Granada, then Navarre. She didn't think Portugal was going to create problems at her back, but one never knows. She had underestimated Boabdil of Granada when they demanded a higher tribute so they could finance the wars to take over the other Moorish states. As soon as Boabdil realized what they were doing with the extra taxes, they refused to pay them. She should have known. He always played along with Fernando when it was to his convenience. He had no conscience! Boabdil played the Moors to his side when it was in his interest, as he was doing now. And so, here she was, staring at war with Granada. She couldn't continue to hold off the re-conquest of Granada indefinitely. The political pressures were just too great. She and Fernando would face political death if they failed. On the other hand, they were already feeling the effects of the lack of commerce with the Far East, controlled by the Muslims, and ultimately the Moors in her own back yard.

And then, what about the power and wealth that Genghis Khan's descendants gained with control of Persia? They controlled the routes from India to Russia and from China and India to Persia. They made commerce safe

in all that part of the world. The Khans were able to divert some commerce north. This was part of the reason the Muslims were weak; they were being squeezed from both sides. The Mongols on one side, taking a piece of the pie; the Christians on the other, controlling traffic and banking through the Italian City States. When Godfroi took over Jerusalem, the Moors were weakened further by their lack of control of the Middle East. But now, how was Isabel to continue to have access to the spices and silks she needed without the Moors? Without commerce through the Middle East, Spain would be strangled economically!

And of course Isabel also had to contend with the Italian City States. They allied themselves with the Pope and controlled commerce through the Mediterranean. She needed them and the Pope on her side. The Pope didn't like, and with reason, an Inquisition controlled by Isabel. She had used the Inquisition to squash her opponents. Nine years earlier, Isabel had named Cardinal Thomas de Torquemada, a converted Jew, to head the Inquisition. She had been forced to give the Pope some semblance, even though superficial, that he was in control. Torquemada had done a good job of keeping appearances, even though perhaps he was a little too bloody, in some cases, for her personal taste.

Isabel's personal confessor Talavera had been instrumental in this deceit. She had also named Cardinal Pero Gonzales of Toledo to head the siege of Granada. He, of course, with his bastard sons, was in no position to argue with Isabel and not do her bidding. Isabel's tolerance of his womanizing assured her his help in giving the Pope the false security he felt from having a Cardinal in control of her Army. But Fernando really controlled the army. She needed to hide this from Rome. She could not offend the Pope without offending her army and her people. They loved the Pope! If her plan succeeded to have Cardinal Rodrigo Borgia, a Spaniard, be the next Pope, she would gain much room to maneuver. But right now, she was being pressured to conquer Granada; to fight the Moors. She didn't even know if they could afford a long and costly campaign, as this was sure to be. The Alhambra was going to be a tough challenge to conquer. It was so well located strategically. It had everything as its advantage. It was practically impregnable according to Fernando. It had its own water and secret entrances and exits. How long could they hold out? The conundrums of being the Queen . . . what should she do?

If Columbus could deliver a different route to the spices, her problems were greatly simplified. Not over, just simplified. Then the conquest of Granada wouldn't endanger commerce. She would be able to do commerce directly, using the new routes. The riches that were to be gained were

unimaginable. The conquest of Granada would please the Pope. All Spanish Catholics would love Fernando and her. She would be the Catholic Queen that disposed of the Moors! And she would have more time for her children. The old Merovingian plan of re-conquest transmitted from Mary down through her ancestors, strengthened by the other secret knowledge added by Templar Nights that joined the Nights of Santiago a century and a half before, were all converging inexorably.

The day before, Columbus presented his scheme to find a new route to the spices. The question was how reliable were the Chinese maps he professed to have seen. Columbus believed the Chinese had circumnavigated the world more than sixty years before. None of her advisors understood the tremendous importance of her meeting with him. She was hoping there is another route to India, as the Chinese had discovered, as Columbus claimed. Otherwise, the push to get rid of all Moors and Jews would be a fatal mistake, at least for the future of Spain and Catholicism. Columbus must succeed if Isabel and Fernando were going to attack Granada for the final push to rid the Iberian Peninsula of the Moors.

Her thoughts were interrupted when Fernando joined her in the Throne Room. Several of their ministers gathered round. After they had finished with the royal salutations, they were seated in their designated places. She looked at Fernando sitting next to her. He nodded slightly as a sign for her to begin.

“Columbus insists he can reach India and China by crossing the Sea. He recommends a group of three caravels to insure success. On the other hand, I know the Portuguese are exploring going around Africa. We still don’t know how big Africa is. How far south does it reach? And we have no other program in place. We have to gamble that Columbus is correct.” Fernando and the Ministers listened carefully.

One of the Ministers interjected, “Perhaps the Portuguese also had access to the Chinese world maps, if they exist, and they have determined that it is better to round Africa.”

The finance minister joined in, “We can not finance this adventure and fight Granada. With all due respect, your Highness, I don’t even know if we can afford to fight Granada. We don’t know how long they can withstand our siege. And we aren’t even sure that we can win it. The longest effort we can sustain is six months, maybe less. With regard to Columbus’s proposal, I, for one, cannot recommend distracting any monies on an adventure that remains such a huge risk. They might sail west and we never see or hear from them again. In the name of God, be reasonable.” As he finished, his shoulders slumped in despair.

Isabel looked around the room, waiting for more opinions. They didn't understand the underpinnings of the commercial situation. Should she explain it to them? So she countered, "What do we know about the Portuguese African adventure?"

"We have spies," another Minister said, "but they are guarding their charts as if they were more valuable than gold. We know they have found some islands to the West. The Canaries and the Azores. We have stolen some charts that show their locations, but then they could be fakes, just to trick us into sending a ship to look for ghosts. And from what we hear, there is not much on these islands; if they exist."

"Our spies . . . how dependable are they?" she asked.

"They are good, but the Portuguese captains are very loyal to their king. It is hard to get information considered state secrets."

"Well, they should guard them as state secrets. A lot of riches will be bestowed if they find a way through." She waited again. Again silence. "So, the Crown doesn't have the money. I take it that means that we can't borrow anymore, correct?"

They nodded.

"Thank you all for your advice and frankness. I will inform Columbus of my decision tomorrow. You are all dismissed." She sighed as they left. She looked over at Fernando.

He smiled calmly at her. He looked into her blue-green eyes, then he rubbed her cheek gently with the back of his hand. "Come, let's enjoy a walk in the garden. The afternoon is perfect, and the gardens are filled with spring flowers." He took her hand, and led her out.

They sat listening, in the garden, to the water fountains the Moors designed so many years before.

"I'm still amazed at their ingenuity, to use a natural spring for such a calming effect," she began. Then, "Fernando, it is not a question of whether we can afford to do it. It is a question of whether we can afford not to do it. I think that I could use my personal jewelry to finance Columbus's caravels. It is the only solution. The Secret Codes of the Templars demand that we take over again. If we can't win against Granada, we will be dead, not because Granada can then turn and conquer us, but because Granada will squeeze until we bleed. They control the flow of commerce, of the spices we need to feed our people. They are refusing to pay their taxes. It is hurting us. But you and I know that even with the Moors gone from Spain, the Muslims in Africa are still going to try to squeeze us. We can't win either way. Our only alternative is to find another route."

“What happens if Columbus fails, if the Chinese never existed? Then we will have lost your jewels for nothing. At least you and I will have each other and can live in seclusion and splendor the rest of our lives.”

“Would you be happy with that, knowing that most Spaniards are starving?”

“You are right, my dear. I would not be happy. So the answer has to be yes. On the other hand, if we fail, what future do we leave our children? Especially Juan. So much is expected of him. Isabella, Juana, Maria and Catarina—the girls we could still marry to suitable kings or princes. How would this affect all that?”

“I’m more worried about Juan. He is only fifteen; he needs to finish his studies. Maximilian has proposed a marriage between his daughter Margaret and Juan. Of course he has made all this entirely subject to the expulsion of the Moors from Spain. Our girls, they are all beautiful, intelligent, better educated than most men. There will be a line of suitors at our door. We can marry all of them well, perhaps even to kings. In their case, we have some time, a few years. But now, we are running out of time. Yes. Columbus must have his caravels!”

“Isabel, also keep in mind that if Columbus fails, the Portuguese might succeed.”

“That is part of the plan. If we fail and they are successful in opening a new route, we will be at their mercy until we can establish our own new routes, but we can deal with that. When the time comes, we will steal the routes from the Portuguese, if necessary. Tomorrow, Columbus gets his caravels.”

That year Granada fell and America was discovered. Spain entered its Golden Age.

1497 A.D.

Four years later. Prince Juan sat in the Courtyard of the Mexuar in the Alhambra. The full moon lit up the courtyard and, at either end, The Golden Chamber and the Comares Palace. The courtyard is slightly rectangular in shape, about 30 feet wide by 45 feet long. Its floor is made of large white marble squares. The symmetry and patterns of the façade of the Comares Palace, raised three white marble steps above the courtyard, were considered by the Moors to be nearly perfect in their construction; a perfect balance of height and width of the windows, arches and doors with the proportions of the building.

Believing that Allah alone is capable of perfection, and as a measure of respect for Allah and his ability to make perfection, the Moors purposely made

one side of the right doorway slanted and bulging. This façade commemorates the successful siege of Algeciras by Muhammad V in 1369.

In the middle of the courtyard is a round fountain, about eight feet in diameter, the top of which is only a few inches above the courtyard's marble squares, with a small stream of water sprouting from its center. The fountain sits inside a fluted trough of white marble. The water overflows from the fountain into the trough. In the process it makes a very soft, steady, calming sound. That is what Juan sought. Juan knew his parents were trying to get him away from Salamanca and get him more and more involved in complicated affairs of State. He knew that his parents hoped that the beauty of the Alhambra, by far the most beautiful palace in all of Spain, would be a good incentive for him to settle down to the affairs of a future King. His instruction on the Secret Codes, particularly relating to codes of behavior and governance, were taking up too much of his time.

Juan sat on the steps that led down to the perfect square in the middle of which lay the circular fountain.

Four years before, everything had been so perfect. He had just met Mary, the most beautiful sight he had ever laid eyes on. The day she arrived in Salamanca, she took the University by storm. Everyone loved her—redheaded, with fair skin, a slight sprinkling of freckles, just enough to make her look more alluring. And her deep green-blue eyes, the same color as his mother's, had the capacity to cast a spell on you. She had come to Salamanca to study at the University, to take advantage of the opportunities created for women by his mother.

While in Salamanca, Prince Juan attended classes in the same drafty rooms and sat on the same hard benches as anyone else while listening to lectures delivered by the best intellects of Spain. He remembered fondly the days when he played his harpsichord and attended performances of Juan del Encina eclogues at the nearby palace of the dukes of Alba. Prince Juan invited his friends regularly to afternoon gatherings in his palace in Salamanca where he and five or six well trained young singers, directed by a professional music master, sang for several hours. His idyllic days as student. How he wished he could return to those simple days. He loved to play several instruments: the guitar, the violin, the clavi-organ, the organ and the clavichord. Prince Juan studied history and economics, but more important to him was learning music and practicing singing. The nights with Mary were so sweet and tender. She was three years older than he was, but he felt that they were made for each other. She had the strange ability to make him feel completely happy. He never worried about when he would be king. He was just so glad to be happy all day with her.

Then, he had to start facing the realities of becoming the future King. Margaret of the Hapsburgs of the Austro-Hungarian Empire was chosen for a marriage of convenience according to his station, which forged an alliance that would consolidate more power in the hands of Spain. He had no choice but to marry her, his love for Mary notwithstanding. He was forced to be more serious and to sing and play his beloved music infrequently. He had to study more. All this would have been fine, if it wasn't for the fact that he was seeing Mary less and less. But it was all still manageable and expected.

A little over a year before, a week after he had married Margaret, he woke up in the middle of the night sweating. He felt he didn't fit in his skin, like trying to crawl out of his body. He needed to take deep breaths to fill his lungs, trying to calm down. His anxiety grew and grew; he couldn't identify its source. He tried walking around his room, but that did not make this terrifying feeling subside. He walked outside in the courtyards and gardens of his palace in Salamanca, taking deep breaths, eyes darting and looking around in all directions. He felt trapped, hunted. He wanted to escape, but escape from what? To where? He shook his head from side to side; nothing he did worked. Finally, exhausted in the early dawn, he went back to his room and collapsed. Sleep finally afforded some measure of peace.

He blamed his state of mind on Margaret. She made him crazy with her superficial chatter. She drove him mad with her jealousies about Mary. The strange feeling would subside, but every two or three weeks other strange feelings would come back. His thoughts raced ahead of him, his speech raced attempting to catch up. Mary stared at him as if he were a stranger. He spoke at speeds that changed his voice and made him a different person altogether. He made love to her desperately for long hours, and for that he was grateful. Sometimes his energy levels were so high, he also made love to Margaret all night.

The feeling became worse as the day grew old. It was like an invisible hammer hitting his brain without touching his skull. Each day the feeling got progressively worse, became almost unbearable, then sheer exhaustion let him drift to sleep and peace.

Then inevitably his mood shifted. He felt like he had lost his best friend, his mother and Mary all combined. He could only describe it as a very deep sense of sadness and grief, mixed with anger and anxiety. It would go on for days, and then slowly he would feel restored, at peace until the next time. Every time the feeling came back it gripped him as though squeezing his chest. Then, it would leave, and he would fly high for days, the exhilaration so intense, he sometimes felt like he was going to die. At other times he

would just be overcome with intense anxiety and fear, and he couldn't make it go away.

The fear would not subside, no matter how much he told himself there was nothing there. Then he would lose all pleasure in his singing and in his music. It felt like he was not himself, like he was an observer outside himself watching as he went through his daily motions. He felt like a phantom. Reality became ghostly, transparent, and unbelievable. He started thinking of death. He had a recurrent nightmare: he would calmly decide to jump into the abyss, convinced that death was the best course of action. As he fell, flying through the air, he was astounded to find the abyss bottomless. As he continued falling to his death, he would change his mind, start to scream in terror, then . . . wake up.

Margaret didn't understand any of this. Margaret didn't empathize that he was madly in love with Mary, with the young Flemish red-haired artist who a few years before had stolen his heart. Her jealous fits made everything worse. Margaret understood theirs was a marriage of convenience, but still she insisted that she be treated with complete respect. In this she was right. Prince Juan couldn't blame her for that. But, oh, how he missed Mary. It had been three weeks since he last saw her. How he longed for her. He needed to touch, and taste and smell Mary every day. Making love to her was as necessary as breathing.

His mother and father, The Catholic Kings, appeared at the door of the Comares Palace opposite the courtyard where he sat. He waved at them, hoping that they would go away. He needed solitude. They meant well but simply didn't understand his fiery desires or his moments of turmoil. He certainly couldn't unburden himself with his mother. Even though she was highly educated, she was so pious, or at least acted that way. Everything was planned and calculated to maximize the power of the Spanish Crown. She certainly wouldn't support his affair with Mary. When his father had noticed his strange behavior during one of his episodes of deep turmoil, he had explained it away, by confessing his feelings for Mary and his confusion about what to do about it. Fernando had arranged quietly for Mary to live in a nice house in Salamanca and recommended Juan visit her discreetly. If only his father knew of his agonies. How could he save himself?

And so he struggled and tried to balance his duties as future King of Spain with his personal desires, mostly to play music and be with Mary. But four or five times a year he would be gripped with his intense desire to fly, to run, to giggle, to make love all day until, occasionally he had to be physically restrained for fear of his exhausting himself to death. Finally, sleep.

Inevitably these bouts of flight would be followed by deep plunges into darkness. His melancholic temperament, as the court doctors described it, was responsible for these changes of mood. Prince Juan learned to disguise all this, as the episodes, as he called them, became more and more familiar to him. The deep fear was what he feared the most, and then this fear would trigger the unbounded fear. It felt like he was dying. To be able to disguise his terror required such a huge effort; that effort exhausted him, but the exhaustion was a potent method to combat this inexplicable fear that seemed to be lurking in the shadows of his mind, waiting to ambush him at any pretext.

When he was in his dark mood, Prince Juan blamed his mood on the weight of his responsibilities or on missing Mary. At other times he blamed it on his wife. When he was flighty, he didn't care about anything, not even his unbound terror, not even his black mood. Inevitably, when he fell back into his dark mood, he could hear himself saying to himself, "I wish I were dead, I wish I were dead, I wish I were dead, I wish I were dead," as if he was repeating some chant like a Catholic priest saying the rosary. The thought of some secret knowledge assaulted him, but he couldn't remember anything. "Secret secret secret knowledge knowledge," the words turning in his mind like a windmill.

Eventually, sometimes he thought about what he was repeating to himself and realized it had meaning. These thoughts took him back to his childhood, reminding him of when he started to understand the meaning of the words of the prayers he was taught. When he attended to the words, repeating them slowly, listening, he gave them meaning; and realized the meaning. Then it became so obvious, and to think that for years he hadn't even acknowledged that these thoughts had a meaning.

For the next three years he lived like this, if this could be called living. Prince Juan endured the episodes; masking as well as he could from all others his inner turmoil. His sister Juana was the only one that seemed to understand. She alone had the courage and the empathy to discuss with him his madness, as she frankly called it.

More and more, Prince Juan wished that he could have a simple life, that he could be at the lowest station in society, where everyone would tell him what to do and no one expected anything at all. Just to be unnoticed, to be anonymous—then he would be all right. How he wished for that. How he wished he were dead.

It was a sunny day. He was back in the Alcazar of his childhood. The night before he argued with Margaret and hadn't slept. The vista of the valley below the Alcazar of Segovia sparkled with the green and yellows of the

foliage. Juan didn't notice either the sun or the sparkling views. In a futile effort, he tried to control his agitation. He entered the Throne Room looking for his mother. He stopped in his tracks—the room empty. He forgot what he was doing there. He couldn't think. He turned to leave, and then turned back confusedly. "Secretsecretknowledgeknowledge," turned in his head like a squeaky windmill, pounding in rhythm with his heart. A strange black void seemed to fill his head. Then, "Iwishiweredead . . . wishiweredead . . . wishiweredeadwishiweredeadwishiwere-dead . . ." was ringing interminably in his head.

1504 A.D.

How could Isabel ever forget the events of that day? She was sitting in the royal lavatory at the Alcazar of Segovia, next to the Throne Room. The lavatory is built cantilevered, hanging over the huge cliffs. In the middle of the floor there is a comfortable stone chair with a small round opening. Through this opening you can see straight down to the river that runs far below and is part of a defensive moat. In the Throne Room next to her, she could hear someone walking around, taking in deep breaths, mumbling incoherently. She wondered who it could be. She finished her personal obligations, straightened her skirts and walked into the Throne Room to find her son Juan. He looked at her with quickly shifting eyes. They moved left, then right. It seemed he was trying to see her but gave her the impression that he couldn't. He seemed blind, trying desperately to see, to focus on something, by moving his eyes rapidly. She called softly, "Juan, I am here. It's me, your mother. What is wrong?"

He didn't answer. He smiled strangely. He took a deep breath, then walked into the lavatory, next to the Throne Room. Isabel followed him. He looked out into the distance, and then glanced quickly at the river far below. Before she could say or do anything, he walked out the window. She ran to see him; he fell motionless as she watched in terror. Then, suddenly he started screaming and flailing. She would never forget that scream as long as she lived. And then . . . complete silence.

"God could not do this to me; it must have been an accident. He fell out the window," she thought.

"He fell out the window," she said to Fernando as he ran into the Throne Room. And so it came to be known that Juan had an accidental death. It must have been so.

Isabel remembered this and more as she lay on her deathbed seven years after Juan's death. She remembered the death of her daughter Isabel, Queen

of Portugal, in childbirth; the death two years later, of her grandson Miguel, who she hoped would take over her crown; the madness of her daughter Juana; and Catarina's disastrous marriage with Henry VIII.

"What evil doings could I have done that my children deserved such terrible fortunes? It must be God's punishment to atone for what I have done to the Jews and the Muslims. Poor wretched souls caught in the middle of terrible political currents, which I was not able to control. Why have I tried so hard to build institutions that will last, that will protect my subjects, in the New World and in Spain, instead of worrying about my children? I tried to atone for my neglect. But my children paid the price for my political pursuits. Catarina disclosed part of the Secret Codes to Henry. Henry knows the truth about Christ and has challenged the Pope. The Tudors and the English will receive some of the benefits of that knowledge. Their star will be rising."

Fernando quietly approached her bed. He sat next to her and gently dried the perspiration on her face with a soft cloth. She tried to smile. It hurt her to see his pained expression.

"Rest, don't try to talk," he said gently.

"This is my last chance to talk to you, my dear husband. I want to tell you that I love you and always have. I am just hoping that you don't blame me for all the misfortunes we have suffered with our children."

"Don't ever think that. You have been the most devoted wife and mother that I could ever wish for."

"But still, I wonder why so much death, so much madness? I wonder if I had to do it all over again, what would I do different? We both know what terrible consequences the expulsion of the Jews and later the Muslims had on the economic well being of most of our subjects. Juana is unreliable and with Juan and Isabel dead, Catarina is the only one that carries forward our Merovingian secrets. I fear Henry and the Tudors will use them for his own dark purposes against Rome," Isabel prophesized, anticipating Henry VIII's divorce and the creation of the English Church. She belabored in a whisper, "With the secret information, England will slowly eclipse Spain. We have failed. I keep asking myself, how could I have done more and better for my people?"

"Isabel, my love, no people before you had a queen so good. No man before me had a wife so good. No women before you had so many opportunities to learn so much, to be in the arts and be the equal of men."

"I want you to remember what we are trying to accomplish. We need to pass on the Secret Codes. Our grandson, Carlos will think of himself as a Hapsburg, you must instruct him. It's Spain's only chance."

“There is no rush. I’m sure you’ll be reminding me every day of my life.” He looked at her, smiled and his eyes filled with tears. She could see herself reflected in his big brown eyes. Time seemed suspended.

“My time is near, Fernando. I can feel darkness descending on me. I feel coldness in my body and in my breath. I feel death calling me gently. I see her sitting next to me. Hold my hand . . .”

Isabel could see herself lying there. She was floating high above. She saw Fernando shed tears. She saw him pick up her limp hand. Then she felt someone else take her other hand. She thought, “Juan, my dear Juan has come to greet me . . .”

Legal Insanity

Ramirez took a deep breath as he put down the loose pages he had read. Myrna was looking at him. Larry was standing by the window looking out across the street with his back turned to them.

“Would you like the last beer, detective?” Myrna asked softly.

Ramirez nodded. He turned to Larry, “Do you still think these writings have anything to do with your father’s disappearance?”

“Not directly. But it is obvious he knows first-hand the symptoms of manic-depression, and he’s mentioning suicide again. Ultimately, if I follow the story, I am sure that it will contain the clues to my father’s madness. I hope it will show me . . .” Larry’s voice trailed off.

“Say it, Larry. It’s all right,” Myrna encouraged softly. She walked up to him, placed a cheek on his shoulder and put an arm around his waist. Larry pressed her other hand hard against his stomach.

“I hope I can find clues as to how, or where he did it,” Larry whispered, trying to keep his emotions under control. “Then maybe we can find his body and know for sure. In some ways not knowing gives me hope; and I welcome that. Yet, the uncertainty leaves me in limbo, as if nothing has happened. But somehow I know, in some primal way, that my father is no longer, yet I feel nothing.”

“You must be more optimistic, Larry.” Myrna tried to buoy his sagging spirits.

“I know this is very hard, Larry.” Ramirez uttered. “But you have to stay with me. You have to educate me on mental disorders. As of now, I am more inclined to lean towards foul play, especially after the threats against Michael. Tomorrow, I am getting a report from Los Angeles. I sent a friend of mine in the DA’s office—he was there when the whole OJ trial happened—a copy of your father’s theories on the drug business. I am very curious to hear his point of view on this. But, today is Sunday,” Ramirez smiled and stretched his arms yawning. “Before we were interrupted by Michael’s abduction, you were explaining a bit of neurology, Larry. About the sense of self, can you tell us more?”

Larry turned to Myrna.

“Do I need to remind you I have a Master’s in Biology. Neurology isn’t going to scare me.” Myrna smiled.

“What I’m working on is probably better described as neuropsychology—using neurology to explain why we do things.”

“You were talking about the isorropic circuit and how it tends to restore balance. Under certain conditions it can be pushed outside certain limits where a person loses their sense of self. Do you think an act of altruism—like when someone gives his life to protect another’s—falls into this same category?”

“Now that I think of it, yes. It is slightly different than suicide, but definitely a loss of self is necessary to sacrifice one’s life.”

“Could insanity, as used in the legal sense for defense in a murder case, also be considered a loss of self? Could we perhaps define Legally Insane more scientifically using the isorropic concept?” Ramirez could see the cogs in Larry’s mind working. “I ask because I have an older brother. When he was twenty-one, I was sixteen. He was in college at Boston University. He is a good looking fellow, you know, like me.” Ramirez laughed at his own joke. “And like me, he looks very Mexican. He fell in love with this gorgeous girl—blonde, blue eyed. She was a baton twirler, one of the best in the country. Her name was Alexa.”

Myrna silenced Larry with a look, then turned and smiled at Ramirez encouraging him to go on.

“At any rate, my brother decided this girl was going to be the mother of his children. One weekend, they went to Cape Cod; they were at a party, and decided to leave early, jumped into my brother’s car and drove about half a mile. They parked their car and walked onto the beach. My brother took his belt off, it was a wide buckle, he later testified in court, ‘So it wouldn’t be in the way.’ Anyway, he was lying on the sand, apparently touching, kissing and caressing his girl intently and passionately. A man in love. Suddenly, as he himself testified, he heard the sound of wet sand crunching but he dismissed it as he was concentrating on Alexa. He continued kissing her; when, again he heard footsteps crunching sand distinctly coming from several directions around him.

“He lifted his head, turned and saw a pair of shoes about two yards from him. He stood up immediately. He looked about and saw eight men in a half circle around them, with the ocean at his back. The man in the center, the one closest to him, stood with a smirk on his face.

“My brother asked him, ‘What do you want?’ He answered smugly, ‘We want the girl.’ It was obvious they thought that he, a Mexican in their eyes,

would just run and leave. He quickly scrutinized the men, they seemed like a bunch of college kids, and seemed unarmed. My brother estimated that he could run to the car, get his belt and the lug-nut wrench, and return in about twenty seconds.

“‘What’s wrong?’ Alexa asked him.

“‘Alexa,’ he said, ‘Get up and do as I say. Hold the back of my pants so I know where you are at all times.’ She stood up and did so. He walked slowly toward the man in the center of the group, all his attention on him. The eight men stood in a half circle about three feet from each other. He scrutinized them with his peripheral vision, and listened intently to the telltale sound of crunching sand if one of them moved.

“In a cold blooded tone, my brother said to the man in the center, just two feet in front of him. ‘You might kill me, and rape my girl, but before that happens, the first man to move will die.’ Without blinking or looking at anyone else, my brother stared at the leader, the man in the center. My brother detected a loss of bravado, perhaps fear. He instructed softly, ‘Alexa, go to the car. Get in, start it, and turn the lights on. I’ll meet you there.’ Alexa hesitated. ‘Just do as I say. I am going to make sure you get there safely.’ Alexa walked between the man in the center and the one to his immediate left. Nobody moved. My brother stood there waiting for her to get to the car. When Alexa was halfway to the car, one of the men on the extreme periphery of his vision, exclaimed, ‘She’s getting away!’ Still no one dared to move. Another said, ‘We can’t let her go.’ Suddenly one of the men ran after Alexa. My brother, without thinking, lunged at the man in the center, directly in front of him. With his elbow he crushed the man’s Adam’s apple and quickly overtook the man chasing Alexa. My brother jumped sideways, feet first into the running man’s legs. He broke the man’s knee with the impact and he collapsed. My brother rebounded with the inertia and landed on his feet. He turned and kicked the man in the head. A third man was about to jump him, and my brother slammed his head into the aggressor’s face. He turned and focused his attention on the other five men. They hadn’t moved.

“He yelled out to Alexa, ‘Start the car and turn the lights on. I’ll be right with you.’ My brother stood there waiting for the sound of the ignition. When he heard the door of his car close, he turned and walked slowly towards Alexa. Still nobody moved. No one dared go after him.

“Two of the men died. My brother’s lawyer, a public defender, tried to argue temporary insanity, but my brother’s own testimony was used against him as proof that he knew at all times what was happening as well as the consequences of his actions. He got twenty-five years for manslaughter.

“My brother told me later, privately, that as he walked to the car, he had his ears turned backwards listening for any sign of crunching sand. If any other man came after him with the intention of hurting Alexa, he would have killed him, too.”

Myrna and Larry sat in silence. There was nothing to say.

“I wanted to become a lawyer, but I didn’t have the money. That’s why I became a cop. I think my brother, during the three or four seconds that it took him to kill these two men, could not have been aware of anything.”

“He certainly lost his sense of self,” Larry asserted. “I could easily make the case for temporary insanity. While he was attacking these three men, he was only aware of one primordial, overriding factor,” Larry paused and added with emphasis, “Alexa’s safety. He was not aware of any consequences to himself; it didn’t matter if they killed him. He was propelled to do what seemed best to protect her with complete disregard for his safety. This, to me, could prove loss of self, of temporary insanity.”

“I feel like I lost my brother. I miss him. I want you to know that being in jail is another form of disappearing, Larry. He is, in a different sense, also a missing person. Maybe after we find your father you can help me re-open the case.”

“Now you have another reason to understand the brain. Perhaps I can help free your brother and define legal insanity in neurological terms. Today, I’m still hoping my father’s stories and my brain theories will help us find him.”

“So tell us more about the brain, Larry,” Myrna promoted in order to distract Larry from his gloomy thoughts.

“Some basic knowledge on neurons is necessary if I’m going to explain how the brain works, and how it goes haywire,” Larry lectured, getting back on track.

“Neurons, like all cells have receptors on the surface of their membranes. These receptors allow chemicals to go in and out of the cells. When the neurotransmitters attach to the receptors, they open or close gates that allow electrically charged particles to move from the liquid into or out of the cells. Neurons have a long tail, called an axon. The tail can be very short or extend many inches. There are many small branching projections from the tail or the body of the cell known as dendrites. Neurons send impulses, not exactly like electricity, but it is all right to think of it as an electric impulse, down their tails.

“When the impulse reaches the end of the tail, the neuron releases chemicals, known as neurotransmitters and neuropeptides. These chemicals

are then absorbed by the receptors on the dendrites of other neurons. A liquid with all sorts of chemicals fills the space between the neurons.”

“Like sodium, potassium, calcium and chlorine ions?” Myrna asked to show some of her knowledge.

Larry nodded and smiled. “The first three are positively charged and chlorine is negatively charged,” he explained to Ramirez. “When enough ions pass through into the neuron, it produces a voltage reduction, which when it reaches a certain level, opens adjacent gates allowing more ions to enter. In this manner the impulse spreads down the tail. When the electrical message reaches the end, it is turned into a chemical message by releasing neurotransmitters, which are absorbed by the next neuron. In this way, information is passed from neuron to neuron.

“Depending on the receptor that the neurotransmitter has gated, the action has either an excitatory effect, helping to generate an impulse, or an inhibitory effect, preventing the neuron from firing. Typically, it takes many, sometimes hundreds or thousands of these interactions for an impulse to occur.

“There are four main types of neurotransmitters, some inhibitory and some excitatory. Some are fast acting and others are slower. There is a heterogeneous group of neurotransmitters that includes histamine, nitric oxide and neuropeptides. The neuropeptides function as modulators, rather than producing stimulation or inhibition on their own, they just influence the actions of other neurotransmitters.

“To complicate matters, there are many classes of ion channels. Some are sensitive to voltages, some to neurotransmitters, and others to both. Different neurons fire in different ways. Some fire very rapidly, others more slowly. Some fire a single impulse; others tend to fire in bursts. Sometimes a neuron can do both, depending on its incoming signals and on its recent history.

“All terminals of the axon of a particular neuron are either all excitatory or all inhibitory, never a mixture of both. The long distance connections from one cortical area to another area always excitatory. The axons of most inhibitory neurons are rather short and only influence neurons in the same neighborhood. Quite different classes of neurons can produce excitation and inhibition. However, all neurons receive both excitation and inhibition, which prevents them from being always silent, or alternately, going wild.

“One thing is evident: a single neuron can fire at different rates and, to some extent, in different styles. At any one moment it can only send a limited amount of information. Yet during that moment, the potential information coming into it is very large. Each neuron reacts to different combinations of

its inputs and sends out this new information to many places, meaning all its synapses. It is meaningless to consider one neuron in isolation; we have to consider the combined effect of many neurons.

“What one neuron tells another is limited to how excited it is, yet there can be additional information in the pattern. As a neuron sends chemicals down its axon, in some cases these may convey additional information, but the rate of this transport is too slow to convey fast information. The receiving or target neuron doesn’t know where the signals came from. This explains, in part, why we do not know exactly where our perceptions and thoughts are taking place in our brains. There are no neurons whose firing symbolizes this information.” Larry paused to check if his pupils were following.

“This is starting to sound philosophical,” Myrna said playfully.

“The main thing,” Ramirez added, “is that neurons talk to each other with impulses that release chemicals. Instead of ears, they have receptors, right?”

“You’re doing great, Ramirez. Neurons, in their resting state, when they are not talking, send impulses at a relatively slow rate. I distinguish several types of impulses in neurons. What I call the “echo” signals and the “handshake” signals have two modalities: one, the resting state, maintains communication between specific areas, and two, the active state, which activates related areas. The echo signals serve to help direct the traffic of incoming signals to various parts of the cortex. The handshake signals activate other relevant parts of the cortex. This activity keeps the neurons “alert” and ready to fire.

“Neural impulses from the senses are sent to the thalamus. These sensory impulses are relayed to the cortex from here. These relayed sensory signals are what I call “mirror” signals. Any signals generated to produce an action are what I call “command” signals, the true output of the brain.

“A circuit is a group of neurons that are linked together by connections. A system is a complex circuit that performs some specific functions, like seeing or hearing, or remembering, or detecting and responding to danger.

“Interactions between two types of neurons, called projection neurons and interneurons, are keys to understanding how circuits and systems function. Projection neurons have relatively long axons that extend out of the area in which their cell bodies are located. Projection neurons are the ones responsible for sending echoes and handshakes some distance. As soon as the sensory-mirrored signals reach the cortex, the cortex broadcasts patterns, the handshakes, and in this way, objects and events are represented. The job of a projection neuron is to turn on the next circuit or the next projection neuron in the circuit.

“Interneurons send their short axons to nearby neurons, often projection neurons, and are involved in information processing within a given level

of a hierarchical circuit. One of their main jobs is to regulate the flow of synaptic signals by controlling the activity of projection neurons. Inhibitory interneurons release a transmitter that decreases the likelihood that the projection cell will fire. These interneurons play an important role in counterbalancing the excitatory activity of projection cells.”

“With all due respect, Larry, but do I need to know all this to understand suicide?” Ramirez asked, looking at his watch impatiently.

“Are you in a hurry to go somewhere?” Myrna inquired playfully.

“It is getting late. I want to get a good night’s sleep. There’s a lot of territory to cover tomorrow. I’ll be hearing from Los Angeles, Modesto, Mexico and Belize. O’Malley thinks your father disappeared to hide from the drug people and protect you. I am hoping he is correct. But I feel that he would have contacted you somehow. That hasn’t happened, has it?” Ramirez stood up, put on his sky-blue coat, tightened his pink tie, and checked his looks on a mirror on the wall.

“No.” Larry answered sincerely. “I need the OJ manuscript, first thing in the morning. We can’t let Michael down.” He reminded Ramirez.

“I’ll send it by messenger. It will be here before eight in the morning.”

“Let’s get something to eat, Larry,” Myrna suggested. “Care to join us, detective?”

“No. Thanks. I should be getting along.”

After putting on their coats, the two of them followed Ramirez down into the street. It was night. Ramirez headed to the Precinct. Around the corner, at the Atlantic Grill, Myrna ordered calamari and veal Parmesan.

Larry ordered a California roll and a glass of white wine. They ate in silence.

When they got home they checked hopefully the answering machine. There was one message, “Larry, this is uncle Michael. There’s been a change. At nine o’clock your time, they will call me with specific instructions for you to deliver the OJ book. I’ll call you. Try to sleep.”

Larry turned to talk to Myrna, “I hope Detective . . .” Myrna was already sleeping on the sofa. He took her shoes off, pulled a blanket from the closet and covered her. He turned the lights off. In the dark he realized, that now, he had become a man. For the first time he stood truly alone if his father was no longer alive. He could never expect the unselfish help he had received, and taken for granted, all his life. It was a sobering thought. His father would never be there again. He jumped in bed and hoped that sleep would come quick.

Killing for Stories

The next morning, Monday, the sixth day since Lawrence's disappearance, Larry looked out the window as he waited for the drip coffee. A gray morning. The sky, the color of concrete; the sidewalks and buildings, a mirror of the sky. The leafless trees looked like burnt phantoms with arms raised frozen into the gray landscape. The messenger, as promised, had delivered the Orange file. It sat mutely on the desk.

"I smell coffee," Myrna said stepping out of the bathroom. "Mmm. I didn't intend to spend the night here. I suppose I didn't know how tired I was. I slept like a baby. How about you?"

"Surprisingly, I slept well once I fell asleep. Do you take sugar?" Larry finished serving a cup of steaming coffee.

"Black is fine," she said. "Your father liked it with two sugars. I'm sorry," she added seeing Larry's pained expression at the reminder of his father.

"That's quite alright. It's not your fault."

The PC signaled an incoming electronic chat from Michael. Larry rushed to the desk and clicked on the respective icon. *"I have a guy on the line. He says you are home. With Myrna. Wait for instructions. Acknowledge."*

Larry did so.

"You have the OJ book?"

"Yes." Larry typed back.

"Someone is ringing my front door bell. Hang on." Michael's message appeared on the screen.

Myrna was looking over Larry's shoulder. "How much do you trust uncle Michael?"

"He's my father's best friend." Larry responded.

"What I mean, is can you trust a guy who's nickname is 'Vampire?'"

"That's just a joke. My father told me he would do anything for him. They have been friends for almost forty years. I have no reason not to trust him."

They sipped their coffee and waited. A few minutes later the PC chat came alive again: *"I have a goon with a gun sitting here. Adela has been instructed to serve breakfast as if nothing has happened."*

"Is the goon looking at the screen?" Larry typed.

"Yes, and he doesn't like to be called a goon."

"Is it one of the same guys?"

"He says his name is Salvador. And no, he's a new guy."

"How common is it in Mexico that these guys speak English?" Myrna asked Larry.

"That is a good observation. It definitely would be rare. It seems the guys yesterday also spoke English."

As if reading their thoughts, *"He's talking on a cell phone in English. Pay attention carefully. Send Myrna with the OJ book down to the front door in sixty seconds. Check your watch. Acknowledge."*

Larry did so and acknowledged on his PC.

"Type in when she comes back up."

Larry checked his watch, gave Myrna the orange folder. "Go. Now," he instructed. Larry heard the elevator door close out in the hallway. He ran to the window and tried to look down onto the sidewalk, but it was impossible to see anything.

Myrna got to the front glass door. Immediately a man in a dark gray suit appeared on the sidewalk. Myrna opened the door, nervously gave the man the orange pages, and quickly closed the door. Surprised, the man looked at the folder in his hands, then he turned, quickly stuck his right arm into the middle of the back of his pants to pull a gun out, when two shots, fired closed range, hit him in the torso. The man collapsed on the sidewalk with two bursts of blood coming out of his chest. The orange sheets of paper landed on the concrete sidewalk. Myrna ran back the hallway and bounded up the stairs. Larry, running down, almost crashed into her.

"Thank god you're not hurt. I should've never let you do this." Larry looked at her inquiringly, checking if she wasn't hurt.

"I gave it to the man that showed up. Then they shot him." Myrna squealed in shock as Larry pulled her up the stairs to the apartment and locked the door.

"Who are they?" Larry asked no one.

"I don't know," Myrna cried. "I didn't see who shot him, and I didn't stay around to find out. I'm sorry."

Larry put his arm around her. "I wasn't asking you. Don't worry. Just try to calm down." Larry ran to the PC keyboard.

"She's back. We gave it to them." Larry typed. No response.

"Are you sure they have it, Myrna?" Larry turned inquiringly to Myrna.

"I gave it to the man that got shot," she said exasperatedly. "A guy came running to the door, he looked at me, then at the folder. I opened the door

and gave it to him. Then he got shot.” She repeated holding back tears, nodding in disbelief.

Suddenly, two more shots disturbed the traffic’s cacophony. Myrna ran to the window.

“*You gave it to the wrong man.*” The PC chat box answered.

“There is a guy with a gun across the street!” Myrna yelled. “He got shot.”

“Get back from the window!” Larry commanded. Another two shots were fired.

“They shot him again! I can’t see what’s happening,” Myrna wailed. “He’s lying on the ground!”

“Get back!” Larry turned to the monitor. He was about to type in a message when the phone rang. Larry picked it up. Myrna turned to Larry.

“Larry?” it was Michael. “What is going on there? Salvador is really pissed.”

Larry could hear a voice yelling in the background.

“They just killed two cops. This was not the deal. Tell Larry to stay put. If he moves you’re dead,” Salvador screamed, clearly audible.

“Did you hear that, Larry?” Michael asked.

“Yes, I did. I haven’t moved from here.”

“He’s got his gun out.”

“Tell Salvador I know nothing of what’s happening. We did as instructed. I sent Myrna down and she gave it to a guy at the door.” Larry desperately intoned into the mouthpiece. “That’s the truth.” Larry heard a shot through the phone. The phone went dead. “Uncle Michael?”

Larry dropped into his seat. Myrna saw his face turn ashen. “What’s wrong, Larry?”

“I think they just killed him. I heard a shot and the line went dead.” Larry sat nodding his head in disbelief. Police sirens could be heard converging on them. Larry got up and went towards the door.

“What are you doing?” Myrna asked grabbing his arm.

“I’m going to see what is happening.”

“No, you are not. They told you to stay put. You wait here with me.” She looked imploringly into his green eyes.

“All right,” Larry said embracing her. They rocked in each other’s arms as the sirens’ volume increased and seemed to come into the apartment. Two police cars arrived with screeching tires; doors slammed open.

“Cover the corner! Secure the area.” A voice yelled. “Agent down! Need backup. Now!” An ambulance’s siren screamed, clearly increasing in volume.

“What a mess. I’m scared,” Myrna whispered.

“I’m sorry, for all this.”

The two stood there wondering what was happening on the sidewalk after the ambulance arrived, without daring to go to the window. A few minutes later the doorbell rang. Larry, still shocked by the idea that his uncle had been shot, looked at Myrna, who half paralyzed, slowly moved to the intercom and pressed it.

“Who is it?” Myrna spoke softly.

“It is me, Ramirez.”

Myrna pressed the buzzer and opened the front door, then the second door into the lobby. A few moments later Detective Ramirez appeared bounding up the steps two at a time. He was wearing a wine colored suit with thin pink vertical stripes, a plum shirt and his pink tie.

“What the hell is going on?” Ramirez demanded without preambles.

“We don’t know. We got instructions to send Myrna to the front door and give the Orange book to a guy. She did so, and the guy got shot.”

“We have two officers dead. I sent Knobel and his partner to make sure that you had received the manuscript.” Ramirez turned to look at the PC monitor. “Oh, God. Knobel must’ve come to the door at the precise time they were showing up. They probably thought it was a setup. After they shot Knobel in front of your apartment, his partner stepped out from across the street to arrest the man that shot him and a second man gunned him down. If Myrna gave the book to Knobel, he sure doesn’t have it. They must have taken it.”

“They also killed uncle Michael.” Before he could explain, the phone rang. The three looked at the phone. Ramirez turned to Larry and nodded. Larry picked it up.

“Hello?” His answer was almost inaudible.

“It’s me. Uncle Michael. The vampire.” Larry almost choked. “Are you there, Larry?”

“Yes. I am so relieved to hear your voice.”

“Listen carefully. I don’t have much time. Last night I did some thinking and rechecked my e-mails. With your father’s last e-mail, the one with the ‘1486’ document attached,” Michael spoke in a stream almost too fast to be coherent, “it had another attachment. It seemed to be blank pages, but last night when I scrolled down it, another story appeared: 1752. I am e-mailing it to you as I speak. As a safety precaution—I guess, I don’t know, I feel like I’m going crazy—I loaded my thirty-eight and placed it in my desk last night. When Salvador started yelling and screaming and waving his gun at me, I

don't know how, or why, but I calmly felt I could take him out; and I did. I shot him. I killed him. What I am saying, Larry is that I need to disappear. I can't tell you how or where. You know they are listening to this conversation. I'll get in touch with you later. Somehow." The phone went dead.

Larry quickly recounted the conversation.

"Call him back," Ramirez ordered. "We need to get him protection. He can't be running around alone."

"Protection in Mexico?" Larry asked as he dialed. The phone rang, no answer. Larry nodded, "He's not picking up."

Ramirez autodialed his cell phone. "Have O'Malley get in touch with me! Pass me to Captain Barzini's desk. Yes, I know. Just do it!" A few moments later, "Yes, I know you're busy, Captain. Yes, I know two officers are dead. I am at the scene. I need some men to provide protection. Twenty-four-seven. I'll stay here until they arrive." Ramirez pressed the "End" button.

"Do you have any idea how many men shot our officers?" Ramirez looked first to Myrna, then to Larry.

"I can only say they were on our side of the street. At least two. I guess that the man across the street got shot when he started to pull his gun out. He was looking in a different direction, not at the front door. The second shots came from my left. The first shots came from the right."

"Are you sure, Myrna?"

"Not a hundred per cent, no. I didn't see anyone, I just heard the shots. They seemed to come from two different directions."

The PC chimed. Larry clicked on the butler with the tray of mail. Message from *mmerchant@yahoo.com.mx* with a document attached: 1752.doc. Larry downloaded and opened it. The three looked at the monitor.

"Don't move from here. Don't get close to the windows. I'll be right back." Ramirez turned and bolted out the door, down to the street.

A few minutes later, at 9:55, the doorbell rang. This time it was O'Malley. He showed up, as usual, in his navy blue NYPD uniform.

"We have a real problem," O'Malley said as greeting.

"What an understatement," Myrna answered.

"We got a license plate from a witness. It's a rented car and we found it three blocks away. It won't lead anywhere. Is there anything you haven't told Ramirez?" Larry and Myrna shook their heads. "LA and Modesto will open in one hour. If they have something, we'll have to wait until then. Ramirez is now convinced your father's disappearance is connected to the drug lords."

"Well, he's wrong. The drug guys only got interested in my father's writings after you called LA and Modesto. They weren't really looking for him. They

figured that if someone was stirring up things, it must be for a reason. And what is that reason? My father's theories. That's what they are after now. Even now, they are not after him, they only want to get his writings. There is no proof they did my father harm."

"Lack of proof doesn't mean anything. Now we have a missing Lawrence Fogarty, plus two dead officers." O'Malley shook his head dramatically.

"And a dead Salvador in Cuernavaca," Larry added for effect.

"And your uncle Michael has disappeared," Myrna cried. She looked down, out the window. "The news people are here."

"Yeah, they're like vultures. Get back from the window."

The phone rang. Larry picked it up.

"Hello?"

"Larry, its me aunt Minnie. I was watching the TV and they interrupted with Breaking News. I wanted to make sure you are all right. The reporters are in front of your dad's apartment! What is going on?"

"Two officers got shot. I'm not sure why."

"Does this mean someone killed your father?"

"No. I don't think so, aunt Minnie. I still think he . . ." Larry couldn't finish. After a pause he continued, "He left a bunch of stories. I think the answer to what happened to my father lies in them." Larry quickly recounted over the phone a very short summary of the stories and his belief that his father had committed suicide. "I don't know what to say, Aunt Minnie. Did you get anything from him? Did he e-mail you?"

"Don't despair, Larry. I just can't believe your father would do something like that. And yes, I got an e-mail from your father the day he disappeared. It was very strange. It just said, 'See attachment.' It was two blank documents, there was nothing on them."

"You didn't delete them, did you?" Larry then explained briefly how he had followed these stories, without mentioning anything on the phone about the blank pages. "Can you e-mail me the blank documents?"

"I don't see what for, but sure, once I get home. I am in New Jersey, visiting a friend. How are you holding up?"

"I'm fine."

"I'll stop by to see you soon. Well, call me. Anytime, Larry. Are you sure you're O.K.?"

"Yes. I'm fine, aunt Minnie. Don't worry."

"Who loves you, baby?"

"You do."

"Keep that in mind. Call me if you need anything."

“It’s best if you e-mail. I think my phone is tapped.”

“Now you’re being paranoid. Besides, what do I care if anyone hears what I have to say to you? By, love.” The phone went dead. Larry hung up slowly. The phone rang again.

“Don’t play any more games with us, Larry,” a voice said.

Larry covered the mouthpiece and pointed to the phone and mouthed, “It’s them.”

“We specifically instructed you to send us all your father’s writings,” the voice continued. “We know you received one from Michael. And we know your aunt is sending you another one. Save them and wait for instructions.” The phone went dead.

“They obviously have the phone tapped. They want the story that my aunt got, along with the one uncle Michael sent me. You see, Sergeant O’Malley? They are looking for his writings because they think there is something incriminating in them. Perhaps it has to do with the questions raised by you and Ramirez in California!”

“So there are new stories? You still think they have a clue?” O’Malley asked good-humored, trying to elevate the mood. Larry nodded somberly, pointing to the PC monitor. O’Malley looked at his watch. “I have an hour to kill. I’m meeting Dr. Boukhardt at noon. Ramirez asked me to take your suicide theory more seriously.” He added as explanation, “And I am.”

“After today’s events, I lean more toward foul play, I am starting to agree with Ramirez’s point of view.” Myrna said biting her lip and seeing O’Malley’s expression added, “And, yes. I know of your personal preference, that Lawrence disappeared in Belize or Mexico to protect Larry. I don’t quite buy that.”

“That is quite alright. I don’t have any proof, so who is to say. May I?” O’Malley asked, pointing to the monitor.

“Sure let’s read it. I’m supposed to stay put waiting for instructions to give them the new stories. I bet you there are more references to suicide.” Larry insisted.

“Well, let’s see.” O’Malley sat in front of the monitor. Larry read over one shoulder, Myrna, over the other.

Miguel and the Count, Guanajuato, 1752 A.D.

The Count of Valenciana speaks:

I am looking down La Boca del Infierno, as it is called by most that work here. The main shaft drops down into the bowels of the earth. Looking down this bottomless pit, you can only see darkness. Truly, this could be The Mouth of Hell. It is La Valenciana, the biggest silver-producing mine ever.

I feel a certain amount of pride in the perfect roundness of the hole. About 50 meters wide, the mineshaft descends about 500 meters through a series of stairwells and ladders. We have been digging for the last 194 years, going back to 1558. When I say “we,” I mean my ancestors before me. Huge horizontal tunnels spread out from the main shaft at various levels. The ones closer to the surface have been exhausted. We have been digging deeper and deeper.

I still hold the title of Count of Valenciana. This means, among other things, that I am one of the richest men on earth. La Valenciana’s ore is the richest in silver content ever encountered. I have plans to go deeper still, as there seem to be indications of more silver further down, perhaps another 200 meters. Today, La Valenciana has produced more than half of all the silver of the world, but we are approaching the physical limits of what a man can carry up to the surface from those depths.

Sometimes this silver seems like a curse. We mine it, then mint it in La Casa de Moneda in Mexico City, and the Reales are shipped to Spain. The Spanish Armada lately has trouble protecting our ships from pirates and buccaneers. The more silver we send, the less it seems to be worth. Since we started production at la Valenciana, the silver mines of Europe slowly closed as they could not compete with our costs. The ascendancy of Spain as a world power was ensured by the gush of silver. At first, the Reales flowed eastward throughout Europe. Then continued east through the Middle East, feeding the economies with currency. Still the Reales moved eastward, to India, then to China. We yearly send the *Nao de China* from Acapulco to trade silver for spices and silks; but these are getting more expensive, as more and more Reales are flowing into China from India and the Middle East. Thus the Reales encompass the whole of this earth. It is the first universally accepted

coinage in the world. Soon there will be so many Reales in China, that the ones we take from Acapulco will lose their value.

Spain is on a downward spiral. Yet, France is on the ascendance. The English Sterling pound gains strength every year, especially since they put Newton in charge of the Royal Mint in London half a century ago. What is their secret knowledge? All the gold of the world seems to be flowing into the British capital. Their mechanical looms and inventions seem to be more valuable than currency. The capacity to produce seems to be more important than the currency to pay for it. And the English are not even Catholics. What is the world coming to?

I have started plans to build one of the most ornate churches in the world as a small payment to God and Church for my wealth, but I still have to decide on the architect. Maybe my son can finish this project. I feel compelled to build something or at least to start something that will outlive me far into the future. I will name it in honor of San Cayetano.

But now, I have to worry about more ordinary problems. My slave labor has been dwindling and our production has been declining continuously for the last few years. I have instructed my assayers to get me all available young men. The miners and loaders are not the problem. The shortage is in the carriers. On average, if you feed them well, they might live about seven years. This is a small price to pay for the riches I send to Spain so they can expand Catholicism all over the world. Maybe when all are Catholics, there will be fewer problems everywhere.

When they could not find enough young men to slave in the mine, as an excuse my accountant told me, "Count, there are a few young men, but they are so sick and feeble that they would be of no good."

"What about the son of the good looking Indian, the one with the green eyes?"

"The one that you joke could be your son? His name is Miguel. I believe he is just pretending to be sick. He lies on the floor and doesn't move. But I cannot, for the life of me, determine what, if anything, is wrong with him. His family has to force feed him, but he doesn't resist this. They say he has been like this forever, but his physical strength clearly indicates this is not the body of a sick man."

"Bring him immediately! I need all the Indians you can get!" I yelled. "We'll see how hard it is to get this young man to work."

And so they carried him to my presence, and lay him on the floor at my feet. He lay staring at the ceiling with deep green eyes. I had never seen eyes

like that in an Indian. His mother had refused me years ago, so I was pleased her son's eyes were like mine. That is why I joked that he could be my son.

This young man had intrigued me since he was a baby. If I talked to him, if I threatened him, he was completely unresponsive. Just like now. How long could he continue with this façade?

A few days later, I came in and commanded him to stand up. As expected, he continued unresponsive. But this time, I put my whip to his back and he jumped up and stared at me. "Tell me your name," I commanded him, rising my whip.

"Miguel."

I pushed him and he walked. I took him to the mine foreman and ordered the pit boss to give him all he needed to be a carrier.

He equipped him with a hat with a wide rim, a cloth knapsack that would hang from his forehead down his back, a lamp, a shirt and some sandals. The knapsack to carry the ore was attached to a wide strip of cloth that would support the bottom of the knapsack, come up his back, behind his arms and over the hat and press on his forehead. In this fashion he could carry about 75 kilograms of ore if he was loaded by an expert, ten to twelve rocks, each about the size of a human's head. The lamp consisted of a stiff wire that could be attached to his hat and hold a small tray with a candle in front of his head or face to provide some illumination if necessary. The shirt protected slightly from the cold in the mine, but more importantly, protected his back from the rubbing of the ore in the knapsack as he made his ascent. His sandals were a cheap investment to protect his feet.

He seemed to move sluggishly as if it was painful to move, but slowly he made his descent into the mineshaft.

I recount this, because in the next few days I was to witness the most extraordinary display of brute strength.

Most men took more than one hour to climb the Mouth of Hell from the bottom of the mine to the surface; and this, when they were carrying nothing. A carrier, fully loaded, might on his first trip up, when fresh, make it in an hour and half. Each carrier was required to make at least seven ascents a day. The carriers worked twelve hours, and then rested twelve hours. We had two shifts. The men worked day and night.

In some sections of the Mouth of Hell the main steps, sometimes almost five meters wide, spiraled upwards. In other sections ladders were used. A team worked continuously building steps, as the ladders proved to be bottlenecks, especially welcomed by the carriers on their arduous journey upwards.

Miguel was different. He made twelve journeys the first day, and sustained this pace for the next five days.

On the seventh day, a day of rest as required by the scriptures, I had him brought to me.

“Miguel, I have never witnessed anyone to be as strong as you.” I waited for an answer and none was forthcoming. Miguel just stood there looking into my eyes with a completely fearless gaze, his green eyes boring into me. “I need to understand where you get this strength. I could do so much more if I had more men like you. If you help me, maybe I can help you.”

Miguel spoke for the first time in days. “I see things that no one sees. No one can help me, I am mad. Walking up and down helps me.”

I waited for an elaboration, none came.

“It helps you? Walking up and down?”

No answer. It was obvious he didn’t care what I thought. “Why were you lying immobile when I met you? Did that help you?” I prodded.

“For weeks I had no desire for anything. I can’t explain it. Nothing seemed of any importance, not even eating, and I couldn’t sleep. I didn’t sleep for weeks.”

“Why did you get up when I whipped you?”

“Wouldn’t you?”

I had to agree and waited for more but it didn’t come. “Tell me more,” I prodded.

“Did you know that coming up the Mouth of Hell there are thirty-three ladders with five-hundred and ninety-four steps?”

“No.”

“Why thirty-three? Jesus died at thirty-three.”

“We are working on making more steps; eventually there will be fewer ladders. Thirty-three is just a coincidence.”

“There are eighteen steps to a ladder. I am eighteen.”

“You will be nineteen in a year, and the ladders will still be eighteen steps. There is no significance in that either.”

“Did you know that there are 1752 steps carved in the rock of the Mouth of Hell?”

“No.”

“You do know that this is how many years ago Jesus died, don’t you?”

I was warmly intrigued by how the young man’s mind worked. “Yes, of course, but no, I didn’t know there were that many steps. But again, next year there will be more steps added, more than one, and that has no significance either.”

I waited for Miguel to speak again. He didn't. "You still have not told me what the source of your strength is," I pushed.

"I can sleep," Miguel said.

"What do you mean you can sleep?"

"I couldn't sleep before; now I can."

"I don't understand."

"Neither do I."

"I meant, why couldn't you sleep before?"

"I just couldn't. The days and nights became a continuous torment. It would never end."

"But now you can sleep?"

"Yes."

"Because of the hard work?"

"It makes me tired. I don't think all day. I just concentrate on pushing one foot up and in front of the other. At the end of the day I can sleep. Thank you for helping me."

After he left, I sat there, uncomprehending.

The next day, they called me. Miguel: he was not reacting, just lying there. I went to him. When I waved my hand in front of his eyes, he was unresponsive. I leaned close to him and whispered in his ear, "Miguel, do you want me to bring the whip?"

Miguel got up. "Do you want me to whip you?" he asked without looking at me.

I answered between clenched teeth, "I don't need to be whipped to do my duty!"

"What is your duty, Count?"

"My duty is to preserve the great institutions of the Church and the Spanish Crown. My duty is to help extend the reaches of Catholicism. My duty is to make you all Catholics!"

"How can you be so sure?" he said calmly. "I have no idea what my duty is. However, since you have helped me, I will help you." And with that he turned and went down the Mouth of Hell, leaving me thinking about what he had said. If indeed it was different than what I thought, what, I wondered, could be my duty? It was true that the French, and worse, the anti-Papist British were becoming richer than Spain. This idea gnawed at my insides and sleep eluded me. Perhaps Miguel was right; I was not fulfilling my duty.

For the next six days, Miguel carried a dozen loads of ore a day. A dozen trips in and out of the Mouth of Hell. At the end of the sixth day, as he

unloaded the ore from his knapsack next to the huge hole in the ground, Miguel saw me. He calmly approached me.

“Your duty is to help me. Mine is to help you. I need no rest. I need to continue working.”

“Everyone must rest every seven days. It is a sin otherwise.”

“How do you know? It isn’t for me. I need to continue working,” Miguel insisted. “If I stop, I might die. I feel I need to help you and you need me to work. What is the problem?”

“It is a sin. I cannot allow it.”

I forced him to rest. The next day, Miguel would not budge.

“Miguel,” I said gently in his ear, “I am here to help you. Do I need to get the whip?”

Miguel stood up. “If you do not let me work whenever I want, I will lie down and I don’t care if you bring your whip. I really couldn’t care less if you kill me.” This he said in a voice as cold as the ore at the bottom of La Valenciana.

“Miguel, I will help you. I will let you work under one condition: that you learn the Rosary and repeat it every journey up the Mouth of Hell. You need to atone for your sins.”

“Hail Mary Mother of God, blessed is the fruit of thy womb . . .” I heard him repeating as he went down the Mouth of Hell. If he wanted to work seven days a week, I would let him work seven days a week. Miguel looked up at me as he kept coming up and I thought I saw him smile. At least his eyes shone with a smile.

Miguel’s routine continued uninterrupted for months. Then, one day, again we met at the end of his dozen journeys. He saw me and came over. “How is your son doing? Do you love him?” Miguel asked.

“Of course, I love him. He is doing fine. Why do you ask?”

“Because I am doing better. Thank you.” And with that he turned and left.

I talked to the people who worked in La Valenciana with him. Everyone could only speak in praise of Miguel. He always helped his fellow carriers, he helped the loaders. He helped carry other’s loads sometimes as he was getting stronger every day, and still he managed his twelve journeys.

Juancho, who slept next to him, told me, “Miguel says that if he isn’t working, he feels like collapsing and lying still, but if he lies still, then he can’t get up. He says he has no strength to do so. Miguel says that if he works hard all day, sleep will come, and at least for the night he finds peace. If he lies still all day, he can’t sleep and Miguel lives in a hell much worse than the Mouth of Hell all day and all night. He is thankful for your help because

he gets peace at night. Miguel says that he knows in his heart that he must help you. It must be because you are helping him. He tells me that there is no pleasure in anything; there is no pleasure in thinking about his mother or his sisters, no solace in thinking about his childhood, what little he can remember. But he always helps me and I am grateful for that.”

Miguel was now doing fourteen journeys up and down the Mouth of Hell. One day, I saw him unload his ore. He dropped his knapsack to the ground, took his hat off, his shirt off and stood there with his eyes closed with all his skin glistening with sweat. Every muscle could be discerned, and the contour of every vein showed through his tight skin. The sun was bright on his face. Suddenly, he opened his eyes. The light made those green eyes shimmer in such a way that I was transfixed staring into them. I had to walk away. A short distance later I heard someone following close behind me and I turned to see who it was. I was happily surprised it was Miguel. I turned and put my arm around him and lead him up the hill towards my house.

“I think it would be a good idea for us to talk,” I said to him.

“I lied to you!” he cried out in a mixture of rage and despair, surprising me.

“I know,” I said tenderly trying to calm him.

“What do you know?” he responded as he tried to wriggle away from under my arm. I could feel the supple muscles in his shoulders. He was not trying hard to separate himself from me. “I lied to you,” he repeated, as if this was an explanation for trying to move away from me. I kept my arm around his shoulder, rubbing it, calming.

I pressed on, “Let’s talk about your madness.”

“I’m not mad,” he said as he turned to look into my eyes.

“What about when you see things that others can’t see?” I asked him softly.

“That hardly ever happens,” he responded defensively.

“But it does happen.” I answered firmly, as I tried to get him to talk.

As we walked along, we came across an iron frame wrapped with boards. Inside this frame were rocks, and broken tools, refuse of the kind that came out of La Valenciana. He absentmindedly walked into this container. I gently pulled him back out by the arm, and led him towards the house.

“Sometimes it is useful,” he explained lamely.

“Like when?”

“Like when I’m working on” Suddenly he stopped. Looking into my eyes, Miguel said, as I continued to stare, “Do you love your wife? Is she doing well?”

“Why, yes. She is doing well, Miguel.”

“And you?”

“I am fine.”

“Are you sure?”

“Of course I’m sure.”

“Then why do you stare at me?”

“I am not staring,” I lied. “But tell me, how are you doing, Miguel?”

“I am good. Can’t you see? Thank you for helping me. I will continue with my rosaries. I am now doing at least twenty-eight a day. That should buy me some place in Heaven, even if I don’t rest.”

“I wish I could understand how I’m helping you, Miguel.”

“So do I. How are the Church and your King doing?”

“Oh, they are doing well. Not as well as they should, but I am doing really well, even better than they. I know you don’t understand how all this can be, but you are helping this be so.”

“Oh, but I do,” Miguel said. He stood there naked, except for his sandals, with his hat in his hand, facing the setting sun. The sun cast a light on him that made him shine as if he was made of gold, except for the green eyes and the black hair. In a strange way I felt a bond with this young man, certainly a bond stronger than the one I felt for my King.

“Sometimes, Miguel, I am not sure of why I am doing what I do, but still, it is my duty,” I explained to myself more than to Miguel.

“Yes, I know. I repeat the rosary twice every journey into the Mouth of Hell; once going down and once coming up. Sometimes I wish that I were an explorer. I wish that I could just walk all day to some far distant place that no man has trod. I imagine, sometimes, that I could walk up a mountain to see what was on the other side, only to find another mountain; and so I climb the next one until I am tired enough that sleep will give me peace. Sometimes I wish I could walk myself out of the living hell that is my life; sometimes I wish I could walk for eternity. That is why, sometimes, I wish I were an explorer. That way, I would never know what I would find after the next hill, over the next mountain, past the next plains; uncertainty would be part of the journey. Sometimes I wonder if I could be a leader and show the way. The way away from here; not just up and down, which if you think about it is also a way away from here, just in a different direction. I do know that I am here to help you, perhaps in a journey of discovery; perhaps down the Mouth of Hell.”

The sun had set. Miguel picked up his shirt and put it on. He looked at me with sad eyes. “Think about it. Think about what is your true duty.” He turned and left me standing there.

And so time passed. Once or twice a week I saw Miguel, and he asked about my family, about the Church and the King, and always made me wonder. Wonder what was my true duty. Why should I dig holes and enrich institutions? For peace? For betterment? For what?

A few months later, they called me to witness Miguel's sixteenth journey up the Mouth of Hell. He emerged up the stairs, unloaded his ore. His eyes, I noted, were not quite green, they seemed grayer. I walked over to him. Miguel turned into the setting sun, and even though the light was shining in his eyes, his gaze was dull.

Before I could speak, Miguel said, "Do you now know what it is you are supposed to do?"

"What do you mean?"

"Look into my eyes! What do you see?"

"Nothing. I see nothing, Miguel."

"That's the point. There is nothing!"

At that moment he grabbed me by the shoulders and picked me up. His grip was so strong there was nothing I could do. I couldn't move. I could scarcely breathe. He walked towards the edge of the Mouth of Hell. I realized he was going to kill me. At that moment, I clearly began to understand he was a human being, just like me; that he could suffer pain, just like me; and unlike me, Miguel had waited almost a year to do this. Had our situation been reversed, I would have killed him the first time his whip touched my back.

Our eyes were locked. I was in a deep embrace. Death, only a step away. At that exact moment of impotence, I realized neither the Church nor my King was coming to my rescue; neither cared for me.

Miguel held me over the abyss with a grip stronger than ten men. He continued looking into my eyes, saw something, and then slowly turned until his back was facing the Mouth of Hell. He put me down, let go of my arms, and shoved me away from the menacing chasm. Then he leaned backwards and toppled into the hole. I crawled to the edge, and saw him falling, his face towards the sky, his hands neatly folded on his chest, as if he were sleeping, until he disappeared into the darkness of the Mouth of Hell.

I stood up. The sun had set on the horizon, the sky was red.

Lunch at the Aquavit and the Mexican Connection

O'Malley had finished reading the story of the Count of Valenciana when the door opened and Ramirez walked in loosening his pink tie.

"I can't believe this!" Ramirez' face was flushed. "O'Malley, Captain Barzini denied the extra men I asked for this investigation. He denied the protection I demanded. He ordered me off the case when I blew my top. We just lost two good men, this is an outrage!" Ramirez shouted at no one.

"He must've given you a reason." O'Malley reasoned.

"Captain Barzini says that we already spent too many resources looking for one man. He is getting heat from the DEA, which makes sense if the drug lords control some in the DEA. But the mayor is also leaning on Barzini, and pressure is also coming from the Department of Justice. They run the Witness Protection Program. Barzini implied that perhaps Fogarty is in the program and that they don't want us disturbing old files." Ramirez blurted out irritated.

"I checked with the DA's office. They have no drug related cases with a Fogarty as witness. That can't be," O'Malley quipped.

"Excuse us." Detective Ramirez, embarrassed, turned to Larry and Myrna, smiled, and pulled O'Malley to the kitchen. "If Fogarty is in the WPP," Ramirez whispered frustrated, "they wouldn't tell you; the case could be in another state, not New York. And according to Fogarty's theory, the witness protection program, which specializes in disappearing people, is the perfect vehicle to dispose of unwanted individuals. If they snatched Fogarty, or worse, disposed of him, they obviously would not want us meddling. Who else could be interested in Fogarty?" Ramirez asked himself out loud.

"So now we also have to worry about the Justice Department? What are we going to do?" O'Malley asked as Larry and Myrna tried to follow the conversation from where they stood.

"We're just discussing several possibilities and we don't want to hurt your sensibilities. Its nothing sinister," O'Malley explained to Myrna and Larry.

"O'Malley," Ramirez said, raising his voice as he returned from the kitchen so everyone could hear. "Officially you haven't seen or talked to me.

You continue investigating the possibility of Mexico and Belize. Try to do it quietly. I'll have lunch with Dr. Boukhardt instead of you. I mean, a lunch is not an investigation. Right? I'll stay on Larry's theory. Larry, you stay put and wait for the instructions to e-mail. Don't call for food, they have your phone tapped. They could use that as a screen to get in here. I'll send you a pizza."

"Do you think we're in danger?" Myrna asked.

"I don't know what to think. Probably not, but we must be careful."

"Does it make sense to forward the calls from here to another place? We could check the e-mail from anywhere," Myrna suggested.

"I think you're safe here, just don't let strangers in. Do you have a key to the door on the stairwell?" Ramirez turned to Larry.

"I think so. I can also set the elevator so that only someone with a key can access this floor."

"Good. Do it. If someone rings the doorbell, ask him or her to move out into the street so you can see them from the window. Don't let strangers in. I'll come by in the afternoon." Ramirez turned to leave followed by O'Malley.

Ramirez headed to the new address of the Aquavit Scandinavian restaurant where Dr. Boukhardt had made a reservation. The entrance to the restaurant's new quarters resembled a bleakly modernist public square, replete with scraggly trees and rows of abandoned marble benches. Inside, the bar had been greatly expanded into a long lounge area, where the patrons could twirl about in high-backed Jacobsen "egg" chairs. The restaurant's homemade aquavits were now displayed along the wall, like pieces of art, in luminous square tankards. The dining room was small, even claustrophobic, by the standards of the grandiose old space, but the café, once part of the bar, now had a room of its own, appointed with simple butcher-block tables, pendulous sixties-era chandeliers, and orange cone chairs of the type you might see in the executive lounge of an excessively posh Scandinavian airline.

Ramirez looked around and saw a thin, distinguished looking man in his sixties observing him curiously. The man focused on the pink tie and waived. "There are some advantages to wearing a pink tie," Ramirez thought. He walked to the small table in the dining room, introduced himself and sat down. Dr Boukhardt held a martini glass filled to the brim with three olives.

"Love your suit," Boukhardt said as greeting.

"Thanks."

"And Tie. Can I get you something to drink?"

"No. I'm on duty. It's against regulations. I must apologize for the change of plans. I mean me, instead of Sergeant O'Malley. It's been a strange day. Two officers were shot dead."

“Unrelated to Lawrence, I presume.”

“No. They were actually shot right in front of his apartment. I sent them to check in on Larry. I can’t figure it out.”

“I don’t know why you insist on talking to me, Detective. With two officers shot, I don’t see what I can contribute.”

“Its complicated, but I must continue checking the possibility of suicide. It can’t be ruled out yet. I need to learn more about mood disorders.”

“Whatever I can tell you about depression and mood disorders is coming from the best theory on the brain that I have heard: Larry’s. He is a brilliant young man with a promising future. This incident with his father, very unfortunate.” Dr. Boukhardt puckered his lips and took a large swig from his martini.

“Larry, quite naturally, is very upset about his father’s disappearance, Doctor. That’s why I think its better for me to talk to you. He insists that a series of stories his father wrote are the clue to how and where he might have killed himself.”

“Any man’s writing are reflections of his past experiences and rooted in his emotions. If you know how to look, something of a man’s character can always be gleamed.”

“I, personally, don’t lend much credence to this theory or even that the stories are related to anything.”

“If you look at the monstrous sexual stories Lawrence wrote, it is easy to determine that he might have been abused as a child.”

“Excuse me, doctor, but what stories are you talking about?” Ramirez said, caught by surprise.

“Oh, you haven’t seen those?” Boukhardt tried to minimize his disclosure, “Well, never mind. Those stories are only important in the sense that they might indicate where to begin therapy.”

“I’m not interested in therapy, doctor. I’m interested in locating Lawrence, in the possibility of suicide and whether Larry’s theories that the stories can tell us something has some credence.”

“Very well,” Boukhardt said, relieved that Ramirez was not pursuing his careless breach of confidentiality. “Isn’t Larry basing this assumption on the fact that suicide is a recurring theme throughout the stories?”

“Yes, and he also argues that his father is using some of Larry’s neuropsychological models in a metaphorical sense. Therefore the stories must be connected to his father’s mental health.”

“That could add to the argument, don’t you think? What people write, quite often, is a reflection of their thoughts and moods.”

“It might only indicate familiarity with the subject, not an elaborate hoax or a clue to how Fogarty might have committed suicide. Why not just leave a note?”

“Only about one in five people who commit suicide leave a note. These notes generally don’t even start to reflect the dark interior motives that could drive these desperate acts. Even when the perpetrator is a skilled writer, it is difficult to envision that a depressed, confused, hopeless state of mind might lead to great eloquence. Depression over long periods of time can affect the ability to think and adapt. I think this is why Larry believes there can be some clues in the writings. They are linked to his father’s frame of mind, even if it is a past frame of mind.”

“Can you explain quickly what depression is? According to Larry, the story of De Molay’s torture and crucifixion is a literary account of depression.”

“It could be, but more probably it is a reflection of some deep inner pain, probably originating in his childhood and exacerbated by his wife’s death. This would be a reflection on his personality problems, and would indicate a diagnosis along axis II.”

Dr. Boukhardt noticed that Ramirez was eyeing the menu. “I would recommend their famous mini lobster roll, a thin Tootsie Roll of poached lobster wrapped in apples instead of tomatoes. It includes a sprinkling of trout roe and it’s great chased with a glass of ginger-ale granite. Don’t worry about the price. It is my treat.”

“In that case,” Ramirez nodded to the expectant waiter. “I’ll order that.”

“Make it two. And another Bombay martini,” Dr. Boukhardt smiled, and then continued. “Depression isn’t difficult to explain, yet it can be hard to understand. I’ll use Larry’s theories in this regard. Essentially, mania triggers many positive emotions concurrently as the brain speeds up and depression triggers many negative emotions simultaneously when the brain slows down. Exactly which combination of emotions, and which memories are related to these emotions, determines how differently, from individual to individual, these mood disorders can express themselves.

“To understand depression, it is helpful, first, to understand mania. In mania and hypomania, it is necessary to think in terms of neurotransmitters. If there is a very minor increase of glutamate, the primary excitatory neurotransmitter, a small rate of excitation of neurons ensues, and everything will speed up slightly in the cortex. When neurons signal each other faster, thoughts and speech become accelerated, accompanied by increased physical activity, decreased need for sleep, increased sexual activity and a possible

enhancement of the senses.” Boukhardt checked to see if Ramirez was following. Ramirez smiled.

“Prior to the availability of medication, the increased activity could lead to exhaustion and even death. Studies show normal individuals change their thoughts every five to six seconds, compared to less than two seconds for manic patients. The number of syllables spoken in a minute by a manic patient is between 180 and 200; a normal person’s is 120 to 155. This acceleration will interfere with attention as the individual will be more easily distracted and have greater difficulty concentrating.

“The changed speed and patterns of thought excite the associated positive emotions by signaling the thalamus and tricking it to trigger a feeling of joy or even euphoria, sometimes with inappropriate spontaneous laughter. Self-esteem grows disproportionately with decreased inhibitions and a greater sense of importance. As a result of the increased self-esteem, risky and bizarre behavior is common. Grandiose delusions or paranoid delusions are also quite possible. Increases in use of alcohol and drugs are frequent. The increased speed of thoughts activates associated positive emotions and activates the pleasure centers.”

Dr. Boukhardt waited as the waiter presented their lobster plates. He took another swig of his martini, munched on the three olives, put the glass to one side as the waiter placed the fresh martini on the table.

“As a result of the increased self-esteem and speed of thought, all these changes in activities seem perfectly logical to the person in a manic phase. Sensuality is pervasive and the desire to seduce and be seduced irresistible. The manic-depressive’s erratic behavior may seed social violence or sometimes self-destructive behavior. In a few cases, as a result of their actions, they might provoke others to try to kill them, or they may even try to kill themselves.”

“This is exquisite, Doctor,” Ramirez interjected, genuinely impressed with how good the food was. “I think I’ll add lobster to my diet of pizzas and tacos.”

“I knew you would like it, Detective.”

“Thanks for the suggestion, Doctor.”

After a few bites, Dr. Boukhardt continued, “The symptoms of mania or depression mix with each individual’s personality and thoughts to create a unique medley that differs from person to person and even from day to day. Since each person has a different stream of memories, these memories will bring on their associated emotions. In the manic phase, irritable and quickly shifting moods are common; shifting rhythms of thinking trigger different emotions. Just as emotions activate associated memories and ways of thinking,

speeded-up thinking and certain memories will elicit a sense of elevated mood. The euphoric state in turn will feed back and activate positive thoughts and make bad memories inaccessible. The result: an inflated sense of self, leading to grandiose plans and extremely dangerous behavior to self and others.

“Varying from person to person, the excess excitation will eventually produce a slight deficit of other neurotransmitters as their normal replacement rate can’t keep up with the speeded up consumption rate. Levels of other neurotransmitters eventually drop slightly below normal. When this happens the cortex’s signaling rates slow to rates that are less than normal. The slower thinking will be associated with negative emotions and trigger them as the brain is locked into a slower mode. Some of these possible emotions are sadness, emptiness, fear, anxiety, diminished pleasure, worthlessness, and excessive or inappropriate guilt. There can be persistent anger and increased irritability, even an exaggerated sense of frustration as negative moods shift quickly.”

Ramirez was following the lecture as much as he was enjoying the lobster. His plate was almost empty. “And all this you’re telling me, is part of Larry’s neuro-psychological models?”

Dr. Boukhardt smiled, nodded as he forked another morsel, chewed and continued, “This slowed-down brain produces physical symptoms as well: facial expressions and demeanor associated with sadness; decrease or increase in appetite, inability to sit still, pacing, hand-wringing, rubbing or pulling of the skin, clothing or other objects or slowed speech and body movements; increased pauses before answering.” He stopped to think for a moment, took another bite, chewed and continued, “Insomnia or hypersomnia and fatigue or loss of energy are common. A significant reduction in sexual desire is present occasionally. The slower brain also exhibits diminished ability to think, or to remember. There is no access to positive memories—and deficits in concentration.”

“But what has all this to do with Lawrence Fogarty?” Ramirez inquired, trying to bring the conversation into a sharper focus.

“Lawrence suffered moderate depression. But even in cases of mild depression, the person might seem to be operating normally, but this appearance is only through great effort.”

“You mean they might seem normal, but they are not?”

“Exactly.” Boukhardt expertly pulled the meat out of the lobster shell and continued. “All the present negative emotions mixed up and coupled with the inability to remember and to think produce a feeling of indescribable blackness, of unfathomable emptiness, which adds to a greatly diminished

sense of self. In severe depression, this will produce a feeling that is worse than terrible grief. The survival impulses of the organism are diminished in proportion to the loss of self.”

“I remind you we are talking of a human being,” Ramirez corrected, and he smiled remembering Myrna’s comment.

“Yes, of course.” Boukhardt sipped his martini and continued, “This greatly diminished or even lost sense of self, in some cases, will produce recurrent thoughts of death, recurring suicidal ideation without a specific plan, or worse, a suicide attempt or a specific plan for committing suicide. These thoughts might range from a belief that others are better off if the person were dead to actually carrying out a specific plan to commit suicide. The frequency, intensity and lethality of these thoughts vary tremendously from person to person, and even from day to day. Motivations for suicide may include a desire to give up in the face of perceived insurmountable obstacles or an intense wish to end an excruciatingly painful emotional state that is perceived as having no end.”

“But this is not Lawrence’s case, is it?”

“We don’t know. Again, the thoughts and memories of each person will be uniquely linked to individually varying negative emotions. As a consequence, each person will express a depressed state differently. Our emotions lie at the center of the experience that most of us take for granted, the presence of a well defined, predictable and unique subjective entity we call the ‘self’. When our emotions become disordered, our sense of self comes into doubt; we have great difficulty perceiving the difference between health and illness.”

“But Lawrence was not manic-depressive. According to Larry he was just moderately depressed.” Ramirez persisted.

“In contrast to the depressive phase of bipolar disorder, the onset of unipolar depression is produced independently of a manic episode. The difference is that the balance between GABA, the inhibitory neurotransmitter, and glutamate has gone in the opposite direction. This causes a slight decrease in glutamate excitatory action, which will eventually lower the levels of some neurotransmitters, but not all. This explains why antidepressants might produce mania in bipolar patients, since a slight increase in activity by any of the neurotransmitters might increase the activity of glutamate, which is present in almost normal amounts, exciting the brain into a manic episode. In the case of unipolar depression, glutamate might be at lower than normal levels and a slight indirect increase of any neurotransmitter by an antidepressant will help restore its normal level, improving the frame of mind.

“The difference between the depressive phase of manic depression and unipolar depression is a small but subtle one. In the former case, depression was brought by the excessive action of glutamate, depleting the normal levels of various neurotransmitters, slowing down the brain.”

“In other words, the brain crashed.” Ramirez brightened up.

“Correct. In the case of unipolar depression, a slight decrease of glutamate lowers levels of some neurotransmitters, which slows down the brain. A small, but important difference. In both cases the brain slowed down, superficially showing very similar symptoms.

“Would you like some dessert?” Seeing Ramirez’s hesitation, Boukhardt added, nodding, “I’m treating, of course.” Seeing the detective’s embarrassment, he quickly explained, “I chose this expensive place because it is my favorite. It would be my pleasure, really.”

“I would love to, but my time is limited.” Ramirez’s cell phone vibrated. He checked the caller. It was O’Malley. He checked his watch. “Doctor, I thank you for your time and the good food. I have learned more today than I ever thought I needed to know.” He spoke as he stood up to leave.

“Most suicides involve people suffering depression. The other high risk group are schizophrenics,” Dr Boukhardt said looking up at Ramirez.

“But I still don’t know anything that will help me find Lawrence, even if it involves suicide, and that is debatable.”

“Just remember, the more you know about the man, the closer you will be to solving the riddle.”

“Perhaps. But maybe the more I know about who killed him, the closer I will get to the answer.”

“I would keep an open mind. Larry is close to addressing the question of why people commit suicide. I expect this terrible situation will bring him to a solution faster. Call me if I can be of any help. Keep in touch, Detective.” Boukhardt smiled and took a swig of his martini.

Ramirez walked quickly to his favorite Deli on East 53rd St. He looked at his watch. It would take O’Malley about one minute per block to get there, so he would arrive in six minutes. He would have time to order a flan, made with the famous recipe of Victor’s Café.

Ramirez was savoring the last bite of the flan when O’Malley sat down next to him.

“The Mexican Judicials,” O’Malley said, referring to the Policia Judicial, the equivalent of the FBI, “Have issued an all-bulletins look out for a friend of ours.”

“You mean Fogarty?”

“No. I mean Michael Merchant. The all-bulletins say he is armed and extremely dangerous.” O’Malley added when he saw Ramirez’s puzzlement expression, “This is according to Clough. You know, our liaison with Latin America?”

“Oh, yeah. That Clough. I know whom you mean,” Ramirez said as he pulled a ten-dollar bill to pay for the flan and left it on the counter.

“According to Clough, in Mexico, ‘extremely dangerous’ is code for ‘terminate with prejudice if you can.’ In other words, wanted dead or alive. So the Mexican powers-that-be are trying to eliminate Michael.”

“That is strange. But nothing on Fogarty?” Ramirez asked. O’Malley nodded in the negative. “How did you hear so quickly? Normally the Mexicans would go through other channels before we get it.”

“Now, this is the kicker. The Secret Service added Michael Merchant to the list of terrorists and No-fly’s issued to Immigration and Naturalization. But, also sent us, and by that I mean the NYPD, a warrant for Michael Merchant’s arrest. I contacted a buddy of mine in the Secret Service and he told me that this was petitioned through an ‘informal channel’ used by the Mexican President to communicate with Bush. There were specific instructions to pass this information to the New York Police.”

“It means the Mexicans wanted us to know. Do you think they have people working for them inside the New York PD?”

“For sure. We have so many people I’m sure every political organization is represented. I don’t see why other countries wouldn’t infiltrate us also. They are looking for Merchant for the murder of Salvador Gonzales Fernandez,” O’Malley said checking his notebook, “As if he was some honorable citizen.”

“That is our goon. This is highly irregular. Why are the Mexicans alerting us of a killing in Mexico? They must be thinking Michael is coming here, but that is crazy”

“Unless he knows that Fogarty is somewhere near here?”

“I doubt that. At what time do you get off?”

“At three.”

“I think we should stay with Larry. He might be in danger.”

“It would have to be on our own time. You heard Barzini.” O’Malley spoke slowly, thinking the ramifications through.

“This whole thing stinks, O’Malley. Since when do we limit an investigation when two officers are killed?”

“I agree with you, but there are precedents. Remember O’Hare? I mean, he was crazy, trigger happy, he had been involved in a few controversial shootings

of unarmed civilians and always acquitted. Yet we used to send him to bring in the real nasty guys, hoping he would literally bite the bullet. He killed a few guys more before one of them got him. We didn't investigate a thing."

"But that was different. That was internal. In this case outside pressure is being applied on Barzini. I'm thinking that perhaps Merchant will try to get in touch with Larry. If we know something more, perhaps we can help protect them better."

"I'll be there at three fifteen, but only until eight. My wife will kill me if I don't get home early today."

"You got it. I'll take over at eight. Don't mention this to anyone."

"I won't, but you still owe me. Big time." O'Malley rose and left.

A short time later, O'Malley was subjected through the security procedures before being admitted into Larry's apartment: step back onto the sidewalk for a visual inspection, wait in the lobby before buzzing the second door, wait at the stairwell, admitted into the elevator lobby, checked through the peephole, and finally admitted into the apartment. O'Malley mentioned Ramirez's concerns.

"I want you two to know this. I personally feel these guys are only interested in my father's writings, Sergeant. I don't believe they gain anything by killing us."

"Well, I feel different, Sergeant. Lawrence has disappeared. Larry's uncle has killed a man; they have killed two officers, and I'll be damned if I am not going to react on the side of caution. I respectfully disagree with Larry." Myrna spoke eyeing Larry, daring him to argue about this again. He looked at her, smiled and nodded, admitting that she might be right. "Thanks for being here, Sergeant," she added.

"Larry, these people threatened to kill Michael. They also threatened you if you don't pass over the stories. Ramirez wants me to check the e-mails and instructions to relay the other stories. Since they are so interested in the stories, now he believes they might lead to the bad guys."

"My father, I hate to say, Sergeant, is dead by his own hand. Whatever the stories say has nothing to do with them." Larry's voice carried a sad tone. "Perhaps they believe there's something incriminating in the stories, but I'm sure they won't find anything other than what is in the Orange papers. My father was only interested in the contradictions of the OJ case, not in the internal working of the Mafia or the drug cartels."

"The secret codes are an ongoing feature of the stories," Myrna added. "Perhaps they suppose the secret codes will be revealed at some point and these pertain to them."

“This is bigger than the stories. They killed two good officers.”

The three of them stood there looking at each other. Finally, to break the impasse, Myrna offered, “Would you like some coffee, Sergeant? Please, sit down.”

O’Malley sat at the desk’s chair, with his back to the PC monitor while Myrna served him coffee.

Suddenly the PC chimed, the little butler appeared with a tray full of mail on the bottom right of the screen. Larry clicked on the icon. There was an e-mail from his aunt Minnie.

“Larry: I am worried stiff. I can’t imagine how you’re holding up. Attached are the two blank documents. Hope this helps you. I’ll touch base later. Who loves you, baby?”

Larry downloaded the two documents.

“It looks like we have two more stories from my father,” Larry intoned to no one in particular. The phone rang. Larry turned to O’Malley. He nodded encouragingly. Larry put the phone to his ear.

“Larry, please say hello to Sergeant O’Malley,” the voice said.

Larry covered the mouthpiece, “They know you’re here.”

“Listen.” The voice continued, “In a few moments you will receive an e-mail. I want you to respond, and attach all your father’s writings. The two that we are missing, and the two you just got from your aunt Minnie. You got that?” The voice continued impassively.

Still covering the mouthpiece Larry added, “They must have some spy-ware on my father’s computer. They also know about the two stories I just downloaded.”

“Is this clear?” the unknown voice repeated through the phone line.

“Yes. It is clear.”

“Who loves you, baby?” the voice mimicked his aunt, laughed and hung up.

Larry turned red with rage.

“What’s wrong, Larry?” Myrna asked concerned.

“I’m just on edge. They’re making fun of me. It’s nothing. I should just stay calm, Myrna. E-mail them the stories, then maybe we can figure out where and how my father . . .” Larry stopped himself before he could say the words out loud, “killed himself.”

The PC chimed and the butler with the tray filled with letters appeared. Larry clicked on it. There was a short e-mail from *salvadorthesaviour@yahoo.com*.

“Please attach the four stories now. We are watching you.”

Larry proceeded to select the appropriate files.

“Wait!” Myrna implored, “We haven’t even read the stories.”

“It doesn’t matter,” Larry whispered.

“It’s all right, Larry,” O’Malley encouraged.

Larry hit the send button. The stories floated into the ether.

“Can we find out who salvadorthesaviour is?” Myrna asked.

“Anyone can open an account at yahoo, and never use it again. Perhaps we can trace it, but then the computer they used might be a server offshore, and the trail will go cold,” O’Malley responded resignedly.

“Well, let’s read the story and find out if it does or doesn’t make a difference,” Myrna ordered.

Sacagawea and Meriwether, The Missouri River, 1803

Sacagawea speaks:

My husband told me that Captain Meriwether Lewis was a dear friend of Jefferson, the white man's Great Chief; that he was a young man of thirty, but to me he seemed old. I was only seventeen. My husband, Toussaint Charbonneau, a French Canadian, also told me that this was the only chance I would have to travel back to the lands where I had come from. He acted as if he didn't really believe I came from lands to the west. I later found out, and this he didn't tell me, that he had been hired because he spoke many Indian languages. He spoke one, Hidatsa. I spoke two, Hidatsa and Shoshone.

The first time I saw Captain Clark, he had the gait of a man that knows he is at the top, a man with no natural enemies. He can see from the high perch that he stands on, and he knows that his strength comes from within; and that this strength allows challengers, but that they will submit easily once they test his will.

We had already been on the journey for a few days, but I knew. Captain Clark looked at me as I was carrying my recently born son. As was expected I walked behind my husband on his horse. I think I saw a glimpse of surprise in Captain Clark's eyes. I do know that he saw me the same way that I saw him. I wanted so badly to be with him, to help him, to support him, to be an ever-presence in his life. I was carrying my son and I could tell that he paid close attention to this fact. He then looked into my husband's eyes, scrutinizing, and I knew that he and I were one.

My husband spoke French and Captain Clark needed the services of Francois Labiche to communicate with my husband. I, in turn, needed the services of my husband to communicate with Labiche. This made it impossible, at first, to communicate with Captain Clark. I determined to learn English. He always looked and inquired as to my well being. He had numerous chores as the leader of this Great Exploration, as they called it. He had to make maps, resolve problems between the members of the expedition, decide about camping sites, and even about the menu that was to be served

during the meals. He would come over and with sign language instruct the cooks to cook whatever I decided. Sometimes he went out of his way to ask me what kind of meat or berries we should prepare for the day's meal.

As much as I loved him, he always maintained a demeanor that allowed him to be the leader. He never invited me to be more than a friend. But he did make me feel that I was one of the most important people in the expedition at all times. He made all feel like that; I could see it in their eyes. Whatever he said was seen and interpreted by all as the sayings of Great Chiefs. Still, there was something in the way he looked at me that made me feel special. I know he loved me. His eyes shone when he gazed at me. His smile warmed more than the sun.

When he walked, his simple walking mannerisms seemed those of a nervous colt. He would constantly turn to look my way. As soon as our eyes made contact, I would look into the ground as I had been taught to do as a sign of clear interest. However, when I looked up to meet his gaze, when he was supposed to be looking at me if he were interested, he would always be looking into the ground as if he were a woman. I felt such rejection on the one hand; on the other hand, I was a married woman with a son and a married woman's obligations. He always made a special point of checking into my son's health. He seemed to be proud of the fact that there was one woman and one child traveling with the expedition.

As far as I could tell, Captain Clark insisted that a woman and a child were signs of good luck and good will for a traveling group. Anybody who wanted to create problems for my baby and me had to contend with him, especially my husband. You must understand that I was only a seventeen-year-old girl, caught up in the whirlwind of the clash between the great white men and my people as well as the other lesser people that stole me from my rightful place as a very young girl. I was so excited to be there because I spoke two languages. But I had to help my husband keep appearances. I traveled behind him on his horse, helped him with the pretense that he spoke many languages, and he needed me to cook and take care of him in that perilous journey. I carried my baby and dreamt as I walked for miles.

But at the end of every day, Captain Lewis rode by, near me, he looked at me, into my eyes, and I knew that I was under his protection, and the day was good. I never knew what my connection to Captain Lewis was, but it was there. In his eyes I could see an awareness of everyone around him, but especially me. My son was doing well because of him. I wanted to help them succeed in all their endeavors; their endeavors were mine. We were like soul mates; we understood nature and the stars.

I quickly learned English. However, I kept this secret from my husband. I was hoping that this would allow me some communication with Captain Clark and even with Captain Lewis.

I clearly remember when Captain Clark shyly said in English, as he pointed with his thumb at his chest, "My name is William Clark," as if I didn't understand any English. And then, pointing with his index finger at me he asked, "What is your name?"

"My name is Sacagawea," I answered in Hidatsa. I pointed to a bird and added, "Sacaga." And then to myself and added proudly, "wea."

His eyes lit up. I could see his understanding. "You are the Bird Woman! I like that," he laughed as he repeated, "Sacagawea, Sacagawea."

Captain Clark would find excuses almost every day to play with my baby, Jean Babtiste, only a few months old. He affectionately called him "Pompy."

When I got sick, it was Captain Lewis who told my husband in no uncertain terms that he had to walk behind me, that it was I who would ride. I could tell by the tone of voice and Captain Lewis' gestures that these were no idle threats if Toussant didn't follow his instructions. It was Captain Lewis who also made sure that I was eating properly and was given ample time to stop and rest so I could breast-feed Jean Babtiste. Of course there were many times when we were not constantly traveling, times when they gathered specimens, made maps, corroborated their position with the stars and made many writings that I could only wonder in amazement at. I felt I had a role to perform, but I never quite knew what it should be.

It was in the fall, around this time, that Captain Lewis shared with me an entry he had written in his journal at the beginning of this trip:

We were now about to penetrate a country at least two thousand miles in width, on which the foot of civilized man had never trodden; the good or evil it had in store for us was for experiment yet to determine . . . However, as the state of mind in which we are, generally gives the colouring to events . . . I could but esteem this moment of my departure as among the most happy of my life.

Captain Lewis told me strange tales, which in turn he claimed were the reason for this exploration. He said that Jefferson, their Great Chief spoke thus, "We have to build this nation from sea to sea, and have the seas protect us, as the deserts protected Egypt. We have to build railroads from coast to coast, east to west, so that we can travel and move all our goods cheaply, like

the Egyptians sailed the Nile, north to south. If we follow the secret codes we will become the most powerful nation in the world.”

To me, it didn't make much sense. I've never seen a railroad, or sailed, or had any idea what a desert might be. But I knew he had a vision, and was inspired by it. What the secret codes referred to is anyone's guess. Captain Lewis and Clark's nation was already clearly the most powerful in the world as far as I was concerned. More bewildering to me was when Captain Lewis said, "Jefferson told me it was no coincidence that both *The Wealth of Nations* and the Independence of the United States happened in 1776. Both were part of the secret codes." I still don't know what he meant.

I had gone scouting with them a few times, as I had recognized some of the landscape as part of where I had traveled with the Hidatsa Indians that had captured me, and later sold me to my husband. I was supposed to help them decide which way to go to advance towards the Great Ocean. I hadn't even heard of this Great Ocean, much less could I be of any help to find such a thing. I had heard repeatedly of huge Oceans or Great Lakes to the East and North of us. I told them, as best I could, but they didn't seem to believe me. They were endowed with a knowledge that was superior: the knowledge of Great Chiefs. They were looking for the Ocean to the west.

I was with them the day that I recognized the Snake River. My people, after all, were the Snake People, the Shoshones. I knew we were coming closer to my people's homeland. Its name comes from the river's slow winding across the flat lands that remind us of a snake's movement.

We had crossed the mountains at Lemhi Pass, and the next day met some of my people. I had been carefully instructed that we needed to purchase horses from the Shoshones to continue our westward journey. A couple of days later I was reunited with my brother Cameahwait. He was now none other than Chief of the Shoshones. We embraced and cried. I could have stayed with my people, but in a strange way, Captain Clark and Captain Lewis had made me feel more important than I had ever been. As a woman, I knew what my role would be if I stayed with my people. If I went with the expedition, I would have a chance to amount to something. I somehow knew that there was something very important that I needed to do. I felt a strange impulse, as if I had lived in another life, and it was predetermined that I should follow these men. Both Captains expressed openly their satisfaction at my performance as translator. Captain Lewis however seemed a little sad, for reasons I could not fathom.

A few days later, the expedition was following the Snake River trying to determine its origins. I had explained that there were several origins, but they

didn't believe me. Yet I wasn't knowledgeable enough to explain clearly the histories of the Shoshone People and the Snake River that allude to various origins. One afternoon I was alone with them on a canoe as Captain Lewis and Clark were following one of the tributaries. We stopped at the bank of the river, and sat on the soft grass. I could make some sense of their conversation, and the fragments I remember hearing chilled me.

"What the devil is perturbing you?" Clark asked Lewis.

"You can tell? What is it that you are seeing? What do you mean?" responded Lewis.

"I mean that you don't show any enthusiasm about anything. I asked Sacagawea to join us, because she not only instills in me great happiness and satisfaction, but I have noticed that you also seem to brighten up around her. Does this sullen mood of yours have anything to do with the fact that she favors me?"

"Favor you? Why would you think that?"

"Is this, then, what this is all about?"

Captain Lewis turned to look at me. I pretended to be playing with my son. I know he knew that I was looking at Captain Clark, and he knew that I was listening. He looked at me again, then at my son, then at Clark.

"No. This is not about Sacagawea. On the contrary. I thought you knew. I thought Jefferson might have filled you in."

"You mean President Jefferson?"

"Yes, that Jefferson. He knows me well. He asked me to name someone to be second in command in case I died. I decided that instead of second in command, you would share the command. That way no one could doubt your authority in case something happened to me."

"I've heard all that before. I've heard about the Secret Codes that will ensure we are a great country. But this is different, Meriwether. I am not talking about command, or the "historical" nature of our journey. I'm not referring to the future railroads, the future mighty rivers of commerce. I am talking about the man; about you, my friend. Would you care to throw more light on this and tell me exactly what you are talking about?"

After a long pause, Lewis spoke slowly, "I suffer what I call dark moods. Very dark. They come and go. The morbidity of my thoughts is recurring, and they are a constant companion when these moods engulf me. I see death; I see rotting bodies and limbs everywhere. Everything is a reminder that all ends in death. My meals remind me of the end of all life. My thoughts run from one tormented idea to another. Each thought worse than the previous one. The suffering seems to be worse each time, like a small pain that accompanies you and never leaves you, a pain that isn't more severe, it just seems so because

it lasts so long. The pain is worse because it is back, not because of the pain itself. I know it will go away, eventually. It always does; but I dread the day when it comes back. It always does. I can't convey it William, and there is nothing to be done. I just feel that my body is uninhabitable. It is raging and weeping and full of destruction and wild energy gone amok. I see a creature that I don't know but must live and share my mind with. It is an endless level of agony, all day and all night. It is a pain with no hope of relief, at least, no knowledge of when, if ever it will abate. I sometimes think of ending it all by taking my life. I feel it is all useless."

I was sitting quietly breast-feeding my son, listening to this banter of death. I couldn't believe what I was hearing as I nurtured my baby. I forced myself to continue hearing someone talk about his own death. I had been taken from my family as a young girl of fourteen; I had been abused and raped, I had been sold as a slave, as an object, and at the time, my enslavement, compared to what I had endured, seemed like a good thing. However, I had never considered ending my life. I felt that as proof I had been right, I was here, now, sitting in the sun, listening to the soft rustle of the slow moving waters and the leaves blowing in the summer breeze, with my son happily pressing my breast for more milk. As his eyelids closed, I pulled my breast from his mouth, and he smiled. He had fallen asleep. I stood up. I approached Meriwether and William; I looked at them and smiled and then sat down next to them. Clark smiled at me and sat in silence.

Meriwether smiled at me with sadness in his eyes. I understood the sadness; I had felt deep sadness and despair, but his seemed much greater. His eyes seemed to ask me, "Don't you see it, don't you see it?"

"The road back to life is cold and colder still, but with good weather, and the grace of God, I can make it. Don't worry, William. I confide in you, and you should know; I live in terror that someone might find out how fragile I am, but oddly and fortunately, the keen observations of my fellow travelers are not keeping track of me."

"Is this pain like losing a brother or a dear friend, Meriwether?"

"Grief is different than melancholia. Grief is sad, it is awful, but it is not without hope. Grief does not plunge me into unendurable darkness. My own death never crosses my mind. And there is a huge solace and comfort in the enormous kindness of friends, family and even strangers."

"I don't know what to say, Meriwether," Captain Clark said. He turned to me to check how Pompy was doing.

Captain Lewis turned to me and smiled. He then turned to Clark and continued, "My moods are intense and my temperament rather quick to

boil, but I find that making plans into the far future gives me a certainty and control, and the periods of absolute blackness become fewer and less extreme. Sometimes I can only describe this feeling as despair within despair. It comes out of the cold night and gives me an anguish that I didn't think possible. Sometimes I feel that I have felt the wind of the wing of madness. Other times it feels as though I am imprisoned in a fiercely overheated room broken by despair, as if because there is no breeze there is no escape from this smothering confinement, as if it is entirely possible that the only solution is oblivion."

We sat in silence. The waters were very clear. As the river was shallow and wide, you could easily see the bottom. If my memory served me right, we were very near the headwaters. I stood up and handed Pompy over to Captain Lewis. He looked at me inquiringly. I nodded, encouraging him to hold my baby. As he did so, he understood and smiled. I leaned down and kissed him on the forehead. A new life is so sacred.

We could hear voices in the distance. The men were catching up with us. Clark stood up, "We better get going."

I sat in the middle of the canoe, Clark in front and Lewis behind me. The current was very mild and with little effort it was possible to make some headway up the river. I looked back and waved at the approaching party behind us. They waved back. As we turned a bend, there, in the middle of the river was a huge moose. It turned to look at us, and calmly walked into the forest.

Lewis spoke softly, "Don't worry, Captain Clark, this black mood will pass soon. I won't let it interfere with my duties." Captain Clark nodded as he rowed. We turned another bend and came to a shallow pond at the base of a small hill. You could see the water gushing out of the ground, as if it was a boiling cauldron of the cleanest water you have ever seen. There was nowhere else to go in the canoe, but back the way we came. We had reached the headwaters.

Captain Lewis seemed sad for a few more days and then I saw him flash his white teeth once again.

While we were slowly following the Columbia River, I clearly remember one afternoon when I discussed with Captain Clark the reasons for hiring my husband, who had lost much face since we had left Fort Mandan. His ineptness and ill treatment of me had been his downfall. Captain Clark said to me, "Sacagawea, your husband was hired because he claimed that he spoke Shoshone and Hidatsa. It was just a few weeks before our departure that I realized that it was you who spoke Shoshone. At that point, it didn't really matter to me, and for that matter to Captain Lewis, and what is more, we

both agreed that we, he and I, would greatly enjoy the company of a lively woman like you.”

“But what about my husband?”

“He would be someone else on the expedition, that is all. I knew that you would bring Pompey with you. And I promised myself, and made Captain Lewis promise also, that we would always look out for your child.”

“Thank you, Captain Clark,” I said, realizing that I cared more for the two captains than I did for my husband.

A few months later, after following the Columbia River, we finally came close to the Great Ocean. I had a big argument with Clark, the only argument I can recall. Captain Lewis found it all very funny and laughed a lot about this. This made me even more adamant that I should win the argument with Captain Clark.

The local Indians, the Clatsop, had reported that a whale had been beached where we would reach the Great Ocean. Captain Clark was assembling a group, which did not include me, to go see if it was possible to obtain some whale oil and blubber, which could be used to feed the men. “With all due respect, Captain Clark, I have carried my load, just like any other man on this journey. I have taken care of my baby, I have asked no help. I have collected berries and fruits. I have cooked and fished. I have conducted transactions of great importance with the Shoshones. I demand,” Captain Lewis interrupted me with his laughter. I realized he was not laughing at me, but at Captain Clark. “I demand,” I continued, “that I be with the first group to go see the Great Ocean. I demand that I be allowed to go and see this great fish. I deserve it, just like anyone else! I should get to see this marvel. I have traveled too far to be denied this!”

“Be reasonable, Captain Clark. She is right,” interjected Captain Lewis.

“Please.” I pleaded looking up into Captain Clark’s brown eyes. He looked at Lewis and then broke into a smile.

“All right, you can march at the front of the column. As you know, according to the Clatsop Indians we have encountered the Great Lake, as you call it. The Ocean lies just over that hill. We will climb it this afternoon and see if it is true. You can be at the front. What do I care who sees the Ocean first.”

I had never imagined a fish so huge. In my wildest dreams, I could never have seen waves so big. All the travails of the journey west were well worth what I saw that day.

We spent the winter there and rested from our long trip westward. During those cold months, my love for Captain Clark grew and my friendship with

Captain Lewis blossomed. I slowly learned more and more about them. I learned of Lewis' great intelligence and how his knowledge of many things encompassed almost all fields. What he didn't know, Captain Clark knew. Together they made a wonderful pair. I loved talking to both. I felt my intelligence and knowledge expanding, and above all a warmth and equality I had never felt before.

Captain Lewis was a little frustrated that his drawing abilities were not better. He complained to me that if he had to do it over again, he would study and work harder to do better drawings. Captain Clark was always willing to talk about anything, even personal matters. I felt that I should get to understand the black moods that Captain Lewis had mentioned that summer, but he adamantly refused to discuss them, telling me that talking about them was a way to bring them back. He needed to avoid thinking about them and keep his mind planning the future. In this way the dark moods would recede to the back of his soul. The most he told me was that he had to fight to keep the blackness away.

Captain Lewis told me about how he had carefully planned the expedition with President Jefferson. He spoke of President Jefferson as if he were his father. His admiration for him was open to all to see.

On the return trip, as we neared the Shoshone areas of my childhood, I was able to guide the expedition through a gap in the mountains leading to the Yellowstone River. This place was magical. There were steaming hot baths, the colors of the waters varying with the minerals in them; some were blue, others yellow, and others still, red. Wildlife was everywhere; it was impossible to starve. There were deer and elk, moose and buffalo, wolves and foxes, porcupines and eagles and hawks. In the water there were fish and ducks and geese and herons; there were beavers and brant. You could easily live off the buffaloes' placenta if you followed them around, making hunting unnecessary.

We found places where water exploded from underground caves in huge upside down waterfalls reaching into the sky. There were places where the heat of the water would kill all life. Every day was a new and mysterious experience. It was here I noticed Captain Lewis slipping into one of his dark moods. He felt no pleasure at the sight of all these animals. He had no admiration or awe for the flying waterfalls. He lost even his appetite; I had to force him to eat every night.

One night while we sat eating, I said, "Captain Lewis, I worry about you."

"Don't worry. I am fine. This will soon pass, Sacagawea. Just help me so the others don't notice my darkness. This way we can finish the trip successfully. It is very important to me that I finish as one of the leaders of

the expedition.” I promised him that I would help him and make sure that he finished the trip.

Captain Lewis made extensive entries in his journal, noting down animals, plants, geographical and meteorological information. He normally didn't share with me any of the details in his journals. However, he did read the following from one of his entries from the previous summer. He had written it about one year before, around the time we had gone looking for the origin of the Snake River when I first heard of his black moods. We were just a few days from returning to Fort Mandan in mid August. I remember it clearly:

This day I completed my thirty first year, and conceived that I had in all human probability now existed about half the period which I am to remain in this Sublunary world. I reflected that I had as yet done but little, very little indeed, to further the happiness of the human race, or to advance the information of the succeeding generation. I viewed with regret the many hours I have spent in indolence, and now sourly feel the want of information, which those hours would have given me had they been judiciously expended. But since they are past and cannot be recalled, I dash from the gloomy thought, and resolved in the future, to redouble my exertions and at least endeavor to promote those two primary objects of human existence, by giving them the aid of that portion of talents which nature and fortune have bestowed on me; or in future, to live for mankind, as I have heretofore lived for myself.

More than a year after we started, the trip was over for Jean Babtiste and me. We returned to Fort Mandan and my husband was paid for his services. He also received 320 acres of land. I received a promise from Captain Clark that he would always look after my son. That to me was enough pay, but it served as a reminder that I was still a woman.

Captain Lewis said to me before parting, “I hope to see you in the future, Sacagawea, but I don't know what the future holds for me. However, I want you to know that I will always carry you in my memories. I also promise you that I will be a better illustrator next time I see you.” This was the last time I saw him. I stayed with my husband.

Three years later I received a series of letters from Captain Clark.¹⁵ The first one said in part:

I have had a terrible time to get Lewis to work with me to finish preparing the journals of the expedition . . . President Jefferson wrote to

Lewis, "I am very often applied to know when our work will appear . . . I have so long promised copies to my literary correspondents in France that I am almost bankrupt in their eyes. I shall be very happy to receive from yourself information of your expectations on this subject." I find that there are big gaps in his writing and work. Most of them occurring in August and September; some extending into the late fall or early winter. You know what I mean; this can only be indicative of his dark moods.

In early October of 1809 I woke up in the night with the clear notion that something terrible had happened. At first I wasn't sure what could have woken me up; what could have happened, and I went to check on Jean Babtiste to make sure that he was all right. As I stood in the darkness, a terrible sadness enveloped me. I knew that the dark moods and morbid thoughts had overwhelmed Captain Lewis. Meriwether Lewis was no longer.

That day I received a note by post. Captain Clark, in his clear handwriting:

I have tried to help Lewis sort out his expense accounts . . . Several of his Bills to the government have been protested, and his Creditors all flocking in near the time of his Setting out distressed him much, which he expressed to me in Such term as to Cause a Cempathy which is not yet off—I do not believe there was ever a honester man in Louisiana nor one who had pureor motives than Governor Lewis. If his mind had been at ease I Should have parted Cherefully.

A couple of weeks later, another correspondence from Captain Clark arrived. I however, already knew in my heart what the message would say:

A week after he left St. Louis he drew up a will. This in itself wouldn't worry me too much, but a few days later, when he arrived at Fort Pickering, the commanding officer, Captain Gilbert Russell, has informed me that he heard from the crew on Lewis's boat that Lewis had tried to kill himself twice. He also informed me that Lewis had been drinking heavily and was mentally deranged. These are the words that Captain Russell used, he told me that he was afraid for Lewis's life, that he unloaded the boat so he could not escape and kept him under surveillance for several days. His condition continued without any material change for about five days, during which time the most proper and efficacious means that could be devised to restore him was administered, and on the

sixth or seventh day all symptoms of derangement disappeared and he was completely in his senses and thus continued for ten or twelve days . . . In three or four days he was again affected with the same mental disease. He had no person with him who could manage or control him in his propensities and he daily grew worse until he arrived at the house of Mr. Grinder . . . where in the apprehension of being destroyed by enemies which had no existence but in his wild imagination, he destroyed himself in the most cool desperate Barbarian-like manner, having been left in the house entirely to himself.

A week later I received from Captain Clark a copy of a letter sent by James Neelly, the U.S. agent to the Chickasaw Nation that he had sent to President Jefferson. Captain Clark explained to me that Mr. Neelly had been with Lewis the last three weeks of his life:

It is with extreme pain I have to inform you of the death of His Excellency Meriwether Lewis, Governor of Upper Louisiana who died on the morning of the 11th instant and I am sorry to say by suicide.

William Clark added this to the copy of Mr. Neelly's letter:

I fear O! I fear the weight of his mind has overcome him.

~

Governor Meriwether Lewis arrived at Grinder's Inn, close to sunset. It was a rough-hewn, poorly built log cabin. After inquiring if he could stay the night, he brought his saddle into the house. He was dressed in a loose gown, white with blue stripes.

"Did you come alone?" asked Mrs. Grinder.

"There are two servants riding behind me. They should be here shortly. Do you have some spirits? I would like some."

Shortly afterwards the spirits were presented to him. He had a little to drink in a small shot glass. When the servants arrived, he got up and inquired, "Where is my gunpowder?"

"I'm not sure there is any," Pernier, one of the servants answered.

"I'm sure there is some in a canister."

As they went to find it, Lewis walked back and forth talking to himself. "My heart is pounding wildly, the fear is growing. Breathe in deep; hold it. Out, slowly . . . In. Hold. Out, slowly." He repeated this litany in rhythm with his pacing. He would turn and walk towards Mrs. Grinder, and then

suddenly he would wheel round, and walk back as fast as he could. "Who is coming after me? Why do they want me dead? Who? Why?" he repeated under his breath.

When supper was served, he sat down and started to eat. His face was flushed as if he had had a fit. After just a few mouthfuls, he got up and went outside towards the kitchen in the neighboring building, yelling at himself violently. "This melancholia of mine! It is pushing me to insanity. The relief, I know is only temporary; greater pain will follow. It is the hopelessness more than the pain that crushes my soul. Why do they torment me?" He dropped to his knees, and wept. A few moments later, he came back in and smoked for some time. He went out and traversed the yard as before. He again came in and sat down to his pipe, making an effort to be composed. He looked towards the west and thought, "What a sweet evening it is."

Mrs. Grinder, fearful of him, announced that his bed was ready, to which he answered, "I will sleep on the floor. Please tell my servant to bring in the bear skins and the buffalo robe."

"What happened to the powder?" Meriwether asked Pernier when he walked in.

"I couldn't find it," Pernier answered. "Here is the what you requested."

After the skins and the robe were spread before him, the two servants retired to the barn, Mrs. Grinder to the kitchen. Lewis paced in his room, talking to himself in hushed tones, "To die were best. How then with honor die? Unseemly is the noose 'twixt earth and heaven: Even of thralls 'tis held a death of shame, noble the dagger is and honorable, and one short instant rids the flesh of life."¹⁵

Lewis continued pacing for several hours. He thought about Clark and what he had told him not so long ago, "It is like falling into a deep black cave where as you are drawn down, the pinpoint of light that is the entrance of the dark pit grows smaller and smaller. Finally it flickers out and with it goes all feeling. Sometimes there is no despair as there is no meaning. It is a state of not being, of being emotionally dead. My compulsion to give it a name and describe it is very strong but the closest I can come is that of a living void; of being condemned to life. As the ability to live recedes, the most terrifying part of all is that it leaves certain serenity. At that point only the idea of death itself gives hope. Death."

He had a little bit of gunpowder with him. It was enough. He grabbed his pistol, loaded it, put it to his head, "How many times has the idea of ending

¹⁵ Nell Casey, Editor, *Unholy Ghost*.

it all, allowed me to endure a little longer? Not this time.” He squeezed the trigger. Lewis fell to the ground. He had made a hole in his forehead that exposed his brains, but there was not much bleeding.

“O Lord!” he said aloud. He was still alive. He took his other pistol, put it to his chest and pulled the trigger again. The ball entered and passed downward through his body, to emerge low down on his backbone. He staggered to his feet and out of the room and yelled in the direction of the kitchen, “O madam! Give me some water and heal my wounds! I am so thirsty.”

Mrs. Grinder, afraid of him, locked herself in the kitchen. Lewis staggered back towards his room, falling against a stump. He crawled a short distance, then raised himself to his feet by the side of a tree. He stood there for a minute, wondering how to end it, but he couldn't think. Then he went back to the room. Thirsty, he walked back to the kitchen door, found the water bucket. It was empty. He returned to his room and sat in bed. He stared at his portfolio, which contained his razors. Lewis sat staring at it, trying to muster the strength to go get his razors.

As soon as there was enough light, Mrs. Grinder went to seek the two servants in the barn. They came running and found Lewis trying to cut himself in any place he could.

“I have done the business. My good servant, give me some water.”

Pernier helped him drink.

Lewis uncovered his side and showed them his second wound. Lewis looked up at them and implored, “Please get my rifle and blow out my brains. I'll give you all the money I have in my trunk.” The servants did not move. “I am no coward; but I am so strong, so hard to die. Please don't be afraid of me. I will not hurt you. Please get my rifle and kill me.” The servants refused to obey and went looking for help. “Death is the only hope, death,” he thought. Lewis continued to make little small cuts wherever he could until he collapsed. His eyes closed. He died shortly after.

~

I was at Fort Mandan a few weeks after Captain Lewis's death. Captain Clark sent me a copy of President Jefferson's memoir of Captain Lewis:

Governor Lewis had, from early life, been subject to hypochondriac (melancholic) affectations. It was a constitutional disposition in all the nearer branches of the family of his name, and was more immediately inherited by him from his father. They had not, however, been so

strong as to give uneasiness to his family. While he lived with me in Washington I observed at times sensible depressions of mind: but knowing their constitutional source, I estimated their course by what I had seen in the family. During his western expedition, the constant exertion, which that required of all the faculties of the body and mind, suspended these distressing affectations; but after his establishment at St. Louis in sedentary occupations, they returned to him with redoubled vigor, and began seriously to alarm his friends. He was in a paroxysm of one of these, when his affairs rendered it necessary for him to go to Washington . . .

About three o'clock at night he did the deed which plunged his friends into affliction, and deprived his country of one of her most valued citizens . . . It lost too to the nation the benefit of receiving from his own hand the narrative . . . of his sufferings and successes, in endeavoring to extend for them the boundaries of science, and to present to their knowledge that vast and fertile country, which their sons are destined to fill with arts, science, with freedom and happiness.

This was one of the most important moments in my life. I had received a copy of a memoir of someone dear to me, written by the Great Chief of the white people. I sat and cried for my friend Meriwether Lewis. I knew that he had found the peace that eluded him. I felt in my heart that I would soon see him.

Three years later I wrote to Captain Clark informing him that I was pregnant. However, I had not been feeling good for the last few years and I feared that the strain of producing a baby might prove too great for my body. I asked him to remember his promise to take care of my child, and that if things worked out it would be children. Jean Baptiste was now seven years old. Shortly before I gave birth to my new child I received Captain Clark's answer:

I have arranged for the adoption of your children in case of your death. Please have your husband Toussaint and you sign the attached documents and send them back to me at your earliest convenience. A promise is a promise.

*Love always,
Capt. William Clark*

A few days later I went into labor and produced a beautiful baby girl. I named her Lisette. My husband passed me my baby girl and put her in

between my breast and my arm. He smiled at me. I smiled at him and felt very tired. I closed my eyes and slept. I felt a strong hand take a hold of mine. I felt renewed and full of life. I seemed to float up and I opened my eyes into the bright light. Captain Meriwether Lewis was there smiling and holding my hand. I felt very peaceful and relaxed. He said to me, "I have improved my drawing. I am actually getting quite good at it." And this also filled me with peace.

Schizophrenia, What You See Is Not

O'Malley rubbed his eyes. He checked his watch. "I don't think this is what those people are after."

"How else can we convince them that the only thing my father wrote pertaining remotely to them is what they have on the OJ case?"

"I don't know, Larry. I'm beat." As if on cue, the doorbell rang. "It must be Ramirez."

They put Ramirez through the security checks and finally admitted him into the apartment.

"Pizza, anybody?" Ramirez smiled peevishly at the door with a big square box, of the large size variety. He stood there in his purple suit with pink stripes grinning.

"Come in, Detective," Myrna smiled. "Let me take the pizza."

They quickly informed Ramirez of the new stories, and the forwarding through electronic means, as they ate pepperoni pizza and drank Coke. Ramirez tucked his pink tie into his shirt to make sure no red sauce would stain it.

"Anything new on your end?"

"Yes and no. No, because morgues, hospitals, all that, is unchanged as far as Lawrence is concerned. Yes, because, according to my buddy in the LA District Attorney's office, there were a number of irregularities to say the least. The DA used nine prosecutors. Six of them retired immediately after the trial. Detective Fuhrman also retired shortly after. He was one of the main Detectives on the case. But my friend mostly feels that the whole case was botched, and was not handled professionally, especially when the city spent \$9,000,000.00 on it. On the police side, there were some shady elements that could lead one to suspect that maybe OJ was framed. If we believe Lawrence's theories, then it follows the District Attorneys that prosecuted the case were set to fail as long as OJ kept silent."

"That's exactly my father's theory, Detective."

"O'Malley?" Ramirez intoned concerned. "Isn't your wife expecting you?"

"Oh, yes." O'Malley smiled embarrassed. "I must go."

"I'll call you tomorrow. I left a brief report on your desk to bring you up to speed," Ramirez said as the elevator door closed behind O'Malley.

“Anything we should know. Detective?” Myrna asked Ramirez.

“The gravel pit in Modesto is sending money to a Federico Fernandez Fogarty, supposedly one of your father’s cousins. He bought into the pit business when your father wanted to move East.”

“Yes, he is my father’s cousin; his mother was my grandfather’s sister. I remember him. He was one of the few in the family that bought my father out.”

“They wire him about three thousand bucks every quarter. He’s living in Morelia. We talked to him on the phone. He confirmed that he owned stock and said your aunt Minnie has kept him appraised of the situation about your father and has not heard anything different.”

“So you still think it’s possible that my father is in Mexico?” Larry asked incredulously. “One way or another, he must be dead. Otherwise, he would’ve left me a message of some sort. I can’t believe he would disappear like this and leave me worrying to death.”

“Perhaps he felt you were in danger, and that’s something he could not risk.”

“I still think Lawrence might be alive. But I can’t argue with Larry,” Myrna interjected.

“Your father could be getting some money through his cousin. It would be risky, because they might also be watching him and through him locate your father.”

“You forget that they were not looking for my father, Detective. They only wanted the stories after you went poking around.”

“That’s what it seems like, but we can’t be sure. Perhaps they did get to your father because he didn’t cooperate with them. Can I read the stories your aunt sent, the ones you just e-mailed?”

“Sure,” Myrna said handing Ramirez the Sacagawea story. “Does this mean you believe there is some validity to Larry’s theories?”

“I think there is a very small chance Larry is right, Myrna. Let me read this story.” Ramirez started reading. Myrna sat in silence as Larry paced back and forth. Ramirez finally put down the pages.

“The stories seem to be drifting farther away from any possible answer to Lawrence’s fate. But like you said, Detective, we have to explore all leads as long as there is a small chance.” Turning to Larry, she sat on the sofa and patted it, inviting him to sit down next to her. “Let’s explore your theory, Larry. We can’t leave any stone unturned. Tell us more about the isorropic circuit. Under what other conditions is it possible to lose your sense of self?”

“Schizophrenia is the other most common situation where this can happen. It also occurs with personality disorders and panic attacks.”

“What is schizophrenia?”

“Schizophrenia has to do with psychosis. The narrowest definition of psychotic is restricted to delusions or prominent hallucinations, with the hallucinations occurring with or without the individual’s understanding of their pathological nature. Delusions are erroneous beliefs and they may include a variety of themes; persecutory, like my father—

“You don’t still believe that, do you?”

“Well, the doctors that saw my father sure did. And I did too. Let me continue and then decide.”

“We’re listening,” Ramirez said kindly, aware of Larry’s raw feelings.

“Persecutory delusions can include belief of being tormented, tricked, spied on or ridiculed. The delusions can also be of exaggerated or improper somatic, religious, or grandiose beliefs. Delusions that express a loss of control over mind or body are considered bizarre; these include a person’s belief that his or her thoughts have been taken away by some outside force or aliens—in the past it might have been devils—that have been introduced into their minds, or that their body or actions are controlled by some outside force

“The diagnosis of Schizophrenia involves symptoms associated with impaired cognitive and emotional dysfunctions that include perception, inferential thinking, language and communication, behavioral monitoring, affect, fluency and productivity of thought and speech, hedonic capacity, volition and drive, and attention.”

“Hold it. I don’t need so much detail, Larry. How do you explain schizophrenia?”

“In my theory, I propose an imbalance of neurotransmitters slightly different than in Depression and Manic Depression. The argument runs along similar lines. I suspect an imbalance between excitatory and inhibitory neurotransmitters also exists, but in this case we have a complex interrelated balance between acetylcholine and dopamine. Dopamine, depending on the type of receptors it acts on, can act both as excitatory and inhibitory. And acetylcholine can be fast or slow acting, again, depending on the type of receptors. The picture that emerges is more complicated than the glutamate-GABA relationship of mania and depression.

“Without going into the details of the complex acetylcholine and dopamine relations, to understand schizophrenia, it is convenient to start with Delusional Disorder. When the hippocampus is slightly impaired, instead of doing its normal job of associating sensory information to a context, its electrically fused neurons and circuits get locked into a certain configuration, and keep putting the new information into one single particular context.

When it does this, it starts to categorize more and more echoes as being related to the same context, even when originally they had been encoded in different contexts.

“This suggests the hippocampus produces less handshakes to locate relevant memories and construct contexts; it locks in the particular mode in which it is functioning and doesn’t switch as needed. The echoes sent to the thalamus are also locked, and this fools the brain to interpret that the context is constant. The result is the presence of delusions caused by the mistaken belief or wrong context being associated with the incoming sensory information.”

“In plain English, if you are suffering from persecutory delusions, then no matter what you see, it is always interpreted as someone pursuing you, even when they are not?”

“Exactly.” Larry smiled at her. She was so beautiful, he thought, and with effort to hide this feeling continued, “Lack of acetylcholine slows down the thalamus and this has a direct consequence on the attentional subsystems. In Delusional Disorder the temporal dissociation of the attentional systems produces mild visual or auditory hallucinations. This reinforces the locked context.

“When the hippocampus locks into a context, the sensory information is filtered through this context and is interpreted accordingly. The delusions produced by this effect fall mostly into a few categories: like another person is in love with one, or you have some great or unrecognized talent, or your lover is unfaithful, or you are being conspired against, followed or poisoned, or you have problems with bodily functions or odors from orifices and so on. It just depends on which context the brain is locked into.

“If we look at Schizophrenia as a worsening of Delusional Disorder and we continue to decrease ever so slightly cholinergic activity, the symptoms increase and more of them can be present. Both the positive and negative symptoms can be explained in this manner.

“When the hippocampus slows its release of acetylcholine because of receiving less dopamine (D2-inhibition) beyond the levels in Delusional Disorder, Schizophrenia sets in. In this case the delusions are more extreme and can become bizarre as the context of processing sensory information is more distorted.”

“Bizarreness can be hard to judge, don’t you think?”

“Oh, yes. Delusions are deemed bizarre if they are clearly implausible and do not derive from ordinary life experiences. The content of the delusions, as with Delusional Disorder, can be of several themes. An example of a

nonbizarre delusion is the belief that one is under surveillance. Examples of bizarre delusion are a person's belief that a stranger has removed his internal organs or controls his or her thoughts; or his or her thoughts have been taken away. In Schizophrenia the misinterpretation of perceptions or experiences worsens.

"When the thalamus is slowed down enough, the attentional systems become disorganized and uncoordinated, and this produces hallucinations. Imaginary signals become confused with sensory signals and seem real. Hallucinations may occur in any sensory modality, but auditory hallucinations are by far the most common. They are experienced as voices, familiar or unfamiliar, that are perceived as distinct from the hearer's thoughts. Two or more voices conversing with one another or maintaining a running commentary on the person's thoughts or behaviors is particularly characteristic.

"Disorganized thinking, sometimes called formal thought disorder, is considered by some to be the most important feature in Schizophrenia. By inference a lessening of cholinergic activity produces dissociations of different memory systems, even very closely related subsystems that might be used for thinking and/or speech. Manifestations of this might vary: the individual "slips off track" from one topic to another, called derailment or loose associations; answers to questions might be obliquely related or completely unrelated, known as tangentiality; and, rarely, speech may be so severely disorganized that it is nearly incomprehensible and resembles receptive aphasia in its linguistic disorganization, in plain English, incoherence or word salad."

Detective Ramirez followed Larry's explanation of Schizophrenia with interest.

"Once we have understood the causes of the positive symptoms, it becomes easier to explain the negative symptoms." Larry continued. "Primarily for the same reasons . . ."

"You mean decrease of cholinergic activity?"

"Yes. But in contrast to a decrease in dopamine (D2 and D4) inhibitory activity in the hippocampus, a decrease in dopamine (D1) excitatory activity in the frontal lobes affects the executive function areas in the prefrontal cortex. This causes disorganized behavior, which might present itself in a variety of ways, ranging from childlike silliness to unpredictable agitation. There can be problems in goal-directed behavior or the person might appear disheveled or dressed in an unusual manner, like wearing many coats or scarves on a hot day. There might be clearly inappropriate behavior, like," Larry searched for an example, "Masturbating in public or unpredictable shouting or swearing.

“This thought disorganization blocks activation of any associated emotions. The systems that so beautifully activate related emotions to certain thoughts are confused by the disorganized nature of the thoughts, and this is outwardly manifested as affective flattening. No emotions mean no emotive responses, and can clearly be seen in the schizophrenic’s face, immobile and unresponsive, and with poor eye contact and reduced body language. Even though the person might smile occasionally, his or her range of emotional expressiveness is clearly diminished most of the time.”

“I don’t see how any of this is related to your father,” Myrna protested.

“There is a link between depression and positive symptoms. Depression has been observed before, during, and after the onset of psychosis. My father’s persecutory delusions clearly fall into the category of positive symptoms. And furthermore, there is a greater risk of suicide among people with paranoid schizophrenia with a threefold increased rate compared to non-paranoid schizophrenics. Over the years doctors who saw my father insisted he was having persecutory delusions. This, if true, implies he is slightly psychotic and makes it more probable that he killed himself.”

“But we have put the delusions behind us, haven’t we?” Ramirez interjected.

“We can’t do that if no one was after him when he disappeared,” Larry whispered. “Here is another story my father wrote, this one illustrates psychosis. I wonder if he is talking through personal experience.”

“You two have read the next story?” Ramirez asked.

In response, Myrna got up and went to the desk to fetch the story. “This one is about Van Gogh. We must keep in mind that Lawrence was choosing critical moments in history for the returning lights that volunteered to solve the riddles of world peace and suicide. I, like O’Malley, still believe it is a literary tool relating to the story of God’s autobiography. Nothing more. I am sure this was just something he researched.” She handed a few loose pages to Ramirez.

Vincent, Auvers, 1890

Finally, Vincent van Gogh headed north to Auvers hoping to find a peace that eluded him and which would allow him to paint. He wrote to his brother Theo. “. . . I have found a true friend in Dr. Gachet, something like another brother, so much do we resemble each other physically and also mentally. He is a very nervous man himself and very queer in his behavior . . . I painted his portrait the other day, and I am also going to paint a portrait of his daughter, who is nineteen years old. He lost his wife some years ago, which greatly contributed to his becoming a broken man.”

For several months Vincent painted prodigiously, as if his work could save him from his interior demons. He looked into the mirror. His green eyes looked back at him. His red hair was disheveled and his beard had several days' growth. The upper part of his left ear seemed a hideous flap of flesh. The voice that instructed him to kill Gauguin had been silenced. It had been necessary to cut the ear off.

Vincent missed his friend. What would Gauguin think of this painting of vast fields of yellow wheat under dark troubled skies? He did not need to go out of his way to express sadness and extreme loneliness. The multitude of black crows flying randomly above the field showed the confusion more clearly than words.

A few days later, Vincent sits at Dr. Gachet's table with his daughter Marguerite. They are in the middle of lunch. He is aware that it is Sunday, July 27, and he is concentrating on this fact with all his will power. He finds this exercise helpful to hide from others the terrible darkness that has descended upon his soul. But as hard as he tries not to remember his hallucinations of the morning, they keep creeping into his vision, obliterating everything else. He can see his face in the mirror, his skin in patches of pink and red, a circle of small pimples on his cheek, shining, ready to explode, yellow puss on the tip of each. He watches fascinated as his red beard turns to leather, as the patches on his face become a tough mask of thick, dried leather scraps alternating white and red, sown together with a thick, black, course thread. His face frozen into this bizarre mask.

The pimples are bright yellow, spilling green puss. His eyes, his only means of expression, dart from side to side, up and down in terror. His green eyes stare back at him and reflect the blackness of his madness. His stare fixes on his own pupils—he tries to see into himself, into the darkness of his soul.

Then the blood, a deep wine color, starts to emanate right above his left eyebrow, oozing through the dry leather patch that is now his skin. He takes a hand up to his eyebrow to catch the blood so it doesn't drip into his eye. His skin feels like tough dried leather; the blood thick and sticky. More blood oozes from his forehead and then through all his face, the blood seeping through the leather patches, staining the white and the red. He tries to catch the blood in both hands. It spills over; he can't stop the flow!

"If you will excuse me, I have to get back to work." Vincent addresses the Gachets calmly, stands up, and pushes his chair away from the table. He turns and leaves the dining room. Marguerite stands up, but her father restrains her by placing a hand on her arm.

"Vincent!" Marguerite calls after him, but there is only the response of the door closing behind him.

Vincent walks quickly to his room at the café nearby. "It is back. The madness is back! Not again, not again, not again." One thought reverberates in his mind, "I must act quickly before it is too late." He goes to his room, lifts his mattress and pulls out the gun. He checks that it is loaded. He hides the gun in his jacket.

Vincent grabs a yellow towel and tries to clean the blood oozing from his face. He can feel the blood dripping down his forehead and cheeks, but the towel remains yellow. He rubs his face frantically with the towel as he feels more blood running down his face. He starts running towards the wheat field he has been painting of late.

He breathes deeply. His forehead feels on fire. "Don't think too much," he repeats to himself. "Just do it. Act quickly. It will stop the blood." The fear grows until it is too much to bear, then, just as suddenly dissolves. In its place is a steely determination. "Bluish-gray, silvery cold," comes to his mind. He slowly pulls the gun from his jacket, puts it to his breast, and takes a deep breath. As his chest expands, the barrel of the gun, unnoticed by Vincent, points slightly above the heart. He grits his teeth and pulls the trigger. He falls back and loses consciousness. The bullet has missed the heart but is lodged critically close.

He opens his eyes. He can tell by the sunlight it is late afternoon. He sits up, looks at his chest and slowly staggers to his feet. "I must get to my bed. This is ridiculous. I botched it. I can't do anything right. I must go and lie

down.” Mme. Ravoux watches him through the window as he approaches the café walking drunkenly. As he comes in and sidesteps around her, Mme. Ravoux asks solicitously, “We were waiting for you for dinner. Can I do anything for you? Are you all right?”

“Oh, it’s nothing, I am wounded,” Vincent replies, staggering up the stairs to his room. Mr. Ravoux immediately goes to see Vincent.

Vincent lies in bed and shows him the gunshot wound. “I shot myself . . . I only hope I haven’t botched it.” Mr. Ravoux runs out to get Dr. Gatchet.

When doctor Gatchet arrives, Vincent is lying on his bed, calmly smoking his pipe. “Don’t worry Vincent, you’ll be fine. I’ll take care of you.” Dr. Gatchet examines the chest wound. “It’s not bleeding much.”

“I will do it all over again, so don’t bother.” Vincent smiles and continues smoking calmly. “Don’t call my family, I don’t want them involved.” Dr. Gatchet doesn’t argue. “It is just as good that I die. I am no good.”

Dr. Gatchet makes him as comfortable as possible. He knows that trying to dislodge the bullet could start a massive hemorrhaging which would mean a quick death. “Whatever you say, Vincent. I am just going to make you more comfortable.”

The next day, Theo is located in Paris. He comes to see his dying brother. Vincent tries to console him, “Don’t cry. I did it for the good of us all.”

“Don’t say that. You’re going to be fine, you’ll see. You have a good chance of recovering.”

Vincent shakes his head slowly, “La tristesse durera.” The two brothers sit in silence, holding hands. Later that night Vincent speaks out, “Theo, forgive me for all the troubles and all the expenses I have caused you. Hopefully my paintings will be worth a little more now.”

He starts moving in and out of consciousness. He smiles at the thought, “I want to be a warrior, a great warrior. Why did I waste so much time painting? Fighting should be easier . . .” Vincent wants to laugh, but he lacks the strength.

“What is it, Vincent?”

Vincent smiles, closes his eyes, the thought, “to fight, it should be easier . . .” slowly vanishing.

The Secret Service Connection

The phone rang. It was O'Malley. "I'm sorry to bother you, Larry, but perhaps it is important. Is detective Ramirez still there?"

Larry passed the phone to Ramirez. "Yeah. What's up?"

"Listen, Ramirez. Remember John, my buddy from the Secret Service?"

"Yes."

"He just called me. He started by saying, 'This conversation never happened. All this is off the record.' I trust him, we go back a long way."

"Cut to the chase, O'Malley."

"These are his words, according to my notes."

"When did you talk to him?"

"Just a few minutes ago. He said, 'Call Larry now.'"

"How would he now anything about Larry?"

"I don't know the details, but John said, 'Tell him that everything is all right. He has nothing to fear as long as he has been truthful and has turned over all his father's writings. If he hasn't, he has twenty-four hours to do so.'"

"This came from the Secret Service?"

"Remember the phone is tapped?"

"I hear you, but this sounds like it came from the drug people, the ones that are tapping this phone. Are you sure it was John?"

"I'm certain," O'Malley answered impatiently.

"Whom do we send the stories to?"

"They will send an e-mail every hour so the story can be attached in the answer. Every hour the e-mail address will be different. Hold on. I have an incoming call." After a brief pause O'Malley came back on line. "Someone is listening to this conversation. They just called on the other line and said, 'The Secret Service, us, it is all the same. Follow John's instructions. Just remind Larry that we will know if there is a story missing, and we will know if he is not being honest. Instruct them not to hold any story back.' Don't forget, Ramirez, they said twenty-four hours."

"I don't understand. How can the Secret Service be doing them a favor? What is the connection?"

“I don’t know. Perhaps there is something embarrassing for the government and simultaneously incriminating to them, the drug guys, or whomever they are. Don’t try to understand. The priority is Larry’s and Myrna’s safety. Got it?”

“I got the message, O’Malley. Don’t worry. I’ll talk to you tomorrow.”

“Wait, I’m not finished, Ramirez. John also said that you and I should back off. That we should not look for Fogarty because it’s a waste of time. He assured me the police have been instructed not to investigate. Otherwise there’s no deal. I took the liberty to tell them, it’s as good as done. I’m thinking of Larry’s safety.” The line went dead purposely before Ramirez could answer.

Ramirez hung up slowly. He conveyed the conversation to Myrna and Larry. “Something is happening at a very high level. Why else would the Secret Service and the drug people be working together? The drug lords must be using this informal channel through the Mexican president. I have to admit, I’m confused.”

“I must disclose that I have a couple of stories I haven’t shared with anyone. I’m sorry. I didn’t see their relevance.”

“Everything is relevant.” Ramirez decide to remain silent and not betray Dr. Boukhardt’s earlier comments. He waited for Larry to continue.

“They are strange, sexually charged stories.” Larry hesitated, “I didn’t want people to see this side of my father. Some people might interpret that he was sexually abused, which I doubt.”

“Could there be more stories? Stories that we don’t know of. After all, your father e-mailed stories, he put stories on discs. What about the hard copy he mailed you, Larry?” Myrna inquired, clarifying, “The one about Liu, the Chinese acupuncturist.”

“I don’t know. And they haven’t asked for that one,” Larry replied honestly to the two questions.

The PC chimed. The butler icon with a tray of mail walked onto the screen. Larry clicked on it. There was an e-mail from *Exaviorfromcuernavaca@yahoo.com*: “*Reply with stories, 1st warning.*”

“So what do I tell them?” Larry turned to Ramirez.

“E-mail them that you have a hard copy of a story; that you don’t have an electronic version. Ask for instructions,” Ramirez commanded. Larry did so. A minute later the PC chimed; there was an e-mail from *murderedbymichael@hotmail.com*. Larry opened it: “*Scan the story and send it as ‘jpeg’ files. Now.*”

The scanner was not hooked up to the PC. It was in the bookshelf among his father’s small collection of books.

“God. That’s all I need,” Larry cried impatiently.

“Calm down, Larry. I’ll hook it up,” Myrna said. She picked up the scanner, plugged it into the back of the PC, and then plugged in the power cord. A green light indicated it was on line. “Let me see,” she continued as she looked at the desktop. Not seeing any scanner icon, went to the control panel, clicked the ‘add hardware’ icon and quickly got the scanner configured to the PC.

Larry pulled out the sheets from a manila envelope and began scanning the story he had received what seemed eons ago, but was only four days before. They attached twelve ‘jpg’ files and replied to the e-mail.

“OK, that’s done.”

“What about the sexually charged stories?” Myrna asked. “I haven’t seen those.”

“We’re buying time. They did say we had twenty-four hours. They don’t need them yet.” Ramirez looked at his watch it was eleven o’clock at night, “We now only have twenty-two hours.”

The PC chimed again. There was an e-mail from *killermerchant@yahoo.com.mx*: “*We know there are stories missing. 2nd Warning: you have twenty-two hours.*”

“Hmmmph,” Ramirez snorted.

“What does hmmmph,” Myrna mimicked, “mean?”

“They could only know other stories are missing if they’ve seen or know about another story.” Ramirez said to no one in particular.

“Maybe they have another inside source,” Larry said.

“You mean, like me?” Myrna asked indignantly.

“I don’t mean you’re a spy. Just that, perhaps, inadvertently, you or I have given something away over the phone. Perhaps someone else knows something.”

“Like who?”

“Like uncle Michael, or other friends of my father. I don’t know.”

“At any rate, you have twenty-two hours, so don’t sweat it. Wait till tomorrow. See if you can find anything else to send them.” Ramirez said.

Ramirez’s cell phone vibrated. It was Captain Barzini.

“I thought I told you, you were off this case,” Barzini barked. “Don’t you speak English? Can’t you follow an order?”

“It is after hours. I was just checking on my friends, nothing official. I was just leaving,” Ramirez responded defensively. “With all due respect, Captain, but how do you know where I am?”

“I have my sources. It is part of the deal. This investigation is closed. I have it officially that Fogarty is dead. You and O’Malley are to back off, Detective. Get my meaning?”

“Loud and Clear, Captain.”

“I have my orders to follow. Make sure you follow yours if you value your job. Now, pass me Larry . . . Larry, this is Captain Barzini. I am chief of the NYPD. I have not had the pleasure of meeting you. I have been following this case closely,” Barzini lied smoothly and continued hurriedly, “You can be sure this is a secure line. I know your phone is tapped. That is why I didn’t call you directly. Sometimes certain unpleasant duties come with the territory, so I will not beat around the bush. I have been told that your father is dead. I want to offer my most sincere condolences.”

“Excuse, me. But, who told you this, Captain?” Larry’s knuckles turned white as he held the phone.

“Like I said, some duties come with the territory. I also have to follow orders. I have it from high sources, which I can’t reveal—it concerns national security—but all this will be over as soon as you turn in all the stories.”

“Do you know how my father died?”

“No, I am sorry. I don’t know any details.”

“Do they?”

“For reasons even I don’t know,” Captain Barzini tried to steer the conversation in a different direction, “Your safety is guaranteed if we stop our investigations. Your well being is my first concern. I have been told they are waiting for a story that is sensitive to the CIA. This is as much as I can reveal. For your own safety, I cannot urge you enough to pass this information on. I hope you understand our limitations in helping you find your father or figure out exactly what happened to him. My hands are tied. For whatever its worth, from the reports I have read, I, for one agree with you. Please keep in mind that sometimes we can never know exactly what happened or the specific details of someone’s passing. We definitely can never know what their last thoughts were. I extend my deepest condolences.” After a brief pause, he added, “Are you alright with this, Larry?”

“I don’t know what to think. I am stunned. He wouldn’t by any chance be in the witness protection program?”

“No. I can categorically confirm he is not in the witness protection program. This is not that kind of national security issue. In time, things will improve, Larry. You will have a better perspective. I am very sorry we couldn’t be of more help.”

“This has nothing to do with the fact that you lost two men, would it?”

“I’m not sure how to interpret your question.”

“I mean, this is not a matter of being intimidated.”

“No. Definitely, not. Like I said, it is a question of national security. There is nothing I would like more than to go after the killers of my men. But sometimes we have to consider the greater good.” After a small uneasy pause, “Can you please pass me Detective Ramirez?”

“Yes, Captain?”

“I don’t want any solo acts, Detective. You are on two-week vacation with pay as of now. This is an order.” Captain Barzini hung up to avoid any arguments.

“I am ordered to leave. This is highly irregular.” Ramirez squirmed uncomfortably. “I can’t even imagine what pressure is being brought on Captain Barzini, or even by who. For him to leave two dead officers without investigating . . .” Ramirez let the sentence hang in the air. “I am really sorry for all this, Larry. I mean it. I don’t how it will all pan out, but probably I won’t see you any more. It was a pleasure to meet you and work with you in these adverse conditions. Both of you. Maybe you can help me with my brother’s case—you know, the Legally Insane defense. I’ll contact you later when you’ve had proper time to grieve. It takes a while.” Ramirez hugged the two of them, trying to keep his eyes dry. Myrna kissed him on the cheek.

“For whatever it is worth, Detective,” Larry said extending a hand. “Thank you.”

“Remember to pass on every story you have. Don’t hold anything back. If you need me call me at this number.” Ramirez handed Larry a card. He straightened his pink tie, checked his image in the mirror and left.

The Abusive Connection

Myrna and Larry sat in silence, each with their own thoughts. Finally Myrna asked, “Can I read the sexually charged stories?”

Larry nodded and went to the PC. He opened file V and *Book V, Parallel Universes* appeared on the screen. “I guess there is no harm in you reading it. Just try to keep an open mind.”

Myrna read the two stories. Larry looked at her trying to read her face as a clue to her reaction, but she was expressionless. She finally looked back at Larry, as she was going to speak, the phone rang.

Larry answered, it was aunt Minnie, “Larry I’m on my way to the apartment. I’ll be there shortly.”

“Ring three times, so we know it’s you, aunt.”

“I’ll see you in a bit. Who loves you?”

“You do,” Larry smiled. “See you soon.” He hung up. He turned to Myrna, “So what do you think?”

“The stories are quite graphic. What surprised me was their homosexual nature. Knowing your father, I was expecting something quite different, to be honest.”

“Do you think they could have anything to do with sexual molestation?”

“You’re talking about your father?”

Larry nodded.

“No, I don’t think so. But I guess that just shows what I know: hardly anything.”

The doorbell rang twice.

“That was quick,” Myrna said.

“That’s not my aunt. It was only two rings.”

Myrna nodded, went to the buzzer and said to Larry, “Go to the window.” Then she spoke into the front-door intercom, “Who is it?”

“Dr. Boukhardt.”

Larry spoke quietly as he walked to the window, “It’s alright. It’s him. Put him through the drill.”

“For security reasons we have been instructed to follow the next few procedures. Please bear with us. Are you alone?” She spoke into the intercom.

“Yes.”

“Please move back eight feet so we can identify you from the window.”

“It’s him,” Larry confirmed looking down onto the sidewalk.

“Come up the stairs. Don’t use the elevator.”

Larry went outside the apartment and unlocked the door to the stairwell. Dr. Boukhardt appeared. Larry quickly introduced them to each other.

“How are you doing, Larry?”

“It doesn’t look good. They say he is dead, Doctor,” Larry admitted. “I feel that the longer this goes on, the less chances we’ll have of knowing what really happened.”

“I know this is a tough time, but sometimes it is helpful to talk about some of the issues. Shall we go over some of the symptoms?” Doctor Boukhardt said eyeing Myrna as they walked into the apartment.

“You can talk freely in front of her. She knows everything. She’s been with me since the beginning of this mess.”

“Last time you talked to your father, he was clearly deficient in some skills, and I wonder specifically of maladaptive traits. He spoke of the attacks coming, he mentioned the blackness. These are indicative of a suicidal mode. Do you know of anything that might have deactivated the suicidal state?”

“No, of course not. But neither do I know of anything that could trigger the suicidal mode. I didn’t talk to him again the day he disappeared.”

“He was depressed, his self image was depleted, he showed anxiety and hopelessness. His distress tolerance and ability to regulate his emotions were at a low. What would you say about his interpersonal skills? His level of problem solving?”

“How would I know,” Larry answered.

“His interpersonal skills were fine, Doctor,” Myrna interjected.

“Did you see him the day he disappeared?”

“No. I saw him a few days before.”

“Was he acting strange? Did he seem agitated?”

“Definitely not. Not, when I saw him,” Myrna answered without hesitating.

“He mentioned problems sleeping.”

“That has to do with his panic attacks,” Larry responded.

“Did he seem to have a problem managing anger?”

“No,” Larry and Myrna answered in unison.

“I still would like to explore his maladaptive traits.”

“What do you mean by maladaptive traits, Doctor?” Myrna asked.

“Early traumas.”

“Like being sexually abused?” Myrna raised her eyebrows.

“Does she know of the stories?”

“Like I said, Doctor. Myrna knows everything. I discussed that possibility with my aunt.”

“You mean that you talked to your aunt about your father being sexually abused?” Myrna asked surprised. “You didn’t tell me that.”

“I was going to tell you when the doctor showed up,” Larry whispered apologetically. “At any rate, Doctor, you can ask my aunt in person. She will be here soon. However, I must take a stand against maladaptive traits.”

“I’m listening. You know I respect your keen mind and your innovative approaches,” Boukhardt said intrigued.

“The best example, according to traditional psychology, of maladaptive traits is evidenced from studies of psychopaths. The standard approach says they have no remorse and no feelings as a consequence of being exposed, repeatedly to abuse as children. But try to imagine, doctor, being continuously subjected to acts of unprovoked, extreme aggression—verbal abuse, smackings, cigarette burns, immobilization, confinement in tight spaces, or tied up, beatings, multiple fractures, starvation—or perhaps, even worse, denial of the simplest demonstrations of love and affection—the withholding of a caress or a praise, never experiencing a smile of approval, no one ever sitting in silence, or at peace with you. These individuals adapt perfectly to their terrible environment, one with random violence and aggression. If you and I, as grown-ups, suddenly were subjected to one tenth of what these unfortunate people went through as children, we would probably snap in less than a day.”

Dr. Boukhardt made no comment. He nodded encouragingly. Myrna smiled at Larry.

Larry continued, “When the environment in which they grew up changes—the parents die or they are jailed—Why should we be surprised that they don’t know how to react correctly to a completely unknown set of conditions? It is not a question of being maladaptive. They adapted to their brutal environment. It is rather a question of an extreme change in the environment, a transformation so colossal, that no life-form, except, perhaps man, could survive. And these psychopaths, who have endured the unimaginable, for the most part, don’t kill themselves. Maladaptive traits have little to do with suicide! Perhaps in some cases, I admit. But my point

is that most abused children move forward as best they can, perhaps lashing out and causing havoc, perhaps becoming psychopaths.”

“Perhaps, in some cases, this leads to suicide?” Dr. Boukhardt gently asked.

Myrna moved closer to Larry and smiled at him to calm him down.

“Maladaptive traits, in relation to the suicide mode, have to do with diminished skills, with inability to regulate emotions properly, with distortions of personality. This is what contributes to the triggering of the suicide mode.” Boukhardt explained calmly in more detail.

“You are not listening to what I am saying, Doctor,” Larry countered. “I am conveying as clearly as I can, that even if you are abused in some way, as a child, it doesn’t mean that you become suicidal. What I’m explaining is that even if my father was sexually abused, it doesn’t have any bearing on his committing suicide.”

“Early trauma in childhood has been linked to suicidal behavior. I understand that you would protect your father’s image, and that this is not a good time to press my arguments. Remember I am on your side, Larry. I am just trying to be helpful, and I should know better than to bring this up at a time of deep grief.”

“Part of grief is a quest to understand. This discussion isn’t inappropriate. It is necessary. You can talk to my aunt about sexual abuse. She will be here soon, but I see no bearing of this on the subject of . . .”

As if on cue, the doorbell rang three times. “That’s her,” Larry said. He spoke into the intercom, “Come up the stairs.” He pressed the front-door buzzer and let her in. Larry opened the door to the apartment and they could hear several people walking up the stairwell.

“Can I help you with anything, gentlemen?” aunt Minnie’s voice asked from the stairway.

“Just keep walking and be quiet.” A man’s voice said.

“Shit,” Larry exclaimed. “Someone came in behind her.” He moved toward the stairwell landing as it opened. Minnie was pushed gently forward. Two men followed her onto the landing. Physically they resembled detective Ramirez, but certainly not well dressed or elegant. Quite the contrary, they looked like they were tough and meant business.

“We’re not here to hurt anyone. Just do what I say.” The first man said brandishing a 38 revolver. “We need to see your PC.”

“Do as they say,” Minnie instructed Larry. He backed into the apartment. Minnie followed him with the two men close behind her.”

“Over there,” the first man said to the second, pointing to the PC monitor.

The second man sat down at the desk. “Well, well. What do we have?” The end of the *Parallel Universe* story was on the screen. He turned to the first man, “They have more stories they haven’t sent us.”

“We were about to,” Myrna interjected quickly. “We were waiting for instructions to where to e-mail them. That’s why we have them open. We wouldn’t be hiding it from you.” She smiled as she attempted to appease the men.

“Listen,” the first man said putting his gun into Myrna’s stomach looking at Larry and then at Boukhardt. “Listen carefully. All of you. I was sent to deliver a message and make sure that you clearly understand it. No one will be hurt if you send us everything Lawrence wrote. I come here and the first thing I find is another story. We cannot have that.”

“Please,” Larry pleaded. “We are trying to do what we are told, but we don’t know how some of this is relevant to you. Whomever *you* are.”

“It is not for you to decide what is relevant. Leave that to us. I have been instructed to tell you in no uncertain terms that no games will be tolerated any longer. Is this clear?”

They nodded. Myrna looked at the gun pointing at her stomach. “Can I ask a question?”

“Go ahead,” the man with the gun said looking into her eyes.

“What did you do to Lawrence?”

“I have been instructed to make sure that you pass along all his writings. I have no knowledge about what happened to him, nor do I care,” he said in a cold tone. “It is not my business.”

The PC chimed. The butler-with-the-tray-of-letters icon walked onto the screen.

The man sitting at the PC clicked on the e-mail icon. There was a message from *searcherofstories@yahoo.com.mx*. He clicked on it. *3rd warning. You have twenty hours.*

“Send them the stories. They are file V, like the Roman numeral. You know what Roman numerals are, don’t you?” Myrna said without thinking.

“Don’t get sassy with me, young lady. Especially when I’m pointing a gun at your stomach. Send the story, and look for other stories in the computer. Search for all Word documents. He wrote everything in Word,” he instructed his partner.

A long list of documents popped onto the screen. The partner selected them all and attached them to another e-mail. Boukhardt and Minnie watched

nervously. The partner pressed the send button and all stories were sent into cyberspace.

"Delete all the documents with a doc extension." The man with the gun instructed.

"No, don't!" Larry yelled. "It's all I have from my father. Please," he implored.

"Sorry. We can't leave copies around. Delete them," the man ordered with finality.

"At least put your gun down," Larry pleaded. "It isn't necessary. We are not the kind you are used to dealing with."

"I don't know what that means, but for now I will comply with your wish. We are not stupid killers, we are part of a much bigger picture," the man couldn't help himself, he felt compelled to impress these people. "We're on our way. Remember, we are waiting for a story to authenticate all others. We need it. If you have something, send it now. If you don't have it, find it." He put the gun up to Myrna's face. "I wouldn't want to hurt such a pretty girl." He put his gun away and looked to his partner. "Let's go," he ordered, turned and walked out of the apartment followed by his partner. They walked quickly down the stairs and disappeared as quickly as they had appeared.

"They forgot to delete the Parallel Universe stories," Myrna said.

"Who cares? God, we got careless," Larry snapped pulling his hair.

"Don't be so hard on yourself," Minnie said to Larry. "It's all my fault." Then turning to Myrna, "I wish I could've met you under better circumstances."

"Like wise, aunt Minnie. I'm Myrna," she said smiling as Minnie surprised her with a hug and a kiss.

Minnie turned to Boukhardt, "And who might you be?"

"I'm doctor Boukhardt. Pleased to meet you, aunt Minnie."

"Oh. You're the psychiatrist," Minnie said. "I already told Larry not to speculate about sexual, child abuse or any other such outlandish ideas. Nothing like that happened to my brother. I don't care what he wrote."

"You see, doctor? It's just like I told you," Larry added defensively.

"He probably was a victim of a chemical imbalance that caused his panic attacks," Minnie continued. "The right medication should've taken care of it."

"Perhaps. You are right about one thing. It doesn't help to speculate, and that is really the only thing we can do. We don't understand what happened to Lawrence, but it would help to have closure by knowing. Each one of us will have to reach their own conclusions, and make peace with them." Turning to Larry and Myrna, "If you want to discuss something or need anything, don't hesitate to call me. I'm sorry I couldn't be of more help."

"If there is anything new, I'll keep you posted," Larry called after him as he walked out of the apartment. "Thanks for everything, Doctor. I really appreciate it." Dr. Boukhardt smiled and disappeared down the stairwell. Larry closed the door and leaned his head against it.

Minnie walked up to him and placed her hand on his shoulder. "Let it out. It will feel better." Larry sobbed and turned to embrace his aunt. After a while he breathed normally.

"I'll be home if you need something. A pleasure to meet you, Myrna. Don't worry about me. I'll be alright." She kissed Larry on the cheek and left.

The next morning when Larry emerged from the shower, Myrna was sitting on the floor in the "Lotus" position meditating.

"What are you doing?"

"I'm trying to relax, Larry."

"Well, I hate to be helpless and I can't relax. I have a bad feeling there are more parts of this story somewhere. Like Ramirez said, perhaps this is a test, and they know of some other stories, so if they don't see them, they will know that there are other stories missing."

"I want you to know I didn't find the sexual stories of the parallel universes offensive. And within the context of the autobiography of God, they work. There is nothing wrong with it. It's OK to send it to them. Your father was just exercising his literary skills."

"It's just so uncharacteristic of my father. He never once discussed things in such detail with me. I don't know what to think."

"Larry," Myrna said kindly, "Just think of him as a man, not as your father." She stood up and served him a cup of freshly brewed coffee. They sat in silence on the couch.

"And there is a strange break between the stories of the hermit and the Grand Master of the Templars. You had to fill in the information to give the whole story continuity."

"Calm down, Larry. We're just thinking out loud."

"You're right." Larry sat down and rubbed his forehead. "My father said, 'Follow the story. The keys are the key.' Is there something we're missing?"

"What is the fourth key to?" Myrna asked as she inspected the keys hanging next to the front door. "Could it be his mailbox? Have you checked his mail?"

Larry got up, took the key ring from the peg on the wall, opened the apartment door, then the stairwell door and ran down to street level. He tried the key in the mailbox labeled 2A. It opened. There was the usual junk mail, a couple of bills, and a manila envelope with his father's neat handwriting

addressed to Lawrence Fogarty. This could mean that it was either self-addressed or addressed to Larry. His heart raced. He looked at the postmark. For a moment he hoped his father was sending more recent information. His heart sank: it was dated on the day his father disappeared. He ran back upstairs.

“Look, Myrna!” Larry closed the door behind him, sat on the couch, and opened the envelope. Myrna sat next to him. There were a dozen neatly typed pages.

The PC chimed.

“What do they want?” Larry asked irritated.

“They want the stories. Keep your cool, Larry. Pass me the story so I can scan it.”

While Myrna scanned the pages, Larry clicked on the e-mail butler icon. An e-mail from *thehuntersofstories@hotmail.com* appeared: “*Twelfth warning. Send us what you have.*”

“You think we should send this before reading it?” Myrna asked.

“My father is dead. It doesn’t matter.

“You’re going to continue with this attitude?”

“We need to convince them we are telling the truth. You think they left the sex stories on purpose?”

“Its hard to tell. It might be a test.”

“Knowing my father, and him knowing them, he probably played a game with them to insure our safety. That is what he meant by ‘follow the story.’ Nothing more.”

“And the ‘key is the key’ message was to make sure that you got the different stories.”

“Exactly. The ones in the safe-deposit box, the ones mailed to me and to his mailbox, the ones e-mailed to others, and the ones on his PC. All requiring different types of keys. Who knows? Ultimately, it probably is just a game to confirm our good faith. If my father knew they were really after him and his stories, what I find strange is why didn’t he just give them over. It doesn’t make sense. They must have started looking for the stories after my father disappeared, when Ramirez began looking into my mother’s death and the OJ case. I still think he left us the stories in such a way, that I could slowly get them all, piece them together and figure out how he killed himself. However, someone that spent so much energy and thought into how to leave a message about his or her death, doesn’t seem likely to have killed himself. Yet he seems to have done just that. Maybe he thought about it for a long time, and finally, in a moment of impulse he set everything in motion. He mindlessly mailed or e-mailed some stories and did himself in.”

“We should read this story before sending it to them. Perhaps there will be some clue as to what really happened. We should know first.”

“For now, I’ll just send them the two parallel universe stories.” Larry attached them to the e-mail reply and hit the ‘Send’ button.

“I wonder what they will think about copulating monsters and goddesses?”

Myrna poured two more cups of coffee, took them to the side table next to the couch and invited Larry to sit down.

“This could be the last communication between my father and I,” Larry spoke with emotion; he couldn’t stop the memories of his father flooding his thoughts, smiling and talking to him. But now, everything seemed so trivial. He must be dead.

“Come, let’s read together,” Myrna encouraged Larry, interrupting his memories. She took his hand and pulled him next to her.

Smith and Johnson, Iran, 1980

Dawn was a few hours away. The abandoned Manzariyeh runway, a mile away, was code named Desert One. The runway, in the valley below, could be clearly seen under the stars shining brightly on the Iranian desert near the border with Afghanistan and Pakistan. Operation Eagle Claw had been set in motion a few weeks before; it would conclude today if everything went smoothly. The air was cool for April. Zahedan, the only city of importance in the vicinity, was several miles away. A dirt road half a mile away led there.

Jerry Smith, a tall, 6'2", black man from Texas squinted into the west. His green eyes denoted his mixed ancestry. This year, 1980, would mark his thirtieth birthday. He was a Ranger, a Colonel of the newly created Delta Force Special Operations. Sitting next to him was CIA special agent John Johnson. Physically, Johnson was a white copy of Smith, except he was seven years older and with curly brown hair, and he was also green eyed.

The Office of Technical Services, the CIA's gadget division, had developed infrared beacons which could be activated by remote control and would allow pilots with night vision goggles to see runway markings in pitch black darkness.

"The beacons are in place, Colonel," the radio crackled. "We've finished doing the core samples. The runway can support heavy aircraft. We're ready for the Hercs," the affectionate nickname for the Lockheed Hercules C-130 cargo planes. "Awaiting instructions."

"Roger that. Six C-130's are on their way." The Hercules C-130 workhorses that ferried everything, from weapons to troops to medical supplies into dangerous areas, had just taken off from Al-Masirah airbase off the coast of Oman. It would take approximately three hours at low level flying to get to Desert One.

"Let us know expected time of arrival."

"Roger and out," Jerry breathed into the radio. Turning to Johnson, "We have three hours to kill. Tell me about you."

"What are you interested in?"

"Of all people, why am I babysitting you?" Jerry inquired, smiling with a raised eyebrow.

“I suppose because you know the territory on this side,” meaning Iran. “Perhaps, because the Delta Force is flying in. I certainly don’t need you to protect my life. If you’d read my file, I was a Green Beret in Vietnam, like you. I was stationed there in sixty-five and sixty-six.”

“Oh, you’re one of those. I was there in seventy-one.”

Johnson nodded slightly. His green eyes were a mirror reflection of Jerry’s.

“It was a mess,” Jerry added.

“It’s always a mess. When I got there, I was young. I thought we were fighting the communists, helping freedom and democracy. What did I know? I’ll tell you: what we did know was how to kill. You know by personal experience how it was. It got so bad—I don’t think this was still going on during your tour—on weekends and days off, we’d go off into the jungle and hunt Vietcongs. We had contests to see who would kill more. We cut their ears off and strung them to make necklaces. The guy with the longest necklace was the winner and would get free beers for a week. One weekend I got fifty-two Vietcongs. It was sort of a record. Fifty-two lives for a couple of beer cases,” Johnson commented casually, trying to seem detached. “It was crazy.”

“How did you get into the CIA?”

“When I was in Nam, there were a number of CIA operations in Cambodia. To wage an effective campaign against the North Vietnamese, it was necessary to be there. The funny thing is we, the military, weren’t allowed into Cambodia. It was called a neutral zone. What the hell difference did it make? The CIA was there, how could it be neutral? At any rate, they were running drug businesses to raise money, imagine that, to provide weapons to the partisans that were against communism. I never met any of these people, the partisans, but it seemed that at least the CIA could go wherever it was necessary to wage war. So I started asking about how to transfer to the CIA. When my tour of duty was over, a spook approached me in Saigon. He signed me up after a couple of drinks. It was that simple.”

“What was your first mission? Is that what they call it?”

“At CIA it’s an assignment. After perfecting my Spanish in Mexico, my first assignment was in Bolivia, to track Che Guevara down and kill him. I got there in the middle of September—this is back in sixty-seven. The Bolivians assigned some group of Special Forces to me. They were a little bit of a joke. Most of the time I had to baby-sit them. But they would be useful in case I ran into Che’s group. He and his men were well armed, and I would need help to get to Che. It took a couple of weeks to track them. It was harder killing Vietcongs. They thought they were eluding us, but I was

simply chasing them, keeping them on the move, looking for an opportunity to surprise them. When the time was right it was rather easy. They ran out of water, and were low on supplies. At the end, things got so bad for them that they were drinking their own piss.

“In Vallegrande, in the lowlands of Bolivia, we got our chance. We killed most of them, perhaps one or two escaped, but Che was among the dead. As instructed, I cut his two hands off for identification purposes, and buried all the bodies in a concealed place in the jungle. That’s how I got the Cuban communist revolutionary.”

“Isn’t this supposed to be top secret?”

“Oh, yeah. But, let me tell you, Jerry, I had never seen a country so poor in my life,” Johnson continued quickly to avoid giving the impression of a cold-blooded killer. “They didn’t have a single paved road in the entire country. If communism could help those poor Bolivians, I wouldn’t oppose it. People were so poor, and opportunity so scarce, that on the streets, people would hang on to me and say, ‘*Gringo, llevame contigo.*’ Take me with you. Take me with you. It was sad. The whole affair stunk. Since then, I have a nagging feeling that in previous lives I have been doing this. That I have been wasting my time; that I should be doing something else; something where I really save somebody, instead of killing people.”

“Then why are you still here?”

“Inertia, I don’t know,” Johnson shrugged. “What about you?”

“I’ve been in the army all my life. When I heard that they were creating Delta Force, I applied. Being a Green Beret it was almost automatic. So here I am.” They sat in silence for a while. “Boy that is something,” Jerry said with admiration. “So you are the legendary CIA man that got Che.” After a pause he added, “Have you been assigned to any other important stuff?”

“I got involved in Chile in the early seventies,” Johnson said casually.

“I’m a little ignorant about Latin America,” Jerry admitted peevishly.

“By the end of the 1960s, the polarization of Chilean politics had overwhelmed the civility of Chile’s vaunted democratic institutions,” Johnson explained. “The centrist agreements of the past, which had enabled presidents to navigate a complex course of compromise and conciliation, became more difficult to attain. The CIA had influenced elections in Chile dating back to 1958, but in 1970 the socialist candidate, Salvador Allende, was elected president. In a reflection of Chile’s increased ideological polarization, Allende was elected president with 36.2 percent of the vote. President Nixon directed the CIA to prevent Allende’s inauguration through a military coup. I was ordered to take out one of the opponents of the coup, Army Chief of Staff

General Rene Schneider, but still Allende took office as scheduled.” Jerry nodded and listened in the silence of the cool night.

“For the first time, I saw a man that genuinely cared about the people, perhaps more than any of our Presidents. But Allende was a commie. Well, he was more of a socialist, but the CIA didn’t make these fine distinctions. He had some interesting ideas, and he enjoyed a honeymoon with the people for the first year. With the CIA undermining him, inevitably things went sour. Allende’s government therefore moved quickly to socialize the economy, taking over the copper mines, other foreign firms, and the banks. By a unanimous vote of Congress in 1971, the government totally nationalized the foreign copper firms, which were mainly owned by two United States companies, Kennecott and Anaconda. The government also took over virtually all the great estates. It turned the lands over to the resident workers, who benefited far more than the owners of tiny plots or the numerous migrant laborers. However, by 1972 food production had fallen and food imports had risen.

“Things got pretty nasty. In spring of seventy-three, congressional elections were held. This was a democracy, but we were hell bent on derailing its existence. The National Party and other opponents of Allende hoped to get two-thirds majority, enough to impeach Allende, but only managed to get 55% of the vote. Worse, Allende’s party, Popular Unity, won 43%, adding six congressional seats. Allende was there to stay.

“While I was stationed in Santiago—as a military attaché—I met an English operational researcher, a cybernetic manager. Stafford Beer was his name. He was brought in to help implement and manage the national economy in real time, using novel techniques taking advantage of the new computers of the age; the IBM 360’s. It was through him that I began to see Allende had good intentions. When Chile developed a siege economy through the implacable hostility of the CIA, the nation’s life support systems—from financial credit to vital supplies—were strangled. What little success Allende achieved in the eyes of the people—Beer made me see—made it less likely that his experiment would be allowed to continue, because it became more threatening to CIA ideology.”

“When you say CIA ideology, whose ideology do you mean? Doesn’t the CIA do what the President says?”

“Well, that’s the thing. Yes and no. Yes, there are parts of the CIA that provide information and do what the President says, but there are other parts of the CIA running shadow programs. It goes back to the OSS, the precursor of the CIA. With the death of Roosevelt, the chain was broken.” Johnson lectured with flair.

“What chain might that be?” Jerry asked seriously.

“A chain of what I call good intentions; a personal theory about a secret code of behavior, that’s all. When the chain was broken, we started selling drugs to our own people; selling arms to anyone so they can kill each other in scales never imagined.” Johnson smiled crookedly. Jerry nodded understanding.

Johnson proceeded with his history lesson. “The OSS advised Truman to let the Soviets fight it to the death with the Germans. We should have shortened the war and raced to Berlin, but we stood by, letting the Soviets close the Iron Curtain. The cold War would escalate to unprecedented levels and we would sell weapons to many countries. It was the OSS that recommended dropping the bomb on the Japanese. At least, in Asia, Truman was able to successfully put off the Soviets.” Johnson took a deep breath. Jerry smiled, looked away down to the runway.

“The CIA has huge secret budgets,” Johnson resumed without being able to stop talking, it was a cathartic experience. “They run huge illegal businesses, claiming to raise money for clandestine operations. But what I saw in Chile first-hand made me think twice. At any rate, Beer wrote two books. *The Heart of the Enterprise* and *The Brain of the Firm*. Interesting reading if you’re into management. Beer included a scathing account of the CIA’s involvement in the death and overthrow of Allende. Which by the way, was my last assignment relating to Chile. This is an example of the kind of thing the CIA does. I was ordered to locate all the copies of these books and destroy them; like we were in the Middle Ages. I got most of them, but Allende had been friends with the Mexican President Echeverria, a committed socialist, and a few copies survived in Mexico City.”

“Everyone knows that the CIA was involved, so why bother with some management books?” Jerry interrupted.

“The CIA likes to send personal messages to their perceived enemies. It is not a question of what the President wants, it is what the CIA wants. When you can’t make sense of things, just ask whose interests are being protected by this dark side.”

“So what happened in Chile, Johnson?”

“Beer told me that Allende was aware that the government couldn’t survive more than a few months, so I was surprised when I got the order to kill Allende. Why bother, I argued. But orders are orders. I was instructed to make it look like a suicide, but who would believe that. In September of seventy-three Augusto Pinochet initiated his military coup, backed unnecessarily by the CIA, as Allende’s government was very weak. I abused the confidence of some

Chilean friends and I got into the Presidential Palace. Pinochet's ridiculous forces mounted an assault on the Palace. Allende had ordered to resist. Everyone inside figured they would die. I got close to Allende, under pretext of being a friend, to help him escape. I surprised Allende with an assault rifle, making sure to shoot him under the jaw, into the head, so it could be argued that he committed suicide. I placed the rifle in his dead hands and left. Everyone quickly surrendered after that. I simply walked away."

"You killed Allende too?"

"I was very disillusioned after this. Here was a man that cared about his people, democratically elected, he hadn't really hurt anyone and I was ordered to kill him."

"So, why do you continue with the CIA?" Jerry asked kindly.

"Like I said, inertia. I don't know what else to do. Maybe it's time to do something that really matters, instead of killing people and doing what is familiar. I am good at what I do, but I no longer believe in why I'm doing it. It's all lies and cheap propaganda. I feel like I was supposed to be building nations, promoting peace, but the only thing I've done is kill people who ultimately, probably would not have been a threat to anyone. Somehow, I feel I need to make a drastic change, like taking care of one person at a time. Save one life, then another. I get this nagging sensation that I have dedicated my life to the wrong task. My mother committed suicide when I was seventeen. I was so angry at the world. Perhaps preventing suicide, instead of nation building, should be my true purpose. Perhaps it is time for me to settle down, marry and have a family."

The two men sat in silence thinking about their conversation, about their past and what had brought them together.

"What's going on in Afghanistan?" Jerry asked to break the silence.

"You know, it's such bullshit. My job is to coordinate recruitment, with different agents in all parts of the Muslim world, from the Philippines to the Middle East to the Soviet Union, especially Chechnya and Uzbekistan. The CIA, in their wisdom, has decided to wage Jihad on the Soviet Union."

"Jihad on a super power? That is asinine." Jerry laughed.

"The arrogance of the CIA is such that asinine is not seen as an obstacle. They are recruiting young men from all over to help liberate their fellow Muslims from the Soviet infidel that has invaded Afghanistan. A whole series of networks are being created to absorb the restless young Muslims. We're getting them from Saudi Arabia, Palestine, Egypt, Iran, Iraq, Malaysia, you name it."

"You can't just give them a rifle and send them to fight the Red Army. Who is going to train them?"

"A few guys like you, like me." Johnson said sadly.

“That’s preposterous.” Jerry snorted.

“Most of what is going on is laughable. We are arming Saddam Hussein and his Guards because he is fighting the Ayatollah. The Ayatollah is fighting with the weapons we gave the Sha. Our theory is that they will kill each other off, but the reality is they will both emerge better armed and wiser at war than ever. The CIA’s theories are based on let them bleed so our boys don’t get killed; a copy of the principle of World War II—where we armed the Soviets and let them fight the Nazis. Eventually we had to face them, stronger than ever, thanks to Lend Lease—in Korea, in Cuba, in Vietnam. Likewise, we are going to have to come back here and kick their asses.”

“You mean the Iraqis and Iranians?”

“And the Afghans as well; whoever is left. Things are getting out of control. It’s about oil and drugs. In Afghanistan, it is mostly about the poppy trade. It’s about big bucks to offset the initial expenses of supplying arms to the rebels. They think it is a game about selling weapons and enriching a few people through the drug trade.”

“Oh, by the way,” Jerry interrupted. “Guess what our cover story is if we’re found out?”

“I have no clue.”

“We are here to rescue the hostages.” He laughed when he saw Johnson’s expression of disbelief. “Yes, the embassy hostages.” He was referring to the fifty-two American hostages in Teheran.

Johnson’s laughter followed. Then he added, “It could work. No one could blame us for trying to rescue the hostages. Sometimes reality is stranger than fiction. I don’t know why this reminds me of an old, big, black momma in Texas when I was a little kid. She was famous for her massive farts, described by my American Lit teacher as, ‘She vented hurricaned effluviums that knocked out the robins in her balcony.’ I couldn’t believe it until I saw it with my own eyes.” Johnson laughed so hard tears streamed down his cheeks.

“You saw her fart?”

“No, I mean I saw the knocked-out birds,” Johnson nodded, still laughing. “Unbelievable, but true.”

Jerry laughed as he visualized the birds on the ground, feet up, passed out with the vaporous fumes of the huge woman. Then he imagined the woman in the act and laughed more. “That’s hard to believe, but possible. So if a woman can knock out robins with a fart, I guess a rag-tag army of Muslim militants can fight the Soviet Union. People believe what they want.”

The two men laughed again, then Johnson added, “But getting serious, this plan is staggering in its scope and complexity, bringing together scores of

aircraft and thousands of men from all four services and from units scattered from Arizona to Okinawa. Who's going to believe this? This Afghan adventure will come back to bite us in the ass, one way or another. The same with Saddam Hussein. Terrorists, criminals and Jihadists are strange bedfellows, but once we arm them, they won't voluntarily disarm or disband. That is naïve. They certainly aren't going to become democratic either."

Jerry nodded in agreement. "Do you think there is a remote chance that they will succeed? During Vietnam, the military war games predicted, in most circumstances, that the Vietcong would win, and still we persevered stupidly to fight until 'Peace With Honor' was achieved."

"I have seen some of these young recruits, talked to them, read their files. In general, they have been at the brink of spiritual breaking, but have not broken. They are victims of injustices, financial and legal, with no opportunity to better their lives, much less defend themselves in a system of corrupt jurisprudence. They have seen close family killed, imprisoned, abused, raped or beaten down to the lowest levels of society in systems that have no way of advancement. They crave for a chance to fight back, to lash out at imaginary or real oppressors. They fall easy victims to religious propaganda, which the Muslim faith, like all, are expert at providing in the formative years, like the tobacco companies, hoping to produce lifelong addicts. They are willing to fight to the death. Minimally, they see a direct route to a better life—not the life with seven virgins in paradise, but a life where they have a chance to find some self-respect and the respect of others.

"When you combine this with the fierce Afghan rebels—men that value their independence more than life; men who have fought everyone, from Genghis Khan to the British, who are not impressed by the Soviets at all—you have an explosive combination. These men are not afraid to charge tanks on horseback, like a nineteenth century cavalry charge. I've seen them get in close to the tanks where they can't get shot; they seek hand-to-hand combat. They are fierce and courageous warriors. These Afghan rebels are capable of transforming these young fanatics into fierce, suicidal combatants. Like the Vietcong, perhaps these forces can prevail against a super power. Unlikely, but possible."

"The sad part," Jerry added, "is that no one, our government, or the CIA, is doing anything to provide opportunity for these young Muslim men. When there is no hope, death is a welcome exercise. Death with honor becomes opportunity impossible to pass by."

"Spoken like a poet," Johnson smiled.

"Desert One, we are vectored," the radio crackled.

"Prepare to receive the Hercs," Jerry pressed the radio.

“Roger that, Colonel.”

Both men turned south in the direction the Hercs were expected. They heard before they saw, the powerful Allison T56 turboprops. A deep rumbling hum without perceptible origin grew in intensity. The Hercules C-130's were flying with lights off and maintaining radio silence. They would land guided by the infrared beacons under cover of darkness. In the clear glimmer of the predawn sky the first of the Hercs could be discerned flying low, three hundred feet off the ground. The pitch of the engines changed as the flaps were extended. The first of the Hercules C-130's hit the ground with a screech of tires and a large puff of smoke. A sandstorm engulfed the backward half of the plane as it applied reverse thrust. As the plane slowed down, the dust storm caught up and engulfed the aircraft. From one side of the artificial cloud at the end of the invisible runway, a Ranger appeared, as if by magic, to direct the aircraft to its designated parking spot, safely out of the way of the next incoming Herc.

At one-minute intervals, the next four planes landed. The dawn light illuminated the runway when the sixth and last Hercules appeared. The plane's camouflage markings could be discerned. The four turboprops made a loud hum that could probably be heard for a couple of miles. The dawn light allowed the pilot to land easily without the aid of the infrared goggles. A team of Rangers ran to assist each Hercules.

“Begin unloading,” Jerry ordered unnecessarily into the radio.

“Roger that,” the radio crackled back needlessly as the Colonel watched through long-range binoculars.

“Now the hard part,” Johnson said walking down the hill towards the runway. The six Hercs had been loaded to maximum capacity, 42,000 lbs, on the Air Force Base off the coast of Oman a few hours before. A quarter million pounds of assorted military supplies—AK-47's, ammunition, Stinger shoulder launchers, SAM Stinger missiles, grenades, grenade launchers and medical supplies of various sorts, mostly for treatment of gun wounds. Conspicuously absent were any food supplies.

Nine RH-53D Sea Stallions were approaching. The Nimitz on patrol in the Gulf of Oman had approached the Iranian coast to minimize flying distances to slightly more than three hundred miles. Their range was about 600 miles, barely enough to make the round trip from the aircraft carrier. They would need to refuel to carry on their true mission, ferrying supplies to Afghanistan.

Radar signatures had been detected above three thousand feet. The twin-engine helicopters were coming in much lower to avoid radar detection. Each

was capable of ferrying seven tons; consequently two trips were needed to deliver the supplies to the Afghan rebels. Improvements to the aircraft included an elastomeric rotor head, external range extension fuel tanks, crashworthy fuel cells, ARC-182 radios, and defensive electronic countermeasure equipment. The external range fuel tanks had been removed to allow greater payload. One of the Hercules aircraft was serving as a tanker, the gas station of Desert One. A gasoline tank on four wheels, resembling the gasoline trucks in airports, was hauled down the last Herc and pulled to the middle of the runway by six Rangers.

"This is Bird Three," one of five watch points on the periphery of Desert One intoned on the radio. "We have visitors. Repeat, we have visitors," the radio crackled.

"This is Desert One. What kind of visitors?" Jerry spoke as he walked alongside Johnson.

"It looks like a school bus coming down the old dirt road, Colonel."

"I knew this was too easy," Jerry said to Johnson.

"They don't seem to be stopping," the radio added. Bird Three was four miles away; the road passed less than half a mile from the runway. In the early dawn they would see the Hercs. Jerry calculated the imponderables.

"Stop them."

"Any suggestions, Colonel."

"Are they all children?"

"Negative. I can't tell."

"If they don't stop, blow their tires out. Make sure there are no spies or military people on the bus. Don't hurt anyone unless it's absolutely necessary. Let me know what's happening. Out."

"The imponderables. They always became part of the game. It will take three hours, if everything goes according to plan, to load and deliver the two helicopter sorties to the rebels."

Jerry was calculating his options. He looked at his wristwatch. "The birds should be here by now." Jerry turned to look south. Suddenly the multiple thumping of the helicopter rotors could be felt through the desert's dry air.

"There they are. Right on time," Johnson said pointing south. They quickened the pace towards the runway. They could clearly see the Rangers running down the six aft loading ramps moving the military supplies into position for loading the Sea Stallions. The loadmaster of each Herc zealously directed the operations.

The helicopters were flying low in three formations of three. The first two formations arrived and landed in the runway, behind the tail of each of the

six Hercules, lifting an unwelcome cloud of red dust. The third formation landed in mid-runway, close to the gasoline tanker, to top their tanks. As soon as their tanks were full, the three Stallions started their engines and a cloud of dust enveloped them.

As soon as each helicopter was loaded, it revved its engines on and hovered a small distance off the ground slowly, backing away. The first three helicopters to do so were automatically replaced by the helicopters that had topped their tanks in what seemed a choreographed dance. The first trio of loaded Stallions flew in a half circle and stopped to refuel at mid-runway.

"I'll catch you later." Johnson shook Jerry's hand, then saluted and ran towards the helicopters. A Ranger handed Johnson his M-16 and a backpack. Johnson easily slipped it on. As another Stallion began turning its blades, Johnson boarded it. A few minutes later the second trio of Stallions to be refueled turned slowly hovering off the ground and tilted eastward gaining height as their rotors bit into the cool dawn air. Three more loaded helicopters moved to refuel. A minute later, three refueled helicopters followed into the east. A short interval later, the last trio to load joined the low-flying formation. Jerry watched the Stallions disappear into the rising sun as the dust settled on the runway and the silence filled the air.

"Bird Three, what is your status?"

"Bus full of smiling kids and some very pissed off grandparents. All under control, Colonel."

"Do you need any assistance?"

"Perhaps some extra water would be good, especially if they're going to be our guests for another three hours."

"Consider it done. Out."

Less than an hour later, in the hills south of Marabad in Afghanistan, the nine Stallions touched ground and the pilots turned the engines off. Johnson jumped out, as Rangers began quickly and methodically unloading the military supplies.

A very tall thin man with a scraggly beard approached Johnson. His deep brown penetrating eyes settled on the military supplies. "Good to see you again, Johnson; for more reasons than one." He spoke with an Arabic accent.

Johnson nodded as he approached the man. He was three inches taller than Johnson. "How does your training camp for fanatics progress, Osama?"

"It's slow. It is Allah's will. But now that we have some supplies, they will take this more seriously. It is good. We will move some of the stingers and AK-47's to the front lines immediately. The Soviets have control of the

highways, but we own the mountains and the deserts. Our only threat, really, are the Mi-24's, the Soviet's version of the Stallions. But with these stingers, we'll have a good chance of taking a few down." Osama spoke brashly.

"My bosses say that it will be good for recruitment, even if you don't bring down Mi's," Johnson responded, thinking, *I hope you're not selling them to the tribal warlords.*

"Either way, it is good for Jihad. It is in the hands of Allah." Osama giggled like a child.

"Please don't speak to me of any religious war. You're one crazy son of a bitch, Osama. But who am I to criticize? I was just as crazy when I was your age."

"Well, the few recruits you have sent me are aiding in establishing networks to their home countries; especially Muslims from within the Soviet Union. They harbor a natural, virulent hatred of the Russians. The Afghans have strong ties to Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan. Soon Muslims will join us from all over. My main group, at present, is all Saudis. They are fiercely loyal to me."

"To you?" Johnson raised a brow. "You and your close associates are without any faith, without any sense of law or decency. Perhaps they are loyal to our money. I've heard you are bragging that you are spending your personal fortune."

"I exaggerate, but it helps my image, Johnson. And," Osama added slyly, "The Russians will think it is the work of a Saudi fanatic, not the U.S. of A." He smiled crookedly.

"They can't be so stupid, you are just a terrorist, a pragmatic opportunist. They can't confuse your actions with ours," Johnson said, turning around to review the progress of the unloading. The Stallions were almost ready for their return trip to Desert One.

"Don't, give me moral lectures, just follow your instructions. In the end we'll see who goes further." Osama laughed.

"I'll see you in a couple of hours with our second load." With that Johnson walked back to the waiting Stallions. The slow thump-thump of the first rotor in motion beat the air. Soon it was impossible to hear one's thinking as the nine helicopters flew down the mountainside with the sun at their backs. Johnson looked out on the rugged, dry mountains that seemed to be kissing their rotor blades.

"This is Mother Hen," a voice crackled over the radio. This was the code name for the E-3A Airborne Warning Control System Aircraft, AWACS for short, supporting Eagle Claw operation. It was flying at 37,000 ft in a big circle above the Nimitz. "I have an incoming bogey." The Stallions were under strict orders to maintain radio silence. This chatter was for their benefit as they passively received radio signals.

“Launch protection,” the Nimitz ordered. In less than 30 seconds two F-14 Tomcats were in the air. In less than fifteen minutes they would be over Desert One.

“Iranian? Repeat, Iranian?” the Nimitz inquired.

“Unlikely. It is flying Mach 2 at 42,000 feet. Heading in our direction. Most probably a Russian MIG from one of their airbases in Turkmenistan. It is hugging the border on the Afghani side.”

“ETA if it continues at present speed and course?” the Nimitz intoned calmly.

“ETA is nine minutes,” the AWACS answered.

“Mother Hen, report any changes”

“Roger, and out.”

Johnson pressed the chronometer of his Omega wristwatch. Every second would be vital. He turned to the pilot in the lead Stallion with raised brows. “What’s our ETA to Desert One?”

“About thirteen minutes.”

“Should we put down to avoid detection?”

“I don’t think he can see us unless he flies overhead. We are too low under the mountains.”

The AWACS silently monitored the progress of the converging dots. The nine Stallions, the two Tomcats and the MIG. The MIG was clearly going to win the contest.

“This is Mother Hen, we are detecting a radio signal from the MIG. It must be reporting the Hercs’ position. The MIG is turning!” A tone of relief, referring to the fact, that for now, the Hercs would not be attacked.

“Cold Blood,” the Nimitz radioed the lead Tomcat. “Proceed to Desert One and provide cover.”

“The cat is out of the bag,” Johnson addressed his pilot. “Let’s proceed as fast as we can. We stick to the plan and abort only when necessary.”

The first six Stallions landed behind each Herc raising a dust storm. The last trio landed at mid-runway and kept their rotors churning. A team of Rangers proceeded to load the helicopters with the last of the military supplies.

As the loading was beginning, the two Tomcats broke the desert silence with a roar as they came screaming overhead flying low to avoid radar.

“This is Cold Blood. We are at Desert One, holding low pattern, awaiting instructions. Over.” The radio crackled, now that silence had been broken by the MIG discovery.

Jerry stuck his head into the Stallion. Johnson grinned, “We need to get out of here fast. Load us up as quickly as possible.”

“We are dancing as fast as we can,” Jerry answered.

“The Russians know we are here. Now it’s time to make up for our paychecks. Agent Johnson reporting: everything is rolling at Desert Five,” referring to Osama’s rebel camp in Afghanistan, this was Johnson’s official report.

“I gathered that. How in the name of God did a Saudi get to be in charge of Desert Five?” Jerry inquired.

“The Saudis provide a lot of oil and his family has big investments in the U.S. I hear they have some pull with our old chief of the CIA. He quit in 77; now he’s Reagan’s running mate. I’m telling you, Jerry. Things have gone sour. The wrong people are pulling the strings. Fighting Jihad with drug money against a super power is dangerous to say the least. But if Osama wants to get his ass blown to pieces, why should I care?”

“I’m worried about our boys’ asses getting shot. Why didn’t that MIG fire a single missile at us?” Jerry asked, concentrating on the mission at hand.

“He was probably sent to investigate. The enforcers should be on their way. I’ll bet a couple of beers on that.” Johnson replied.

“This is Mother Hen. Three incoming bogies on the edge of our screen.” Jerry and Johnson turned ominously to the radio.

“Spoken like a prophet.” Jerry turned to the sky as if he could see the incoming enemy.

“Can you be mores specific?” The Nimitz radio beamed into the air.

“Probably MIGs. Coming from Kabul. Speed 2.3 Mach. Altitude 38,000 feet. ETA to Desert One, if maintaining present speed and course, twelve minutes.”

The first two Stallions to be loaded started their engines and hovered a few feet above ground and moved back. Two of the helicopters at mid-runway quickly took their place resembling a choreography of bees communicating where the honey was.

“Here comes the Russian cavalry,” Johnson said sarcastically.

“I suggest we keep our engines off,” the pilot addressed Johnson, and seeing his raised brows added, “Heat seeking missiles.”

“Good idea. Keep your engines cold. Just make sure we can take off in a hurry if we need to.”

“This is Mother Hen,” the radio came alive again before Jerry could issue any new orders. “Three—no make it four, incoming missiles. Make it six. Repeat, six incoming missiles!”

“Cold Blood, attract and evade,” the Nimitz ordered immediately. The tomcats’ afterburners roared and the fighter jets climbed eastward to meet the incoming missiles.

“This is Cold Blood, one missile locked on me. I’m turning right, Cold Turkey.”

“Roger that. I’m turning left,” Cold Turkey responded.

“Turn on my mark,” Cold Blood ordered as the six streaking missiles were coming towards them. The alarms in the cockpit were deafening. “One, two, three, turn!” Both Tomcats veered upwards in opposite directions. The missiles could not compensate quickly enough and began to turn trying to follow the heat sources. But only two locked on the Tomcats. The other four missiles continued past the Tomcats towards Desert One.

“Two missiles successfully turned away. Four incoming missiles. Prepare for impact,” Mother Hen announced calmly.

“This is Cold Blood. We have locked on bogey targets.” Referring to the MIGs. “Request permission to fire.”

“Bogeys are turning away,” Mother Hen reported.

“Negative.” Nimitz called out. “Return and protect Desert One. Repeat, protect Desert One.”

“Proceeding to Desert One. Roger and out.”

The first of the missiles hit the runway and two Stallions were struck by flying shrapnel and parts of the runway.

Only one Stallion was hovering above the ground. The other eight Stallions and the six Hercs had their engines off. Coordinates guided the heat seeking missiles. The second missile passed harmlessly overhead.

The third missile locked on the exhaust of the Stallion’s engine. The Stallion’s computers rang the alarm. At the last second the pilot veered the helicopter violently but the missile managed to hit the rotor. The Stallion went out of control and crashed into the nearby, parked Hercules C-130. A huge fireball erupted.

The fourth missile hit the runway, and shrapnel damaged another Stallion’s landing gear.

Johnson and Jerry ran towards the fireball. A piercing scream escaped from inside the burning helicopter. A ranger on fire jumped out of the conflagration. Johnson jumped on him, pushed him down into the ground, and rolled over him. Jerry dove on top of the two men and aided in putting out the man on fire. Two other men staggered down the Herc’s aft loading ramp carrying a third, badly burned Ranger.

“Medic!” Jerry shouted as he got up intending to go into the Herc.

“The rest are dead, Colonel,” one of the men shouted to stop him.

Johnson began towards the Stallion, but stopped when he felt the heat from the hot fire on the skin of his face. The screams from the Stallion quickly

stopped. He stood impotent, raging at the death of these young men. *For what? How many more needless deaths?* He turned to look at the badly burned Ranger. A medic quickly injected morphine. They rolled him onto a stretcher as an I.V. was inserted into his arm.

Jerry turned to Johnson. Their green eyes locked.

"It's time to abort the mission," Jerry said matter of factly.

"I concur." Protocol demanded that the two be in agreement.

"Report damage of Stallions. Load all material into whatever is fastest," he ordered into the radio.

"Two Stallions are damaged," the radio crackled in response. "They can't fly home. The good news is they are empty."

"Proceed to destroy them."

"One Stallion with damaged landing gear but is able to fly. We can worry about landing when we get home."

"Bird Three," Jerry ordered into the radio. "Release the bus. And get your asses over here on the double. Bird One through Five, repeat, get your asses over here. We are evacuating Desert One." Jerry spoke quickly into the radio. "Destroy whatever we can't take."

As in response, two loud explosions took care of the crippled Stallions.

The loading of the military supplies proceeded quickly, up the aft loading ramps and into the Stallions. Every man pitched in. A few minutes later, the last of the men clambered into the Hercs and the Stallions. The seven remaining Stallions revved their engines and turned slowly eastward. They would fly home, as planned on the Afghani side. The Iranian's radar probably had picked up the incoming Russian missiles and would be investigating soon.

Johnson turned back to see the first of the Hercs slowly moving down the runway, gaining speed and lifting off. The other four Hercs followed in line reminding him of a busy commercial airport. The second Herc lifted off as the runway disappeared behind them.

"As soon as we get past the Afghan border, drop me off," Johnson said to Jerry.

"The mission is aborted, Johnson. You don't need to continue with your assignment."

"I am not," Johnson said. "I've had enough of this business. I am not going back."

"But that's suicide. Are you crazy?"

"Just do me the favor. Drop me off. I've been in worse places."

"What will I tell them?"

“Whatever. Tell them that if I can’t save nations, maybe I can save one or two people; perhaps save myself. Tell them I am out of the program and they better not come looking for me.”

“What will you do?”

“Maybe I’ll find a woman. Settle down, have a family.”

“In Afghanistan?” Jerry asked incredulous.

“Why not? There are a lot of people with green eyes here.”

~

“This might be the story that is critical of the CIA. But I don’t see any clues as to how, much less where my father might have killed himself. These stories . . .” Larry broke off. “I was so hopeful. But ultimately I have to agree with O’Malley. These stories don’t have anything to do with my father’s . . .”

“Disappearance?” Myrna filled in. She looked at him tenderly and added, “As of right now he is still a missing person.”

“I have a strange feeling in the pit of my stomach.” Larry said.

“What do you mean, Larry?” Myrna asked.

“It doesn’t feel like this last story was written by my father. I can’t put my finger on it. There is something not right.”

“What do you mean, Larry?”

“I’m not sure. It’s just strange. But,” he added slowly, “Well, I certainly miss him and today it feels like he is dead. I still think he committed suicide, but will never know how. I’ll never see him again.”

That reminded Myrna of the strange dream she had the night before. She hesitated about telling Larry about it when the PC chimed. Another e-mail message, this one from *exterminatorofstories@hotmail.com*. It read: *Fourteenth Warning: You are still missing stories. Send now.*

Larry hit the reply button: “*I have one more story. I got it in the mail today. I scanned it. Attached find twelve ‘jpeg’ files.*” Larry attached the scanned pages and sent them into the World Wide Web.

“Maybe this is the story they were looking for. It mentions the CIA and drugs. But it certainly doesn’t help us. It doesn’t mention anything about my father and that bothers me.”

The Suicide Theory and Reincarnation

“Listen to me, Larry,” Myrna instructed. “You forget the stories your father wrote are all part of the autobiography of God. God, immortal, wrote them, selecting key points in history about the lights that will illuminate mankind and lead them to find a solution to world peace and prosperity; as far as world peace, they have failed miserably. But, I need to remind you, it is also the story of the lights that will shed insight to the problem of suicide; that is your role. Your father left you the task of finishing his book.”

“How is that?”

“Don’t you see? The efforts of nation building and peace have been botched. All the labors of the lights will be for nothing, unless . . .

“I explain suicide? So my father is part of the story? He killed himself so I would finish a book that can’t be published? People don’t commit suicide for such mundane reasons. Suicide is a much more complicated process. Outside stressors are just the tip of the iceberg. They are at best the straw that breaks the camel’s back.”

“I had a very weird and wonderful dream,” Myrna said tenderly taking Larry’s hand in hers. “Maybe it’s a part of this. I don’t know, perhaps you can tell me. You are the expert. But whether you like it or not, you are now a part of God’s autobiography, an integral part of your father’s story. Within that framework you are the last of the lights and there is nothing you can do about world peace. Now it is up to you to explain why suicide happens. Strangely that is what my dream was about. Perhaps, your father loved you so much; he wanted to make sure you could understand suicide. Then, you would find peace and come to terms with his . . . disappearance?” Myrna said lovingly. She kissed him on the cheek.

Larry looked into her aquamarine eyes. She smiled back.

“Your eyes are green, like your father’s. Like everyone’s in my dream.”

Larry nodded slowly. “Yes, they will always be,” he answered lamely.

“Sit down, Larry. Let me tell you about my dream,” she said pushing him into a sofa. “I know you’re going to analyze my dream and tell me all about the stress of the last few days, but hear me out. Just open your mind and more importantly your heart.

“Generally, I don’t remember my dreams, but this one I remember in detail. I was dreaming that I was sleeping here, like I was last night, and I heard a noise on the landing outside the apartment door. I got up and went to investigate. I opened the door and the landing was dark and I couldn’t see anything. I stepped out onto the landing and suddenly someone grabbed me from behind, above the elbows, pressing inward. He pressed so hard that I could barely breathe. The grip was so strong it felt like it could crush my bones. It was so cold it felt like steel fingers pressing into me. I wanted to yell out to you, to warn you, but when I tried to shout, I didn’t have any breath to scream anything. I just opened my mouth and silently mouthed your name.

“A wave of fear overcame me and I knew I was going to die. It didn’t matter as long as I could save you, if only I could warn you—but I could only mouth silent screams. I was so scared I couldn’t force air out of my mouth! Then, your safety became my only concern. My fear of death dissipated and anger took its place. I was concentrating on getting air out my throat to yell out another warning when the scene suddenly changed.

“I am standing on the roof of one of the skyscrapers on 61st, it is about eighty stories high. I see your father, Lawrence, running past me a few feet away. He is wearing his jogging sweats, and he is grinning like he’s out for a morning run. He keeps going and as he approaches the edge of the roof I try to scream, but again, I can only mouth his name. There is no sound. I can’t even whimper. He jumps over the side and I run to the edge to keep him in sight. As he falls, I yell after him in fear and pain.

“The scene changes again and I am on the roof of a neighboring, much smaller building, looking up and watching him fall to his death. The light has changed, it is night, indirect light comes up from the streets below and he is falling towards me, legs and arms stretched out in free fall. His expression is not one of fear, but one of concentration, intent on some immediate task at hand. As he falls past me I can sense a great calm in him, which fills me with a peaceful feeling.

“As awful as the dream seems, my feelings are good. At that moment, I understood, without words, how hard our mission, the mission of the lights is. Every life starts with nothing but a vague memory or an unfulfilled desire from a past life. And with only a few clues, we wonder what to make of our lives. Strangely, I felt very happy. I woke up very relaxed.” A tear shimmered in Myrna’s eye and she puckered her lips.

Larry smiled at Myrna and caressed her cheek, “It is a beautiful dream. It means exactly what you think. Your feelings confirm it is the story of the

lights, a message from my father telling you that everything is all right. A new phase must begin. I grasp that, so I'll finish his story. I'll explain why suicide happens." Larry stood up and kissed Myrna on the forehead.

The next morning Larry wrote the following:

Why do people commit suicide? Several elements have to converge to produce a situation conducive to an act so contrary to life and the survival drive. Even though I am enumerating them in a particular order, the first condition is the only one that is truly necessary, although not the only one, for suicide to occur.

First and foremost, a person must experience a loss of the sense of self. This condition is often, but not always, produced during depression and the depressed phase of manic-depression and occasionally in schizophrenia and schizophreniform disorder. With slowed thinking or disorganized thinking, negative emotions are triggered and brought to the surface. At the same time, because of the effect of the negative emotions on the brain, certain modes of thinking, primarily all the memories associated with positive emotions, are inaccessible. The inaccessibility of these memories produces a distortion of the sense of self that generates a condition that skilled writers cannot begin to describe adequately. There are no words for it and the best one can hope for is a good image: a skittering black darkness, a berth in a pounding hell, a veritable howling tempest, downwards into hell's loneliest black depths. By combining several descriptions, a better sense of this condition can be conveyed: the hidden, shadowy terror of devouring misery crashed down on me with a clammy chill.

*Because it is so important to understand this mental state, I have given it its own special name, *idiozimia* (from the Greek, *idios*=self and *zimia*=loss). And, I have named a partial reduction or diminution of a sense of self, *archidiozimia* (from the Greek *archi*=beginning). *Idiozimia* is a condition where the isorropic circuit cannot restore balance because it has been pushed outside the homeostatic range. In other words, neutral calm cannot be restored.*

Idiozimia is perceived as a menagerie of simultaneous negative feelings which produce in the individual who suffers from it a torment greater than the sum of each of its parts. The combination of negative feelings is individual to each person, and this makes each individual's experience different. Just as each person has unique memories, so each person will experience depression uniquely. Each individual's thoughts and experiences are unique, and when they are activated by the negative emotions, will be expressed in special ways.

*A history of a diminution or loss of the sense of self must be the most important predictive symptom of a potential suicide. This loss is a necessary precondition for suicide to become possible. But *archidiozimia* or *idiozimia* alone is not a sufficient condition either; other elements must be present. Suicidal thoughts*

might be a manifestation that archidiozimia or a complete loss of self are present but are not in themselves proof of anything. Suicidal thoughts could have been caused by a previous idiozimia even if at the present moment the self is intact. The problem, however, is that archidiozimia or idiozimia can present itself abruptly and unpredictably. And the loss of self cannot be judged by outward appearances either.

A second element is suicidal thoughts. The state of archidiozimia allows suicidal thoughts to emerge which otherwise would be unthinkable. The possibility of inflicting damage to oneself becomes less illogical. There is a huge gap between suicidal thoughts and acting on them, but once the thoughts are part of a possible solution, the gap becomes smaller. The continued intrusion of these suicidal thoughts slowly makes them seem more possible, more likely. A plan might emerge; this is a real danger sign. The tools or methods for suicide might be perfected or put into place; a very serious sign. At this point, if idiozimia is present, it might just be a matter of time.

Third element: the slow vanishing of inner strength. The intense suffering that accompanies depression and some combination of symptoms in schizophrenia and schizophreniform disorder can be so acute that ending one's life becomes a real alternative. The effort to stay alive in the face of extreme torment seems insurmountable. The struggle to continue a semblance of normalcy uses up all possible energy; only in the mildest or very moderate cases can this outward appearance be achieved to begin with. Hardly any energy remains to do anything else. The desire for calm and peace might be overwhelming but the effort necessary to achieve this seems elusive and impossible. The strength to continue living erodes slowly until death seems a welcome act.

Fourth element: hopelessness. The suffering becomes so great that the situation starts to feel hopeless. Relief from the pain seems beyond one's grasp. That the suffering might eventually subside does not seem possible. Slowly, death becomes a longed-for relief. The renewed negative feelings, after having enjoyed a respite, can spiral out of control. Disappointment and frustration add up to all other negative feelings. Perspective on the nature of the pain is lost, magnifying its intensity like a long felt toothache pushing the individual slowly to a form of insanity. The seeming hopelessness of the situation needs to be obsessively ended. A quick solution becomes imperative. The wrong solution, if continued existence is considered a desired goal, is quickly equated with death. However, if ending the hopelessness of relieving the suffering is considered a necessary goal, death becomes a logical act.

Fifth element: damage to the hippocampus. Because of prolonged and intense stress, secretions of glucocorticoids damage the hippocampus. The hippocampus will store and retrieve the memories of all related objects to the event, in this way

creating a context. When the hippocampus is damaged, the emotional context will be perceived wrongly. The negative emotions, put into the wrong context, will exacerbate the effect of the first four elements.

Sixth Element: the aftoktonic switch (from the Greek aftoktonia = suicide). Within the context of the last four elements, or because of their repetitiveness in past experience, the echoes streaming from the cortex reinforce and increase the chance that the thalamus will match these signals with external sensory signals and erroneously, but automatically, trigger the respective emotions related to hopelessness and vanishing strength, and thus activate the related suicidal thoughts. Under certain conditions, the accumbens will receive a dopaminic signal in duplicate: a) The amygdala will signal the nucleus accumbens and amplify these thoughts, and turn them into a belief; b) the hippocampus simultaneously signals within the context of hopelessness, and turn its into an urge. With a stressed, damaged hippocampus, the hippocampus's and amygdala's signals, respectively, are perceived as an urge to end life, and a belief that death is welcome. This binary combination is perceived as an irresistible urge to commit suicide by whatever means available. This is the aftoktonic switch. Suicide is not a random, purposeless act. To the sufferer, under these conditions, it becomes the only available solution to his or her problems. At best, the need to stop consciousness to end unendurable pain is irresistible, which leads to a suicidal act. When idiozimia is present and the aftoktonic switch is triggered, only one overriding, insistent, single-minded urge to end it all, as all other alternatives become inaccessible, is inevitable. There are many pointless deaths, but suicide is never a needless act. More often than not, during the act of suicide, it is perceived as the best and only possible response to alleviate the excruciating situation.

Furthermore, if increased glutamatergic action in the raphe nuclei increases serotonergic activity, the nucleus accumbens, through its serotonergic afferents, will respond automatically by lowering the threshold for impulsivity/aggressivity, making it more likely that these behaviors will be enacted. If this is coupled with a low 5-HT serotonergic activity related to low harm avoidance, then this neatly explains the well-known facts that improvements in depressive symptoms correspond to rising levels of serotonergic activity and that suicidal behavior increases with an improvement in depressive symptoms. Under these conditions, this would also explain the increased risk of suicide with use of SSRI's (selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors) at the beginning of treatment of depression, especially people under eighteen years of age.

Seventh element: this is so important that I have given it a special name, the phobothymic switch (from Greek, phobos=fear and thymos=wrath or anger). This element might be independent of the second, third, fourth and fifth elements just

described. It is common that depression or schizophrenia is accompanied by anxiety or panic attacks. Depression and schizophrenia are states that clearly indicate that something is wrong, and the fear and anxiety associated with these states could be normal responses to a dangerous mood disorder. In order for the amygdala to build up a fear response, the prefrontal region must be shut down; otherwise the prefrontal lobes signal the amygdala and fear slowly dissipates when danger is not present. However, when the amygdala is completely unchecked by the prefrontal lobes, the fear escalates and a panic attack ensues.

The first step of the fight-flight response is freezing, a strategy that helps fool predators into thinking that you are dead, or makes it harder for them to detect you. At this moment the phobothymic switch can go either way, fear or aggression can be equally possible. Freezing also provides a small amount of time to evaluate the threat and determine to flee, attack, or simply return to a resting state: false alarm. This state feels strangely both like anger and fear, like a prickling sensation down the spine.

When the anxiety attack or the fear escalates into a full-blown panic attack, there can come a moment, when suddenly the phobothymic switch is activated: the flight mechanism switches to a fight response. The uncontrolled fear turns into uncontrolled aggression. In this aggressive mode, the perceived threat, in this case an irrational panic, which is translated to a feeling of imminent death, is immediately faced down with an anger attack. A confrontation with the biggest known fear, imminent death, becomes not only logical, but seems the only solution, the only way to win, the only way to survive. When the tiger has chased us into a dead-end canyon and there is nowhere to flee, we inevitably turn to face it and fight it to the death. There is no other choice. In a normal, healthy situation, at some point the threat is evaluated (not rationally, there is no time) by the cortex and determined that escape is impossible, or conversely, that the threat can be removed by quick action. Either way, the amygdala receives a signal from the cortex, and automatically the response changes from flight to fight mode; from fear to anger; from a panic attack to an anger attack. It is two sides of the same coin. The phobothymic switch is an elegant engineering solution to automatically and quickly change the strategy for survival; at some point, the organism is better off fighting than fleeing.

The question then becomes when, not if, the panic turns into a fight mode. In this particular instance, when the individual is also experiencing idiozimia or even archidiozimia, this switch into an aggressive mode becomes lethal. Each individual, according to his or her experience, will have a different point at which he or she will go from a flight mode to a full fight response. This point is probably impossible to determine in advance. Being young and male probably increases

the probability that this will happen. I suspect that the stronger, mentally and physically, an individual is, the lower the threshold for the panic attack to switch to aggression.

The phobothymic switch described is probably the reason why we lose so many young with no forewarning signs. They, themselves are not even aware that this could happen. The first time they experience this is their last. If they survive this first experience, because of some distraction or interruption, they will then move into the category of potentially suicidal. Most of us don't know how we are going to react to a huge threat we have never encountered before, until we are faced with it. Unpredictably, the phobothymic switch will flip over to attack mode during a panic attack without warning. When this happens, the panic attack, the greatest fear, turns into the greatest possible type of aggression, the suicide, lashing out and killing the source of danger, killing oneself, because the cause of the panic attack is oneself. In this state of extreme anger, there is only one response available as all other possibilities are inaccessible. Sadly, this is a response that the victim hadn't even contemplated before: self-destruction.

In some instances, mostly in the case of women, the choice of method for suicide is benevolent enough that the chances for surviving the attempt are greatly increased. Women in general choose less violent physical means to end their lives, increasing the number of suicide attempts in comparison to young men who in turn have a higher suicide rate than women.

Out of the despairing darkness, a calm collectedness came over my father, Lawrence, as he embarked on facing the greatest fear, death, itself. He switched from a panic attack to an anger attack, a mental state of complete aggression; aggression against himself coupled with a complete belief that death was necessary. He used what was readily available to fashion his weapons, whatever they were—jumping into a rushing river or an oncoming freight train. He fought his last battle and won. But by winning could never rise again to fight. What more can a man do, but face what he fears most?

At this instant, Larry became aware of the immensity and the brutal permanence of the change in his life. Myrna was reading over his shoulder. He stood up, turned to Myrna and embraced her.

“My father is no longer a missing person. He is dead.” He pronounced the words for the first time and cried. The two stood rocking in silence for some time. Finally Larry whispered, “My father once said to me, ‘You become a man only when your father dies, because from that day forward, you truly stand alone.’”

“You’re not alone. I grieve with you.”

Epilogue

Delta of the Balsas River, 2007.

An old, rented, yellow VW Beetle cruised lazily down the two lane highway south from Playa Azul, Michoacan, along the Mexican coast. The thin, fit driver in his sixties saw a sign coming up that pointed to the left, “Presa Infiernillo,” indicating the way to the huge hydro-electric dam built on the Balsas River to supply electricity as far as Mexico City. He got to a bridge that spanned the river and stopped.

It was early in the June morning and the air was still cool. The river flowed lazily down to the Pacific about twenty miles away. He saw a sign pointing to the right, “Lazaro Cardenas 20 KM,” leading to a secondary road. He took the right turn and about 5 kilometers later he saw a sign “SICARTSA-Sidedurgica Lazaro Cardenas Las Truchas-15 KM.” He was approaching the largest steel foundry in Latin America.

“If I remember correctly, it should be around here,” he thought. And there it was, another bridge spanning the meandering Balsas River. A Coke sign advertised a small store on the side of the road. He parked in front of it, crossed to the other side of the road and looked down into the river. He saw a small dock with a rickety turquoise boat with a small outboard motor. There was a big styrofoam ice chest in the bottom of the boat. He walked down a dirt trail, amid tall grasses, to the riverbank. He stepped onto the dock. A man sat lazily under the bridge, in the shade, observing him with an inscrutable smile with his hands behind his head. They studied each other carefully. After a brief hesitation, he stood up, looked up to the road and seeing no one walked cautiously to the dock. He looked into the man’s green eyes and smiled

“*Puedo ayudarle en algo?* Can I help you with anything?” he asked casually in Spanish.

“*Me dijeron,* they told me I could find a ride to the delta,” the older man responded in perfect Spanish.

“*Quien le dijo?* Who told you?”

“An old man, a friend, a long time ago,” the older man responded in Spanish and smiled.

“It will cost you a block of ice, plus I need to fill that case,” the man pointed to the red Coke plastic case under the boat’s seat. The case had twelve empty bottles of Pacifico, and an assortment of glass bottles—Cokes, Fantas and Sprites.

“*Cuanto dinero necesita?* How much do you need?”

“*Son trescientos.* Three hundred pesos. If you want a ride back, you get a discount, it’s only one-hundred and fifty each way.” The man laughed at his joke. “Per person,” he added and laughed again.

“*Claro que necesito regresar.* Of course I need a ride back,” the older man said. “I’ll take the discount.”

“*Se paga por adelantado.* You pay in advance,” the slightly younger man answered smoothly, smiling at the man with the green eyes. He turned to look up the bank of the river to check if anyone else was there.

The older man smiled, chuckled and pulled a five-hundred peso bill and said, “*Asi esta bien,* Keep the change. It is just me. I’m alone.” He reassured the younger man.

“It will only take me a couple of minutes,” the younger man apologized as he jumped in the boat, grabbed the styrofoam ice chest, placed the empty soda case on top, and ran up the path, across the road to the small roadside store. At the store, he pulled four bottles out of the plastic case, placed them on the floor, replaced them with four Cokes he pulled from another case, and repeated the operation with Fantas, Sprites and then Pacificos.

“*Vas a llevar tu hielo?* Are you taking your ice?” the man behind the store counter asked unnecessarily as he pulled a block of ice from the freezer and placed it in the styrofoam chest.

“*Si, lo de siempre.* Yes, the usual.”

The man handed over three one-hundred peso bills.

“*Asi esta bien.* Keep the change.” He walked back across the road, carrying the drinks and the ice down to the dock, carefully placed the styrofoam chest and the case of beers and sodas under the seat in the middle of the boat.

“*Listo?* Are you ready?”

The older man nodded, climbed in and sat in the middle seat.

The man pulled the starter rope and the small, ten horsepower, engine spluttered to life. He put it in reverse, then deftly went forward and down the river.

The water was muddy, but uncontaminated. A soft breeze blew in their faces. Ducks, pelicans, robins, and white cranes abounded. The vegetation on both sides was dense.

“*Mucho turismo?* Much tourism?” The older man tried to make light conversation.

“No, that’s why were here. Didn’t your friend, the old man tell you?” The younger man smiled. “We came here thirty-five years ago. We met a man here, getting on in years, probably about your age, and as fit as you. He answered the exact same thing when we asked about the tourists.”

The older man nodded slightly, smiled and almost laughed. “Yeah, I remember he was born in Acapulco, and then moved up the coast until he finally settled here.” The boat’s engine was the only noise that disturbed their steady movement down the river. They continued in silence, each man in his own thoughts, remembering back thirty-five years ago.

The delta spread into three branches. They headed down the one on the right, then stopped on a sandy island. The sand was very fine and light gray in color. There was a small coconut grove growing. A small thatch, palm roof, with two hammocks, a table with four chairs, and some type of mud oven could be discerned. A rustic marimba, obviously for protection from the rain, was placed under a small tin roof adjacent to the thatched palms.

As he carried the case of beers and sodas over to the thatched roof, the man said over his shoulder, “You could have saved some money and had a coconut instead of a beer or a soda. With ice, it’s really fresh. With Gin, its better, we call them Coco-Locos.”

“*Y de comer?* And for food, what do you have?”

“*No le dijo el viejo?* Didn’t the old man, your friend, tell you?” he joked. “Just about anything. We have red snapper, mussels, clams, shrimp, fresh water “*mojarras*,” oysters. We can fix the fish in a red tomato sauce “*a la Veracruzana*” or in garlic, or just pan-fried on the barbecue. We can also fix it in rock salt. Ah, this is our specialty, because it keeps all the juices in. You never had fish so tender and juicy, I guarantee it.” He said smacking his lips.

The older man looked around but could not see anything resembling a refrigerator. “Unbelievable,” he thought, “nothing has changed.” He addressed the younger man, “*Donde guardan la comida?* Where do you keep all this food? With this heat it isn’t safe without refrigeration.”

The younger man smiled, “*Como nos dijo el viejo.* Like the old man told us, we let nature keep it until we need. You see, it’s simple. You tell me what you want, and I go fish it, or dive for it. Nature is plentiful. You never ate anything fresher. The old man grew up in Acapulco, he told us that when he was a boy, if he was hungry, he’d go to the bay, dive for fish or whatever he hungered. Eventually there were too many people. Food became scarce, so he moved to Zihuatanejo. Eventually, he had to move again. He searched up the

coast for an isolated place, a place where he wouldn't have to move again. We were one of the few adventurers that came here. Now he rests in peace and we do what he did. I guess you could say we inherited this place."

The older man smiled. "I'm so happy to find you. It is truly good to be here."

Another man approached swimming up river, coming from the direction of the surf.

"*Ahi viene mi socio*, there's my partner." He was the same age as the younger man. He was tanned, product of many days in the sun. He walked up the beach, waived in greeting and sauntered to them. He slowed as his green eyes studied the older man intently.

"*Estan solos?* Are you alone?" he asked his partner and the client of the day.

The two men nodded affirmatively. He relaxed visibly.

"*Vera*, you see. Here we don't need electricity, or televisions, or newspapers. Food, nature provides in abundance. If we need anything else, we barter with people like you. We feed you. You buy us some ice or beers."

"*Entonces*, then, what do you recommend?" The older man asked smiling looking into the green eyes of the recent arrival.

"*Yo recomiendo*, I recommend, first some clams, just with lime. Then red snapper in rock salt. That will make your trip worth while. You think you can handle the clams while I get a red snapper?" the new arrival asked his partner. His partner nodded affirmatively.

"Make yourself comfortable," the partner addressed the older man, handing him a beer and pointing to the hammock. "We'll be right back Then we can talk." He grabbed some fins, a snorkel, face mask, a bucket, a knife and an inner tube. "I found a nice place near here with big clams."

The other turned and saw a small crab on the beach, and threw a fistful of sand at it, enough to stun it so he could catch it with bare hands. He walked to the turquoise boat, grabbed a fishing rod and expertly baited the fishing hook right through the middle of the crab's carapace. "*Huachinangos*, Red Snappers love crabs," he explained smiling as he jumped into the boat and pulled the starter rope. "It'll just be a moment," he waved and headed towards the ocean. The big surf could be seen in the distance.

A short while later, both returned. One with two dozen clams, the size of a man's fist; the other with a five-pound red snapper. After preparing a fire, the fish was placed in aluminum foil, covered with salt rock and thrown on the barbecue. Three plates of clams were served, a bottle of Tabasco and some limes were produced magically and the three sat at the table to enjoy a feast fit for kings.

“*Esto esta delicioso,*” the older man said, his green eyes reflecting the serene vegetation around them. The two partners waited for the older man to speak as they chewed slowly, savoring the clams. “Flash,” he said finally. “Your son is doing well. Nobody is after him. I’ve made a few of these deals before. I applied some pressure, and everything is fine, let me assure you. He is safe. Fats Morales took care of the Mexican side.”

“Is he happy?”

“Happiness is different than safety. But safety is necessary for the pursuit of happiness. He seems to believe you’re dead, that hangs heavily on his happiness. He’s working hard. He finished his neuropsychological theory. Including an explanation of suicide. He also wrote a paper on temporary insanity for legal defense. The last I heard, he’s going to marry Myrna next month. Everything considered, I think he’s doing very well.”

They continued eating in silence.

“I must admit I am very grateful to Larry, and you,” the old man spoke sincerely. “Larry’s work on suicide, motivated in part by your disappearance, has helped me to understand my mother’s suicide. I am more at peace now.”

The two younger men smiled sadly and continued savoring the food.

“The fact that you are here, does that mean they are not looking for us, Johnson?”

“They always look for you,” the old man answered. “They never stop. They are always cleaning loose ends. Things were pretty quiet for many years. I thought you were quite safe. What happened?”

“I was in mortal danger.”

“Are you sure that you weren’t being paranoid?” Johnson asked.

“You mean, like the doctors said? That I was delusional?”

“Things had been quiet and they seemed to be off your back.”

“A couple of weeks before I disappeared, a man paid me a visit in New York. Once again they wanted to know where I got the information on the OJ case. They insisted that I had some inside information, they wanted to know who my informer was. They still didn’t believe me, that it was all conjecture, that I was just using circumstantial evidence to build my argument, that I accidentally glimpsed the truth.”

“What made them start asking again?”

“How would I know? As before, they didn’t believe me, you know, that it had been just speculation, a wild guess on my part. They gave me an ultimatum and came back a few days later. They tortured me.” Flash stomped his right elbow against the table with a clenched fist, the back of his hand facing

the old man. He looked into Johnson's green eyes and slowly extended his fingers—four of them. His right pinkie was missing. "They cut it off. They wrapped a steel wire around it and tightened it slowly until it cut through my finger. Then they used a red-hot electric barbecue-starter to cauterize the wound. I can still smell my own burning flesh." The memory of the torture triggered the beginning of a panic attack. He started breathing in and out slowly, his eyes almost turning white, his head turning from side to side.

"It's alright. Breathe in, more. Out. Take a deep breath, Flash," Vampire ordered gently as he stood up and grabbed him by the sides of his head. "It's alright. Look me in the eyes!" Vampire said pointing with two fingers at his eyes. "Keep looking at me. Smile. Concentrate on my smile." Explaining to Johnson, "He still gets panic attacks, worse than before." Turning to Flash, "That's it, keep looking into my eyes. Breathe in. I'm here with you. Nothing is happening. Stay connected to me. C'mon." Vampire encouraged.

Johnson stood up, looked into Flash's eyes, and smiled, "Take your time. Continue with your theatrics, they won't ruin a great lunch," he joked as he sat down and continued eating. The levity broke some of the tension among the three friends. In a serious tone he added, "I went through post traumatic stress syndrome a couple of times, back when I was in Vietnam. I understand something of what you're going through. Then I got used to the high stress levels of combat and I was fine. You need to use your rationality to help push the fear away and keep it at bay. Humor, even if it's black or morbid, always helps."

"Keep talking. It helps." Flash managed to say between breaths.

"Any thing that might make you laugh. But with the faces you're making, I can't think of anything funny." Johnson tried to mimic the expressions of fear on Flash's face.

"That in itself is funny," Vampire chuckled.

Still, Flash struggled to regain his composure. After a brief pause he took another clam and ate it. His voice broke as he tried to continue, "They told me that if I didn't cooperate, my son would be next, he would lose a finger, then I would lose another one, and then we would alternate, both of us losing fingers until we had none left. Better I gave them the information. I had no choice, they didn't believe me. I couldn't let them mutilate Larry. I thought seriously about suicide, but couldn't do it. So I put my old plan in motion, making it look like suicide. When did you get involved, Johnson?"

"When Ramirez started asking questions about your wife's death and the OJ trial, alarms were set off. It was like disturbing a wasp's nest. That was the trigger. All of a sudden, waves went out looking for you from many

directions. That is how I was alerted. That wasn't supposed to happen. There was no reason for anyone to reopen your wife's case. That is why I don't think anyone was after you before then."

"I disagree, Johnson. They are convinced I know someone's identity, or several identities. They think there is a whistle blower in their midst and I know him. They insist that my writings are too specific to be speculation."

"Perhaps you're right. Unfortunately, perhaps your speculations are just on the mark. You should have contacted me before staging a suicide disappearance. But, I have to admit it was a good act. You had me really worried for a while."

"Not all was acting. I had a terrible time after my wife died. Yes, I was almost back to normal, but never quite got there. And then, after they cut my finger off, it all got worse, my fears, my panic attacks, it was excruciating. It still is! The waves of panic were real. I still get them. I still fear for my son. I don't sleep well. I'm a mess, part of every day. If it weren't for Vampire, I don't know where I would be."

"It was unfortunate that your son and Ramirez quickly connected your wife's death with the OJ trial, and stirred up things. Old skeletons jumped out of the closet, brandishing weapons. Still I managed to protect you. A few days after you disappeared, when they started looking for all your writings, I mailed a story, making it seem like you wrote it, mentioning enough details of my CIA experiences to lead them to believe you knew a lot more, because you were part of our group. I had to convince them that more than drug information would come out if something happened to you. I know, by first hand experience, they never stop going after the rogues. As I told you years ago, there is a group of us that aid innocent by-standers or burnt-out agents lead a more normal life, even though it generally means a life in the shadows. I help people like you, one at a time. It is difficult.

"Flash, you shouldn't have acted on your own, you should have consulted me. You cannot blackmail them by releasing stories and playing games with them."

"I was trying to protect my son. And, also, I hoped he would somehow see that things are not what they seem. That certain givens in our past are not what we think they are. That we can never really know the whole truth."

"They just put a spin on your stories, and fight it till it goes away. Today they are making it seem that you were crazy. And more important, they can always put a spin on your death, until people believe it. Once you're in, you are always in. Your protection lies with others. Your protection now lies with the fact that it is useful for them to show you as a crazed person who killed himself. But some suspect you're alive somewhere."

“But how did you manage to convince them that I wrote the CIA story?”

“The manuscript was just a Word document, printed on an ink-jet printer. I forged your writing and the postmark on the envelope to make it seem you mailed it to yourself the day you disappeared. In reality, I only had to convince Larry that it came from you. I was sure he would convince them. I have many talents you don’t know about.”

“I can believe that!”

“You did really well, I have to admit. The whole series of stories you left, Flash, were brilliant. You instructed Larry very craftily and gave him enough clues to let him know that things weren’t what they seem to be, yet he concluded that you committed suicide. If you needed to disappear, as I recommended initially, you must make it plausible you’re dead; it’s for the best. This way he’s not looking for you and he won’t be in danger. They won’t be looking for you because they won’t feel threatened. Inevitably, in time, their leadership will change and it’s impossible to predict when they will try to eliminate perceived threats again. It’s better to fade out under the radar screen. But, why did you include those stories of fornicating demons?”

“They were not demons, they were deities. And they were not fornicating, they were having oral sex. There is a big difference.”

“You sound like an American president I heard talk on the subject, cutting a fine line between what is and what isn’t sex.” The Vampire interjected.

“Well, whatever, but what was the purpose of including such stories?” Johnson asked Flash.

“I figured that at some point or another, a typical practicing psychiatrist or psychologist would be brought into the investigation of my case. Their theories of suicide typically involve superficial reasons ranging from loneliness to feelings of burdensomeness, to a lack of belonging, to low self-esteem to negative temperamental outlooks on life, many of which I could not recreate or invent convincingly. However, many theories do blame suicide on early childhood trauma, such as physical or sexual abuse or abandonment. So I had to leave something, some clue, that perhaps I had been sexually molested and then the establishment would find it easier to believe in my suicide. It was just an extra card in the play.”

“Johnson, how did you find us?” Vampire’s curiosity got the best of him, he couldn’t refrain from asking.

“It wasn’t easy, Vampire. I just did what Flash said, ‘Follow the story.’ Of course, I had internal, personal information at my disposal. Flash’s comment of disappearing in a deserted beach, Vampire’s remark to Larry of retiring to

the beach and playing the marimba rang an unconscious memory. Where else could you two have gone? My Spanish training was done in Mexico before I went to Bolivia. Remember when I came back to Mexico and I met you two, before I went to Chile as the Military Attaché. That's when we came here and met the Old man. As you know I set up the informal communication channel between the Mexican president and the American president. I knew the CIA should be by-passed occasionally. What I didn't anticipate was the drug cartel getting control of this channel. In the nineties, it was used for the wrong purposes. However, in your case, I used it against them and convinced them that you were harmless. That's why they left you alone for so many years. The new war on terrorism has changed the drug scene. Has changed the nature of everything. The new leaders have gone to war to take care of loose ends, not necessarily to hunt for terrorists. The secret code of conduct has been lost again. There is a lot they want to keep buried, including you two. That's why you must remain hidden."

"Johnson, have you found out what the secret codes is?" Flash asked intrigued.

"Of course not. You forget it was you who planted these ideas in my head years ago. I wish we were dealing with men that upheld the highest degrees of conduct when it comes to governance and public life, but we live in a time of no laws, no morals. Politicians are just a bunch of greedy men, not better than the drug or oil cartels. By definition, they have no principles and they cater to what will get them votes. That is the sad story of mankind. History is just a tale of how the few screw the most. If there ever were secret codes of conduct, no one is using them today."

"Especially in Latin America. We understand that. Flash came up with the wrong idea in the wrong time and the wrong place. I was his friend, and that put me in the wrong place at the wrong time. We've had very bad luck, that is all. Both of us are grateful to be alive. And we were ready for a change. Weren't we, Flash?"

"I am very sorry that you were dragged into this, Vampire. I never intended for you to be connected to my disappearance."

"Well, if I hadn't killed Salvador, maybe I would have had a chance. It's my own fault."

"That makes two of us that killed a Salvador. I'm still paying for having done that."

"So, I'm the only one that hasn't killed anyone? And still, I'm on the shit list."

"It's called the hit list." The Vampire corrected.

“We, all three, should keep in mind that we are very lucky to be alive. And believe me, if they ever find out where we are, we are in trouble.” Johnson added solemnly.

The three men ate in silence. Flash finished his portion of red snapper and licked his fingers.

“Sorry, we forgot the napkins. Vampire, next trip, get napkins and cooking oil, preferably olive oil.”

“We’re going to need extra money for that,” The Vampire laughed.

“Johnson,” Flash said on cue picking up four wooden baguettes, two with bright blue balls at the end, and two with pale green balls. “Would you like to hear the marimba? I’m getting good. It’s ten pesos a song,” he grinned as he got up and threw the two baguettes with blue balls at the Vampire who caught them naturally one-handed as he stood up. Flash walked a few steps to the marimba and played a few notes. “And the Vampire plays a mean base, we’re getting very tight. You’ll love it. Johnson.”

**This page is for version tracking purposes only.
This is not part of the book and will be deleted
when the book goes into Author Copy Stage.**

Designed by :

Corrections Done by :

Date :