

Om Range
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Chapter 1

The Pacific clouds moved in between the mountains, settling amongst them according to orders given by King Neptune, mandates ordained by the local spirits who looked after the peaks, as well as their own wills. Some became overlying white cushions between the hard-blue sky and the soft pine-green hills. Some met the cold winds moving in from the North and turned black. Some decided to meet their ultimate aim, becoming fog in the process of dissolving into thin air, merging with it, perhaps to be moved back to the Ocean again or perhaps to permeate the land underneath it.

But whatever the clouds decided to do, it would be anything but ‘uninteresting’. This was, after all, Interior British Columbia, a place where ten ecosystems which normally spanned half a continent were compressed into a few hundred miles of terrain which changed every ten miles. Sometimes it was desert. Sometimes it was rain forest. Sometimes it was lush pasture without a single tree to shade it from the blistering summer sun or biting winter wind. But always it was...interesting, like the people who were blessed, challenged and cursed to inhabit it.

One of these 21st Century pioneers shook his head, the autumn chill still lingering in his body despite the fact that it was amply clothed by a long-sleeved Three –R Pizza delivery tee-shirt, a jet black, paper-thin leather biker vest and a parka which was more bulk than substance. Size 12 black boots covered his shivering feet. As cowboy hats made him feel stupid, tukes made him feel like he was wearing a Newfy condom, and wearing a helmet would just be too ‘safe’, he remained hatless, despite the recent buzz-cut that exposed his head to the elements. Between his legs was his most trusted and beloved companion. A mare who he knew better than anyone else, and one that he invested with a soul more special than his own. She was his creation, after all, whipped into shape by his bare and often bloody hands, particularly on days when she misbehaved, and today ‘the bitch’ refused to take another step, having reached her limit with her master’s impatience and expectations of her. John McClure had not yet reached his 15th birthday, but no one was going to chastise him about the obsessive relationship he had with his best friend, who took constant abuse by his hand. Except of course his slightly older brother who chose quite a different beast to command to do his dirty work.

“You should be kinder to her,” Bill smirked at his younger brother, pushing back the brim of his stetson, stroking the neck of the four-legged proud-cut gelding he had been riding most of the summer. “Machines have feelings to,” he reminded John regarding his motorcycle.

“This bitch will move when I tell it to!” John growled while adjusting the carburetor, hoping that this time the mixture of gas and air would be agreeable enough to the beast

for it to get moving. Still, 'the bitch' slumbered in an uneasy half-sleep, just as her master was, still not awake.

Bill rolled up the sleeves of his denim jacket and looked at his watch, a "Ruskie" WWII timepiece willed to him by his tall-tale telling Grandfather. He looked over a thousand acres of brush below him, taking note of the spots of bovine spots of brown moving the branches of the trees which were already starting to lose their leaves. "It's already 9 o'clock," he commented with a fully awakened soul to a groggy-eyed John. "Guess morning starts for you and that Injun motorcycle of yours at 11."

"Noon!" John growled back, pushing the throttle on the bitch, who still refused to get out of bed. "And it's a fucking Indian motorcycle. Not a goddamn Injun."

"Guess it's got the work ethics of an Indian too," Bill said in cowboyesque manner of the resurrected Indian motorcycle. "Maybe if you offer it a bottle of booze or a hit of lysol it'll get out of bed for you," he smirked.

John smiled at the pun. The two very white, very Anglo descendents of immigrants who had been everything from gold seeking 49ers in California to Mounties keeping American scalp hunters from coming north of the 49th parallel had both had their fill with modern day Indians who abused the special privileges the 21st century Canadian government had given them as well as the special admiration each had for 'Aboriginal dreamboats' who turned out to be Injun bitches and 'First Nations Visionaries' who turned out to be even sleazier than the Casino Owners who backed them. Then again, there were as many White bitches in their world as red-skinned ones. Still, 'Injun' jokes broke the tension between them.

From the earliest age, chisel-faced six-foot-fit Bill felt more comfortable around animals than people. Large nosed, wide-chinned John's companions were more two dimensional, unless he put on his 3D glasses in front of his computer screen. Bill's music was sung in harmonious 4/4 time by a long-haired, soft-skinned Country songstress. John freely followed any no-beat garage band featuring a bald chick with more tatoos than skin covering her emaciated body. Bill loved sunshine, his farmer's tan making his arms seem more Indian than caucasian. John felt warmest inside in December when the sun had the good sense to set by 3 pm, affording him 18 hours of uninterrupted dark black sky. But somehow they both learned to use their differences for mutual advantages.

From the earliest age any of the could remember Bill did John's chores in the barn while John did Bill's homework. University-bound John worked his on-line magic to convert Bill's C's and D's into B's and occasionally A's at report card time, while rodeo-bound Bill brought home horny buckle bunnies in the hope that 'Brother John's' devotion to virtual cyber-sex would not blind him to the possibility of getting the real thing one day. Their hard-working mother and day-dreaming father seemed to either not know about the various deals the lads made between each other, but there was one thing which both parents insisted they do together, and equally. Their absence this year due to out-of-

town jobs they could not afford to pass up, along with the lack of funds in the emergency fund to hire anyone else, required the guys to work together, with failure as no option.

“Round up’s going to be interesting this year,” Bill said as he looked over the sixty-something head of cattle dispersed in the vast valley which came into his family as a result of his great-grandparents claiming it from Nature, and the Indians who weren’t using it, a hundred and fifty years ago. “I’ll ride flank, and you ride drag,” he said, turning his horse’s head down toward the trail leading to the valley.

“I’ll fucking flank you if I’ll do drag!” John sneered back, still immobile on his 200 cc ‘chopper’. He was well aware that the cowboy meaning of the word as to ride in the back of the herd as it kicked up dust and ready-to-be-shed hair, both of which he was allergic to. “Why the fuck should I ride drag anyway, Bill?”

“Because if you don’t get that put-put mobile going, you’re gonna have to ride that mare I saddled for you.”

John’s fear of ‘Buttercup’ infused fire into his brains, and smarts into his fingers. Sensing where the problem was, he connected gas tank and motor, revving the engine on the rebuilt forty-year old Indian motorcycle, grateful that he would not have to put his ass into the saddle of a chopper who had four legs. “Now I ride flank!” he exclaimed.

“Why, because yer afraid of riding ‘drag’, John-John?” Bill said with a mocking lisp.

“Because I know how much you really like ‘drag’ and maybe the way you looked at yourself in the mirror when Mom dressed you up like Cinderella on Halloween that year when we---”

“---I can maneuver better on this horse than you can on that put put!” homophobic Bill snarled back. “To ride flank, you have to ride fast, and hard!” he continued, moving the conversation to matters at hand rather than visiting past memories which threatened present realities.

John answered older brother Bill’s knowledge and wisdom with regard to bovine beasts and the grasslands they converted into mudpiles with a salute of his third finger, a confident grin, and a cloud of dust. While Bill put his bandana over his face, too late to prevent dirt from coming in between his teeth, John was halfway down the hill, then into the middle of the valley, moving in stragglers on the East pasture hanging around the river, starting with a large-horned, heavily-haired bull, ‘Samson’, who fancied himself in charge of the heffers and calves on his side of the pasture.

Bill clicked his horse down to the West pasture, ‘yehahing’ the other half of the herd towards the middle. Samson’s very muscular brother, Goliath, had different ideas, challenging the horse and rider, his younger, as yet un-named, son cutting out cows Bill had just convinced to move forward down the trail to the winter corals.

John showed off his riding abilities with two wheelies and three jumps, the last one nearly knocking him into cowshit, a portion of the dung having made it onto his jacket. Still, he was the winner, bringing in more cattle with machine than Bill could bring in with his mare.

The race was on between the two wheeled bitch and four legged mare, both instruments pushed to their limits by their riders. Both rode flank and drag at the same time, moving what they could of the herd from the sides which became the back, then the sides again, then the front. But though the mounted human studs had the bulls in their command, what was missing was someone reliable and trusted riding point. The role was pre-cast to the lead mother cow whose turn it was to guard the herd, and advise it.

Both John and Bill knew of at least five candidates for the job. They went by the names of yellow 12, 45, 65, 32 and 23, according to their tags. Over the last six months, they each did their rounds as guards at key points in the circle of cows that always surrounded the calves inside of it. Each of the five had a calf of her own, or course, but nonetheless they rotated shifts as being head guard. And probably head boss, even of the bulls. It was, for them, all about the calves. But for now, for their teenaged human stewards, it was about moving everyone from the bucolic nursery on the vast soon-to-be-grassless pastures to a more confined location where they would be able to the winter corals where they would have to do minimal work in order to feed and water themselves.

The three year old heffers remembered the transition from open summer range to enclosed winter pens. Some seemed to look forward to the taste of ample hay sheltered from wind, rain and snow. Others seemed to recall the confinement with less pleasant memories. They seemed to be making up their own minds about where to go, all of them putting as a first priority the welfare and proximity of their own babies.

All of the bovine 'motherhood' got Bill to contemplate the prospect of human fatherhood, with its joy, pride and feeling of accomplishment. Then he recalled what human mothers were like, most particularly 'first time' heffers who got knocked up, or rather tricked the bulls into getting them pregnant. He was thankful that Rodeo Bunny Leonie chose to 'forget to take her pills' with someone other than him. Irving, a super dud, rather than dude, richer in the pocket than in the biceps who Bill never really got to know, and didn't want to, even though he could have. And should have.

John let his mind sift into the realm in which it felt more secure, and expansive. The distribution of cattle was still chaotic, but the random motion was diminishing on the North end of the herd, the node of ill-defined cohesiveness centered around Yellow 32, hiding the ear-tag which was the only way John could recognize her, though everyone else knew her as 'Big Bertha'.

Calculating the mathematics of it, John thought it better to let the stragglers on the perimeter have their way. He zig-zaged his way in towards Yellow 32, maneuvering as many cows, steers and calves her way. As intuited, Yellow 32 provided a magnet for the randomness, coalescing the movement of the animals into a harmonic symmetry centered

around a central node. It was all very logical. Motion mechanics which John applied wherever he could to keep his mind from becoming bored and dying of disuse before it got a chance to connect to the REAL world in Vancouver. But Yellow 32 seemed to feel insulted at being considered merely another molecule-converted-into-anti-matter-magnet in John's ever growing theoretical universe. She bolted out of the pocket he thought John had created for her, turned around, and led the herd back to the barren high pasture rather than the sheltered facility abundant in hay and consistently clear water. She then resigned her post as head mother, dismissing her fellow bovine 'molecules' to fend for themselves, to be ruled by the laws of randomness and the inclination of their own very different minds. Answering John's grunt of frustration with a warm, voluminous expression of being pleased with herself delivered from her anal orifice directed into his face.

Bill was admittedly behind his self-imposed timetable of converting the cows on his side of the pasture into a unified herd thinking with one mind. It was because he was just taking his natural time, the soft-voiced, slow-talking cowboy-in-self-training told himself. Or maybe some of had to do with Sampson, some of it with mud puddles in the terrain, or some loco weed that found its way into the grasslands. But he feared it was because of something else. Maybe he wasn't a good enough cowboy to make it in the 21st Century. He could motor a pick up down a washed out logging road and trudge a tractor through waist-deep marshland when called on to do it, but as for fixing anything made of metal or negotiating prices for such with people in town, he was as dumb as Sampson's mentally defective son. He noticed, once again, the young bull try to follow in the footsteps of his father, stumbling where Sampson stomped, huffing and puffing like an old man while trying to pretend he was a young stud to the 'ladies' who listened to Sampson, and the head 'mother cow' more than they ever listened to, or liked, him. Though 'Slow Sammy', as he had come to be called, tried to hump many a heffer, he never was able to hold on, though Bill told his father that the bull was just a fast operator.

Gazing at Slow Sammy from the corner of his pathologically-sympathetic eye, Bill thought about his own relationship with his father, Will, All Canadian Rodeo Champ for five years running, who could master beast and machine without breaking a sweat, and sell snow to an Eskimo even in the brokest of economies. Though Bill was never called Junior, he always felt that he was growing up in his father's shadow. Or trying to anyway. But, as ex-girl friend Leonie once said to him after he turned in another 'great effort' second showing at the summer rodeo, 'you have to prove yer a winner to yerself before you can prove it to someone else.' Maybe it was a line the Half-Breed heartbreaker stole from a Country song someplace, but it was true.

Having got most of the herd heading towards the old rusted and rotting, but still standing firm winter coral with the help of 'Big Bertha', aka Yellow 65, Bill turned around his mare for a look at the other end of the pasture. He rolled his eyes as 'genius John' kept trying to create theoretical order from real world bovine chaos, now headed towards the weakest section of fencing with the new highway on the other side of it, he smelled opportunity snorting into both of his nostrils. "Let's see what we got in us, Sasha," he

softly spoke into the ear of his mare, giving her a gentle kick with his feet and a brisk, light tap with his reins on her rump.

Sasha loped down the hoof-carved trails criss-crossing the valley, thinking with her rider. Bill spotted Yellow 32, aka Big Bertha, about to lead the herd into a part of the fence which was more of an illusion of containment than reality. And a dangerous one at that, as there was still barbed wire buried in the underbrush beyond the broken fenceline. Yes, it would have made more sense for the McClures to buy fresh wooden planks and put the posts seven rather than ten feet from each other, but it also made sense that people who raised the beef that was sold in the store were paid fairly for the hard work and immeasurable risks they undertook each season. Thoughts about rich CEOs sitting at their steak house business meetings setting beef prices such that they were the only ones who ate well at the end of the day raced through Bill's mind. He recalled that both his father and mother looked forward to being part of round up, and they both yearned to be able to make a full time living working from the home they loved and built, rather than take menial jobs hundreds of miles away to just make ends meet. Bill and John had been privileged, then burdoned, with the task of keeping the homestead going, and this broken fence made from wood that was the best they could afford was the last straw.

Yellow 32 was having a ball of a time coaxing John and his motorcycle into places more fitted for hoofs than wheels, and eventually she did dismount him. She looked square at John as he attempted to mount up again, smiling at him, but neither common bovine nor most human humor registered with him. Strapped to the fender of the Indian Motorcycle was something he could speak with when he had to. A vintage but still very functional Colt 45 revolver intended to be used on suffering cattle or to scare hungry coyotes, cougars and bears, though John often thought about using it on himself, particularly on those sunny 'happy country days' when the 15-year-old hermit thought he'd never be able to crawl his way out of ranch life, and ranch country.

John whipped out the semi-legal 'antique' and aimed it at Yellow 32, asking her to come his way. She complied, walking slowly, defiantly, then stood in front of John. She shook her head just close enough for his nostrils to get stuffed up from her dander. She smiled as the allergic-to-everything tough guy sneezed his guts out, snot lining his chin and upper lip.

"You and the rest of you walking pieces of hamburger and shit, go there," John commanded, wiping the snot off his face, pointing to the trail leading towards the winter pasture with his finger, keeping the gun barrel pointed at Big Bertha's very big and ego-inflated head. "Please?" he continued, lowering the gun along with the assertiveness in his hoarse voice.

"Don't think that'll quite do it," Bill, having worked his way to John through the herd without disrupting it. "You ride flank, I'll ride drag. Work with you?"

"And what about the bitch here, Bill?"

“Your bike or Big Bertha, John?”

“What about your half of the herd?” John challenged, seeing no new cows arriving with his brother. “You lost them in the bush or the ET’s take them, again?” he chuckled.

“We’ll get them, and these nags, together,” John said confidently and sincerely.

“Together,” John said to himself, cynically. Wanting to believe it. Having to, to get through the day. And to get through the year, as he was well aware mathematically and otherwise that getting each ounce of the now merely thirty-cents-on-the hoof cows to the corral, then to market was the only way he and his brother could keep their dreams alive, and their bodies fed. To say nothing about the medical costs that both of the parents were incurring which were not covered by Medical Care. “At least they weren’t not in America,” John thought to himself, knowing that his destiny had to be somewhere outside of the ranch, Interior British Columbia, or perhaps even Canada itself.

John mounted sore and manure-stained ass atop the rust-impregnated seat of the Indian motorcycle and gazed at Bill, atop his horse. William McClure II seemed bold and confident without a tinge of arrogance, anything but a ‘junior’. The primo-prototype of the cowboy, the hero of the 19th century who opened up the West. Maybe the dinosaur who would save it in the 21st Century. It was just a theory, which when tested by the experiment of life maybe might turn out to be true. With the same probability of being correct as the wish John had that one day he wouldn’t have to leave his brother, and only real friend, to save himself.

The two culturally and perhaps genetically mismatched brothers somehow worked together and moved the herd toward the corral. It was an easy, almost effortless task once they all were thinking with the same brain. Upon closing the gate on Yellow 32, Bill thanked her for riding point for them. While she was being sucked dry by her should-have-been-weaned calf, he snuck her a handful of grain, being sure that no one on four or two legs noticed it. “You did good, Bertha. With winter coming on, ain’t no choice but to pen you in like this. So we can keep you and that young stud of yours alive once the snow falls.”

He looked at Bertha, ignoring the fact that one day she would have to be shot for home butchering if she got sick, or shipped out to the meat buyers if the price was right. Her warm, brown eyes reminded him of Leonie, before he realized she was a bitch, or perhaps he was a wimp. He looked at the oversized calf who should have learned graze on his own rather than feed off his Mama, then looked at the ranch-house in need of a new roof, then the patchwork of junk plywood overlying the wall behind he spent most of his time ‘Montana dreaming’, then the gravesites which held the bodies, and spirits, of his departed grandfather and grandmother. He wondered how long it would be before his own parents would be resting there. They certainly weren’t at rest above ground, plagued by mounting bills despite their intelligence, compassion and hard-work ethic, and the medical problems they were having which forced them to work out of town. It seemed to

Bill that if you're sick, you stay at home and get better. But like 'Slow Sampson', Bill understood as much about economics as equine-terrified John did about training horses.

As for 'genius John', he did the count of the cattle in the coral, their loud mooing giving him a headache. Three times he made the rounds, writing down the stats on each of the beasts while wearing leather gloves and underlying plastic ones, one of his mother's surgical masks tightly pressed against his nostrils and mouth. No matter how many times he counted, the figures came out the same way. Bill read the numbers in his frustrated and angered eyes.

"How many?" Bill asked.

John lifted up two fingers. In most cases, it would be an acceptable loss, but not this year. And particularly as William senior was always a 'leave no cow left behind or unaccounted for' kind of man, who passed that credo down to his sons, though for different reasons. Bill looked out over the pasture, worried about how he could have missed 'Tina' and 'Louise', a pair of heffers who thought for themselves and were always together as a herd of two. John's mathematical mind calculated the benefits of recovering the two chronically-roving walking piles of money-making hamburger, though his human heart shivered at where they could be stranded, or suffering. Both brothers felt bonded, scared then terrified as they heard a honk from a truck behind them.

It was a large truck, with an enclosed box on top, a flashing orange light on top. Emerging from it, an old man with determined steel blue eyes, a wild mane of unruly white hair, an overgrown mustache, and a limp which made his gait even more fearsome. In his hand, two tags, which he showed to the lads.

"Tina", Bill said regarding one of them fondly.

"And Louise?" John asked, fearing the worse about the missing cows, and the old man bearing their tags. "What's happened to them, Hans?"

"I see them, where they were not supposed to be," he pronounced with enough of a twinge of native German in his speech to sound authoritative, and smart. And perhaps wise. "But I find them," he continued, with a compassion unmatched by anyone in Bill and John's life, including their own parents, or buds at school, or animals at home.

Hans smelt of a varieties of human and animal excrement but carried himself off like a scholar, wearing his third hand Salvation Army rags prouder than any over-paid teachers or rich tourists John and Bill ever knew. He invited them to come to the back of his truck, its cab loaded with books containing topics and titles that baffled Bill and fascinated John. "Kommen Sie heir, bitte," he asked, unfolding the back of the truck. "I did best I could, but..." he said, allowing the boys a look for themselves.

"Barbed wire, invented by idiots too lazy to build fences, und sold by assholes who think they will take their money mit them to the grave," Hans commented regarding the cause

of the injuries to the wounded heffers. “Suture I get from der back of the hospital from one of your father’s nurses, who maybe like to date one of you, ya?” he continued regarding the tools used to repair the extensive wounds on them. They looked more like patch-worked quilts than cows, but were able to walk, bellow, eat, and shit on John’s trousers with as much ease as any healthy bovine.

Both boys were amazed at the skill ‘Old Man Hans’ was able to apply with his shaking, arthritic fingers, and the no-budget medical facilities he had on hand at his cabin in the woods, little more than a shack which he operated as an animal shelter despite being shut down several times by the law for practicing veterinary licence without a licence. Both lads knew that Hans had not only saved their asses from a whooping from their father, and perhaps the ranch from being foreclosed by the bank. Neither knew what to say.

“Danke,” Hans smiled at them. “Means thanks. But to thank mit words is to cheapen gift. So, you will thank me mit noble deed you do for the world someday.”

With that Hans drove away as quietly as he arrived, before John could say ‘what GPS was he using to find those missing cows’ or Bill could utter ‘who was that masked man?’ of the pillar of the community who always found himself under any structure about to fall down, in the niche of time, with no explanations as to how, or why, he was what he was, and did what he did.

CHAPTER 2

Carl Stiller woke up out an uneasy sleep in his hotel room, feeling the holes in the blanket. ‘Acceptable for now’, he told himself as the monthly rates were cheap. He had thought about renting an apartment in town, but it would require signing a lease and laying down a damage deposit and having neighbors who he would have to become friends with. He was determined that his stay in Bluewater, BC would be as short as possible, even though his assigned duty as the new RCMP officer was for ‘an undefined period as yet’.

He showered quickly and toweled himself off, feeling the course towel against his closely cropped hair. ‘Acceptable for now’, he told himself regarding the regulation haircut required upon his entry at the Academy in Regina and to get his diploma at the graduation ceremony afterwards.

The Toronto-born, North-Vancouver-raised twenty-five year old knew that being an RCMP officer was a stepping stone to something. He hoped it would be, anyway. It had to be, as he had screwed up so many other career opportunities, most of them legal, some of them borderline, on a good day.

He looked over the town he was now in charge of managing and protecting, taking note of the two mills which now displayed ‘closed’ signs on their locked gates. The shops which had just recovered what they could from the six-figure-income summer tourists,

adjusting their prices for the five going on four-figure income year-round residents. The fast food joints that hired kids fresh out of school who had nowhere to go, and no idea how to get a job anywhere else in the world. The highway sign reading 'Vancouver 322 km' going West, 'Edmonton 443 km' heading East, with no places in between which interested Carl culturally or otherwise. 'Acceptable for now', he told himself as he counted down the days till he could get out of this 'Wilderness Paradise' town in which the majority of a Cop's time was to bring home drunk kids, give speeding tickets to out of town motorists who didn't recognize the speed traps, and, of course, deal with the weed growing operations that exported the best recreational grass north of the 49th parallel.

With regard to those 'herbalists', Carl knew the real score. As the lumber and cattle industries were sold down the river by the fat-cats elsewhere, the two major sources of income were retirement pensions for the old and weed growing for the young. Of course some arrests had to be made, but the solution for the problem was to let it continue. 'Acceptable for now', Carl told himself as yearned for a higher purpose and Calling as to his banishment to this 'Paradise'.

Carl's commanding officers at the Academy and single mother in North Van said it would be a golden opportunity to enjoy himself. To fish. Hike. Horseback ride. Ski. And maybe meet a 'nice girl to settle down with'. But 'nice' was definitely what Carl did NOT want now, or in the future. His image of what his life MUST be like was based in images seen on the movie screen rather than the stage of real life. A 'pathological misperception', according to the therapists his mother made him go to and all of his girlfriends he ever had. "A disease that you got from your father's side of the family," Carl's Mom would say to him, particularly when he threatened to go live with the 'rich and powerful' side of the family she had divorced herself from to save her sanity, and Carl's soul. "Be content with small things and you'll always be rich," she would say. Along with other blabberings like "there is mastery only in servitude" and "if people give you a dollar, be sure to give them back a dollar twenty-five." The latter was perhaps why Mom was always broke in pocket, and heartbroken with regard to any man she loved, or thought loved her.

Carl felt ashamed at thinking about Mom again. He was, after all, twenty-five-years old. He thought about his father, and what would have happened if him and Mom had stayed together. He thought about the promise he made to Mom, and the man he called Dad, despite his mother's wishes. To her, he promised to do the Right thing. To his Dad, to make his Mark in the world, and to do it in a BIG way. Such presented a challenge in such a small town. He prayed for a Mission to do the Right thing and a Big thing. The Universe could not be so sadistic as to deny him that chance. So he hoped, anyway.

CHAPTER 3

The midnight inter-racial Powwow started out as a bunch of Old Indians telling stories about the good old days to Young ones. The beer was free, as was the food. Fresh moose meat, which beat the hell out of stale hamburger. And Leonie was under orders

from the Band Chief to go to listen to the 'Old Ones' if she wanted to keep her Red Card active. Thankfully they were not all from her own tribe or genetic background.

"It is like dis," Old Man Hans said once again regarding his prophetic proclamation, demonstrating his point with mundane, featureless stick of ancient fir and a beautifully-leafy green willow branch, putting them both over the fire, giving the flame equal chances to burn them both. "The strong, old and established cultures. The superior ones. They survive the fires of Life and the winds of Time," he said of the stick of dried fir which did not burn. "The inferior cultures that look 'beautiful', rich, colorful and 'cool' wither up in der Fire burns cool every time. And cool is cold. Lifeless und heartless," he warned as the lush willow-branch caught the blaze, its green leaves turning into ashes, its proudly bent shaft bowing to the Fire.

Leonie knew that the no-frills, dull-looking fir stick didn't burn not because it was more Ancient or less 'cool', or more superior in its moral or intellectual fiber, but because it was petrified. The wood and sensitivity inside of it had turned into stone. As unchangable as Old Man Hans was. After she was through satirizing him between her ears, she looked back at the Old Coot, knowing that he was reading her mind, again.

"Is the same mit people, the superior peoples will always triumph over the inferior ones, though for a time, if the superior peoples let them, the inferior ones rule." the long haired, colorfully ancient Paleface he continued with the blessing of the Old Indians around the campfire, and the tolerance of the other palefaces.

Hans continued to tell his story about a noble race of self-reliant mountain people who let themselves become corrupted by lawyers, moneylenders and accountants from the villages in the valleys. The hero of the tale was part Viking and part American Indian, born of two rugged individualists who defied the gods and the villagers below. He got into the intricacies of the tale, with the musical accompaniment of his music again, pumped out from an eight track tape played on a re-conditioned ghetto-blaster. She recognized the 'tune' this time from music appreciation class as 'Lohengrin'. A slow moving piece that sort of moved you, but not something you could dance to with a First Nations high-step, a cowboy two step or a South Bronx stomp. All three cultures flowed within Leonie's anything-but-Nordic-German veins. She wondered about what to do about Old Man Hans telling tales about superior cultures that would one day enlighten, educate and, if necessary, rule the world 'for a thousand years'.

It was not so bad a dream, and one that Hans had to believe in to stay being Hans. Though he had been in Bluewater for the last thirty years, he lost none of his German accent. In fact, it got bolder and more emphatic, and musical as well. The Old Country as it once was, a few hundred years ago, or perhaps a few millenia ago, kept Hans going in the new country. No one knew his real age, or his real origins of course. And when asked about them, he would always say "Superior Minds and Hearts live in present. Inferior and weak ones get stuck in the past."

According to anyone with a linear or lazy mind, Hans was a dinosaur who didn't get the memo that he was extinct and had been ordered by the 'Universe' to die, or at least retire to the rocking chair. But to anyone who was Alive, or trying to be, Hans was Prometheus reborn, and redefined every time he defied the laws of nature, biology or people dynamics. He had saved virtually everyone's ass, livelihood and animals in Bluewater at least once. Leonie did get fed up with the Old Man's singing the praises of the golden old times and the new ones to come. It was so 'uncool', and she felt like he was embarrassing himself. But he was what he was, and she was what she was. A mixed blood Nigger, Injun Chink who had become adopted by the Aryian Sage who seemed to see her as White, pure of spirit, and advanced in her mind. Little did he know about Leonie's advanced ability to get guys to doing whatever she wanted to, and her even more valuable gift---to be able to let others around her think she was wise, and smart, while here real skills were in being manipulative. Too bad she couldn't manipulate a richer guy than the now absent Irving to take care of the baby which was now growing in her womb. All of her other prospects left town with no forwarding address. Perhaps they were superior enough to know what she was really all about. And what diabolical plans she was incubating for the Community who valued her as a golden child.

CHAPTER 4

Maybe it was the hot models he saw on the beer commercials during the hockey game, or the billboards for the re-opening of Hooters and the new Casino in town, or perhaps the bun that tasted so sweet going down that was now giving him heartburn that got Bill thinking about Leonie on his way into town to see what kind of deals he could negotiate at the junkyard for his beater truck and what kind of bargains he could statch at the second hand clothing store. The Indian Princess broke his heart and his spirit but he still loved her. Like a mortal seeking to save his soul and redefine his Purpose for existence, he sought to please her, and serve her. Even though she refused to answer his calls, or accept his admission of responsibility for being the father of her unborn child. But Leonie knew that nothing happened from his end the night of conception, and more painfully, he knew it too. Still, the idea of going through life without Leonie drove terror into his heart. A primal fear which, for the moment, was replaced with a car screeching out of a clump of woods, racing towards his bumper at full speed, its lights and sirens at full tilt.

Bill turned on his right hand signal, which thankfully did work, at least today, and pulled over. He waited for the officer to approach, recalling that perhaps he was going 90 in a 60km zone, or maybe he did slow down at the stop sign at the deserted railroad tracks rather than come to full halt. Or maybe it was something his vehicle was rather than did. In any case, one more ticket would cost him his licence, which would cost the family the ranch. Surely he could negotiate some kind of settlement with the Cop who emerged from the vehicle which he recognized as Sergeant Jack Johnsson's cruiser.

"No problem," Bill told himself, feeling relieved as he remembered the favors Johnsson owed his father. "Probably a practical joke," he considered, recalling how 'Uncle Jack'

scared the shit out of William Sr. on more than one occasion just to ‘make his afternoon more interesting’. “Big problem,” Bill Junior said to himself when the officer approached, took off his sunglasses and announced in a voice he didn’t recognize, “Licence and Registration.”

With shaking hands, Bill gave Officer Carl Stiller the documents required, trying to hide the syringes and other veterinary ‘junk’ within the recesses of the glove compartment. Through the mirror, he looked at his face. It seemed young, but also old. Inexperienced but arrogant. And hungry to make an arrest, any way he could. And not in the way that the other Officers in town were at the last weekend of every month when they had to meet their quota of out-of-towners ticketed to keep the RCMP and Community Charity coffers full. No, this officer was out for another kind of score here. He perused the vehicle as if it was a vessicle for contraband material which had to be seen by the inner eye before being seized by the hand. Just watching, thinking, trying to find something incriminating.

“Was I speeding?” Bill asked, receiving no answer. “Going too slow?” He continued over-explaining his innocence by self-accusing himself of offenses he may have committed.

Officer Stiller sniffed the hay within the recesses of the back of the truck. Bill explained that it was timothy and brome. The tight-lipped, swagger-gaited RCMP seemed to agree, though he pocketed a pinch into a small numbered evidence bag, a fistful into a larger unmarked baggie.

The next items to inspect were the bottles in the cab of the truck, brown tinged and unlabelled.

“Milk replacer,” Bill said, his speech devolving into a stutter. “For cows, eh...calves...ya know?”

Officer Stiller sniffed the contents of the opened beer bottles that had been converted into feeding ones, and some which had not been. “I haven’t been drinking. Not when I’m driving anyway,” Bill asserted. “And, well, not any other time either,” he continued, knowing that his licence and face put him severely under-aged. On the dash was a pack of smokes, legal ones. “My father smokes,” Bill said. “Tried to get him to stop, but, you know---”. The next item to run across Bill’s terrified brain was a pipe. An antique which John had used to smoke some tobacco which was not so legal, and which Bill himself had tried on a few occassions, though not with the beneficial effects it was supposed to produce. He felt his flesh turn ice cold, his breath frozen in his shivering throat. He let his eyes fall into a blank stare in front of him at the road ahead, imagining himself being taken to places he feared he could never return from. Every sound around him was amplified and muffled at the same time, broken finally by---

“The horn.” Officer Stiller ordered in a soft voice, pointing to it.

Bill pressed on the horn, producing a meek beep then a thud, then nothing at all. Stiller smiled in an official manner, ticked something down on his pad, and pointed to the break lights. Bill accommodated the request, noting Stiller's 'gotcha' nod as he checked the back of the vehicle. The young officer adopted a fatherly tone, pointing to the front lights. They worked, thankfully, shining brightly in Officer Stiller's face on his right side, at his chest on the left. Another tick on the pad. Next, Stiller gently tapped on the wind-shield, at a small crack which had not enlarged for four seasons. Another tick on the pad, moving to a second page.

Bill made a move to get out of the truck but was held back by Stiller's uplifted left hand while he continues to write with his right. "Officer," Bill pleaded. "This is the only truck we got left. My Dad and Mom are out of town working jobs they had to take. It's just me and my brother busting our asses to make ends meet to keep the bank from foreclosing on a ranch that's been in our family for a hundred and fifty years."

Stiller kept writing, his heart cold as ice. Bill kept worrying, his heart pumping harder and harder with each official 'non-response' the newly-arrived Cop projected. "Look...I'll do anything you say if you only..." Bill pulled out his wallet, emptying whatever cash he had in it into his outstretched hand. Maybe a stupid thing to do, but the only thing he had left to try..

Stiller looked at the paltry forty-five dollars and change and snickered with the kind of arrogance that Bill knew very, very well. That elitist roll of the eyes the rich tourists threw at him when he wasn't bagging their groceries fast enough. The snooty nods from the terribly 'English' English teacher who over-corrected him on his mis-pronunciation of Shakespear's sonnets. And the 'you'll never be good enough for anyone' look of pity from Leonie.

Bill dared to look into the Officer's face. If his life were to be over now, it would involve him going down as a man, not a boy. Stiller seemed impressed, but not shaken off his initial agenda. He whipped off the three pages of tickets and handed them to Bill, pointing his attention to it.

"A warning?" Bill said, not being able to read all of the writing but sensing that they were very serious.

With that, the Officer handed Bill his card, his Christian name 'Carl' underlined. He smiled warmly, sincerely and with a need to connect to who Bill really was. "You call me if you see or hear anything that you think I should know about. I'm a public servant not an executioner. Know what I'm saying, Bill?"

"I think so, Officer---"

"---Carl." He said, extending his hand out. Bill shook his hand and felt something warm about it. Or maybe it was just his ice cold hands warming up after being saved from the depths of hell. "Take care of them cows," Carl said as his farewell in a diction and

subtext which was definitely from out of town. With a warmth that seemed too real to trust, but which Bill knew he had to.

CHAPTER 5

William McClure Sr. didn't say much when he came home two weeks earlier than he expected to. He did his 'check in' mid-autumn rituals. Counting of the cow, looking into each of their eyes to see if what was on paper was for real. Assessing the status of the house, procrastinating any repair possible till next fall. Asking his sons, who he regarded as men but still called 'boys', how things went in half-sentences and mumbly grunts. He seemed satisfied with 'good' from 'Billy' and 'okay' from John. But things were far from good or okay when after he got on his horse for a 'check in with the land' ride, winding up flat on his back in a grand-mal seizure.

John was the 'boy' who 'manned up' by spending time in the hospital with William. It wasn't that brother Bill, or son Billy, didn't care about his father. He did, to a point of being paralyzed emotionally by his father's pain and prospects with a the 'liver problems' which now was looking more like cancer than self-imposed pickling of that organ with Jack Daniels and Johnny Walker Red. Besides, John was better at using mental anesthesia so that he could use his brain to solve the medical problem rather than make the patient feel better. Like John read somewhere, people become doctors because they are fascinated with curing diseases, those who decide to be nurses because they care about people. John did care about his father, more than he could tell any doctor, particularly when he saw him helped back into his bed with his naked ass sticking out of the hospital gowns designed to make proud people feel like enabled patients.

"Don't look at me like that! Or I'll kick YOUR ass!" Will admonished John. "You neither, you self-righteous bitch!" he blasted at the Nurse who was about to lighten the mood with a humane and well-designed joke. He shooed the Nurse away, the abuse caretaker accepting that command with gratitude. Through eyes that had been through a grueling 12 hour shift that felt more like a 36er, she gave John an 'he's all yours' nod and left.

Will stared out the window, embittered. John looked at his chart, letting the data on it sift through his head, pulling out as many medical circuits in his cyber-oriented brain as they could fall into. Will didn't talk, which was normal, but he was listening, with the kind of desperation and respect John never felt from the man who, so he was told anyway, was responsible for half of his genetic material.

"So, Doctor John, any fucking ideas that you have?" Will asked. "Besides that Colt Revolver that you fucking forgot to clean, again, the last time you used it at round up."

"The opera ain't over till the fat lady sings," John found himself saying, quoting a St, Elsewhere re-run on the Oldie Cable station. Followed by "the game isn't over till it's over" from one of the cowboy festivals he had to attend as a kid. Then a "Nature doesn't give you a problem without a solution," from another source. Upon stumbling on that

utterance, John felt a chill go through him, the source of that theory, or wish, directly behind him.

“Und no laws for brave ones, ya?” came out of his mouth. Old Man Hans nodded a respectful hello to Will, winked a ‘there ya go’ gesture of accomplishment to John, and grinned a ‘simple’ good morning to Doctor Tully, a swagger-gaited physician who carried himself off more as a Cop than a healer. “I bring strudel!” he announced proudly, placing it on Will’s tray.

Will, who felt himself closer to death than the pathologically-healthy Old German, gave him the courtesy of a sniff of the pastry, then pushed it away. He folded his arms again, staring out the window. Down at the people in the parking lot with pity. Out at the mountains straight ahead with fondness. Up to the heavens with anger.

“Strange,” Hans said, pacing around the room, sneaking a look at the Will’s charts, and the medical notes and hypotheses genius John had scribbled down in an attempt to convert his knowledge of physics into a Promethian understanding of biology. “Everyone likes my strudel. And it makes them feel good. Gertrude at the fishing store. Yolanda at the hair shop I go to have my ear hairs trimmed and blown into. Ralph at the feed shop, who is celebrating 50th anniversary to wife he should have never married. And Tristan who chases bunnies but---”

“---Never catches them,” Will said, awakened from despair by the name of the third son who he loved in ways that he never could have loved John or Bill.

“And licks them till he gets a hard on,” John said, quietly, remembering the hound that was saved from a certain death from leukemia by one of Han’s medicinals. Given confidentially, with no mention of what the drug was, or what it did. It smelled of peppermint, John recalled. As did the strudel Hans was cutting up now, calibrating it with a ruler in his head, offering William a piece of it.

William took it in his shaking hand. Then hesitated, seeking approval, from John. Hans smiled, sneaking John a note containing biological flow charts with references to journals John had learned to read very fast. Central to the information was an almond, something shaped like a seed which seemed very basic, and central to a theory which could make good things happen, theoretically. As always, Hans was ready with the answer before John could fully formulate the question.

“The mathematical answer ist Faninaci number. Biologically, it is about keeping seeds as seeds, and not becoming plants. Mit some chemicals which prevent seeds from becoming seedlings,” he said, pointing to a pregnant woman’s belly in the hallway.

John did the other calculations, biologically and mathematically. He had to ask the question, and challenge the good fortune. “Killing any cells that divide can kill the person who has them.”

“Cancer cells are inferior beings who are parasites,” he said. “To be superior, we must not be afraid to eliminate inferior beings,” he continued, turning his head. “For the greater good, we must do what our minds say is best, and our hearts know is necessary.”

With that, Hans disappeared again. Just as Doctor Tully came to check on the chart, with a new Cop behind him in the hallway who seemed to be far more intelligent than the average Cop. Perhaps someone who purposely didn’t score over 105 on his IQ test so he could enter the Academy. Someone looking for a story in a town where there were no real stories, or interesting ones, at least according to John. His nametag confirmed it---“Carl Stiller,” John said, recalling the story Bill said about him.

“Carl who?” Will asked.

“Nobody,” John said, hoping it was true, not wanting to burden his Dad with things that perhaps would pass. Or perhaps not.

CHAPTER 6

Carl presented his paperwork to Sergeant Jack Johnsson, counting the number of files in the foot and a half-tall stack. Unfortunately, ‘Uncle Jack’ was more concerned with what was in the files than Carl realized. “This is going to involve a lot of paperwork, Constable Stiller,” the Marshall Dillon of Blue Water warned his new arrival.

“The offenses are enforceable,” Carl asserted, intentionally addressing his new superior by any name, as he had no desire to begin a real relationship with him.

“Yes, Carl, but they are all so---“

“---Enforceable.” Carl added up the revenues that could be collected, writing down the figure.

“More money than anyone here ever collected on DWIs, speeding tickets or zoning ordinances,” Johnsson admitted. “But, Carl, law enforcement here is about more than money. It’s about community.”

Sergeant Johnsson seemed to believe it. Or maybe he was just getting flack from people further up the socio-economic ladder in Bluewater about the barrage of traffic violations and commercial bylaw codes that Carl saw fit to enforce. There had to be SOME kind of ladder leading to a fat cat on top who could be toppled down, giving Carl enough glory points to transfer to someplace civilized, or at least more populated. Or a fat-cat caught with his pants down in the wrong place, with the wrong mistress, or boy lover. Carl would get his glory or favor points any way he could. After all, he was just doing his job.

Carl could see more from the corner of his eye than he could from straight on. As a child he thought it was something the ETs implanted into his head, but as he grew into

adulthood, he realized the true value of that undetectable skill. From that clandestine perspective he noted the Christmas duty roster, his name on for Dec 24, 25 and 26th.

“I hope you don’t mind,” Johnsson said, startling Carl out of his sense of superiority. “Your mother’s name is Ukrainian and you can celebrate Russian Christmas in January, with full pay,” he smiled back. “Maybe fly her up here. Christmas on December 25 has gone way too commercial, but there should be some day when we remember whose birthday we are supposed to be celebrating.”

Carl slapped on his most sincere ‘thank you’ smile and directed it straight into ‘Uncle Jack’s’ face, holding back of course his real opinion of Christmas, and the real ethnic origins of his mother and father’s family. His ever-scheming mind hit upon a fact which he had ignored ever since his arrival. There were no synagogues anywhere within 100 miles of Bluewater. Even if there were, he would not attend anyway. He had attended Temple at his Barmitza in Toronto, for the gifts he would get afterwards. And at his father’s funeral, so he could be insured a part of his inheritance. And probably a few other times when it was not about praying to God but being around other Jews, a ‘Savior-less’ people whose duty it was to make their own Salvation here and now on planet earth while, in theory anyway, waiting for the Messiah to finally swoop down from the clouds onto the tar-pit at Pearson Airport and stroll down Yonge Street with gift certificates for all who were waiting for him.

Carl would have to be his own Savior now, and deliver himself from the clean, green, neighborly hell Bluewater had become for him. On the way back out to his patrol car, saying ‘howdy’ to even more friendly faces that repulsed him inside because of their simplicity and contentment, he thought about opting out of the contract he had made with the RCMP. Maybe do something dishonorable yet not illegal so he could be fired. But such was not an option. He had failed as a crook in Toronto and Vancouver, a source of shame to his father as well as to the surviving Uncles and Granduncles who were doing very, very well working on both sides of the law.

As was expected of him, Carl bought his lunch at the Triple-R Pizzeria, reminding them that he had an allergy to pineapple. God would forgive him for having ham on his complimentary personal-sized triple-loaded Hawaiian, and perhaps expect it. After all, God was a well meaning crook who hired other crooks to do His dirty work, he pondered. Such would explain why Jews were not only allowed but encouraged to be the money-lenders in Middle Ages Europe, taking on the ‘immoral’ profession forbidden to Christians which was necessary for the Christian economy to keep it going. In 21st century currency, dreams were as valued as dollars. Maybe even more so. No surprise that there was a higher proportion of Jews in the ‘dream merchant’ industries of Hollywood South and Hollywood North than blacks in the National Football league. He thought about dreams again. Dreams of being great himself one day. Of doing something both Big and Noble. And being remembered for it, as hell to his people was to be forgotten by those who were still alive. To be interesting to himself, and others.

As for 'interesting', Carl spotted the only interesting face he knew in Bluewater across the street through the window of his cruiser. Racially, she was a mix of everything that was NOT blonde, blue-eyed and Nordic White. He had followed her for a while, noting her from straight on when she wasn't looking as well as from the corner of his eye when she was. Maybe she spotted him as well. She seemed to be someone who didn't want to be here, and who felt that she was deserving of being somewhere else, and willing to do whatever it took to get her there. 'Leonie' he had heard her called by many, but never really addressed for who she really was, or could be.

Today she stood in front of the Health Care building, reading a pamphlet on Reproductive Choices, held by a shivering right hand. A left hand with a bloody bandage around the wrist laying uneasily upon a belly which was bigger than last time he had seen her, poorly hidden by a loose-fitting parka.

Carl adjusted the mirrored sunglasses covering his eyes and wrapped his fingers around his chin. Leonie lifted up her left hand, extended the third finger upward and waved it three times in his direction, throwing him a defiant 'fuck off' stare.

Carl smiled, then took off his sunglasses. Leonie gritted her teeth in the manner of an Apache on the warpath. Carl held up a fist full of dollars. Leonie stroked her chin, thought about it, and pointed to the Chinese Food joint at the end of the block.

"You sure this lunch is free?" Leonie said as she gobbled down the Chow Mein, Peanut Chicken and Fried Shrimp that smelled more like canned tuna.

"I get coupons and I can't use them all," Carl said, leaning back on his chair, nibbling on a bowl of white rice, showing off his skill with chopsticks. But Leonie wasn't impressed. Score an extra ten points for the almost-legal-age First Nations bombshell pregoid-mama who could lead him to where the motherload.

"Ya know," Carl continued with a professorial film-director 'aesthetique'. "You can't really trust a city, or a relationship, unless you see where the garbage is."

"And it ain't in the junkyard or town dump," Leonie shot back, without so much as a smile or mild chuckle.

Carl scored another ten big ones for Leonie, with extra points for not laughing at her own joke, or expecting him to either. He moved his chair in closer. She didn't retreat or move ahead. Another five points for 'colorful' behavior which beat the shit out of 'good' behavior. He noticed something in her pocket.

"Tea," she said before he could utter a word. "Calms me down," she continued as she gulped down her food, shaking like a leaf, nervous about something she was very tight lipped about, and getting progressively terrified about.

Carl asked to see the tea. Leonie obliged him. The owners of the restaurant continued to banter in Chinese amongst themselves with happy smiles, though Carl's limited vocabulary in Cantonese could make out phrases like 'dumb White guys', 'stupid Indian' and 'asshole Cops.'

"Peppermint," Carl said as he discretely smelled the 'tea' in the unmarked plastic baggie. He took a sample to taste it but Leonie stopped him.

"Powerful medicine," she said from a source inside of her that sounded very Aboriginal, and mystical.

"And legal?"

"Far as I know," she said, retrieving a carefully measured half teaspoon. She stirred it ceremoniously into the small cup of water, muttering something in what sounded like Cree. She drank it with a sense of reverence, fear, and respect. Three emotions which Carl had never seen in her in all of the times he had 'casually observed' her around town.

Carl ceiled the bag, while pinching a small portion of the ground up 'peppermint' grass himself. He snuck it into his pocket while Leonie's eyes were closed. When she opened them, she seemed to be a different person.

"Calm now?" Carl observed, and said.

She smiled 'yes' with a face that seemed relieved, hands that stopped shivering. She wanted Carl to believe him, and he let her do so, even though he knew that nothing worked that fast, or effectively.

"Powerful medicine from a medicine man who deserved his privacy?" Carl asked in his most politically-correct 'sensitive mench' metro-sexual voice.

Half of Leonie bought the 'non-question'. Carl continued, adding a little more gay and a lot more CBC radio into his tone. "It's important that secrets of your people remain with your people. But, then again, can't we all be one people? With the global village being what it is. With so much suffering in the world. With so much potential for us to synergistically help each other."

"Synergistically?" Leonie asked, abruptly distrustful.

"A biology term. I help you. You help me. We become greater than we could be apart."

"I knew that," Leonie blasted out.

"I know you did. And that you wanted to see my reaction to me thinking you didn't," Carl smiled.

This time Leonie smiled back. “You don’t look like you belong here,” she said. “Which I mean as a compliment.”

“You don’t look like you belong here either,” Carl said. “Which I mean as a compliment.”

Leonie pulled her lips back and leaned back. She looked down, timid about the emotions going through her rather than afraid of the man in front of him.

Carl’s power of internal and external observations seemed very clear, beckoning him to speak it as he saw it, and felt it. “You seem like an old soul stuck in young body. An expansive soul marooned in a tiny place.”

“So my medicine man says about me to my face,” she confessed coyly, turning her head downward. “I say sort of the same thing about him, but not to him. Or to anyone else who is...ya know...”

“....Slow in the head?” Carl said, looking straight at her.

Leonie didn’t look up. Carl turned his head, his peripheral vision still very much on, and shut off for incoming people to see.

“His name is Hans,” she said just as Carl thought she couldn’t read his mind, or heart. “And I think it would be a synergistic thing for you to meet him.”

CHAPTER 7

Carl thought it was a meeting between himself and a grand wizard. He purposely didn’t shave that day and was out of uniform, his Criminal Lawbook at home as well. He told ‘Uncle Jack’ that he was out fishing for big trout by day and beautiful women by night. He took care to be sure that the casting rods his superior officer loaned to him smelled of fish and that the condom packs loaned out to him were emptied.

The directions to his real destination were cryptic at best. Leonie greeted him at the ‘gate’ of the small cabin nestled in the woods which was unobservable by air or ground unless you were within fifty feet of it. It was strange to see her on top of a horse, so relieved and calm, and hotter looking than eve. She had somehow disposed of the ‘accident’ that had been incubating in her womb. She seemed to have no remorse about it either. Highly unusual. As was the ghostlike creature that exited from the woods. His white hair blew around his face, making him seem more like a lion than a man. His eyes were deep blue, converted into bright light that penetrated everything they looked at. A hushed vibrational sound came from behind him, as if Nature herself had orchestrated his exit from the Temple, in preparation for his new student, Carl, to ‘happen’ upon him. It

sounded like birds, then angels, then gods, then...something very human, and familiar that moved him in a way that he never felt before, or at least allowed himself to feel.

“Forest Murmurs,” Carl said recognizing the music coming out of the cabin which fitted so well into the rhythm of the woods around it. “From the Ring of the, eh...eh...”

“Nibilung,” the Old Medicine Man smiled from a face which was pure white, and Aryan, with a smile as welcoming as any Jewish Grandmother. “Kommen Sie auf das cabin, bitte,” he said as Carl felt a firm arm covered with deeply wrinkled skin come down upon his shoulders.

Carl looked to Leonie who merely gave him a ‘go with the old coot if you know what is good for you’ smile. She clicked her horse and rode down the mountain, disappearing into the woods.

Hans introduced himself to Carl by his Christian name, then ranted on in German which Carl could not understand. “No matter”, he thought to himself as he smiled back and gave another ‘ya, gut’ to Hans, sneaking his hand into his pocket to check the on button attached to mini-tape that could be translated later. As Carl approached the cabin, it seemed to be less 17th century and more 22nd with regard to its technology. “So this is where the best weed in British Columbia is grown, or genetically engineered,” he thought to himself. But that couldn’t be it. All the Germans he had gotten to know in Bluewater and the ones who had found their way to Vancouver were money-pinching masochists who overworked themselves to death, legally. They bucked the system only when they cheated on their taxes or sped down the TransCan Hyway like it was the Autobon. A symmetrical, dry sense of humor, as long as you don’t make jokes about the War. Fanatics about anything Western, particularly Native things. Maybe fanatical about being romantically involved with under-aged Indian Princesses they could only dream about back in the Old Country?

As Carl was shown to the door of the cabin, he noticed lots of animals. Health ones having the run about the place. And patched up ones on the way to being healthy. Scattered amongst small corals and pens which comforted rather than confined their happy and boisterously-expressive inhabitants. As it was feeding time, Hans invited Carl to be part of the ritual. Carl knew as much about feeding horses as he did about conjugating verbs in German, but Hans instructed him in the art of throwing hay and not getting kicked by the recipients of the chopped up grass, which all appeared to be very legal. Indeed, there was no evidence of any loco weed at the place with the exception of the wilderness between the Old Coots ears. It was a happy place. An interesting place. And, if tapped by a smart bunch of bikers or Russian mobsters, a profitable place. This old fart had to be up to something not sanctioned by the law, or at least not understood by law abiding citizens, Carl reasoned and intuited.

Carl noted what he could of the cabin through the only open window. Inside lay an elaborate biochemical laboratory, a simple bed, and a rebuilt and functional computer, held together by more tape than metal. Bookcases lined with volumes that seemed to

have been read, topics ranging from Plato's Republic to the latest Proton Theory. A retired, or certifiably-crazy, professor's haven, with walls with nothing on them. No diplomas. No pictures of students. No photos of anyone, even Leonie.

"Interesting," Carl said to himself quietly as he put his hand on his chin. He looked around, noting that the back door was open. Hans was busy patching up a wound on a lacerated horse, pouring some kind of powder inside it as he went along. He seemed very preoccupied with what was in front of him. But did this Nordic Medicine Man see as much from the side of eyes? Carl tested it by pretending to hit a cat nuzzling up to his leg, but the Old Man didn't notice it. Probably a medical thing, Carl thought as he pondered his next step. But the next steps taken had to be legal, as only dumb-asses bypassed the law by directly violating it. "Ich gehen in?" he asked in his best broken German.

"Ya, ya," Hans said, focusing on the work at hand.

Having obtained legal permission for search and possible seizure, Carl shooed the 'guard cat' away, then kicked it away from the door. He entered, his stare pulled into a metal device behind the door which was hardly something Injun Medicine of Old kept in their teepees. There it stood, shining in all of its glory. A WWII repeater rifle, its Nazi insignia filed down, but not completely. He reached for it, slowly, his hands feeling the coldness of its steel and sensing a history behind it which defied anything he dared to or could imagine.

"It's an antique," a voice rang out behind him, in English. "For protection," the voice continued.

Carl turned around, noting a large-nosed 15 year old kid who carried himself off like a man. In his arm was a computer, the tape and invoice on it reading 'H. Steiner'. Strapped to his belt was a Colt 45 pistol.

"Protection?" Carl asked in as non-Cop a voice as he could come up with. "From who?" he said, turning around.

"Asshole like you, Carl?" the gun-toting computer geek said without a tinge of hesitation or fear.

"And you are?" Carl asked, seeing before him something interesting in the kid's face. Someone whose destiny was somewhere a lot bigger and bolder than Bluewater

"Bill McClure's brother."

"And 'Bill McClure's brother', what did Bill McClure say about me?" Carl sucked up his gut and put a swagger in his step. With each inch taller he made himself feel, Carl saw that this punk geek 'deputy' shrunk a foot shorter. "I didn't hear you, 'Bill's brother'. What did Bill say about me?"

“That you should...you...should eh...” the geeky kid stammered out.

“That I should what!” Carl said, then commanded, then yelled, taking hold of the Nazi rifle and aiming it at the lad’s head. Taking delight in seeing the deputy geek shiver in fear then urinate into his trousers. “Dumbass Brother Bill said that I should fucking what!!!”

“Leave here and go back to where you belong,” Hans requested, kindly, appearing at the door. “Please”, he said. He held out his firm hand, asking Carl to give him back the rifle. Begging for it, but from a source of intelligence rather than desperation.

The ‘what to do with all of this’ scenerios ran through Carl’s head. It was nothing like anything he had seen in any film at the Cineplexes in Toronto or Vancouver. Or even the screenplays he tried to write himself during his ‘writer’ stage. No, this was real life, with real people and real agendas. He felt his mother asking him to do the Noble thing, and his departed ‘you never made anything of yourself while I was alive’ father commanding him to do a Big thing. Both of his hands felt to be moved by puppeteers elsewhere, as Carl watched himself put the German Army rifle down, hold his head up high, and walk out the door. Leaving his own trousers, for now anyway, unsoiled.

CHAPTER 8

Doctor Tully’s lower jaw hung three inches below his upper lip, a mouthful of awe-strook crystal-clear white teeth inside. “You was sayin’ what, Doc?” William McClure Sr. asked regarding the latest MRI on his thorax, abdomen and head.

“It’s impossible!” Tully said. “It’s great news, but it’s---“

“---The power of fucking prayer, goddamn,” Will boasted from atop his own two feet, his biological vitality regained, he spiritual health restored by having his two sons next to him.

“It could be a lab mistake. You had metastatic cancer! In your liver, lungs and brain.” Tully said as he turned around to look at the screen again. “We have to be sure this wasn’t a mistake in the records.”

“I’m sure enough,” Will said as son John handed him his spur-bearing footwear and other son Bill gave him his hat. He effortlessly slipped on the boots and laid the weather-beaten stetson crown atop his head. He gently pushed aside the wheelchair offered by the ‘bitch nurse’ and apologized to her for the trouble he’d caused her.

“It could be a false positive,” Tully begged, as he overheard yet another quip of disrespect for him from the nurses at the main station.

“I’m positive enough,” William proclaimed in a voice free of coughs, death rattles and blood. “Positive that you docs like you know as much about medicine as John knows about cows and Bill knows about computers!”

“And that someone who brought that peppermint flavored apple strudel to you knows he’s practicing medicine without a licence!” the man in the very clean, sterile white lab coat asserted. “Someone who’s doing more harm than good,” he continued from a deeper, less judgmental place.

John, Bill and Will froze. They looked at each other, neither saying what they were really thinking. They all knew Hans has a history, but such things were in the past. Like Will’s having an affair with two women while faithfully married to the boys’ mother. Like Bill Jr. harboring perhaps a bit too much affinity for the clothes in his mother’s closet than he could admit to anyone, even his four legged companions. Like John’s skills at a computer which, on a good day, were borderline and on a bad day could land him in jail and the family in the poorhouse. No, Hans had his reasons for keeping a German Army Rifle around for ‘protection’, and saying when asked ‘we all did what we had to do for the common good, often at the price of our own survival’ when asked about the War.

“Well?” Tully asked, knowing fully well that Will and his boys were hiding something that had to at one time be uncovered. “What do you want to do? What about your wife, Will. You made me not tell her that you were in the hospital dying. What are YOU going to tell her now? About this...And about everything that someone is going to find out some day anyway.”

Will took his time to formulate the words. “I’ll tell her that all is good at home. And that she can stay with her sister working in the fishing lodge for another few weeks. If she wants to.”

With that, Will led his 15 and 17 year old men out the door. Tully stood there with his hand up his ass, alone. But not for long. The man who he requested to see came up to him, ten minutes early. “You look too intelligent be a patrol Cop, Officer Stiller,” he said as he snuck him a folder from under his lab coat. “Too smart for this two-bit mill town.”

“You too, doc,” Carl answered, giving Tully the respect he never got from any of his subordinates, or superiors. “Shalom,” the young RCMP Crusader said as his farewell words.

Tully said nothing back, but felt much more. He had ignored the quarter of his background which was Jewish for two quarters of a century, having been brought up Catholic and marrying a Pentecostal wife. He found himself vindicated, healed, and on the way Upward to someplace...important.

CHAPTER 9

Constable Carl Stiller looked at the death certificate, contemplating the finality of it all. The writing on it was elevated, as was the case in all historically important documents. As was the name written in scripted ink for the deceased. “Solomon Hershel Stiller” jumped off the page to his face as he read it once again, tilting the document so that the sun above the clouds could illuminate it even more intensely. The light penetrated through the window of the plane with a hot ray that roasted the palm of his sweat-soaked hand. He was determined to not let it shake. Uncle Sol, and Carl’s departed father, would think so little of him if he did. The passing of Uncle Sol was something that had to happen. A perhaps Divinely-inspired solution to a complex problem for Carl, as well as Uncle Sol. Particularly if what Carl suspected was actually true.

“Your father?” the Priest seated next to Stiller asked in a French accent far more Quebequa than Parisian.

Carl nodded his head in the affirmative, allowing sorrow to fill his eyes. Forcing it to, as the sight of a Man of the Cloth still immobilized his ability to lie effectively. He felt uneasy, worried that the untruths he was harboring would come out. Most particularly because the Padre spotted the RCMP badge under his coat, its nametag and number very readable.

The priest said nothing with his mouth, but everything with his eyes. He answered Constable Stiller’s worried look and hidden ambitions with a gift. A small Bible, bound in leather, a Mass Card in it. He crossed himself, then invited Carl to do the same. Carl did so, thinking that God would forgive him for masquerading as a Christian, yet again. After all, he was doing God’s work, nearly 50 years after the Creator had neglected to do so.

The priest, apparently a very traditional Catholic, said a prayer in Latin over the death certificate, insuring that the departed was in Heaven. Little did the Good Father know that for Uncle Sol there was no heaven, as he was a Jew. And for Carl Stiller there was no Paradise either, as Uncle Sol’s death was a fabrication. Designed to allow him leave time from duty in Bluewater with no questions asked, and perhaps a way to make a quick getaway from the taxman and lingering creditors for Old Uncle Sol in Toronto, should he wish to declare himself dead to better look after his real business interests.

Hunch-backed in the manner of D.A. Adam Schiff from an old Law and Order episode, with an even more gravelly voice, Uncle Sol seemed smaller than Carl remembered him as the ‘never-going-to-be-retired’ Pharmaceutical Executive drew down the shades of the large window which normally illuminated his extra-large size office and adjoining laboratory. Maybe it from three decades of defiantly trying to stand up tall to a world that kept trying to make him bow down and die. Or maybe it was Carl, who found himself seeing his uncle’s office as being so much smaller than he remembered it, as he now per the city around it. He presented his Uncle with the death certificate he had

secretly confiscated at the hospital and masterfully forged in the Bluewater apartment he swore he would never call home. “Is this an order from the young Turks who now think they are my bosses, or a request to retire from your mother?” Sol smiled, sadly, his mind drifting elsewhere very fast, and elusively.

“She still likes you,” Carl offered. “Loves you, actually. As much as when my father was still alive, to tell you the truth of the matter.”

“I was too old for her then, and I’m too old for her now,” Sol confessed, staring into the mind and soul of his nephew. “And you, ‘Constable Stiller’, seem to be a lot more clever, and maybe smart, than the last time I saw you,” he said with a complimentary tone that made Carl smile. “When was that last time I saw you anyway?”

“When you bailed me out of jail, got the charges expunged, and told me I was a loser who wouldn’t amount to anything on either side of the law,” Carl replied.

“Yes, yes, indeed,” Sol said, patting Carl on the shoulder, leading him to his desk, and the matter at hand. He smelled the sample of ‘peppermint tea’, reconfirmed its identity from the spectrophotometer and amino acid analyzer. “Yes, this is it,” he said with gleeful assurance. “Good work, Inspector, no, Police Commissioner, no Health Commissioner Stiller.”

“Just doing my job, and family duties,” Carl smiled snidely.

Sol looked over the rest of the documents, his stare once again drawn to the face of the man thinking he was hiding from view in the faded picture of the 2003 Indian powwow. “Yes, that is him,” CEO he affirmed with an Ancient sorrow and lingering bitterness. “Necessary work, Carl,” he continued, with a thick Yiddish accent. “A mitsfa you have given to me. Your father. And your people. Our people.”

“He calls himself Hans,” Carl said proudly.

“As he did then too,” Sol said, pulling out a file from a draw which he kept locked except on special occasions. “Hans Edelmann.” Sol’s eyes seemed fixed on the old photo of young Hans in the draw like it was that of a demon.

“What did he do?” Carl asked, noting how well the SS uniform fit around young Hans’ broad shoulders and confident eyes in the composite sketch Sol had been holding onto for the better part of half a century. Carl waited for his uncle to relate horror stories about how many Jews, Gypsies or Homosexuals old Hans had shot in the head, and how cleverly he had evaded capture and detection by the War Crimes Commissions. Sol remained silent, however, causing Carl to gaze again at the photo and seeing himself in that uniform, with a few modifications of the insignia of course. Carl recalled how a Buddhist vegan Dominatrix girlfriend of his once said, ‘say what you will about the Nazi’s but they sang great marching songs and had bitchin’ uniforms.’ He pondered what kind of accolades and bitchin’ outfits he could be allowed to enjoy once Hans was

arrested. He felt his Uncle Sol's oversized brown eyes, more ancient than ever, with that 'very hidden agenda' look which everyone on his father's side of the family had, but never quite was able to pass down to him.

"I'll need witnesses, and evidence, for what he did," Carl said proudly.

"Not yet," Sol smiled, smelling the peppermint tea, gazing again at the spectrophotometer data, stroking his chin while perusing the files from Doctor Tully as to what the potion did, or didn't do.

Carl felt excluded, once again, from family affairs to which he thought he had a right to know about. He knew that half of his family became medical scientists and the other half became drug merchants. He knew that they survived the bust of the 80s better than anyone else, and flourished during the 90s recession. He knew that new diseases mysteriously appeared in the world just prior to a pharmaceutical company 'miraculously' discovered a cure. He knew that cures that were not profitable for the 'system' were discredited in the scientific literature with academic elegance and the lay press with colorfully-cool quips. He knew that Uncle Sol was disappointed over Carl got booted out of the Biochemistry Graduate Program at U of T for selling cheap drugs to easy women, and would never forgive him for slipping out too much information his family's Pharmaceutical Industry. But he knew that Uncle Sol saw in this peppermint tea, something that would do more than 'calm the nerves' for pregnant Half-Breed Western Canadian Princesses. He pushed his mind into the latent biomedical gear he thought he had lost, advancing his ideas and propositions. "From what I can make of it, the active ingredient is something that inactivates expression of the P54 gene and the 37K and 51K reactive glial proteins that unlocks the genetic helix and makes cells divide, making them able to make their own rules and penetrate any walls. A selective anti-cancer drug that can penetrate even through the blood brain barrier into the CNS. And in smaller doses, cause abortive effects on fetal tissue which---"

"---Shh!" Uncle Sol interrupted, holding his finger up to his nose, hearing the alluring and commanding rhythm of high heels in the hallway outside. Then a knock on the door. Then an authoritative, perky "Doctor Stiller?"

"Which will be you, someday soon!" Sol said proudly to his nephew as he whisked Carl out the back door.

"R and D meeting in fifteen minutes with the investors. You said it was very important," the voice continued. A wave of guilt and fear overtook Sol's face, as if he was eight again caught with both hands in the cookie jar, about to have each of them cut off. Carl offered him the death certificate. Sol declined, for now.

"Doctor Stiller," the subordinate perky skirt repeated, but in the mannerism of an Inspector, Mother or Deity, an executioner behind her ready to chop off not only the heads of those who disobeyed but the balls as well.

Uncle and nephew both felt themselves bonded by mutual desperation, for reasons neither of them dared to voice, but which would require another several steps in the biochemical reactions brewing in their heads to go ahead on schedule, and with 100% successful yield as the end result.

“Papa Jacob” Stiller had been in the pharmaceutical business since the days when prednisone was considered a new wonder drug and penicillin was the most powerful antibiotic on the hospital shelf. Of late, he had been suffering from Alzheimer’s disease, but the board at Stiller Pharmaceuticals insisted he keep his position, office, and, as long as he didn’t get involved in any real business decisions, dignity. He was glad to see his grandson Carl, and greeted him with a big Hassidic hug each time he introduced himself. Such an event took place every fifteen minutes, as the once smart and now perhaps only wise old man had no memory for anything that happened more than twenty minutes ago. However, his recollection of things in the past was painfully impeccable and assertively accurate. Particularly when it came to Sergeant Hans Edelman.

SPELL CHECK FROM HERE....

“He was an orderly who was smarter than any doctor in the camps, and who because of such should have been more compassionate,” Papa Jacob said as he poured a glass of Manichewitz wine into Carl’s glass with an arm still bearing a number burnt into it.

“What did he do?” Carl asked.

“If you ask anyone who was a patient, horrible things. If you ask anyone who is a scientist, brilliant ones,” he answered. “But...” he continued, his body frozen, his mind traveling to places Carl was told about but never really felt.

“But what?” Carl asked.

“He did do some good, for some people, when he could, sometimes,” the Old Man confessed. He pushed himself up from his chair with his gold-plated cane and limped to the window, staring down at the city below him. “He disappeared after the War with valuable information and new medications that were earth shattering at the time. Some which we Jews who were branded criminals before the War stole, just after the SS left the Camps and before the Allies liberated us. But the rest of the miracle cures those brilliant monsters learned while they broke or fixed our bodies,...hmmm.”

“He kept for himself?” Carl asked.

“And is going to sell to others. Or sold already to the Communists.” Papa Jacob growled, absorbed with the ghosts in front of his fire-breathing, worn out eyes.

Carl put together that this was why Stiller Industries rose from a nothing herbal company in 1944 to a major player in the medical-pharmaceutical industrial complex three years

later. Why the company was always ahead of medical marvels produced in university laboratories. And why he was told to shut up and be respectful of others whenever he asked his elderly relatives what they did in the War. And why Carl's mother made a bee-line for Vancouver as soon as his physician father started coming home with more expensive Chanikah gifts than any other doctors in Toronto General could afford to buy.

"Doctor Hans" must suffer, and die, Papa Jacob said. "No matter who says differently," he continued, sneering at Uncle Sol outside the main door as he escorted a congregation of slickly dressed Asians out to their German-made BMW limo.

"I'll get him, Papa Jacob. I'll bring Doc Hans to justice." Carl promised the old man. He laid his hand on the Patriarch's shoulder and felt it to be brittle, yet strong.

Papa Jacob patted Carl on the forearm with pride. "This will make our family proud, and rich, Heinrick," he said with renewed vitality. He turned around and looked straight into Carl's face with a warm grin, putting a fistful of dollars in his pocket. "And I insist that you take this. Buy your wife a nice dinner after you meet with President Eisenhower in Washington. A big steak for her, and an extra large ice cream Sundae for that new son of yours. What was his name, Carl?"

"Yes, Papa," Carl smiled back, trying his best to imitate his father's gestures behind a forced smile.

"That lad Carl is going to be a great man someday," prophesized, shaking his index finger in the manner of a rabbi. "Because he'll be able to twist and redefine the law, where we were only able to break it or work our way around it."

Carl left the old man in the 1950s. He considered asking Uncle Sol or even Doc Hans if there was a drug to make his brain function in the here and now. But even if Stiller Pharmaceutical's newest drug, 'memory brain cell regeneration factor', aka MBCRF did work, it would be dis-service to use it on Papa Jacob. Unless of course Carl had control of its use, distribution and profit structure. Such is what Papa Jacob would have wanted, and deserved. Enough of a rationalization for Carl to expand his ambitions with regard to what he wanted, and now deserved.

CHAPTER 10

Carl spent the rest of his time during his 'compassionate leave' very discompassionately and creatively extracting information about Doc Hans from witnesses he could find in Toronto and Montreal. From Alzheimer's patient Irving Schwartz, he recorded his account and forged a very convincing signature on the paper verifying that Mister Schwartz was of sound mind and body. From now-blind Rachel Korinski, he obtained a sworn statement that she recognized a recent photograph of him as being the young man who raped her. From stroke victim Lena Ulmann, a 'look' from her face at the photo was blown into a written account of the atrocities Hans had committed, built up from and

traceable to the facts Papa Jacob and Uncle Sol had recorded. It was the way justice worked, after all. In their less-than-legal business endeavors, every conviction laid upon the Stiller family, including the one laid upon Carl, was a fabrication or embellishment by a business competitor's lawyer or a cop out to score a conviction. That was how justice, as well as most research science, worked. You have a hunch, or an Agenda, then twist the facts around to the most believable story possible. Truth was a relative term, to be used in the service of those considered worthy relatives.

Of course, Carl did heed some of Uncle Sol's advise. Arresting Doc Hans would be delayed, until the right time. There were still many medical miracles which the Old Coot had in his lab books from the War, and probably many more he had developed since that time. Carl would need an assistant in nailing Doc Hans' palms to the wall while he pocketed, for the greater good, what the eccentric genius madman had developed between his ears. That assistant had a large jelly donut stuck into his mouth as Carl's bus pulled into the Tim Horton's parking lot and he brought his evidence-stuffed bags inside to call a cab.

"Had a nice trip, Constable Stiller?" Sergeant Johnson asked of Carl in a cordial 'Uncle Jack' tone as he wiped the grape jelly and powdered sugar off the margins of his gray-going-on-white mustache.

"Sorry about being back late," Carl replied, helping himself to a seat in front of the Marshall of the town he knew now he would be leaving, in glory, perhaps as early as New Years. "Had some legal family business to tend to that I didn't expect," he related as he pointed to the the latest 'non-person' high school kid he had intimidated, now at the counter. He commanding his eager, WASP servant with his finger to bring him a double glazed with sprinkles and large coffee.

"And speaking of legal business," Uncle Jack said. He stood up and pulled out an envelope, handing it to Carl. Informing the terrified kid at the counter to hold off on his waiter duties. In a very Seargently motion with his stubby fingers, Johnson 'requested' Carl to open the envelope.

Carl proceeded to do so. Another one of Uncle Jack's surprise invitations to a free turkey dinner, or a BYOB bachelor party for a member of the detachment who was getting hitched. The old fart always acted most official when he was about to become more familiar, and potentially cooperative.

Carl pretended to be surprised as he opened up the envelope, and was so. His mouth dropped as he read the legalese text, and the subtext between the lines.

"It's a restraining order for you to not come within fifty feet of Doc Hans," Johnson stated as anything but an Uncle. "You've been served," he continued, walking out the door.

Carl looked around him at the faces in the town that now considered him more of a criminal than Hans or anyone else could be, to them anyway. They all turned away from him, excepting for the kid waiter. "You been served," he smiled, laying the donuts and coffee in front of him. Tempted to accidentally spill the hot brew on the Constable's lap, but discouraged to do so by Carl moving his hand towards the handle of his service revolver.

The kid pulled away, but Carl knew that his survival, and success, in the Mission at hand depended on him sleeping with one eye opened, or not at all.

CHAPTER 11

Bill McClure parked his truck just in front of the liquor store, using whatever discipline he had to not go in to make a purchase. Even if he wanted to, he couldn't, having just purchased a badly needed new chain for his saw and duct tape to repair the split hand on his axe. The rest of the money he had collected for chopping wood, repairing fences and preg-checking cows for the week was all gone, poured into making his hunk of motorized metal as mobile, and legal, as possible. Word was that 'Constable Carl' was on the warpath, handing out tickets to everyone for even the most minor violations. Most of the shops were on their best behaviors, the pavement in front of them cleared of ice, the trash in their bins so tightly wrapped that even a rat with the size of brother John's nose couldn't smell out where the best eats were dumped.

The moon was full, and the streets empty. Bill felt that the town belonged to him, and his imaginations. He looked over the mountains and valleys illuminated by the bright ball in the sky and imagined what it must have been like before the plow, bulldozer or chainsaw came to bring order to it. He imagined himself riding through fenceless meadows, darting around the trees, stopped only by hitting a river, or an Indian maiden by the shore inviting him to 'set a spell' in sensuous Shuswap or colorfully-lyrical Cree. Thoughts of Leonie came to him, once again. Particularly as the manikin in the General Store window seemed to whisper her name. The 'lady in the window' had blonde hair and brown eyes, with a WASPish chiseled chin but everything below her waist was Leonie. Bill found himself asking where she was, how she was doing, and who she was doing it with, but the Lady in the Window didn't answer. She just stood there, fashionably bending her right arm at the elbow, its hand placed confidently on her right hip. Her long legs covered with shimmering white hosiery, punctuated by pointed tan-shoes bearing a 4 inch stiletto heel that flowed its way into a tip thinner than a delicate pinky finger. Around her waist was draped a brown skirt curving its way down to the upper portion of her knees, tilting outwardly for the last four inches, embellishing the hips above and the calves below. Atop the thick black belt that shrink in her waist was a long sleeved satin brown blouse which clipped closed just above the wrist, opening into a tastefully wide collar that made her cup B breasts seem like a D, or at least a size C, with not a lump of sagginess to it.

Bill remembered what Leonie looked like in an outfit just like it, and what someone else looked like it in it when she went into town to pick up supplies on an afternoon he told no one about, except one of the visiting Docs at the hospital on that night when he was tired, lonely, and needed to talk to SOMEone he could trust. He tried to talk to Leonie about the growing need to get 'inside her skirt', and to explain why her clothes smelled 'sweaty' after she got home, and to the best of his memory, at least when he was sober, he only inferred it.

The Lady in the Window beckoned Bill to pay attention to her, and she was irresistible. As was the need to get 'inside her skirt'. Seeing that no one 'real' was around, Bill felt safe enough to test the waters. To see if he was cured, or incurable. He let his left hand slip over his left hip, and stepped up three inches from the two-inch cowboy heel he was wearing. He imagined her skirt around his thighs, her hosiery tingling the hairless skin on his shaved legs. Her long blonde hair falling down around his tight shoulders making them relax and feel natural within himself. He found himself smiling, tasting lip stick around his mouth and feeling earrings gently pulling down the lobes of his ears, said ears hearing very distinctly---

"One in ten guys have tried it or like it," a frighteningly familiar voice from behind whispered. "Two in ten in places where the streets don't roll up at sundown," he continued.

Bill turned around, as 'manly' as he could and saw Carl's face lit up by the moonlight. His truck with four ticketed repairs that didn't get done brightly illuminated by a streetlamp, next to a sign reading 'No Parking Anytime---Loading Zone.'

Bill felt Carl to be the devil himself, or perhaps God out to get him for the Sin which could not be confessed to man, woman or Pastor. How did he know about Bill's secret? The Doc at the hospital was bound by the Hippocratic Oath, and as for Leonie, she pledged on her Ancestor's Souls that she would stay silent about anything Bill 'said or didn't say' to her. If the truth, or even rumor, got out, it would destroy Bill's reputation His relationship with his father. And his mother's heart. Even brother John would feel extreme disappointment in him, though it would pass in five, ten or fifty years or so.

"What do you want?" Bill asked the twenty-something out of town Cop who seemed more resolute than anyone in town he ever knew was.

Carl pulled out a picture of Hans in the present as an Honorary Native Shamen, and a sketch of him in the past as a less than honorable Nazi doctor.

"It's just a rumor," Bill said. "And even if he was there, he 'did what he had to do to survive and for—"

"...for the common good, which was often very, very dangerous" Carl said as Bill did, but with a mocking German accent, punctuated by a Sieg Heil.

Bill hesitated. Carl waited. The spirit-broken Broke-backed Cowboy took another look at the pictures of Hans' past. Of who he was, and photos of what he did to Jewish Prisoners, at least according to Carl. "Even if he was there, he's a different man now. Do you know how much good he has done for everyone in this town?"

"Do you know how much HARM he can do? And how much MORE good you and me can do if we use ALL of his miraculous secrets, for a greater good?" Carl offered.

"Miraculous secrets?" Bill let fall from his mouth as a half question, and challenge.

"Your father is alive, when he was supposed to be dead, Bill."

"And he's going to STAY alive, as long as I have anything to say about it, 'Carl'!"

"No problem with that, unless you, eh...you know."

"He's been like a father to me! And a friend. Didn't you ever have a father who was also a friend!"

"That is irrelevant to this discussion, Mister McClure," Carl answered, clamming up, hiding something behind his lips.

"I don't think so, 'Constable Stiller'," Bill growled back, stepping boldly towards him, his proudly erect with a fire flowing through it worthy of both genders. "I think that you have an axe to grind here because maybe someone else cut off yer balls someplace else."

"You're talking to a Police Officer!" Stiller barked, backing up towards the curve, nearly falling into the gutter.

"I'm talking to an asshole, and an idiot," Bill replied in a hushed Eastwood-tonian growl. He raised his hand, preparing to push the smart-assed cocksucking newby Cop all the way back to Toronto. "Who's trying to fuck up this town because his own life is fucked up. Who fucked up my Leonie's chance to have a baby that she wanted to have! And deserved to have!" he continued, pushing Carl against the wall across the street, grabbing his collar, staring straight into his 'everseeing' investigative eyes, just as the Officer reached into his coat.

Bill pulled back, hoping that Carl would pull a gun on him. Anticipating that the Toronto cry-baby would wet his striped trousers before he could get off a single shot. Never anticipating the full power of the weapon Stiller retrieved from his breast pocket.

"It was him!" Constable Stiller asserted, forcing Bill to look at another photo of Hans as a scientist. Along with a sample from the here and now of the 'peppermint tea' which Bill's father had been 'saved' by, for the moment anyway. Along with a medical report signed by Doc Tully saying that Leonie aborted due to being intoxicated by force, with

medical complications that were permanent, and most probably life-threatening the next time her not-yet-twenty-year-old uterus decided to have a period.

“They had to ship her out of town to have the surgery,” Stiller said. “She’s not the same, and never will be.”

“But my father, he’s doing fine...And the other patients who.”

“They had cancer. To Doc Hans they are obedient lab rats, nothing more, Bill.”

Bill was at a loss for words, thoughts and handleable feelings. Within the space of three minutes and a few more pieces of hard evidence on very official looking paper, he lost faith in everything and everyone. Except of course his new ally, Carl, in a fight to rid his town of a Savior who was perhaps the anti-Christ.

CHAPTER 12

Dr. Tully knew that he shouldn’t have let Carl Stiller embellish his medical records. Something in his gut and his head told him it was wrong to fabricate the biomedically-convincing sci-fi account of Leonie having complications due to her drug-induced abortion which required extensive surgery, and a possible lifetime of sterility as the result of such. But bigger issues were at stake, complicated ones. The biggest and most complicated issue was clearly visible across the street, teaching a dog owner how to find a person inside the fear-biter canine he could bond with, and assisting the German Shepherd-Dobie mix in seeing a friend inside the human who, on paper anyway, owned him. From anyone’s perspective today, right now, Old Hans was a cross between Santa Clause, Buddha and Mahatma Ghandi, to the human and canine world alike.

“You know, Hitler loved animals too,” Carl reminded Tully over a table of domestically-cooked burgers and imported Matza ball soup over a private lunch in his third story office, the tallest building in town. “He used to have conferences at his Winter Chalet about how to exterminate our people while forbidding anyone to so much as throw a rock at any of the wildlife in the forest around it.”

Dr. Tully remembered the stories and the images. He recalled the university project he was assigned in psych class when he drew the straw of having to do an analysis of Hitler. Reading Mein Kampf and remembering the struggles of the writer rather than the thousands of grammatical mistakes and ethics miscalculations before the war for the ‘dignity of the German people’ started. The home movies of Adolf smiling with the children and the dogs when the war he started in their honor was going well. And the way he killed his own people mercilessly when it was going badly, including poisoning children and his own dogs in his Bunker. Tully could feel Constable Stiller reading his thoughts, and feelings.

“So?” Carl asked. “How do we bring down the bad guy while at the same time, raising up the good guys?”

“And we’re the good guys?” Tully challenged, feeling the meat in the matza soup to be more salty than he remembered it was in his childhood, feeling the heartburn coming up from the portion of it he had already swallowed with delight previously.

Carl leaned in towards Tully, lowering his voice, looking around the room in the manner of a spy trying to assess where the hidden microphones were. “I’m just a guy who wants to do right by the legal system,” he said with an Al Pacino-like voice and matching hand gestures. “And you’re just a guy who wants to do right by the medical system,” he continued in a Deniro-esque growl under a warm, self-decieved ‘deal that you can’t refuse’ smile. He took out a cigar, flicked the switch on a Jersey-esche Stripper Bar lighter and leaned back like Tony Soprano, puffing smoke circles into the air.

Tully noted even more pathology between the ears in Carl than ever. These act-outs weren’t just the result of unconscious copying of the ‘Heat’, ‘Goodfellas’ and ‘Soprano’ flicks he rented constantly from the video store. They were becoming real, and Carl was becoming something very different than Constable Stiller. Still, he was an officer of the law. And he knew influential people in the Pharmaceutical Industry in Toronto. And he was a fellow Jew.

“What would happen if, say, some of Doc Hans’ patients were to develop complications that the old fart never planned on?” Carl waxed on in an ultra-hushed Canadianized ‘Hannibal Lecter’ diction.

“I thought you wanted me, or someone else, to go to his hideout and find out what ‘wonder drugs’ he’s got, and what he’s working on?” Tully asked.

“Already taken care of,” Carl proclaimed with a Sherlock Holmesian hunch, trading his cigar for a pipe as he paced. Carl said. “But we need something that’s a tad less ‘elementary’ in approach, and effect, my good doctor.”

“Something like someone somehow secretly making Doc Hans’ most loyal patients sicker than they are?” Tully asked. He waited for the next character to waltz into Constable Stiller’s ego-inflated head, and probably inferiority-plagued soul. “But nothing that could endanger their lives, of course,” he answered with a ‘House’ like ‘Wilson’ tone.

On cue from his new director, Carl developed a limp, a flippant puttering of the lips, and aimed his colorfully-cutting remarks with a mocking lisp. “High Priest Tully. That white coat makes you look so pure and virgin. When you were a kid you probably played in the mud with plastic gloves on. And actually believed that George Washington never told a lie. ‘I cannot tell a lie. I cut down the cherry tree’. Just like you when you got those straight As at UBC after almost washing out of Ross University in the Caribbean. Hard work, clean thoughts, and being sure that after you cut the cherry tree down, you ate all the evidence and burned the wood, right?”

‘Constable House’s’ banter was annoying, but correct. Maybe it was a bluff, or a lucky guess, but it was accurate enough. Tully knew that he himself had cheated his way up more than one biomedical ladder, burying the evidence as he went. And Carl, as himself as well as the characters overtaking him, was very good at digging things up. Again, Tully felt Carl and his army of media-sleuth personas seeing deeper and deeper into him. “Better to be on the winning side,” Tully thought to himself. Or at least the side that will survive, he concluded.

CHAPTER 13

Following his Government Insurance mandated check up at the hospital with Doctor Tully, being warned to not eat fatty food, and gobbling down two double cheese burgers he had at the Hospital lunch counter despite the strict orders to stay away from fatty fried foods, Will McClure I came home to a house full of animals. “They found me outside my sister’s fishing lodge up north” wife Mandi said of the five stray cats she brought home in the inflated suitcases. Her new feline companions inhabited every corner of the kitchen, the most friendly of them purring while seated on Will’s chair. “They’ll be no trouble,” she smiled.

The fifty-year-experienced veteran rancher took a deep breath, tightly shut his lips, and walked past his wife as she offered him a pie she had just baked after arriving that morning. “Cherry and rubarb?” she said to him by way of explanation. “I guess he had a big lunch,” Mandi continued, apologetically, to John as he ambled in from the computer room.

John looked down the hallway as Will entered ‘the porcelain throne library’, and shut the door behind him, concerned about something other than the additional five houseguests. His mother picked up one of the felines, showing off its whiskers, allergy-free hair, and smile. “I haven’t been home in a two months, John,” she inquired. “Is something wrong? Is something wrong with me?” she asked, turning the blame on herself, once again, for all the problems that plagued the ranch, the boys, and Will’s escalating destructive behavior towards others, and himself.

“It’s not you, Mom. It’s him,” John said, as he heard the first vomit come out of Will’s mouth. Then the first flush. Then smelled blood coming out with the second upchuck, and the flush afterwards. And the coughing that sounded like it came from the depths of his lungs rather than the back of his throat.

“The booze again,” Mandi grunted, taking a seat at the table. “I want to go help him, but I shouldn’t. I’m not supposed to enable him, you know,” she said. “I have to let him hit rock bottom if he’s going to get up again. That’s why I left, and stayed away when he told me to. And why I’m telling you and your brother now to---“

“----Shit! Fuck!” John said, hearing something from the bathroom with his finely tuned ears that his mother and brother thankfully couldn’t.

“What the hell did you say to me!” Mandi blasted out.

The fourth flush brought Will down to the floor in a thud that even the runty deaf cat could hear. Mandi and John rushed to the door, finding it locked, blood spilling out from under the door.

“What the hell is---Will!” Mandi screamed out. “Open the door.”

“He can’t.” John said.

“He won’t!” Mandi insisted.

John heard the death rattle from the lungs. It loosened his tongue, his self-taught medical lingo, speaking things he was sworn to never say in front of his mother. “Expiratory wheezes, metastasis probably in the lower left and right lung lobes. Stage 3 neoplasm. Tumors recurring in the mouth, intestine, liver and...” John could feel the seizures coming back, echoing from his father’s body onto the door, and into every bone in the 15 year old geek’s hyperallergic body.

John pulled the family shotgun off the wall and rammed its butt into the door.

“Cancer?” Mandi exclaimed as saw the man she once loved and learned to hate lying on the floor trembling in an uncontrollable seizure, diminished by something from a baggie containing German writing with European 7s on it which John pulled out of his pocket and slipped under his father’s tongue. It brought the violent seizures into a controllable tremor. He was conscious of his environment again, but also of his pain, and the shadow of death around him as he shook his shaking fist at the heavens, giving its Boss the finger. “I didn’t know he had cancer” Mandi gasped, loud enough for only her son to hear.

“He didn’t want you to,” John answered, lifting his father into the cat-hair-coated back seat of his mother’s Toyota three and a half cylinder junk-mobile, praying that he and its ailing passenger would make it into town without dying.

CHAPTER 14

Having been tied up with his appointed rounds and out of range from his cell, a device he didn’t know how to answer even when it was in his hand, Bill McClure arrived at the ER just after his father was stabilized, evaluated, then sedated. He stared in disbelief and anger at the man who was always bigger, stronger and bolder than he ever was. Tully strolled over, looked at his chart, and took notes, saying nothing. Feeling less, at least as

Bill saw and felt it. “The treatment he was getting was supposed to be working,” Bill said. “Why isn’t it?”

“I don’t know,” Tully replied, looking at his chart. “But maybe I can figure it out now,” he said, eyes fixed on the photographs and baggies in Bill’s backpack than in his patient’s well being.

Bill handed over the pack, being sure that the nurses didn’t notice, and his father’s eyes were indeed closed.

“You did the right thing here,” Tully said, patting Bill on the shoulder.

Bill felt like the hand of death had touched him. Though he did intend to do ‘What Jesus would have done’, it felt like he was a dedicated apprentice to Judas, or the devil.

“It looks like it’s all here,” Tully said of the photographs Bill took of the files Hans had stored in the rooms he requested that no one enter in his unfindable and sometimes-locked cabin. And of the small samples of medical powers and nectars stolen in amounts just large enough to be analyzed by small enough to not be noticed by their preparer, or perhaps discoverer. “Yes. All of it’s here. The answers we need.”

“Except for that patient of yours who you paid to meet Doc Hans in town to ‘mentor’ him about how to treat his dog while I was stealing and snooping on his stuff,” Bill protested. “I deserve to know who that patient was.”

“You deserve to NOT know,” Tully warned, turning to John with a look of concern which was as human and caring as any Hans had ever projected. “This thing with Hans is ...complicated.”

“Complicated that can’t be explained by something simple is convoluted. And a man who can’t say what kind of complicated he’s involved in is no man at all,” Bill asserted.

“A line from one of those Old Westerns where the good guys always win,” Tully said with fond but seldomly-expressed remembrance. “Guess you remember who said that and exactly what he was wearing at the time.”

“That I do, Doc,” Bill said. “Brown boots, checkered shirt, off white coat, and an honest smile. At my grade 8 graduation ceremony.”

Bill watched as Tully recalled that it was he who delivered the prophetic words in a less complicated time, at least for him. He waited for the reminder to find its way into Tully’s troubled soul and scheming mind. The final utterance was delivered with carefully and caringly. “It’s complicated, Bill.”

Tully walked away with a doctorly stride, his back arched, his head erect, his eyes seeing not people but patients. Bill remembered a line from James Arness in “The Way the

West Was Won”, or maybe it was Paul Newman in “Life and Times of Judge Roy Bean.” “A real man doesn’t lie, cheat or apologize,” Bill heard from the voice-box inside his head in a gravelly voice, then remembered that he first heard that immortal and livable credo from an even more cantankerous old fart. His father, Will. Whose life would be spared and whose medical condition would be taken care of only if Bill lied and cheated, which would eventually lead to an apology to someone who he would have to betray, or sell down the river.

He looked out the window at the river below, seeing its waters a muddier than normal. Its flow of waters going more between East and West rather than North to South. The master puppeteer swaggered in, giving him another file.

“Tell whoever you want to about me and the Lady in the Window, and any pictures you or anyone you blackmailed into taking of me when I was ‘experimenting’, like my shrink told me to!!!” John grunted out, refusing to take his next assignment from Constable Carl. “Tell whoever you need to about it all, or make up any story you want about me. That I’m a dope dealer. A child molester. Or a murderer who accidentally gave an overdose of insulin to terminal patients here who mercifully and FINALLY died in this hospital. I quit!”

“Our guys in Toronto need more medical information about what old Man Hans is doing. We need you to get into more of his files, and into his head,” Carl informed John with a slant of the head and hush of the voice that seemed very David-Caruso-ish.

“Why?” John asked, as himself.

“Because it’s the only way I can guarantee that the people you love, and know, will get the medications they needs to stay alive, and the immunity from prosecution to stay out of jail,” the Constable continued.

“Hans couldn’t do what you said he did.” John said, taking the assignment sheet into his shaking hands. “He couldn’t have!”

“The world is---“

“I know, it’s ‘complicated’,” John said sarcastically. An ‘advanced state of expression’ that Leonie said he was not capable of. How John wanted to talk over the whole thing with his horse, and how well he realized that the all-heart, no-brains mare would never really understand. Only his brother John would understand. And it was he who Bill would now have to lie to most, and perhaps betray first.

CHAPTER 15

There it was in front of ‘genius John’s’ tired, bloodshot eyes, laughing at him from its lower position in the universe to his, presumably, higher one, begging the well-read,

cyber-savy geek to do his worst. He held in his sweaty palms and aching hands the instrument to carry out the duel, holding his fire for yet more information regarding his now formidable opponent.

“Go ahead. It just a piece of wood, ya?” Hans smiled as the seventy-something Aryan Shaman swung his own ax, smashing the log under it in five clean pieces that fell to hard ground with a large thud, falling into place with the other sticks of firewood which he had split in record time. “You let piece of wood make you feel like piece of shit,” he advised, continuing gleefully singing Beethoven’s ‘Ode to Joy’ more in the manner of a victorious soldier on the march than an opera singer waling it out to the Creator.

John hesitated again. He looked at the log stump and calculated it once again. Trying to intuit where its lines of least resistance were. Surely his brilliance as a scientist could make up for his lack of strength as a man. As always, Hans was ahead of him.

“You know,” he said as he continued, converting an even bigger piece of wood into burnable lumber without missing a beat to the medley of German Work songs. “The reason why our people were so great, and always will be respected. Is not because of our brilliant minds.”

“Then what?” John asked his medical and, on a good day when the hypothesis that God does exist was more true than not true, spiritual mentor. “What makes ‘our people’ great?”

“Force of Will,” Hans continued, proving his point by blasting the wood into smithereens. “Intension of Will.”

“For the right cause,” John stated, intended more as a challenge than statement.

“Of course,” Hans pontificated. “Our people are the most intelligent. Inevitable result of advanced mind is a giving heart. A heart dedicated to...hmm...” He hesitated, breaking stride, taking a contemplative moment. His attention fixed on the Universe behind his eyes, letting the pieces of data fall where Nature said they must go rather than his own limited perspective. “A heart dedicated to...hmm...”

“Love?” John asked, completing the improve of the mind, a skill which the Old Man had taught him and shared in exchange for John’s respect, and bond-ship. “Yeah, love,” John repeated, contemplating the traditional meaning of the word.

“Yes,” Hans smiled, lifting up another piece of wood, hammering it into submission with his axe. “But love of soul? Love of body? Love of mind? Love of brain? Love for work? Love of thinking? Love FOR thinking?”

Hans continued to rant off philosophical expressions of love which felt like a reading from Zorba the Greek, Last Temptation of Christ and Saint Francis, written by Nikos Kazantzakis, an old Greek author who spent most of his training years in Germany, as

well as his most productive and philosophical later ones. John remembered other passages from Zorba and Last Temptation, thinking and feeling that the head-heavy Hellenic author was speaking to him, yet again. As for the present, he knew that Hans was smart enough to power his cabin with something electric, but wise enough to heat the facility with something that was under his control. Burning dead wood from the forest, or setting fire to stagnant souls in general, was one of Hans' passion, and the intensity of Passion of this Old Fart made Zorba look seem as geeky and lifeless as a Canadian pharmacist on a time release capsule of Ritalin. Especially when it came to Hans' talking about 'our people'.

It wasn't that Hans considered the products of German Culture to be the only expression of human accomplishment. The self-transplanted Bavarian did have many kind things to say about Italian opera, Latino salsa and even Black rap. But, like Einstein, German humor, German music and German literature made the most sense to Hans. They also grew on John, in ways that he didn't realize was happening. He surrendered to it, with a force of Will, letting Hans' singing fill his ears, infuse his gut, and put fire behind his eyes. Muttering along with the words he liked hearing but didn't understand, the geeky 15 year old social misfit grabbed hold of the axe, stared down the stump and let her rip. The first blow shattered more bones in his hand than the wood underneath the head of the axe. The second made a dent. The third split it all the way through, leaving a pile of conquered wood on the ground, and the conqueror with a body shaking in pain, and infused by Passion.

Hans smiled, nodded in approval, and switched songs. A stronger tune with a bold marching beat that demanded nothing but greatness from those who sang it, inviting all who joined to equal spoils in the battle undertaken. John joined in the song, his arms becoming that of a Superman working the most Noble and Strongest of purposes. Each stick of wood was another piece of Promethian fuel to keep the biomedical laboratory moving forward and upward, often in violation of the laws of physics themselves. A magical bonding moment in which old and young merged together in Brotherhood. Putting Beethoven's music and Schiller's words into practice. An eternal moment which ended when Hans heard someone coming over the hill. He put down his axe and grab his gun, aiming it at the intruder.

"Doc Hans!" Bill said from atop his horse. "It's me."

"I know that's you," the old Coot barked out. "But who is behind you? Or to the right. Or to lefts. Or behind me?" Hans wielded his German Army rifle in all four directions, protecting his cabin as a Shaman of old would protect a Sacred Medicine wheel from evil spirits.

Bill dismounted and walked his horse up to the cabin. "Interesting footprints," Hans said of the hoof-marks imprinted into the early winter mud. "Like what someone else left when they came here to read my library, und helped themselves to some 'spices' from my kitchen."

Bill froze, not so much because he was found out by Hans, but was being seen through by John with the kind of rage he never saw in his younger brother.

“You have some questions to ask each other, ya?” Hans asked of the two brothers as they engaged in a pre-shootout showdown with their eyes. “Or maybe for me?” Hans challenged Bill.

There were so many questions to ask, but one was on Bill’s mind more than any other. “What’s in the peppermint strudel that my father got that cured his cancer, then made him sick again?”

Hans laughed like a madman. Possessed by something not of this world, or at least this century. “A better question is what was put into the cheeseburger he had at the hospital after seeing the great Doctor Tully, and before he came home and got sicker than he ever was before.”

Bill started to think about something far more complicated than catching a mad scientist. More complicated than arresting someone who had experimented with people in the Death Camps. More complicated than working for a hot shot Crusader Cop who was, at the end of the day, only working for himself.

“We, all three of us, have done lot of good work here from der time you could walk, ya?” Hans said. “Saved many lives, und improved many more, ya? Mit wide open minds und bold hearts, ya?”

Bill conceded the point. John believed in it.

“Und the world below these mountains is filled mit idiots und assholes in high places who are overpaid to fuck everyone over except themselves, right?” Hans continued.

Bill agreed. John nodded in solemn approval.

“Und despite what der press says, there is a Conspiracy to make 99% of the world slavers and 1% masters. So many of those Masters are Godless Jews who use their shield of having been persecuted to prosecute ALL of us in THEIR courts, mit THEIR laws, to fill THEIR pockets und to feed THEIR inflated egos,” Hans stated as sacred fact. “The ‘good Doctor’ Tully und his puppeteer ‘Constable Carl’ are only small part of the Conspiracy.”

Hans went on about how American Jewish children born after 1950 were taught facts about the Holocaust that they recited but never felt. About how Israel today was in league with the Illuminati and how they treated Arabs in the Middle East worse than Whites treated Indians in the Old West. About Albert Einstein declining the invitation to be the President of Israel because he said that ‘God judges us according to how well we treat Arabs and non-Jews’. About how Hollywood finances are controlled by Jewish lawyers and how Hollywood art is censored by Jewish gatekeepers who rule the

'sensitivity' contests with an iron fist and a manipulative set of rules they change without notice. About how Hitler's being denied access to Art School as a hard working, passion-driven young artist was a crucial miscalculation administered by arrogant, culturally superior 'cool and hip' Jews. About the fact that the Holocaust DID happen to the Jews in WWII, but that many other Holocausts occurred to many other people then and now who are not considered as 'important' or as the 'Chosen People'.

Bill looked at John, asking what he wanted to do about the situation. John asked the same question of Bill. Their conversation was never stated. Besides, it was too complicated to put into words, and certainly too dangerous to say anything about to their bosses, or confidants.

CHAPTER 16

"So, your father kicked you out of your house," Carl said to Bill as he entered the storage shack behind the Chinese restaurant, his saddles, boots and jeans thrown into piles as disorderly as they were odorous.

"I left!" Bill asserted. He unpacked his duffle bag, laying the contents Officer Stiller had requested on the boxes next to the tv which had been assigned the extra job of being tables.

Carl was impressed. Not only with the stash of drugs and photos of notebooks that Bill had stolen from former SS Corporal 'Hans', but by the fact that the 17 going on 7 'lad' had become a man. Leaving his father, his brother, his mother and his horses to serve Global Justice rather than family needs. Constable Stiller never thought Bill had it in him to do so. Then again, Carl didn't have it in himself either. Maybe, he thought, this guy who secretly wanted to be a girl had more balls than he imagined. The next stage of his Mission would prove it, and it was time to see what kind of stuff his new partner Bill had in him. But for the meantime, there was the matter of the latest bootie from the former SS Orderly's hideout to contend with. The formulas seemed familiar to the eye, the odors of the medicinals an odd mixture of things Carl had seen before.

"'New variations mit old themes', the old Dinosaur said when I asked him about it," Bill replied as he peeled off his mud-caked shirt and jeans and quickly made his way to the bathroom, or more accurately, 'toilet closet'. "It took Herr Furher Professor two weeks to make one bottleful of magical medical elixir that only seems to work if you believe in it and are healthy to begin with anyway." Bill continued, in a mocking German accent, "buy if vee had enough chemists making this during the war, our children would be hundred times stronger than der Inferior races, und grow up to be adults who would live three times as long."

Carl shared in Bill's joke, and Mission. He waited for his next question, though, which would be about his own Purpose.

“You said you knew how to keep my father alive, and healthy, Officer Carl,” Bill asserted as he emerged from the bathroom in a voice coming from someone else entirely.

“And you owe him this because he tossed you out of his house?” Carl replied, noting that Bill’s legs, arms and chest were shaved as clean as a baby’s bottom. And on top of them lay wardrobe which was anything but masculine.

“One in ten guys in the real world, and two in ten in important places, right?” Bill said by way of explanation as he floated by Carl, his red pleated dress undulating in the gentle wind coming in from the window, which was open. With spectators watching. Kids he didn’t know, but had chased for violating curfew codes, riding their skateboards in restricted zones and a score of other offenses that his boss would never let stick.

Caught off guard, Carl froze. He felt cold, strange, then touched, by ‘Billie’s’ tender hands and gloss covered lips. Smack, a kiss on the lips, with a hug that went down to the ass as the toes on Billie’s red stiletto ran up his calf, to his thighs and into his crotch. His hands grabbing hold of a point under Carl’s balls that only Carl and two of his very-ex girlfriends knew about. That ‘G spot’ which could make any man’s doink stand up and salute. As the ‘embrace’ continued, it was all confusing, then it turned dark, then light, then ‘expressive’. Carl turned around and saw wide smiles on the faces of the kids, each of them holding digital cameras.

“What the fuck it this?” Carl screamed out, reaching for his gun. “Put those cameras you shoplifted down. NOW!” His weapon was drawn, and as such, had to be used. The character he was becoming, Bronson, Eastwood or Duvall, would have demanded nothing less. He turned it on ‘Billie’, who snapped a picture of him holding the piece. Then suckled it with his lips, working his way up to Carl’s hand, licking it till he dropped the gun on the floor. The kids made a mad dash out the back window, leaving their very allegedly stolen cameras behind.

“You’re a pervert,” Carl said.

“One in ten, or two in ten?” Bill whispered, pointing to the third leg growing steadily under his trousers. “And a pervert whose father is going to live a long and healthy life, right?”

“Absolutely,” Carl said.

“And a pretty pervert whose father is going to be...rich? For my mother’s sake. And maybe, it he gets some brains and balls, and decides to see Uncle Hans as what he really is, John is going to be rich too?”

“Why not.”

“And a pervert who...has OUR best interest at heart.” ‘Billie’ appended the remark with a winking of the eyelashes that seemed both flattering, and sincere. Carl had no idea

why Bill had chosen to come out of the closet now, and for him, but one thing was for certain. He had a very dedicated partner in his Mission now. As to what that Mission was now, it would be....amplified.

CHAPTER 17

On a good day, John's culinary skills included being able to non-destructively fry water, burn toast and add instant powder potatoes to water in sufficiently correct proportions so he would not vomit the gruel on the way down the hatch. The only reason why he had any skills as a chemist was because he saw microscopic molecules moving around the easily broken beakers filled with liquid. The only reason why he aspired to be a BIOchemist, dealing with molecules that made up 'life', was the life-infused mentor beside him.

"Der ist many ways to boil water," Hans said as he carefully adjusted the level of the vintage Bunsen burner under the 30 year old beakers emitting small bubbles the climbed to the surface slowly, each of which seemed to have it's own identity. "Trick when extracting molecules in solution so they still are alive is to coax them from their pockets within water matrix mit honey from brain und not forcing dem out like Uncle Joe Stalin's tanks."

John saw pain in Hans' face as he referred to the Russian dictator and the tools he used to conquer half of Europe under the guise of 'Socialist Liberation'. Whenever John and his brother told Hans about another 'cool' combat game on line, or fantastically filmed patriotic war films featuring youthful heroes, Hans reminded them of how an entire generation of patriotic Germans lost the war, their youth, and ten years of their adulthood, put to work in Siberian Labor Camps from 1945 till 1955 when Uncle Joe finally kicked the bucket. After 'Comrade Stalin' sent Russian soldiers who dared to surrender to the Germans rather than die fighting to the same camps. "Tragedy. Mess. A waste," he would say about what happened to his Comrades at the hands of the Red Army. "We all did what we had to do to survive, and did as much good as we could given where we were and what we could do," he would say, again and again, as to what he was doing during the War. As to why he was able to get a 'get out of Gulag free' card soon after being captured in what had become East Germany, his response was "I was lucky. Many others, not so. God requires lucky people to do more than others."

The answers were always the same, no matter what the question. But today, the wrinkles in Hans' face seemed deeper. His eyes more watery. His usually stiff upper lip quivering in a way John had never seen. John dared to ask a question which came from a place in his mind that felt intelligent, and insightful. "Did you have any brothers, Uncle Hans?"

Hans' eyes answered 'yes', with fondness and sadness, mixed together in the way experience does when it paints good memories bad, and vice versa. "Tristan was, as you say 'cool'," he said as he continued to gently boil out the active ingredients form the bark extract. "Popular mit all the girls. Captain of soccer team und every other team mit the

guys. Very good horse rider. Smart businessman who love giving away money more than making it. Bad in school. Success in life. Smart where it mattered.”

John recalled Bill’s many successes and very short, irrelevant list of shortcomings. As if Hans was reading his mind, the old man turned to the young one and answered the question the latter was about to ask. “Tristan always think I was der smart one. Tried to teach me to be popular und rich, but could not. But we take care each other. Look after each other’s backs. Till one day he....”

Hans took a deep breath and held it inside him, his body frozen in deep and haunting memories. Withdrawn into that part of himself which he shared with no one. Hoping to extract more information, for his own sake, for the world’s sake and for the Truth’s sake, John edged his head closer to the old man. He approached the safety zone, but refused to listen to the border guards. “He what?” John dared to ask.

“He joined the wrong side!” Hans replied, his assertion fueled by anger. With that, Hans went back to work extracting medical molecules from mucky botanically-enriched mud. His hands moved mechanically rather than musically. John did his assigned ‘assistant cook’ duties for the biochemical master chef with his hands, but not with his eyes, or mouth. There was something about Bill, and perhaps Hans, that would put things together. Both seemed to have secrets with regard to their ‘feminine’ side, as well as their relationships with those of the feminine gender.

“Were you ever married?” John asked, casting himself as the bookworm Engineer in Zorba the Greek to his mentor, and friend, Zorba.

“Many times, in many ways, to many ‘souls’” Hans replied with a warm smile, appreciating the dramatic setting John had put into motion.

“Which ‘souls’ did were most special? Most important to you?” John inquired, wondering if perhaps a gay affair with a the wrong fellow soldier in the War was somehow behind his dark and secret past. Or if perhaps ‘brotherly love’ extended to matters of body as well as mind. John had to prepare himself for anything, caught between his bondship with Uncle Hans and his annoying yet deepening dedication to Truth, and perhaps the Deity behind it.

Hans laughed in the matter of a wise, confident and liberated old man. “Who is most important, who is less important!” he smiled. “Such is the problem with so many ‘souls’, und people!” He abandoned his post, opening up a cabinet. He took out two glasses, and his best bottle of schnapps. The bottle which he said he would share with John when he was old enough to become Master of the world and Ruler of his Own Fate.

He filled one of the glasses to the brim and gave it to John, pouring out a small portion for himself. “You see this schnapps? Ist special. And what ist special about it is not that you have more than I do. Is not that you are more important that I am because you have more in your glass than mine.”

Hans looked at his glass of schnapps with Blissful Reverence, fondling it like a beloved woman's face---as John saw it visually anyway. "My relation to this glass of schnapps is special. And different than my relationship to this glass," he continued, taking John's glass into his hand. A hand that caressed the sides of the glass in a fond way which was--

"Different, yes," Hans said, reading John's mind, and soul, once again. He put down the glasses, and invited John to come to his window. He gazed at all of the animals outside, the ones he rescued from abusive owners, the ones he saved from death from the wild at the hands of Mother 'bitch' Nature, the ones given to him by anonymous donors, and the ones who were, on paper anyway, owned by people other than himself. He called out to them with a "Gutten Tag" that rose them out of slumber, then a rendition of Wagner's 'Morningstar' from Meistersinger that awakened their very different souls, the nature of which could be seen in their eyes.

"You see?" Hans said. "All these relations of mine. I love them all differently. Not one more than the other. No one is more important than anyone else. Everyone is special to me, in different ways. As many ways as there are souls."

John felt compelled to do a 'Plato' to Hans' 'Socrates'. As was the custom and expectation of the Old Man, who valued youth who questioned him far more than those who obeyed him. "What if all of those animals were drowning?" John challenged. "And you had one lifeline to save just one of them. Which one would you save? Which one of those souls would be the most important one, who you considered special enough to save first?"

Hans smiled, stroked his chin, formulating the answer to the question he had not been asked, at least for a long, long time. "I'd jump into the water myself," he smiled.

"And...?"

"Und swim over to all of them as fast as I could."

"And...?"

"Und look at who was where, und who was who, und..."

"Und' WHAT?!" John said, looking at his watch. "While you're philosophizing, all those special souls are drowning. Sinking deeper, deeper, deeper--"

"---I dive...Deep below them all!" Hans replied, putting himself in that improbable but now, for him anyway, real place.

"And do what? Tick tick...tick!"

“I dive deep...and grab the kelp from below und...yes...make a net large enough to save them all!”

“And those you can’t save, or were too late to save?”

“Those I saved, they save the others!” Hans asserted, his pale face acquiring a reddish angry hue. “Just like YOU, you will save others!”

“Because you saved me,” John found himself saying, thinking, and feeling. He looked at Hans’ face, deciding to let his brain rule his heart. The right side seemed Saint-like, with all the qualities of that state of Being. The left was Warlike, dedicated to getting the Mission done no matter what the mandate behind it. Hans seemed to be a composite of Martin Luther and Atilla the Hun. Ghandi and Ghengis Khan. Or, more practically, John himself and his now estranged brother Bill, at war with each other in a world they both had to fix, and fix very fast.

CHAPTER 18

Most of the time Hans could grow what he needed from the ground. As for the rest, it was ordered into the Bluewater Health Food Imporium under the title of ‘Nutriceuticals’. The operator of the Imporium, spelled with an I, could find ways to bring in anything from selenium to strychnine, halva to hemlock and knew the difference between what healed and what killed. Sensually-hunchbacked four-foot-eight ‘Sister Teresa’, affectionately called Mama Teresa after she let her long black mane go gray, had acquired her botanical skills while a Nun. She learned how to use them effectively in the service of humanity after she left the Order, initially for a Priest who she fell in love with, who then fell in love with another Priest two years into their marriage. The chronically-overworked but always-smiling neo-Hippie, ex-Catholic Christian-Buddhist Druid knew where to get everything Hans wanted, and needed, but she was retired now. She was getting old, and besides, it was mandated by law that she stop working. Not by Papa Nature but by Constable Carl. Somehow he made the code violations on her place stick, forcing Sergeant Johnsson’s hand into putting her shop into ‘limited sale’ mode until the nature of what constituted a ‘nutriceutical’ was clearly defined by the Federal authorities. She claimed to never have sold controlled substances, but it was Constable Carl’s word against hers. And her subsequent attempts to bring in raw herbs from which a skilled chemist could extract prescription-only medicinals in them had been found out.

It was up to John now keep Hans supplied with what he needed for his various biological experiments, and continued function as a Doctor to the people in Bluewater who needed healing. ‘Doc Hans’ never took direct payment for his services as he took the Hippocratic oath, one of the pledges in it being that ‘you shall not do any harm’ and the other ‘you shall not extract payment for services rendered’. It made sense in Ancient Greece where the physician was allowed to take what he needed, and only what he needed, to stay alive and supplied with raw materials, from all of the markets in town, honoring each of them equally in this endeavor. It made sense to Hans, as he refused to

accept any money, bartering for what he needed, and only what he needed, never taking what he wanted unless it was offered to him. “I have gift of being able to heal people und when I need a rest from the world as it is, I have place between mein ears where I can go to create. How many other people have such place to go when they want to escape world as it is?” he would say, in various ways, to various people, most particularly, John.

Though hated most of Bluewater’s citizens, ‘Constable Carl’ had become very good at making them do what he wanted them to. He knew exactly how to drive a wedge between the Patron Saint of Bluewater and the people he had served for so many years, in so many ways. To those who had relatives in the War, he inferred that Hans was a Nazi as well as a German soldier. To those who didn’t care, or refused to believe such things until proven by a REAL judge, Carl used whatever dirt he could find on the them and inferred that the law be brought down upon them if they even thought about taking care of Hans. Whatever dirt Constable Stiller could not find, he created with the help of his new accomplice, ‘Billie’ McClure.

“Is up to you to get what we need now, ya?” John remembered Hans telling him as he got off the bus in Vancouver with the list of supplies to get in his left pocket, the stash of emergency cash the Old Coot had been hiding under the cabin floor in his right. “Is just you und me against the world as it is, in service of world as it could be,” John recalled as he walked into the bus terminal, feasting on the urban odors of everything that was NOT natural ranging from bus fumes to the stench of garbage rotting in the dumpsters. “Your brother has become minion of evil so you must now be instrument of good, und Truth,” he recollected as Hans’ last words before patting him on the back and sending him out on the road. “Good” was something that John understood, sort of, and even admired. But ‘Truth’ was another matter. Which was most important? “Good” involved doing what was good for humanity, “Truth” required acting in the best interest of what humanity could become.

He looked at the list of items Hans required, and desired. Medical products available in Chinatown, through friends of Mama Teresa who Carl did not know about or through contacts at UBC John had made semi-legally on line. Extraction machinery that was available through the surplus assets sales at the aforementioned University, which would allow Hans to reprove that ‘the true pioneers build new bold empires with the garbage the old empire throws away’. And books, of course. Most of them were available on line, thanks to John’s ability to bypass passwords and create fake bank accounts. But there were some books that John needed to get a hold of first, ones NOT on Hans list. And pictures which Hans seemed to fear but never described, and certainly did not have stored away.

The library annex was new, but the books lining the shelf felt ancient. Haunted at the very least, spirits seeming to jump through the leather bindings, daring the viewer to open them. John lingered and haggled with the ghosts, begging them to choose someone else. Hoping that they would stop screaming and crying out to them. Finally, the voices stopped, replaced by a deafening silence.

“You are looking for something?” a Eurasian librarian of forty or so asked in a Yiddish accent, her bulging eyes made to seem three times larger though thick, black-rimmed glasses.

“SomeONE,” John confessed, having located the Camps Record in question according to its location and function.

“A victim of the Holocaust,” the librarian surmised. “A relative of yours?”

“Someone a lot closer, and distanced,” he said, tears streaming down his face, but connected to emotions he could not define. “Around 36 miles South of Buckenwald, I think. A place where medical experiments were done. For, ya know, advancement of scientific knowledge. For the ‘common good’ of course. So many advances which could maybe be used for, ya know, ‘good’ today, after so many bad people did so much shit to good people because they were, ya know...” John froze, a lump caught in his throat. An invisible ghost holding his hands back from reaching for the books, his eyes forced downward by a heavy weight laid upon his shoulders.

The librarian reached for the book John was terrified to look at, or even touch. She opened it. “Hmm..” she said as she opened the page. “Interesting that you picked this book,” in a professorial way that offended him.

“What the fuck do you mean, ‘interesting’, you half-breed chink bitch!?” John grunted.

“Yes, interesting,” she replied, dispassionately. “The second volume of this was requested by someone else.”

“When?!” John demanded, poised for battle, no matter how many guns Constable Carl had on him. No matter how many crooked Christ killer Jewish lawyers he had with him ready to put things in the Camp records that didn’t happen so he could nail Hans’ body to the cross and extract his medical secrets for profit. “When this fucking ‘someone else’ ‘request’ to have a copy of these original records?”

“Today,” the librarian replied, pointing him to a reading room, handing him the book. He opened it up, spotting, as he suspected, scientific discoveries in them which seemed brilliant. Innovative means by which one could destroy tissue and bring it together with godlike skill. Subjects names by prisoner numbers, ‘crimes’ committed and first names. Investigators listed only by military rank and serial number. Cures for all manners of diseases inflicted on the subjects ranging from cancer to spinal cord trans-section. Chemical agents which John had not seen anywhere else except in Hans’ ledgers.

The librarian took his hand, patted him on the shoulder, and said something that sound assuring in what sounded like Hebrew. Or maybe it was German. Whatever it was, she felt it necessary for John to go into the reading room and see who else requested a look at the second volume. “Only one volume at a time,” she said by way of explanation. “But in this case, I’ll make an exception, for both of you.”

Who was ‘both of you’, John wondered as he edged his way into the reading room, pictures of victims starved to the brink of death at every turn. Photos of proud, well-fed Aryians beneath them, most of them marked ‘captured’, ‘hung’ or ‘committed suicide’. None of them looked like Hans, but then again, all of these Aryians seemed to look alike. Cold eyes. Empty hearts. Brains given a twisted advanced sense of intellect by a demon possessing them all. Faces that seemed to remind him not of Hans, but of Constable Carl.

John clenched his fist as he turned the corner towards the last table in the room. Prepared to rip Carl’s throat open, or whoever else was there to find out the Truth about the Camp in which Hans allegedly did his medical ‘training’ as a youth. Prepared to defend Hans at all costs, except of course if the Truth dictated otherwise.

The reader didn’t smell like Carl, nor like any Constable. Certainly not any MALE Constable, or inspector, or Jewish gangster on their payroll. No, the reader smelled of sweet perfume. Her hair very blonde, flowing down past her shoulders. Her legs muscular, yet very shapely, tastefully framed by a dark brown skirt-suit which was both seductive and serious. Her arms solid, yet strongly feminine. She turned around, sensing that John would be coming. Knowing he would be. And somehow expecting him. She extended her hand and tapped it on the chair next to her, inviting and demanding John to come share the ‘literature’ with her.

John proceeded, sensing that she was not the only one in the room. He smelled the company of vicious mobsters and crooked cops to his right and left, and confirmed it with his eyes as well. As for the former, leather jacketed rough looking ‘hunks’ too handsome to be anything but Russian mafia. As for the latter, two Hassedic ‘gentlemen’ whose shoes were new, beards more pasty than real, without prayer shawls or the odor of being unwashed. Still, the woman in the chair invited John to sit down next to him for a ‘reading’.

‘Truth shall set you free,’ John remembered, not from the Bible classes his mother tried to get him to attend, or from his father who tried to keep him from slipping into a life of crime, but from Uncle Hans, who was being framed for being a War criminal, or perhaps really was one. Putting trust in the ethereal ideal which few knew and even fewer lived up to, John walked to the table, pulled out the chair and turned to the ‘big boss lady’ in question.

As she turned around, John dropped his jaw. She looked familiar indeed.

“Yes, I do look different without my mustache,” brother Bill related in a hushed voice adopted to hide his naturally deep tone of speech.

“But...” John said.

“It was my idea to frame Carl at first,” Bill explained. “Then it became HIS idea to like me like this.”

“So how do we nail him?” John asked. “I mean, ya know, not nail like you or me fucking him up the ass, but crucifying his ass so he leaves us and Uncle Hans alone.”

“Uncle Hans may not be who he says he is,” Billie said.

“You know who he IS, and was to US!” John affirmed. “And everyone else. He fucking saved our father’s life! And can save so many others!”

“Only if we get the fuckers who Carl Stiller is fucking around with first,” Bill said. With that ‘Billie’ turned to the Russian ‘scholars’ and Hassidic ‘rabbis’ and winked at them seductively, showing stroking his leg seductively. “They’re my body guards, if I’m good. They’ll become my executioners if, well, they figure out what you and me were intending to do when we cooked up this secret plan of ours.”

“You and me are fucking dead meat if they find out what’s under that skirt of yours, ‘Billie’”, John warned.

“Not if we find out what’s in their heads first, and the day planner of their corporate bosses first,” Bill whispered through the sides of his succulent, lipstick coated lips to John. Meanwhile, John looked over volume II and I of the Camp records. There was something haunting and ‘interesting’ in volume II. John’s knowledge of German came first from reading science articles in that language. He became quite proficient, and felt cursed now as to how much better he was at reading it than brother Bill, or ‘sister’ Billie.

There it was a third of the way into Volume II. An experiment marked ‘mind control’ in which a coded drug was given to four groups of subjects in different doses. Next to each of the subjects, the number of other ‘subjects’ they killed themselves. Hans serial number, something which John had located by taking an impression off the rifle he used for ‘protection’, was listed as one of the developers of the drug in question, as well as one of the subjects doing the killing. A perfectly symmetrical dose-response curve. The next page revealed ‘preliminary’ studies with an antidote, Hans’ serial number listed as primary discoverer. Fewer subjects tested with this, but the results looked, according to the bottom line of it, ‘promising.’ The next batch of pages revealed something else. Hans’ serial number was also on record as discoverer of many other medicinals which, according to the records anyway, promoted miraculous cures for wounds, burns and chemically-induced cancers. Nothing and no one listed as the ‘investigators’ who induced the initial violations of the flesh.

“What does it say?” Bill asked John.

As fast as Bill asked the question, John felt his ‘bodyguards’ listening for the answers. He also felt Bill speaking from a part of himself that he didn’t know, and didn’t know if he could trust. At least right now. Something felt ‘hormonally’ wrong.

“What does it say?” Billie asked, again.

John discreetly moved to the next table, giving Bill the cold shoulder and faking tears of sorrow for the Russian and Hassidic onlookers. They rolled their eyes condescendingly. “Better to be considered worm who is crushed than wounded dog who can still stand on own four feet,” he remembered from one of Hans’ lectures about doing innovative things in a world that served the status quo above all else.

His photographic memory absorbed what it could of the rest of the material, the camera hidden in his jacket pocket capturing what he could. Both would be examined privately, quickly and discreetly.

CHAPTER 19

The coffin was laid into the ground carefully with ropes that were pure white, the wet dirt piled on top of it with shovels which remained shiny. The sky was clear blue, a gentle breeze of crisp salt air blowing in from the ocean. The verses of the song delivered by the Canter were in immaculate Hebrew, his lips rolling around the notes perfectly.

“Clean,” Uncle Sol whispered to Carl as the other mourners walked up to the grave and said their final farewells. “Papa Jacob always liked things ‘clean’. From wanting to be buried out here by the ocean in Vancouver instead of the cesspool we call a lake in Toronto, to never letting the sheets get wet after having sex with his wife or mistress,” he continued, a tear running down his cheek. “Even his death was, clean,” he said, more absorbed by grief than he ever expected to be.

Carl remained silent. He lowered his eyes, folding his hands in sorrow. Acting professional above all things. After all, he knew he was being watched. By Papa Jacob’s corporate competitors who were secretly wondering which direction Stiller Pharmaceuticals would take now that its founder and Patron Saint was gone. By his unexpectedly-departed grandfather’s mafia ‘friends’ who were at times allies, at times comrades and at times confidants. By the other survivors of the Death Camps that Papa Jacob miraculously lived through the horror of those times, for reasons that the old man never really revealed. By Papa Jacob himself, whose death was quick, merciful and somehow ‘fit’ into the grand scheme of things. And by Carl’s departed father, who somehow offered his own opinion regarding the Moral Justification of the Old Man’s untimely death in a conversation with his son delivered with voices only he could hear.

“All of what happened had to happen, Dad!” Carl grunted back, softly enough to only be heard by the ghost and himself. “He was suffering, and God took him out. You remember God, don’t you? That well-meaning Boss up in the sky who took a long lunch break back in 1933 and never seemed to come back from it. Well, it’s up to us to do His, or if He is getting a sex-change operation, ‘Her’ work now. I did God’s work because

someone had to. Like you did when you were alive. And what I did after I had that talk with Papa Jacob and----”

Carl’s words were stopped in his mouth by a hand gently placed on his shoulder, and an angelic face moving closer to his, the eyes assuring him that all was okay, the angel’s fingers gently touching his lips, hushing them into remaining still as his troubled mind settled into much needed rest. This time he looked the angel in the face, and smiled back at her. “Thank you,” he mouthed to her.

“You’re welcomed,” Billie whispered back to him from under the brim of a Dior hat with a meshed veil covering his, or as ANY human eye saw it, her beautiful face. Carl allowed Billie to take his hand, causing him to stand up taller, like a man. Like his father would have demanded, and like Papa Jacob would have expected. Despite the fact that ‘Billie’ was not a traditional girlfriend. But Billie was truer than any other ‘real’ girl Carl ever knew, even his mother. Why he was attracted to him, or ‘her’, was still a mystery, but a reality he had to accept. Carl felt that he could trust ‘her’ more than anyone else now, perhaps because he HAD no one else. Not really. He found himself envying Billie in his pervious life as Bill, and his brother John. They had a ‘Hans’ they could trust, and before this Hans business came along, John and Bill had each other. ‘Uncle Sol’ was an associate to be liked at special times, a boss to be feared or manipulated most of the time. But, Carl had himself, and the Mission he felt to be assigned to him by his father, and mother. “Do a Big thing, and the Right thing.” ‘Big’ was about obtaining money and power. ‘Right’ was, well, something you made up or perhaps felt as you went along, defined by Guides Carl related to more from the silver screen than real life. The movie in the mind that had to end with a finale in which the moral book-keeping was reached.

As for that movie, Carl wanted to tell Billie about how he had to modify the script as it went along. How it was necessary to pit the people of Bluewater against each other so that their Patron Saint ‘Doc Hans’ could be discredited AND disabled. How it was necessary to drive a wedge between Bill and his brother, and family, so that the deaths of so many Jewish families could be avenged. How it was necessary to rebuilt the Stiller pharmaceutical dynasty back to what it was in the good old days of the 70s and early 80s for the sake of family honor and to make it even greater for the sake of the world. And how it was necessary for him to give Papa Jacob that overdose of insulin when the Old Man was about to give away the company that his family had spent two generations building up, and as he was about to give away the plan Carl had been incubated to bring back its former greatness.

CHAPTER 20

It was a mixture of flowingly Latin terms and thought-provoking broken English medicaleze for Hans. It was all green Greek to Leonie. Normally her ‘hunting and gathering’ trudes through the woods was hunting for buyers of weed and gathering of the best, or at least most sellable, botanicals on the lush forest floor. But for the moment, it was about being ‘honest Injun’ for the White Shaman who had been adapted by the

elders of her tribe as one of their own. Actually, the botanical gathering with Doc Hans felt more like being a thinking Tonto to a stoned out Lone Ranger. It wouldn't be so bad if the Old Coot was drugged up with weed or mushrooms, but it was an even more dangerous 'medicinal'---himself, and the past he always lived in but never really talked about.

“No...nein, nein! Dat one over der!” Hans said to Leonie after she had exhausted herself pulling out a bagful of what she thought was Tempusvenicum, or was it Temporavenesian or Temporavenusflytrapus?

She fumed, daring not to say anything. It had been a long day for her, an internally exhausting one for Hans for reasons he never expressed. “Come...You find Tempusvenicum, ya?” He showed her the picture, making her say the name, yet again.

“Isn't there a word for it in English?” she asked.

“Der is. A simple name. Ma you ist not simple. Du bist better than simple. Mit hard work, you and everyone else from your race can become just as good as, und maybe better den de Master race, ya?” he smiled. “I always knew dat ven you people applied yerselves, you would revolutionize the Whole world,” he proclaimed proudly, placing his hand on her shoulder as if King Arthur on his most trusted and valued Knight. “Und dat thing where we invented da wheel before you did? You did not need da wheel, but if you did, you would have invented it too, ya?” he continued with a jovial grin begging for someone to join him in the joke.

Leonie did. It was no skin off her Aboriginal back. And it was in her best interest to smile, nod and let the old man have his illusions and delusions. She took nap-sack back into green-stained hand and hunted the forest for more Temporusvenicum. A few more basketfuls and she would be dismissed from “Kaiser Hans” duties in this ‘Camelot’ he thought he created. He would give his glowing recommendation to the chief, she would get back on the Aboriginal payroll, get that ‘scholarship’ money the tribe had set aside for its most promising student, and make a beeline for the closest REAL town where the only Indians people met were the ones they see on plasma tvs and first-class airline-seat movie screens. As her hands bleed, yet again, and her feet felt the mud re-enter through the seams of her boots, she wondered why the Chief stood by the Old German whose ‘praise’ for the First Nations people were always appended by a statement of pride in his own. At least Hans didn't put ALL White people on top of the totem pole above redskins, blackskins, and yellowskins. It was his fucking ‘Master Race’ of Aryians.

She turned around and saw him singing, yet again. It was Wagner, yet again, sung out in rhythm to his seeing, smelling and gently pulling away from their roots in the hard earth three varieties of weeds that looked the same to her. This time the mantra for that chore was the ‘Love’ song from Tristan und Isolde, as intended for a female voice. Somehow Hans had found a way to turn the German lyrics into something appropriate for a man. One who was all man, but who had an understanding of and for women in ways that few others did.

Leonie found herself thinking of Bill again. He was someone who would listen to her talk rather than barge in with solutions. He would anticipate her feeling something before she said anything about it. He would say that he wanted to call her when in reality it was she who wanted him to call. He respected her, understood her, and probably loved her. It was the last offense that forced her to tell him, as gently as she could, to go fuck off. Love without abuse was something Leonie was not used to, and couldn't trust. Or maybe it was just how awkward Bill was about putting her up on a pedestal all the time when all she wanted was a roll in the hay, with of course some verbal and physical abuse as 'foreplay'. And a drink afterwards.

How Leonie yearned for a drink now! She knew it had already nearly destroyed her 16 year old liver and she was well aware that if the Band Leaders, or the Cops, found her drunk again, it was jail time or, worse, the loony bin and rehab afterwards. But she knew it broke the boredom. In an interesting way, so did Old Man Hans. He knew how to 'look after her' from a discrete distance, and help only when required to. In his own way, the alleged ex-Nazi loved her more than the guy who knocked her up and left her pregnant. Yes, it was Leonie's idea to trap 'Sir Irving', son of newly arrived rich University Professor parents to Bluewater. But it was Hans' 'tea' that calmed Leonie down sufficiently so that her 'natural biology' decided to abort the developing embryo inside her after Irving and his pathetically-politically-correct family developed a reason to get out of town to a bigger and better opportunity elsewhere.

Hans seemed so...alone, singing the operatic love song to no one except an imagined mate. He was never known to have dated anyone, politely passing up opportunities from red, white and even the occasional yellow skinned babes whose youth remained with them well into their 60s. Leonie found herself seeing the path in front of the Old Man whose eyes always SEEMED wide open. Yes, he would die without children to remember him and send him off to the happy hunting grounds. Just like hot-looking Leonie herself, as she projected her own most likely course in life, given her skill in wooing young men to like her, and her self-sabotage program to destroy any healthy relationship that would follow.

"What's Tempusvenicum used for?" Leonie asked regarding the pleasant-looking sort-of-cinammony herb that always eluded her eyes when trying to locate it, finding herself slipping into the role Squire John McClure normally occupied for 'Sir Hans'. "What system does it work on first?"

"Nervous system," Hans said, turning his musicality into biological explanations rather than operatic expressions.

"The brain box or the spinal cord?" Leonie asked.

"Ist good question," the Old Professor commented, turned into a young one because of his being called back to the lectern. "Der ist five extracts from AAAAA. Three of dem calm mind in small doses. Und mit large doses, can stop seizures."

“Seizures from anything?” Leonie said. “Better than valium?” she continued, recalling one of the uses of that drug which she had used for purposes of ‘calming’ herself and others in less than legal situations on many, many occasions.

Hans put down plant-clippers and looked at Leonie, seeing something ‘smart’ in her. She let him think the best of her, and treated herself to that ‘promotion.’ Maybe, despite what her whore of a mother and bitch of a father said before they ‘thankfully’ died in that car accident said, Leonie was something more than a hot looking sperm receptacle. She let the idea that she had a brain useful to humanity between her ears sink in to her heart. A workable fit, for now anyway. At least here, when no one was looking.

Old Man Hans seemed to read her mind, and heart. It felt scary at first, then assuring. She felt something between her ears fire up, and connect. Something that John described, sort of, and which he was addicted to. Yes, that was what it was...A new idea, about something other than people manipulation. She gave voice to it, in the best language she could access. “Seizures are, like, ya know, fucked up behaviors in brain cells? That cause us to do fucked up things? Like Julius Caesar who, according the history channel, fucked up a lot of people, maybe because he had seizures?” she said, noting that she sounded more like those fucked up white chicks who stated everything, even their name, like it was a question, like they needed to get approval to believe anything they thought was true.

“Yes,” Hans smiled. “Epilepsy ist one symptom of behaviors dat ist not good. Und Tempusvenicum, some of extracts from it anyway, can stop dem. Anger ist one form of bad behavior. Depression ist the other side of anger. Ist same pathology. Connected to liver function according to Chinese, und the German scientists who verified der work.”

Leonie’s eyes found themselves drawn to a coral, and one of the horses in it. One of her assigned jobs was to ‘train abused und wild horses, but not break der spirits’. It was a job that Hans assigned to her alone, a position of honor according to John, a pain in the ass to Leonie. It wasn’t that she hated horses, but they were holding her back from the life she wanted and felt she deserved somewhere else. Yes, she was good at communicating with them, perhaps something passed down from her grandmother, a skill which skipped a generation. But if there was money in it, it was in places a lot bigger than Bluewater. And if she was to be paid by the horse, the faster the turnaround for the horse, the faster the turnaround in bucks, and as any Injun ex-Princess knows, wampum makes the world go round.

Leonie walked towards the coral, her attention drawn to two horses in it. Hans followed, a spring in his step, joy in his renewed heart. “Thunderbolt over there is depressed, probably the reason why he’s so slow in the head,” she said. “And it’s not because he’s got too much quarterhorse blood in him. Gotta get his mojo moving if I’m going to make him use his head.” She moved on to the next ‘problem child’ in Hans’ equine nursery, an angry beast who approached with ears set back, pounding at the re-repaired fence with

his hoofs. “‘Dumbo’ is, yes I know, half thoroughbred, which explains why he’s half crazy. But the Arab in him makes him half sane, or maybe rebellious.”

“Interesting und insightful observation,” Hans said. “Go on. Bitte. Please.”

She looked at the fistful of Tempusvenicum in her hand. A thunderbolt of innovation blasting in her head. “In the notes I read, and thought I understood, and what John tried to explain to me once, two of these extracts are sort of uppers, and another extract is sort of a downer, right?”

“Ya. Ist so, sort of,” Hans replied.

“And the fourth extract is...something that makes people who take it ‘listen’.”

“Listening to someone else ist something the spirit does, not the mind,” Hans admonished. “Ist irresponsible und scientifically-unwarranted witchcraft to manipulate minds mit drugs, or anything else,” he sternly warned, but with a warm, fatherly tone. “But if you really want to get inside mind of horses, or people, must use heart, spirit and intellect to---“

“---Witches used fucked up potions for years to make people think the way they wanted to,” Leonie interjected. “So why is it wrong for us to use good potions to make people think the way we want them to.”

“Because ist not good thing to do that!” Hans grunted back, his eyes turned away from Leonie as he walked away, absorbed in a past memory which made him angry, sad and, if not rescued from it again, helpless.

“The world is filled with fucked up thinking!” Leonie proposed as she walked up behind him, moving as close as she could without forcing him to take a ‘stroll’ down memory lane from his he would never return. “If we correct bad thinking with good drugs, that’s good, right?”

“Ist dangerous!” he blasted back, straight into Leonie’s face.

“Ist effective! Und necessary!” she asserted. “Look at these animals!” she demanded. “Thunderbolt, Dumbo, and the others who whose minds were fucked up by fucked up people. With Tempusvenicum and the extracts that only YOU can make from it, you can unfuck them and so many other animals.”

“You say we use Tempus extract to help ‘balance’ horse brains,” Hans pondered, calmly.

“Yeah,” Leonie asserted. “For beasts with sleepy spirits and defective minds. A great training drug.”

“Mit training their mind mit dis too,” he continued, pointing to his heart.

“Sure...” Leonie continued. “Why not?” she conceded.

Hans breathed a sigh of relief. He seemed convinced of Leonie’s plan. As for that plan, it was already incubating in her head. “One part Tempus extract to train horses, with a hundred parts of human heart. And maybe a thousand parts of human pain as Dumbo tosses me on my ass again.”

“I fix it,” Hans said. “Some of the world say I am asshole, so fixing broken asses, ist no problem,” he continued with a warm smile.

Leonie chuckled at the joke, and really did find it amusing, and heart-warming. It also stimulated something else in her brain. A plan that had to be expressed for the Common Good to which she was dedicated now more than ever. “I think, perhaps, that maybe when we figure out how to use extracts, and hearts, to make horses ‘behave’ like they should, we can make humans do the same. Higher minds making lower minds more, ya know, enlightened?” She turned to Hans, awaiting his answer.

Hans looked at the horses, the woods, his cabin, the sky, and library of books in German which overloaded the shelves inside. “No,” he said. “Higher minds must teach, not train lower minds. Und never enslave them.”

Dumbo, as if he heard the dare, spotted a weak spot in the fence. He put his ears back, reared up and pounded his hoofs into it. As the neurotic horse with all fire and no brains was making short order of the re-enforced barrier, endangering himself and the other animals around him, Leonie grabbed a lariat and threw it around his neck. With all of the strength in her 15 year old body, she held onto him. “Fucking shit! Fucking idiot! Whoo!!!” she belted out as the horse lashed out at her chest.

Hans remained calm, and detached. “Calm down with heart. He just wants to be free. His mind ist simple.”

“Simple fucking Simon wants to kick me in the goddamn chest,” Leonie said, holding on for dear life to keep Dumbo from doing damage to everything and everyone around him. “Give him a snort of that Tempusvenicum. Of give me a cattle prod.”

“You must make him respect you!” Hans yelled out, putting himself in harms way between Dumbo, the half-broken sharp-edged fence, and the other horses the fuel-injected ‘idiot steed’ was about to attack.

“When you can’t get any fucking respect, fear or manipulation will do fucking nicely,” Leonie proclaimed, the memories of so many human interactions in her life popping in front of her eyes as it seemed like Dumbo was going to end that life very shortly.

Just as the memories were about to get sharper, and the voices from the past clearer, Leonie felt released. She fell on her back, the rope holding Dumbo cut. The steed

bolted out of the coral and made a mad dash into the woods, disappearing in a cloud of dust. She looked up and found an even wilder beast staring her down.

“You do too!” Hans barked, a knife in his hand. “Schnell! Rous mitten! Schnell!” he yelled out with a military voice from a man who seemed to be worn out and broken by war. “Go! Und never come back!”

Leonie backed away into her truck and turned the ignition key. As she jiggled it, then forced the truck submission, Hans retrieved her stuff from the cabin and threw it into the back of the truck. He seemed possessed by something in the past which was now very much in the present. Maybe the genius who healed so many lives in Bluewater over the last 40 years became such because he had been a madman beforehand. But be he genius or madman, Leonie had to save herself now. As a newly adopted member of the ‘Master Race’, she had no choice.

CHAPTER 21

“You bosh should be in schrool!” the owner of the Chinese restaurant grunted at John and Leonie as they walked into his establishment, dirty, tired and odorous.

“Ain’t nothin’ anyone in school left to teach us what we need to know, Mister Lu,” Leonie said.

“You bosh go schrool!” Mister Lu insisted as he took on the aire of mother, father and caretaker, scooping the freshest buffet trays clean and dumping the contents into two extra-large styrofoam take out trays. “I pack you bosh runches. Fish. Good brain frood. Cooked vely good.”

“Very WELL, Mister Lu,” John said. He helped himself to a forkful of the Canonese fried ‘schlimp’, declining to attempt to use the chopsticks his patron, and friend, provided. “This food is very GOOD and you cooked it very WELL, Mister Lu.”

Lu was still not impressed, even though both John and Leonie called him ‘Mister’, a prefix he was seldom addressed by. John had thought about making the hardworking and always under-appreciated Chinese restaurant owner feel better about himself and his craft by calling him ‘Master’ Lu, but he knew that such a sign of respect would be misunderstood as a gesture of ridicule. Indeed, John was learning a lot about people. More than he wanted to know.

“Why you not in schrool?” Mister Lu insisted, yet again.

“We are,” Leonie replied.

“And our classroom is over there,” John added, pointing to a table in the back, the one around the corner which was not visible to the front door, or the majority of other tables.

“Independent study, Mister Lu,” Leonie explained as explanation. “Biology and History,” she continued, opening her backpack and giving Mister Lu a brief look at the books about modern medicine and its abuse in the Camps which John was able to bring back from Vancouver. Lu seemed suspicious. John became fearful. Leonie turned innovative. “Independent study,” she said again, hugging John around the waist and stroking his neck.

“Ah! Independent study, Johnboy,” Mister Lu said, smiling and happy. “Is well medicine for you, Johnboy,” he continued. “Well medicine.” With that Mister Lu, left the John and Leonie to take the “lovers” table in the back. True to form, Leonie led John to that isolated but tastefully decorated corner of the establishment by the hand. It felt...odd. His first ‘date’ with a girl that lasted more than 3 minutes, and one which had sprouted a third leg under his pants. He tried to hide it, but Mister Lu spotted him. The Taiwanese gentleman who had survived 20 years in a People’s Republic jail cell after protesting for human rights gave John a ‘there you glo gluy’ grin and a discretely-delivered thumbs up.

“Strange,” John said to Leonie, whose eyes were on the table and the books she was taking out of the nap-sack. “This is the first ‘date’, ya know, in public, that I think I’ve been on,” the big-nosed geek with the chronically-bad hair and mismatched clothes commented. “It’s usually brother Bill who’s the chick magnet. He got every girl in school wanting him.”

“Wanting, but never having, at least the way a girl wants to be, ya know, ‘had’,” Leonie said, the memories making her feel bitter and sweet with a rhythm driving her troubled mind into agonizing helplessness. John sat down, Leonie looked straight into his eyes. “This thing you and Bill have going between the two of you. And this ‘Billie’ thing he set up to trap cuntface Constable Carl and his cronies. It IS all an act, right?”

“Hmmm,” John pondered. “Maybe ‘Billie’ being Cowboy Bill was an act. Guess we’ll find out when this opera is over.”

“And when the fuck is that?” Leonie demanded. “When the fucking fat bitch with the Viking helmet sings?”

“Or we get the right people to talk,” John answered. He produced a list of people, with their photographs, last known current addresses, and past ‘medical afflictions’. Most of them had been cured. And all of them had, according to ‘Billie’, anyway, been at Papa Jacob’s funeral.

“These guys’ eyes look, ya know, fucking intense.” Leonie said, staring at the computer enhanced aged photographs of the ‘subjects’ in the Camp Medical Record books. “Did Constable fuckface Carl talk to any of them?”

“Billie’ asked them not to,” John replied. “Those who didn’t talk to Carl, or his Jewish Mobster family, are probably still alive.”

“And those who did?” Leonie asked, afraid of the answer.

John produced the obituary columns. “They all died of ‘believable diseases’,” he related with a bitterly sarcastic tone. “Probably insulin overdoses, that we can’t prove of course.”

“We can if they weren’t diabetic in the first place,” Leonie said.

John’s jaw dropped. How could he be so stupid as to not be able to figure that out. Or more accurately, how could Leonie be so smart? Maybe she wasn’t just a hot looking Injun bitch whose only talents were wiggling her tail and getting knocked up. She opened the Camp History book, and turned the pages, seeming to know exactly what she was looking for. “Papa Jacob was...in the Camps?”

“Yeah,” John said. “But he got out.”

“Escaped?” Leonie said.

“According to the records, anyway.”

“And he never told anyone about the Camp. Or what was going on there.”

“I figured that whoever he talked to didn’t listen,” John said. “There were lots of people who didn’t listen then who should have.”

“What was he ‘in’ for?” Leonie asked.

“Being Jewish, I suppose,” John replied.

“And being maybe a Jewish Mobster? A one way ticket into the camps, and a one way ‘escape’ out of them? Who set up a pharmaceutical company with really advanced drugs a few years after the War ended? Got rich fast, didn’t he?”

“Tempusvenicum,” John flashed on.

“Cinamminny ‘happy’ looking plant that can turn a bookworm librarian into a rock star, and turn an indy rock star into a dulled out accountant, depending on how you use it?” Leonie inquired, and offered.

It all cliqued in John’s mind now too, that data finding a place in the computer bank in his brain which was about Big Pictures rather than fascinating picseles.. “What did Old Hans tell YOU about it?” he dared to ask.

“That it was dangerous, and effective. Not fucking much else. Just before he told me to fuck off, or course.” Leonie put down the books, the facts finding their natural slot in the ignited brain behind her intense, and alluring, green eyes.

CHAPTER 22

As a kept woman, Bill had everything. Constable Carl provided him with a great apartment far away from Bluewater with a marvelous view of the river by day and the Kelowna city lights by night. A closet-full of hot, in ways visual and legal, dresses which provided a fantastic view of his legs and a selection of top quality long haired wigs which each conferred their own special identity to whoever wore them. Spending money to use for ‘pretty things’, and even a car to get them. In exchange, Carl requested, and demanded, three things of ‘Billie’. Discretion was essential, difficult and necessary for both ‘lovers’ to avoid banishment from the worlds they still had to go ‘home’ to periodically. Trust was another matter, though. There was still enough “Bill” left in “Billie” to remember why the ‘affair’ with Carl was initiated and continued, though hormones or something were raging hot and heavy in ways the neither Bill nor Billie really understood. But there was one promise that faithful wife Billie was asked to keep, above all else---the care of Carl’s children.

Bill never figured that Carl was a cat person, but he had as many cats as there were letters in the alphabet. Indeed, each had a name corresponding to that alphabet, which was in Greek. Only one letter was missing from the assignment of Hellenic script to the feline creatures--- ‘Epsilon’. From Carl’s lips it sounded sensuous rather than informative. He put it on every note left for his ‘trusted beloved’, from the flowers he sent to Bill, to the tickets for the symphony they both attended and pretended to like, to the estrogen pills which were a gift for Billie’s new ‘life’. Bill did access the latter gift, and found that it suited his inner biology. It was a once in a lifetime chance to try it out, anyway. Besides, he was on a Mission to get the goods on Carl and his minions, in defense of his Uncle Hans, and in the service of his family and community back home. The more effective he could be ‘Billie’ rather than Bill, the more powerful a tool he could be on the inside. As long as he kept, of course, an objective perspective on Carl, on the inside. “Punish the sin, and stop the sinning, but love the sinner,” he remembered from a Church Bible meeting a year or two ago. God, how he yearned for such simple times and simple tasks as that!

Such were Bill’s thoughts as he woke up and tended to the morning rounds of cleaning the apartment and feeding the animals which made such so necessary, and labor intensive. From Alpha to Omega, each of the cats seemed to have their own personality, and behaviors. Carl insisted on videotaping them, the cameras in all rooms except the bedroom running 24/7 on them. He said that he was making a movie that would beat the pants off of any other animal flick ever made. As his cast, Alpha through Omega were each different, each having a place in the house which was theirs. Some were on top of the totem pole, some on the bottom, some not knowing or caring about there being a hierarchy at all. On occasion there would be fights, but thanks to Bill’s skill in tending to

animal wounds, limp legs rather than dead bodies were all that ever happened. Each of the felines had their own spot where they slept, or tried to anyway, and their own food.

It was yet another beautifully-British Columbian morning when Bill opened the cupboard and made the rounds, providing each of the felines with the baggie of food their loving Master had prepared for them the night before. Most of them gobbled up the specially formulated gustatory delights, but 'Delta' seemed resistant to eating it. She had been not herself for a few days, and Bill was worried.

"Come on," Bill, feeling lumps emerging below his nipples he could not yet see. "Eat," he insisted, feeling the air to be more accessible somehow, the sense of smell opened up more than usual. "I know it smells like cat shit in here," he noted, finding the usual odor of ammonia more offensive than 'rustic'. "But this food Carl put out for you is good. See?"

Bill took up a spoonful of the specially prepared breakfast and did an "airplane coming into the hanger" maneuver with it, but Delta shut down the runway and the hanger door, turning her head away from it with a snarl. "Okay, a little taste," Bill requested, gently placing a morsel on the long haired calico's outer lips, stroking her nose lovingly.

Delta answered 'Epison's' kind and educated gesture by opening her mouth, spitting the food on the floor, and helping herself to a nip of human flesh.

"Son of a bitch! I'll fucking kill you!" Bill yelled out as he retrieved his bloody finger from the cat's mouth, slipping into his naturally deep and loud male voice. He rushed over to the sink to wash it off, hoping that the sound of the running water would drowned out any more expletives he would make in a voice Billie was not supposed to have. He heard footsteps outside the door, then a knock.

"You okay in der Billie?" the Vladimir, the very Ukrainian landlord asked. "I call police!"

"No!" Bill replied as 'Billie'. "I had the TV on too loud is all. Sorry."

"Is okay," Vladimir said, going about his rounds.

Bill was grateful for having Vladimir around. He was old school, more wise than clever, more caring than smart. A lot like someone he had abandoned, yet, so far anyway, still served. As long as the Truth allowed him to, anyway.

Many truths were hitting Bill these days. He inner eyes were opening up to a world of manipulation and greed that he never imagined possible. The fact that there were Jewish Mobsters who were just as vicious as anyone in the Italian or Russian mob. The speculation that they were probably just as vicious to each other in War time as in peace time. And the reality that the more a person or industry said they were 'concerned about

your health and well being', the more they were probably looking out for themselves, at your expense.

There were other things too. That 'Billie' thing found a home in Bill in ways he never imagined possible. Yes, it was temporary, but how much more Billie knew than Bill did. Today, in particular. She could see warmth as well as infinity in the horizons over the mountains. She could feel colors that 'Bill' could only see. And she could smell things that Bill never could, particularly today. Ignoring the odor of the feline excrement, Billie could smell fragrances in every corner of the apartment. Basil in the jar of half-opened spaghetti sauce. A tinge of vanilla in the crème doodles given as a complimentary gift at the convenience store. And the unmistakable aroma of cinammon under his nails, coming from the food Delta had declined to accept. A strange odor, until Bill's thinking drifted over to the 'welcome to the apartment building' cake Vladimir came by with two short weeks ago. And the hunt for *Tempusvenicum* on Hans' mountain that he had come down from so many distances previously.

"It's my imagination," Bill thought. "I'm just nose tripping," he said. "Next thing I know, I'll be smelling skunks in perfume bottles, and horse apples in peach marmalade," he mused to himself from a place that was both male and female. But both needed to be fed now, from the medications Carl had set aside. The only allergy Bill ever had was to cats, and he could sense the sniffles coming on. Carl's allergy medication worked very effectively. It could be trusted, as it was bought in a store. And it worked. Bill opened up the bottle and took one of the pills in his hand. Bill was feeling a heaviness in his chest, but Billie held off on that request. She forced both personae to smell the tablets, and each shared equal terror at what the olfactory lobe detected.

"Cinnamen!" Bill and Billie exclaimed, in turn and in their own way. It was confirmed when the tablets were crushed. Within the brown tablet powder were discernable and uniformly-sized specks of white, which smelled even more cinamenny.

"*Tempusvenicum*?" Bill thought, remembering Hans' warning about the pleasant-looking cinammon smelling herb that, if extracted in the wrong way, had disastrous consequences on body, mind and particularly spirit. Bill, at that time anyway, didn't ask about the details, heading Hans' warnings and moving on to things that DID work, and were safe.

Billie cued on to something in the cats, the estrogen pills having opened more than just olfactory capabilities. Carl's feline friends seemed 'possessed' somehow, even the happy ones. Like the kids at school who became the drugs they took, somehow. He looked up at the cameras, and they seemed to be watching him. He knew they weren't, but sensing was more important than knowing, and knowing was essential.

Faking an 'all is well' smile to the camera, 'Billie' smelled the roses Carl had given her, kissing the 'Thank you for everything, you are the only friend I really have, Epsilon' note on it and placed it on the kitchen table. Billie took Bill into the bedroom, the sanctum which Carl said was private, and looked around the room in ways that neither had before.

Spotted behind a mirror was another camera. Noted in the draw of personal momentos about his family, were medical records. Those records recorded ‘aggression and submission’ indices, for feline patients identified with Greek Alphabet letters. And for one human patient identified with one as well--- ‘dear’ Epsilon.

CHAPTER 23

John was as adept at riding horses as Bill was at operating computers. A genetic inevitability, so the geeky, big-nosed younger brother knew about his older one. Thankfully, such changed, particularly after John had snuck that blackberry into his cowboy brother’s backpack, which Bill stuck deep into Billie’s purse. Both Bill and Billie were horrible at getting the ‘initial’ thing right, but this time, it was clear as day, and dark as night. “SOS”, John noted on the e mail sent by his deep undercover brother to the lostinwonderland@gmail.com e mail address he reserved specifically for their communications. “I’m responsible,” the next line. “Thought Tempusvenicum was fucking fairy tale,” the final line on the unsigned correspondence signed ‘done in.’

John stared at the blackberry in the lobby of Beth Israel Hospital, hoping that no one would read what HE was about, or what he was doing there. Bill’s previous correspondences related in intimate detail the people he was spying on as well as the bodyguards Carl had assigned to protect him. Everywhere John looked, he spotted a sinister set of eyes he thought were watching him. From the leather-jacketed Eastern European families bringing in their kids for headaches and most probably fabricated stomach pains, to the Chinese laundry ladies who seemed to understand more English than the underpaid Philopino nurses did. Then there were the doctors, who all looked very Jewish, with Germanic and Slavic names. All of them had big noses, just the magnum-schnozed John possessed, but such seemed to go well with the white lab coats they wore and the Romanesce gait of authority they displayed when strolling from one room to another while everyone else ran.

But this was it. The big city. The place where John was sure he would wind up some day. It felt big, and small, at the same time. A symptom of being scared, he pondered. And for good reason. The plan was crazy, and necessary, more fantasy than reality. And ready to shoot in ten minutes.

“Come on,” Leonie said, having spotted the Nurse who winked at her, beckoning them to follow her around the corner. “We’re on. A live performance of death-time.”

John picked up the busted vintage camera he had purchased from the Salvation Army and carried it as if it was a state of the art HD special. He held his head up high, and put on his most impressive ‘I’m cool and you’ll never be’ director face, following Leonie and the Nurse down the corridor, passing what seemed to be an army of security guards who got both bigger and more ethnic with each turn, particularly around the psych ward.

“Your face, voice and, ya know, energy,” Leonie said to the Nurse as soon as they had passed two large, humor-less, and well-armed security personnel who seemed

genetically-designed for the job. “Lance here was saying that they’re perfect for our film. It’s an indy, but the minute Lance saw you, he knew you were right for the part. Isn’t that so, Lance?”

“Yeah,” ‘Lance’ answered, turning away from the Nurse who no doubt was trained in seeing through human bullshit. “She’ll work for the film. She’s got the right look, and energy.”

“And body,” Leonie interjected quickly, with a seductive smile that kept the Nurse interested in the prospect of being in the film, and perhaps being with her as well.

The misguided guide continued to take ‘Lance’ and Leonie down the hallway, opening the door to the record room, and letting them in.

“Perfect!...It’ll work. Just like you, Yolanda,” John commented to the Nurse in his best ‘Lance’ Starfuckese, finally able to read her nametag through the Johnny Depp sunglasses perched over his oversized Adrian Brody nose. “As long as you don’t fuck it up when we start shooting. And be something than just another walking, talking artificial-sounding prop like all the other clones with boobs and legs like yours become when they get too fucking full of themselves,” he snidely continued with an ‘effortless success. He felt like an asshole, and was being treated by a saint.

“What do you want me to do?” the veteran, hot-looking Nurse asked with the naivety and vulnerability of an ugly duckling being asked.

“Read the new script out there with my lackey here, while I read the room, alone,” John said, his visual attention on the ceiling, the walls and the file cabinets which he viewed through the viewfinder, smiling with each angle. He came alive when he saw the dead bodies on the slabs, covered with a sheet of plastic, the only identification of the life that had passed being numbers and names on the toe. He felt absorbed in the moment, the presence of so much death making him feel somehow alive. Leonie, who had boasted about how bitchin it would be to make love in a coffin, acquired a palish green complexion and nearly upchucked her lunch. Plan B had to be put into effect.

John ‘shooed’ lackey Leonie and new star Yolanda out of the room. Yolanda seemed worried. Leonie assured her with a warm smile, and a tender touch on the shoulder. “Lance has his own methods. An award-winning genius who is well funded, and well respected in the industry. Very well connected. Oscar-winning people like---

“---Oscars and peons who want them suck. Powerful is more important than fucking popular.” John ranted in ‘Lancese’ “And getting a film Right is makes it popular, in the long run.”

“And Yolanda is Right for this film?” Leonie asked, showing off her protégé.

“Fucking right,” John continued, shooing the duo outside. “DO let the door hit you on the ass after you leave.”

Yolanda felt renewed, the exhaustion in her face filled with promise, and delight. Leonie looked worried. John didn't look at either of them, and felt alone when the door closed behind him.

There in front of John the aspiring healer lay medical records of the deceased. Two of the recently-deceased survivors of Corporal Hans' 'Holiday Camp' lay sleeping in their lockers, one having officially died of a heart attack, the other due to stroke. Another was resting very uncomfortably on a slab, awaiting official confirmation of death. Her face seemed bitter, angry and her eyes begging for someone to reveal the truth about her death. “I'll do what I can, Rachel Lazinski,” John pledged as he retrieved a mini-dissecting kit and pulled out what he could from the woman's liver, kidneys, skin and coagulated blood. “So, let's see what kind of cancer you died from,” he said, looking at the chart which listed it as the presumable cause of death, signed by none other than Doctor Tully, who wasn't a pathologist, and, to John's knowledge anyway, was still in Bluewater.

The chemicals in the kit were from Hans' notes and shelves, extracted from herbs obtained from the forest, semi-legal drugs from Mother Teresa's Imperium Health Food Store and reagents stolen from the back door of Bluewater hospital. The cyber-screens and assay analyzing software were from Radioshack, put together by John's head. The assay was for one hormone---insulin. “Yes, high levels,” John confirmed as he saw the indicator going into the red. Residual blood glucose, as determined by a stolen but effective glucometer, down to 3. “Hard to believe for any diabetic who took too much insulin as an accident, and inconceivable for anyone who wasn't a diabetic in the first place,” he said, after finding the location where the injection took place in the arm, along with bruises on the neck wrists consistent with a struggle that never made it to the official medical report.

John then picked the locks on the chambers in which the other two survivors of the Camp lay resting, or perhaps rolling over. Most prominent on Hershel Rabinowitz's arms were the numbers tattooed on them nearly over 50 years ago. His liver and kidneys had been extracted cleanly, and his eyes removed. But the chest of the eighty year old man who suddenly died of a heart attack, within a week of prison-mate Rachel, was still intact. With a skill he never had for cutting into living flesh, John exposed the heart and looked at it. True to his expectation, it looked perfect. Not so with the left leg, bruised black and blue around a large injection site which, as expected, set the insulin detector into and past the red again, blood sugar registering at 2. With Tully's signature on the cause of death as heart attack.

As was the case with 'stroke' victim Erica Strauss, whose chiseled features seemed Aryian but whose identity was not. As for her face, she seemed familiar. She could have been Hans' sister, or twin, had she grown a Cowboy Fu-Manchu mustache and got a bad hatchet job done on her topknot. Tully's signature was on her death certificate as

well, but it looked different. The calligraphy seemed shaky and small in the first portion of the script, then bold and large in the second half. As if the individual signing it was terrified by a rash of Morality, then liberated from that restraint.

John silently asked the victims to talk. Lance probably could make them talk, at least to the camera. But this was real life. With the clock ticking down, and one life still remaining. Her address was on the list of survivors Bill had provided, along with the a location which drive terror into John's heart, and head.

Convincing Yolanda to let Leonie and Sundance-nominee 'Lance' scout locations in the morgue was easy. Getting her to let them into ward where they needed to go next was difficult, and dangerous. "When in Rome, do as the Romans," Leonie assured him as they went through the locked doors. Leonie felt the doors lock behind her and shuttered in terror. "It's research," she continued. "And you're a researcher."

"Of the body, but not the fucking mind," John said. He tried his best to do his 'Lance' imitation as they passed the Nurses station in the psyche ward, observed by the hardworking 'handmaiden' RNs who could see through anything. Backed up with 'by the numbers' East Indian docs glancing over charts of patients, signing papers as if they were passing judgment on defective meat. The walking pieces of drugged up and tortured meat shuffled around the floor like zombies, far more horrifying to themselves and others than anything in film.

John's hands started to shake, his lips quivering. He started to mumble to himself, in incomprehensible words that evoked nightmares he never told Leonie about.

"You're supposed to be a fucking film maker," she whispered to him. "Not a fuck up. Whatever memories you have in your head, can't be as bad as what the patient we're going to interview went through for real."

"Maybe, maybe not," John said. He dared not tell guide and aspiring "star" Yolanda about how his mother narrowly escaped a lifetime stay in a loony bin when she was a teenager, escaping only because she pretended to be normal, and 'cured'. And about how he heard the same voices that she did as a kid, and denied hearing as an adult. And about how those voices were more sustaining, and wise, than anything in the real world. He hadn't shared that 'other world' experience with John, or even Hans. Only with his mother who, once assured that it was not due to ANY drugs, said that it was okay. Just God's way of talking a bit more loudly to him than to others.

The whole issue of God came up again to John as they turned the corner to do an interview with the patient in question, for the film of course. What would you say of someone who worshipped an Energy which could not be seen, could sometimes be heard, and who always was, always will be and always is? Crazy, you would say. Alive, you could also say. Conversely, is it a requirement to be Alive to be crazy too? Alive beat normal, and John hated normal. So did Hans, who was more Alive than anyone in front

of his eyes. More alive than the docs, the nurses, the other patients, Yolanda, and even himself. As a service to Hans, and Life, and the Energy emotionally and theoretically that Created and Maintained it, he had to get accurate and usable information from the patient he requested to see. Who was, according to everything Nurse Yolanda said about her, crazy. John knew that under the lab coat he was wearing, and that provided to Leonie, there were all matters of pathology which could keep the \$400 buck-an-hour doctors and tenure-obsessed university shrinks busy for years.

True to his expectations, Ester Rabinowitz had the only live and open eyes in the place, and as such, they were the most painful. “So, you goddamn docs came here to film a crazy person for your fucking medical journal?” she said to John in thick Slavic accent before he could take in a single breath, or form any initial judgment about the elderly woman whose body still retained many youthful features. No sagging arms. No ballooning breasts. Not even a short, silver-tinged overly-blonde hairdo, the topknot on her being pure white, the thick mane flowing down her arched and quite muscular back. “And that Injun bitch of an assistant with you,” she continued regarding Leonie. “How many of her traditions did she sell out or fuck up to get her goddamn name on the paper you’ll do. Tell ya what, I’ll tell you the facts as they are, you twist them into fantasy about how they aren’t. That’s how your world works in, right ‘Docs’?”

Nurse Yolanda, having already completed a double shift of work under-appreciated by docs, patients and fellow nurses, rolled her eyes. Leonie and John kept theirs open. “Her, the asshole with the hot body that’s going to cool down to a bag of balloons that will scrap the floor by the time she has her third affair.” Ester said regarding the busty Yolanda, as if she was ahead of John’s plan to get rid of her. “You, little dick, and baby boobs. You two idiots, stay.”

“The creative process,” Leonie commented to Yolanda, who, to be fair, really did want to help Ester, who clearly was her most difficult and certifiably nuts patient.

“I’ll be outside, Ester,” Yolanda smiled, sincerely.

“It’s Mrs. Rabinowitz to you, fuckface!” the old woman blasted back. “I’ll educate these idiots and get back to you assholes later,” she asserted.

Yolanda left the room, about to cry. It seemed that she really did care about the crazy old bitch, perhaps more than she cared about herself. John had seen women like Yolanda before. They believed in hard facts. Science, medicine and what was real, knowing that the ultimate knowledge of how things were lay in applied logic and confirmable reality. Strange, he thought. He used to be one of those people too.

“You might want to close the shades, sweetie,” Yolanda said to Leonie. “And check for microphones that aren’t in that camera,” she requested of John.

“Why, are we being watched?” John asked, as himself. Lance clearly was not someone Ester wanted to talk to, and John was getting sick of him too, no matter how popular he seemed to Yolanda, Leonie and himself.

“We’re always being watched,” Ester said with the voice of an Elder rather than an elderly woman. “By Him,” she said as she looked up to the sky. “And them,” regarding entities around the room which, to her, seemed very real. Leonie seemed to feel something too. John held his new NON-fake camera and functional tape recorder with a firm grip.

“The spirits won’t let you take pictures of them,” she said. “The only camera that can see them is here,” she said regarding her head. “And the only way you can hear them is with this,” she continued, pointing to her heart. “Right guys, gals and...hmmm...trophy mates in between?” she affirmed.

“Trophy mates named Billie?” John dared to ask, fearing the worst.

“The demon’s he-she disappeared about a week ago,” Ester said. “Maybe it was because someone besides ME figured out he was a she, or she was a he. Or maybe she or he said too much to the wrong people in this Death Camp.” She looked around her, listening for intruders. None there, except for the ‘demon’ who owned the he-she, in her mind anyway.

“This demon,” John said. “He wouldn’t go by the name of--”

“Shhh” Ester said, mouthing “He’s listening.” This time she was right, or possibly so. The splash of raised black paint on the ceiling looked more like a microphone than an inkblot.

John took off his lap coat and hung it up like an umbrella. He retrieved what he thought were unneeded papers from Leonie’s nap-sack and burrowed a pen from her pocket. He gave it to Ester, who wrote. “Carl Stiller, and...”

She waited, sizing up John and Leonie. Then proceeded to write “Uncle Sol Stiller, and...”

So far, nothing new. Bill seemed to know more about Uncle Sol than Ester did. But Ester wrote another name on the list. “Papa Jacob ‘Stiller?’”. John had been informed about Papa Jacob by Bill and educated himself regarding the rest. A survivor of a Concentration Camp and guinea pig used by the Nazis for biological experiments who made it good, nay, GREAT, in the pharmaceutical industry after the war. A generous donator of money to children’s hospitals in Israel, an innovative manufacturer of medicinals to medical facilities all over the world, and a pain in the ass to every one of his competitors, whom he left in the dust as he forged ahead and left deep in the black (debt) if they pissed him off. But why did Ester write ‘Stiller’ with quotes, and a

question mark? John asked her to explain, for the tape recorder, while Leonie glued a condom over the raised paint spec on the ceiling.

Leonie didn't say if the paint blot was a metallic piece of electronics through which Big Brother was listening, or if it was just a blotch that had a primordial shape which made impressionable and imaginative patients paranoid. It would have been an interesting question to answer. But what Ester said was far more interesting, as she warmed up to John like he was her grandson.

"You are young, and intelligent, and care about people. I was so too when we were sent to the Camps. Holiday camps they called some of them. Hospital Camps for the ones we were sent to." She paused, about to fade into terrorized silence. John took her hand gently. She smiled, a tear coming down her cheek as her mouth connected to the deepest and most special parts of her mind. "We were to be put to work helping medical scientists develop wonder-drugs for the world. When we arrived, we got a week of good meals, soft beds and we even got to keep our own clothes and hair. Then we all got sick...Or were told that we were."

"And you were 'cured'."

"Of diseases that were natural in some cases, inflicted on us in others. You know the details, and I won't bother you with them. But some of us were saved from the worst 'treatments'."

"By Papa Jacob?" Leonie asked.

Ester looked up at Leonie and shook her head. "You are a carrier of disease. The diseases of ignorance and cruelty. You probably read what you are supposed to. Believe what the bosses want you to. Never fucking read between the goddamn lines, you, you, you..." Ester's tongue couldn't get around the words, which came out with a stutter, with an accent which became more German than Slavic. Clearly anger had put her in a different time, place and 'reality'.

"Papa Jacob," John asked Ester, gently. He held her shaking hand, trying to keep his as steady as possible. He looked into her terrified eyes, nodding his head, saying that it was alright to talk. "The spirits agree," he said, looking their way, allowing him to believe that they were indeed real, listening and in need of justice to be done.

"He was just Jacob then," Ester said. "To us anyway. He recruited us. Brought us to the Medical camps, saying that it was a far better place than the Labor Camps or the Holiday Camps. We were to be working together to help the world. We believed him, of course, since he was a fellow Jew. He always seemed well fed, well clothed, and..comfortable, and even after he was finally arrested himself, his rags never smelled of blood, urine or sweat."

"Who was a mobster before the War?" John interjected.

“Who was more vicious to other Jewish Mobsters and other Jews he didn’t like than to anyone else,” Leonie said.

“Yes,” Ester said, admiring the Redskin airhead.

Leonie rattled off some names, most of which John told her about. Some of which Bill had told her about, through John. Perhaps it wasn’t appropriate for John to let Leonie take the credit for having done the research, but the more people Ester trusted, the more corrupt people she would give up, and the more innocent people she could save.

“The War didn’t change much,” Ester said, to both of her ‘grandchildren’. “But we thought that because we were an intelligent people, we would fight the Nazis instead of fighting each other. But, as you may have read, there is nothing more dangerous to a prisoner than another prisoner.”

“Or one who is pretending to be one,” Leonie said.

Ester grinned with pride. She took John’s hand and placed it on top of Leonie’s. The duo felt uncomfortable with the arrangement, having never really given voice to its possibility. They looked at each other with a new set of eyes, more positive than negative. “Yes, you two should be together. You fit each other so well.”

“My brother may have something to say about that,” John said.

“If he’s still alive,” Leonie cautioned. “Bill still is, was, ya know...” Her heart couldn’t quite figure out what kind of feelings she still had for Bill, or what feeling she ever had for him, but they were very, very real, and deep.

“Hmmm, I see now,” Ester said. She didn’t say anything about if Bill or Billie was still alive. About where Carl was and who else he was giving insulin injections to. And nothing about Hans either. But she knew. She knew a lot. “Jacob was a different man after ‘work’ was done. He had special privileges. Food. Clothes. Private rooms with beds that had matrices on them and even blankets. He said he blackmailed the SS Guards for them, and that he owned most of the soldiers in Camp, one way or the other. Yes, he owned much. A full head of long hair that was never cut. A handsome strong body that was so appealing. And he owned us...well, me anyway. For a few nights.”

Ester lapsed into a warm, romantic smile, sharing her story with Leonie, leaving John the duty of keeping away the Orderlies, Nurses and Stiller Organization spies. “Jacob told me a lot. Maybe more than what I told him. About his brother, who knew nothing about women and even less about machinery, unless it that piece of machinery was fueled by blood instead of oil. He told me about his home in Bavaria, and how he was an excellent horserider there. An even better horse trainer. And about the soccer teams he led to so many championships.”

Something sparked in John's head as he heard the story, as it brought up a vivid recollection of a set of half-stories which were about to become whole ones. "And what else did Tristan say?"

"How did you know his real name was Tristan?" Ester asked.

"Because his brother told me, sort of," John recalled from the tales about brotherhood Hans had told him.

"He did say some things about a brother he had, half truths mostly," Ester said.

"A brother who he split up with 'because he joined the wrong side'?" John inquired.

"Yes."

"This brother?" John pressed, pushing the picture of Hans in front of Ester's eyes. The ones from the War, composites he had made about what he would have looked like before the War, and photos he had taken of the Old Coot now, when the camera-phobic Master wasn't looking.

"What did he do?" Leonie asked the shell-shocked Ester.

"This is...complicated," she answered.

"Then tell me WHY he did it!" John inquired. "Please."

Ester's mind wanted to tell all, but something in her soul and aging body didn't want it to be known. She opened her mouth to begin to speak the truth as she knew, experienced and envisioned it, but it was shut closed by a ghost. One that entered her body and grabbed hold of her throat, choking her into asphyxiation, then panic, then a grand mal seizure which made the entire room shake like an earthquake. By the time the crash cart came in and the valium was drawn up for injection, it was too late. She had passed onto a better place. Such was what John hoped, and Leonie prayed for anyway.

CHAPTER 24

Uncle Sol's office seemed even smaller to Carl now, most particularly because Carl's new base of operations at the new Vancouver branch of Stiller Pharmaceuticals was even bigger. There was only one problem with it. "The windows," Carl said as he looked down upon the city, nearly a quarter mile under his feet. "They're too, ya know, clear."

"The only way anyone can see what you're doing in here is if they're flying an airplane, or high as a kite," Uncle Sol assured his nephew.

“Or if they’re disembodied souls who can fly wherever they want to,” Carl said in a David Dukovny X-File voice as he viewed the clouds in the distance. Imagining human form in them, somehow. Doing his best to ignore the real human behind him, whom he felt breathing down his neck.

“There is maybe something you want, or need to tell me?” Uncle Sol inquired, in a cynical yet empathetic voice that seemed frighteningly like that of Papa Jacob.

Carl contemplated his answer regarding the steps he had taken to bring himself, Uncle Sol, and the company back up to where they should be. “Sacrifice an defective or dying finger to save an arm, to save a life, to save the world that life will revolutionize one day,” he felt like saying with the aid of another of the television and film characters inside of him, but none of them stepped up the microphone in Carl’s mouth. That orifice was now dry, salty and raw. “Mi rotas,” he answered, as himself.

“Don’t ask,” Uncle Sol translated from the Greek. “And, as our Czech associates said during the Soviet years, ‘he who asks too many questions gets too many answers?’” he continued, with genuine warmth and expansive understanding.

“Look you old fuck!” Carl blasted back at Uncle Sol, refusing to confess the murders he had committed, and orchestrated, for family honor, fearing that perhaps Uncle Sol would not be so honorable and turn him in for what SOMEone had to do. “You got your company back. I got you what you need from that Mountain Man Nazi to keep it going. And after I finish this ‘cop’ work, which is still part of the plan we BOTH made a commitment to, I expect to be a full partner in the operation made possible! Which is my fucking birthright!”

“Yes, your father would have wanted you to inherit his place in his....Organizations.”

“MY Organizations!” Carl growled back. “At least on the West Coast,” he said, taking another walk towards the window. “You keep everything East of Manitoba. I get everything from Alberta Westward.” He took a deep breath, looking forward to what was possible rather than to what was presently difficult. “A friendly competition, Uncle Sol. The Jew who’s smart enough to bring in the most money wins.”

“Hmmm...” Sol contemplated, walking over map of Canada over Carl’s new desk. “I get Manitoba, Ontario and Quebec. And the Maritimes. You get Alberta and British Columbia. What does the loser get?”

“Saskatchewan, where the main source of death is boredom,” Carl mused.

“Ah yes, boredom.” Sol chuckled, then took a look out the window. “An interesting disease. Do you suppose Hans developed an extract to kill people with boredom, or to cure them of it?”

“We can make him do so, perhaps with a combination of extracts from Tempusvenicum that I tested on cats.”

“And human patients?” Sol inquired, staring Carl straight in the eye.

“Patient, Uncle Sol.”

“I thought it was love, Carl.”

“Maybe it was...but...”

“What happened to her?”

“She’s...not in the study anymore,” Carl replied, looking away from his new associate.

“And she is...where?” Sol demanded to know. “She knows a lot.”

“About driving me crazy, maybe. But not about driving on foggy mountain roads near steep cliffs where the road signs have been, ya know, changed,” Carl affirmed.

“And is the ‘missing’ Doctor Tully a ‘bad driver’ too?” Sol asked.

“Not yet,” Carl replied, knowing now that Uncle Sol knew more than he was saying. Perhaps he knew about the real feelings Carl had for his ‘subject’ Billie. And the feelings he always had for men in general which he told no man about, and no woman either. But there was one relationship that Uncle Sol knew was at the heart of all of Carl’s actions, feelings and ‘mi rotas’ ways of dealing with them.

“Your father,” he said with a waving index finger in the mannerism of an old rabbi. “He was a wise, and hardworking man. A real Mench!”

“Who died because a fucking Cop wanted to get a fucking promotion! And who knew NOTHING about the GOOD work he did as an outlaw, in the service of people who really matter! Like Papa Jacob did in Germany during the War, then afterwards in...” the events of the past and present collided in Carl’s tortured mind. Memories of what the legendary Robin Hood Jewish mobster did before the War, and during it, at least according to what Uncle Sol and Carl’s father told him. The success story Papa Jacob had become after the War was over in a country which had all sorts of rules to keep innovative scientists, smart doctors, and independent Jews in their place. And the real story about how Carl had to silence Papa Jacob forever, as he was about to tell the world a completely different story about how he and Stiller Pharmaceuticals had risen from rags to riches. Stories which came from a brain degenerating with Alzheimer’s disease, or perhaps infected with conscience. Yes, Carl said to himself. It was necessary for him to do what he had to do. It was appropriate in the grand scheme of things for Papa Jacob to be done in by one of his own people before he became the enemy of that people. As it

was appropriate for Sol to speak very special and carefully chosen words to one of his own people.

“Carl,” the old man said with his arms firmly grasping the young man’s shaking shoulders. “Your father. Wherever he is. He is very proud of you. And will be even prouder of what you will become, very soon.”

Sol was never a man to show affection. His wife got a light peck on the cheek for each of the eight days of Chanukah as a special gift. His ‘secretary’ at work would receive a peck on the lips every Monday morning. He never hugged anyone, even at his brother’s wake. But now, the caress from Uncle Sol Carl felt from the Old Geizer reeked of warmth, trust and something even more useful, and assuring. A sense of mutual desperation and destiny.

“You know what you have to do now,” Sol said. “It’s a crazy plan. But it has to work!”

“Crazy plans always do, Uncle Sol,” Carl assured his father’s brother, as well as the ghost of his father who he swore was watching over him now more than ever.

CHAPTER 25

The winter winds were kind enough to keep back the cold, the clouds above the mountains holding back their snow for yet another day, perhaps because they had been overly generous with the pure white crystals the last two years, or perhaps because they had no more tears to cry. But the fog remained. It was thick, the bright white clinging onto the mountain of green, the mist around it reeking of ‘finality’. A magnificent sight to the eye, until it was smelled by the nose, evoking an ancient genetic memory which represented both warmth and destruction. All manner of plant-life was transformed, merging with its Maker.

“At least someone had the good sense to let out the animals first,” John said regarding the fire that had ravaged through Hans cabin, laboratory and home as he searched the woods behind the ‘alter of fog’ behind the opened fences.

“And some of the data books got out of here, I hope,” Leonie concluded, noting the door to the main library that was wide open, fresh tracks from a truck with one large bald tire and one overly studded one leading away from it, vanishing as the path took a detour into the swampland that had acted as a moat to the Aryian Atlantian Castle. Leonie, who once had controlled her own destiny and the people around her, had lost her sense of bearings after discovering what had happened so quickly. It was John who was supposed to be grateful for survival of the books and she who was more connected to the animals here than the person who lived here, and the product the Old Coot produced. Everything was so upside down, and inside out now. She even lost sense of the Four Directions, an Aboriginal thing or perhaps just a male thing inside her which always allowed her to feel which way East, West, North and South were. Now, even the concept

of what they were was a fog as thick and horrifying to confront as the charcoaled buildings that, for strange, wondrous and suspicious reasons, lay in between woodlands that had hardly been tinged by the flames.

Those flames had now become embers, the music of Wagner that she hated lingering in her head. This time, Sigfried's Funeral Music, a tribute to a fallen hero. A somber piece which Hans said he wanted to be played at his funeral. And now a very REAL sound, to both John's ears and hers, played on a cassette deck that miraculously had survived the fire and which had been locked into 'replay' mode, buried under the floor of an emptied woodshed.

"We HAVE to find Hans' body!" Leonie insisted to the still quite, and now ever more distant John, regarding the now crazy and perhaps once sadistic lunatic who had banished her from his kingdom when she questioned him about the wrong drug for apparently the wrong uses. "He HAS to fucking be here somewhere!" she grunted, trudging her charred hiking boots through the rubble for a fifth time. She grabbed a metal post out of the ground with the strength of a Queen Arthora and screamed out in protest to her Merlin, once again bashing through the boards on the ground that had been floors, looking for hidden basements or perhaps entry ways to tunnels. "Come on, you fucking piece of shit! Where are you hiding! This practical joke or fucking philosophical lesson about death has gone far enough!"

"He's gone, ain't nothing we can do about it now," she heard from a deep 'McClure' heritage Western voice from behind her, deep in the woods, approaching slowly, on foot. She turned to the woods, even more pissed off at John for all of a sudden 'tawkin' like his 'family' in that cowboy way of knowing what had to be known, and with a stiff upper lip, taking it on the chin and doing what you had to about it. But the speaker was far more transformed than she ever imagined.

"Thanks fer comin' by, and stayin' close Leonie?" he asked, his face hidden by charcoal-scented fog, but his eyes very open, and defeated.

"No fucking problem there eh..." She was unsure of how to address him now. Perhaps his name would do as a start. "Yeah, no fucking problem there, Bill," she said, noting that his clear boyish face was now covered with smoke, the complexion of youth further displaced by a cheek and chinful of overgrown stubble which was on the borderline of becoming a regulation grade male beard. He walked closer, with a long strided, wide gait that was pure 'man', and transformed into "Marboro Man" by the stetsan that had become his trademark, wearing his old scuffed boots that jingle jangled with spurs he wore to impress people in town but, according to John anyway, he never used on his horses.

"Was ridin' in the back country and spotted this fire, decided to investigate," Bill swanked out of his mouth. Noting a small ember of smoke amidst the brown-toasted grass that wanting to become a flame, he drew up some phlegm into the back of his

mouth and let out a megawad of fluid spit onto it, pressing the remaining smoking twigs into the dirt with his bootheel.

“That how you put out this fire, there?” Leonie spat back. “You spittin on it, like I’ve never seen you spit, anywhere, anytime.” she blasted out, then realized was fact. “Or did you, or your horse, or your ‘boyfriend’ have a caseful of beers and came by to piss the fire away after one of you ‘accidentally’ flicked a match?”

The excessively macho Bill answered the accusations and speculations with actions rather than words. Before Leonie’s lightening fast puzzle-solving mind could flash on the next piece of missing evidence to link the gaps in guys’ Mission together into a viable and solvable explanation, she felt the air to her brain halted by Bill’s fist grabbing her collar. He was not himself, clearly. A ghost had transformed him, jostling his soul between uncontrollable rage and irreconcilable grief. Or maybe, Leonie reasoned with the last of her brain reserves, the battle between the extremes inside of him was escalated by something he had been given after he had returned from the dead. Or on his way to becoming officially ‘deceased’. She sensed that a neurologist, or perhaps John, could decipher what happened. But as neither was present, she had to go with the best of her instincts regarding what to do about the resurrected, irrational ghost who was about to send her to zombieland.

“Where’s Billie?” she asked Bill.

He answered with another grunt, and a tighter grip on Leonie’s collar, but with hands that now shook and emitted sweat she could see, and smell. Clearly this way down into the abyss was the only way to scale the mountain.

“I never understood Billie, but I think I liked her. Even respected her,” she said.

The ghost-patient held his ground. Leonie continued the interview, taking a page from Uncle Hans’ book of communication with animals, and her own. Recalling memories that had not been spoken of, but never forgotten, she pulled out a pound of angst from her gut and transformed it into a liter of humor as it reached the mouth. “You know, Billie did have brighter and kinder eyes than I ever did, and looked a hell of a lot better in heels than I ever---“

Leonie’s next pun was held in mid-breath by an even tighter grip around her neck. Bill, or Billy, or whatever the hell he had become, edged closer to her face, his open mouth drooling with saliva like a rabid dog, the odor from that orifice reeking of ‘sweet and sour’ cinammen. No doubt a residual effect of one of the Tempisvenicum extracts that she wanted to experiment on with horses. And that someone had experimented with on people during the War in the Camps in which Hans was present in a role that had to be determined, for the sake of the living and the dead. In the service of both of those populations, Leonie stated the Truth as she knew it, and felt it.

“Billie did a lot of good work that no one else could have done,” she said. “I love her for that. And so do many other people.”

“Amen to that,” John said, as he emerged from the woods.

Upon seeing John alive, Bill let go of Leonie. With a hug that was more human than manly or womanly, the brothers embraced, tears of joy streaming down their faces.

“I thought you were dead,” John said.

“I thought you were dead too,” brother Bill, and sister Billie, confessed.

Leonie watched the re-union between boys who she played with as toys when she was a girl, and admired the men they had become now. In the sweet sorrow of that moment, she felt herself becoming a woman. It felt strange, in that according to all the written and spoken traditions on the Rez, an Injun chick, even if she is only part Injun, only becomes a woman when she has a child, a fulfilled one if it is with the man she loves, or thinks is in love with her. It seemed unlikely now that either of the two McClure guys would be lifetime mates, or even fuck buddies. Not unless there was a kinky man-woman-hybrid three way going on. But two things were clear. First, Hans had to be found, along with the missing books and the missing facts about what really happened at the Camp where he was officially ‘working’ with, on top of, or perhaps under his mobster brother, Tristan, aka Papa Jacob. Secondly, no matter how many nails and cans of sulfuric acid surrounded the cassette recorder buried under the woodshed ‘floor’, the music coming from it had to be stopped. No matter how appropriate or beautiful the tune emanating from it.

With that minor mission in mind, Leonie grabbed hold of the metal post she had ‘excalibered’ from the ground and pounded her way through the floor. Wedging it around the cassette player, prying it open at risk of being splattered with acid and all manner of obnoxiously-smelling odorous excretions around it, until the music finally stopped. Finally, Silence penetrated the woods, and her restless yet ever-expanding mind. The chronically under-achieving C minus high school drop out was then rewarded with a gold star, in the form of a medal box, a note in a fire-proof case over it.

“I am Alive,” it read, in lyrical English calligraphy that looked more Bavarian than Prussian. “So will you be, und many others, if you open this box und do what ist appropriate. If you are confused about how to do what you have to do, don’t be afraid. You are alive und as such will be able to figure it out. Hopefully before the world figures YOU out. Fear not death, but above all, the tragedy of an under-lived or dishonorable life. Und what is honor? Someone only God really understands, but we must live. Has been an honor working, und playing, mit you all. Hans.”

CHAPTER 26

The calendar said it was still February, but the mountain said it was Spring. Snowfall at the Bluewater Ski Hill was as sparse as jobs for the unemployed mill workers. But one event was attended by all, as a matter of tradition, defiance and, for some anyway, devotion. The Valentine's Day Dance this year featured 'Hannibal's Cannibals', a blues band of mostly punk vegans who that could play most anything if asked, country music if paid enough. Normally, they would never play any town smaller than a hundred thousand people, but strings were pulled and favors called in by an anonymous patron. Besides, it was a charity event that made sense emotionally, but not quite economically.

Its behind-the-scene organizer watched the schoolkids bring in their "Feed Africa" posters while their teachers brought in the video material, and the parents brought in the pots and pot-luck raw ingredients for the food that would adorn the tables and make them seem like banquets. The price for admission was lower this year, five bucks a couple rather than twenty-five bucks a head.

"There's no way the kids can make any money to send to the African village they adopted," Sergeant Johnson commented to the patron who had orchestrated everything, and accepted no pay for it, under the condition that he would remain anonymous. "The idea here is to raise money to keep African kids from dying," he said.

"I thought the idea was to keep Canadian kids from her off the streets," Carl replied. "Get them and their parents thinking about something other than dwindling or missing paychecks. Make them feel, you know, important. Like just because they come from a small town, they aren't small people and shouldn't have small dreams."

Johnson looked at Carl Stiller with new eyes, said windows to his soul overshadowed by a longish JFK haircut that made the formerly wormy, slimey-skinned newby seem bigger and more muscular, and healthier. Maybe he had changed on the inside too. Maybe he wasn't the asshole city punk who wasn't using Bluewater as a stepping stone to someplace else. Carl helped the kids, parents, and teachers bring in everything. Taking the heaviest loads of groceries upon his shoulders. Running out to get the next truckful of chairs to bring in after pridefully setting them up inside. Smiling to people when he said 'hello' and seeming to actually mean it. Perhaps the deaths in Constable Stiller's family turned him into a real man, or 'mench' as Johnson now proudly called him to his face, and behind his back. But there were two questions Johnson did have to ask.

"How in the hec did you get 'Hannibal's Cannibals' to come here?" the blues loving Sergeant inquired.

"Community hours owed for their being busted in other places, and...eh..."

"Because they were about to be busted again?" Johnson surmised, and said.

"They play great music. And said they'd jam with musicians here. Maybe get a recording on it to sell as a CD someplace?" Carl suggested.

Johnson envisioned himself playing with the Cannibals, and always dreamed about it. The 'by the numbers' Cop felt comfortable somehow with Stillerian arithmetic. Besides, it was good for the kids. Those who were still in High School, and those that had barely graduated ten, twenty or forty years ago. But there was still another issue where he had to be official.

"That truck over there," he said regarding the mud-stained beater containing wide, bald summer tires on the left side, new studded winter rubber wagon wheels on the right. "Sign on it says it's 'for sale'," he noted, along with Carl's moment of concern regarding the license-less vehicle being spotted. "And since it's in this parking lot with everything else that's been contributed for auction, I guess who gets to keep it depends on who bids the most for it."

"Yeah," Carl replied, looking up the mountain towards the brushfire which had mysteriously put itself out before the fire department ever knew anything about it.

"Owner lives up there?" Johnson inquired, looking at the price tag.

"Don't know," Carl said, turning to the Ford half-ton dinosaur, still too sturdy for the junk-heap, but too young for the Vintage auctions. "But I do know that someone left it here," he said, frustrated, and confused. "No plates, no serial numbers on it. No nothing except a had working engine. Which I took the impound lot three times, and three times it wound it here again."

"Anything illegal in it?" Johnson asked, as he looked at the cab and opened the hood.

"It's just...old," Carl said with a condescending eye-roll.

"Yeah," Johnson agreed, a smile coming to his face, his mind connecting the the soul of the beater that was the same model and color that he had when he was just a rookie in Bluewater, a red hot rodeo star in every town within a hundred miles of it. "An engine with not a single computer part in it. Wish this baby was mine."

"As far as I'm concerned, it always was. And always will be," Carl smiled. He handed Johnson the deed. All seemed very legal on paper. Perhaps it wasn't if he looked under the hood and checked serial numbers, but it was Valentines Day. The memory of one of his harem of rodeo bunnies came to mind most intensely as she fondled the fenders, feeling the youthful spirit underneath the corroded paint and caked in muck.

"Fond memories, Searg?" Carl asked.

"Hot ones, and warm ones," Johnson smiled. In part because it was the bedroom where he first got to know wife Veronica, and a few drives later, was the 'hotel room' in which daughter Gwenevere was conceived. And because somehow, in Carl, perhaps, was the spirit of the solid son Daniel who he knew, or thought he knew, until he died falling off a

mountain cliff after a ski accident under circumstances no one ever really figured out. Johnson knew somehow that if looked into Carl's eyes, his inner secrets would be seen, or cajoled out of him. For now, he took the deed of the ownerless truck with the summer tires on the left, and the studded ones on the right, and adopted it as his own. Still, he had to have a reason to cross the line, and it had to come from Carl's mouth.

"A gift for your wife?" Carl suggested. "The serial numbers have been filed off. And no one's claimed it. Even with the ad that's in the paper and the---"

Johnson pulled out his wallet and laid a fistful of cash in Carl's hand. "For the kids in Africa," he said. "I'll bring more tonight. But above everything else---this beast is mine! Got that?"

"Sure...It always was, and always will be yours," Carl replied.

Johnson patted Carl on the shoulders, with pride. There had been a lot of bad blood between them, and it was time to get it cleaned up. However, one question still lingered as he walked over to his cruiser and opened the door as he became 'Sergeant' again. "Old Man Hans. Anyone here know what happened to him?"

"No," Carl replied. "And no one in Toronto, Vancouver or Kamloops does either," he asserted.

Johnson felt it strange that Carl asserted answers to questions he didn't ask. The junior Constable was tired, after all. He had lost a grandfather to advancing Parkinson's disease, and an uncle to cancer, and had committed himself to become a Nazi hunter in his spare time to honor those departed relative. Thankfully, old Doc Tully would provide Carl with medical care and psychological counseling. Hopefully, he would be returning from his continuing medical education seminar/vacations in sunny Arizona to still-chilly Bluewater for the Valentine's Day Dance. He always did, and always would, Johnson assured himself, and Carl.

CHAPTER 27

Uncle Sol's day started out as breakfast conference with the research division, now armed with new data and information that they had to act on very quickly. Replacing their virgin white lab coats with suit jackets and ties, the head scientists informed Sol about what was doable, and what was not. The meeting ended promptly at 11 AM, as was scheduled.

Lunch was with the legal division. More suits, more finely tailored than the those of the scientists, designed to make the wearer feel important rather than comfortable. More projects of what can be done or what should be done. More facts related between the lines, which everyone understood but no one wrote down.

Late lunch was with the sales department over a table loaded with donuts. Sports-jackets and mismatched ties, but mouths that knew numbers better than any mathematician or chemist. More about fiction than fact, but fiction based in past fact, with charts containing every color possible, and, at Sol's insistence, possible variations around the upward going curves as well as the impressive lines.

Afternoon tea with the caged rodents and technicians whose job it was to quantitate the medical events in their lives before their abrupt and necessary deaths. No suits, but faces of rodents who seemed today to be more humanlike, and faces of research staff who he dehumanized so he could do with and to them what was necessary for the Big Picture.

Supper was with shareholders, the data from the day distilled into charts, graphs and impressive looking photos of happy, cured people. Uncle Sol let the head legal, research and sales people do the talking, accepting the applause from the funders with a bowed head, a tired mind, a troubled heart. Amplified by a headache which nothing in the Stiller Pharmaceutical catalogue could stop.

The long day finally ended. Uncle Sol just wanted to go home. His limo driver pulled up to the door in front of the High Security gate and opened the door. He looked at the driver, Andre by name. Black as spades, with hobbies that included playing Baroque viola, reading Homer in the original Greek, and indulging in games of hide and seek and Go Fish with his grandchildren. As trustworthy a rabbi as you could hire, order or create. A "Schwatze" to status-hungry Jews, a Nigger to WASP oil moguls, a Barbarian Money to Japanese 'commodity investors', but a scholar and gentleman to anyone who really knew him. Sol considered himself amongst that small number of souls who knew Andre, and entrusted him with things even the most Catholic would never relate in a Confessional.

"Home, Sir?" Andre asked, his head slightly bowed, but his big stature of being 6 foot three un-hidable.

Sol dared to look in Andre's eyes. "Your face. I know your face."

"You do, that, Sir," the Montreal-born driver replied in a slightly French accent which was both real and distinguished. "What of my face?" he asked, compassionately.

"I can't look at any more faces tonight," Sol said, looking away. "None that I know anyway," he continued as he walked down the street to the train station.

Andre kept the door open, reminding Sol of his station in life, the importance of his safety, and how he worked hard in his young life and didn't have to in his older one. Sol answered the intelligently thought out and compassionately delivered pleas with a third digit salute.

He vanished into the night, trying to lose himself in so many other faces he didn't know. From the buskers who played for change at the turnstiles, to the soul-dead office workers on their way home, to the cool-to-be-cruel young wannabe actors on their way to

schmooze fests. But one face materialized above them all, somehow hidden within the humanity of even the most inhuman of his fellow passengers. He silently begged of them all, but none would listen. Papa Jacob who floated around him. Then Ester and the other survivors of the Camp. Then...someone more real, at least according to his eyes. "Doctor Tully?" he asked of the pale passenger leaning on the door with yellow, jaundiced eyes. The train came to an abrupt halt, then the doors opened. Citizens exited, more entered. But Tully and the other ghosts were gone. But one remained, reminding him of a meeting which would happen very, very soon. "Doctor HanS! Tristan was not my real brother, but he was yours. And Carl is not my real nephew, but his is mine. And if you think that what I'm doing is so wrong, then I dare you to stop me...I dare God to stop me too. Neither of you can, or should, you know."

CHAPTER 28

Hannibal and his Cannibals played "Moondance", changing the beats from an even 4/4, to a heartbeat-simulating waltz tempo, to a Grateful Dead-like 11/12 rhythm, all of which made sense to the band anyway. A few of the temporary new members of the group, including Sergeant Johnson, did their best to keep up and at times even led the beat to musical frontiers the Vancouver based band never even knew existed. Some of the dancers on the floor in front of them did a standard Texas two step, some a regae twirl, some a Canadianized tango, and some with beats of their own that had nothing to do with the music but everything to do with their other partner's own vibration. Of course, more watched the dancing than did the dancing, but to the credit of those on the floor, most of them DID lift their feet off the ground, unlike most Canadians elsewhere when they took partner in hand and 'grooved with the tunes'. At least in Carl's experience, and observation.

The lights were dim, but the eyes of most of the those in attendance at the Valentine's Day 'Rendevous' were as bright as they ever were, even those who came stag without any intent to leave with a playmate, companion or prospect of such. Dressed up in what they thought highlighted their best features, the citizenry of the town all looked different than they did in ordinary life. Not an spec of mountain mud on their jeans, trousers or skirts. Not a whiff of sweat, cow manure or second-cut hay anywhere to be smelt. But Carl knew all of them by now. By face. Reputation. And recorded offenses and accomplishments. No one knew what made these people tick, or fall apart, better than Carl did. Of course, he did have a partner in this self-assigned thesis project of his. Just as all roads led to Rome in the past, and all highways filtered down to Young or Granville Street now, all roads to getting anything done for you through the legitimized Health Care System led through Doc Tully, one way or another. As such, he was an indispensable colleague in gathering information about the ordinary and extra-ordinary citizenry of Bluewater. He was even more valuable now. Thankfully, he had sent an 'I'm home and will be in the clinic if you need me to be' e mail to Carl two hours earlier.

As for the present, Carl checked on his staff in the kitchen. They were kids, mostly. Well meaning ones for the most part, and as such, boring to talk with. Their culinary

skills were even blander, forcing Carl to take over as chef. It was something he wanted to do anyway, and needed to do for reasons none of them would understand till they got older, IF they were going to be capable of understanding it at all.

The thing most inoffensively offensive wasn't so much the gravy which containing nothing but beef juice, corn starch and flour. Or the home-made salad dressing that did nothing for the lettuce and tomato except make it sink into the plates a little deeper. Or the perogies which were as monotone in spices as the Ukrainian Christian folk hymns sung by the women who made them. It was about something deep red in color, with ground up locally grown leaves put into it that was supposed to be the highlight of the occasion.

"This isn't sauce, it's still oregano flavored catsup," Carl said as he tasted it, yet again. "This is supposed to be a spaghetti supper, guys," he said to the down-turned faces as gently as he could. "If you want to sell raffle tickets to feed African kids, you have to please the crowd. Give them something, you know...interesting."

"We like it," six-foot fit-and-trim Paul Richter, democratically sort-of-elected leader of the cooking and cleaning crew, replied with a meek, sheepish voice.

"This is what we my Mom cooks up at the café every day," dominatrix-in-training Michele Farnsworth asserted through a mouth that was always the first to speak out, the most verbose, and the loudest in any crowd. "She puts it on chili, burgers, fries and anything else you can bit into that don't bite back first."

"But we aren't going to serve what people get every day here, tonight, right guys?" Carl said to Paul, Michele and all the other kids, who he had personal numbers for in the 'aggression index' file between his ears. "You want your folks, and friends out there to say they really, really enjoyed the food here. That it was, like, ya know, exceptional. Bitchin'. Outstanding. Magnificent. Fab." Carl went on with expletives that he thought fit each of those he addressed, painfully adding 'like', and 'ya knows' as it felt required to maintain a rapport with his 'crew'.

"Yeah," all of them said, and affirmed with voice, head-nods or shuffles of their feet.

"Okay then!" Carl said with a G-rated enthusiasm that scared the shit out of him. Yes, he had cast himself as Steve Martin in another 'Eight is Enough' Disney clone flick, or one of the other burn outs who were once brilliant comics who became 'Cosbyized', but he felt the role coming into him. "Tell ya what, gang!", he observed coming out of his mouth, crucifying himself inside after he realized that he let 'gang' come out, and with so much vigor. "I'll serve up what you got here, with just a touch of some magic I learned when I was at chef school when I was in Nelson one summer."

"Weed?" Michele replied, with a stoner smile and eyes which had that 3 toke glossy glow to them.

“It would give people the munchies,” Paul dispassionately continued, slipping into accountant mode. “It would make people, like, ya know, hungrier.”

“And each plate of spaghetti we sell is another two bucks for African kids,” middle-of-every-road-he-traveled Evan McDonald added.

“Is it true that the weed from Nelson beats anything grown here?” Michele inquired.

“No one grows pot here,” Paul proclaimed, his eyes turned downward. He, Michele, his comrade kids and Carl knew that Paul’s hockey equipment, bookclub account and tuition fund for Bible College was supplemented by his 9 to 5er parents having some semi-legal backwoods botanical activities after hours.

“But if it was legal, would you guys use it?” Carl asked, demanding an answer from each of them.

Of course, they all said ‘no’, following Paul’s lead. Of course, Carl said he was proud of their honesty and individuality. And, of course, he dismissed them from the kitchen, telling them that he’s giving them the night off to play while he takes care of the rest of the work in the kitchen. And of course, for the next stage of what had to be done for Bluewater, Africa, the World, and Carl’s own Chosen People, he had to be alone, in charge of the kitchen which would feed a hungry crowd outside.

It was Sergeant Johnson’s voice that Carl heard next. Loud, assertive and driving straight to the gut. “Desperado” was the song, delivered from the stage with more heart, depth and even style than the Eagles ever did. A classic tune that silenced everyone, including Carl. He thought about what he was about to do, and who he wanted to do it with. And do it FOR. He imagined himself a cowboy riding the range. Being watched over by a trail boss in the sky---his father. Delivering cattle to feed his peeps at the ranch over the hill, Uncle Sol, every other Jew West of Jerusalem, and his gentile mother as well. He imagined inside the ranchhouse, a warm face waiting for him, begging him to stay. Needing him to stay. Wanting him to stay as much as he wanted to.

But, a cowboy’s gotta do what a cowboy’s gotta do. He lifted out the boards he had loosened earlier on the floor, and opened the locked box. He smelled the three bags, each labeled with the appropriate number code, and noted the degree of cinnamen odor in them. He calculated the dose required for an average sized human, plus or minus the better part of a bottle of ‘low alcohol’ wine ingested, and peaked out at the tables. Everything set up, with nametags for each of the diners. A classy thing, he thought. And a necessary thing. Short and long term. He felt himself muttering his thoughts, speculations and calculations, a ghost from his past summarizing the calculus into simple arithmetic delivered with a hushed whisper into his ears.

“Yeah. We have to fuck these people up. For your People, the World, and for us,” the ghost said.

Carl's breath became rapid and shallow, a chill coming over his body as he felt invisible sweat pour out of his head, which was becoming faint. The ghost gently stroked his forehead.

"Let me make it better," the ghost continued, turning his head around and kissing him on the lips.

"Hmmm," Carl said to the unexpected, very female visitor. "You look familiar," he smiled as he licked the lips that had been puckered with so much gusto. "And your lipstick is..."

"Cinammen flavored," she said, letting out a chuckle that terrified Carl. "FLAVORED with cinammen, that is," she continued, producing the lipstick in question with the trade name. "Cinammen rose, actually."

"A rose that, ya know, was, like..."

"Supposed to be, like, ya know, gone?" Billie continued, flicking 'her' extended fingernails up in the air, displaying a bust under a green satin blouse that had grown two sizes bigger and more seductive. "Yes. They're real," Billie continued. "And about that kiss."

"You never kissed me on the lips. Not like that anyway," Carl said, his mind disarmed by a heart which was overwhelmed. "Why?"

Billie turned around, tapping her stiletto heels anxiously. "They had a funeral for me, you know," Carl heard through a voice becoming overcome with tears.

"You...left without telling anyone where you went," he said, making a discrete rush out to the door. "But I can tell those people out there that you--"

"----You fucking tell those fucks nothing!" Billie said, her left arm blocking Carl's exit from the kitchen. Her right embracing him. Her face finding a haven under his neck. "No one came to my funeral. It didn't even make the papers. My mother was the only one who came. Hans said I was a traitor. My rodeo buds said I was just a homo. My father said that..."

The rest of the words were absorbed by Billie's tears. They were never said, but Carl heard them, loud and clear. While trying to console her grief at losing a family and community, he did his best to absorb her anger. Forgetting, of course, that it the last time she was seen was after she got into the car that HE got for her. Which he had warned her about the breaks that needed fixing before she took it anywhere besides the garage. Or maybe he didn't? What character was he playing that day when he had that final conversation with her over the phone? What movie was he himself lost in?

As for the script today, the drama had been escalated from the beginning of act 2, to entering Act 3, heading full force for the finale. “So, we create a disease with these behavior modification extracts, and make these guinea pigs squirm till we decide to give them the cure,” Billie said as she converted anger into action, her feet pacing the room like a lioness plotting the demise of her prey. “According to the Camp Records and probably your feline data, this ‘medication’ does sort of work. But we need verification before it gets sold to the sicko kids and adults all over the world. We slide to glory as they all become happy, well adjusted people after we turn them into a self-destructive mob.” Yes, Billie knew the script so far as well as he, or Uncle Sol, did. But there was a modification the Carl now insisted on. No matter what Billie or Uncle Sol said.

“This town is already diseased,” Carl said, opening up the curtain. “Look at them! These humanoids are all sicko. Some are too aggressive. Some too passive. Some too fucking ordinary.”

“And these sacs of ‘oregeno’?” Billie said, smelling the baggies in the celophane-protected wrappers.

“Are the cures for the diseases that make this town so fucked up,” he continued. Carl assigned each of the faces in the gathering room outside a number on his aggression, depression and ‘dull out’ indexes. He showed her the charts he had carefully drawn, with the data Tully had been collecting on their pathology that passed for ‘healthy normality’ by people who themselves did not know the difference between being Alive vs. a walking corpse, or being Connected to Life vs. ‘socially integrated’. He told her that once his data was complete, Bluewater would be a town so Alive, Enlightened and Intelligent, that it would not only create its own very legal money making industries, but accept ‘hybrids’ like Billie/Bill to become whatever they want and need to be.

“But what about Uncle Sol?” Billie asked.

“He’s still at stage 2,” Carl replied.

“Creating the disease, and holding back the cure for just the right time, then investing big in the pre-tested wonder drug just before it hits the shelves,” Billie surmised. “Why can’t we do that here?”

“Because WE, want to be ahead of Uncle Sol, and everyone else!” Carl exclaimed. “I’m my father’s son, not my fucking Uncle Sol’s nephew.”

“Yeah,” Billie said. “But there’s one problem with that.”

“You don’t know...” Carl spat out. “What the fuck do YOU know anyway?”

“That you’ll need a hot looking waitress to serve up this wonder stew,” Billie said with a perky smile. “And to collect the data afterwards,” she continued. With that, she motioned for Carl to continue his biochemical modification of the three pots of sauce,

stripped off her coat, shook a Valentine's Day bunny tail on her ass, and put a Lone Ranger mask over her eyes. "We both ride out of town after we fix it, and never come back. Okay with you, Tonto?"

"Me like," Carl replied in Tontoese, feeling connected to the role, his co-lead actor, and the Mission at hand.

CHAPTER 29

Leonie fell asleep under the bright, distant stars and the close, even brighter full moon. She did not intend to, but she did. Perhaps there was a reason for going into the parallel reality, the *huya aniya*, as the Yaqui Indians called it, where you could actively change the reality the so-called awake and living were experiencing. According to that parallel belief, it was what you did in dreams that affected reality, not what you did in reality that determined your dreams.

This time 'in', or 'out', the grand-daughter of one of the most powerful Shamaness' in the Pacific Northwest recalled what happened that afternoon. It was a clear recollection, accurate in every detail. After having discovered Hans' box, she did examine its contents. And she did so alone before showing any of it to John, Bill or Billie. Besides, they were off in the woods sharing their experiences and future plans with each other.

Inside of Hans' most secret vault and most final statement were reams of medical data, written in what looked like German AND what read like colloquial Western Canadian English. Ways to simulate diseases in animals so cures could be found that could be applied to people, or animals deemed valuable to people. They all dealt with curing the body, healing the mind, and, as Leonie's inner eye read it, liberating the soul. Neurological diseases were his specialty, of which psychiatric manifestations of such were given intense consideration. Central to the curative agents was 'grow juice', or as it was spelt in some places, 'grow jews'. As Leonie remembered in the dream about the reality before the dream, 'grow jews' could, theoretically anyway, make new brain connections grow in specific systems. Applicable to not only nerve trauma situations incurred during wartime, but degenerative brain diseases such as ALS, MS, diabetes, Parkinson's, Alzheimer's dementia and a host of other psychiatric disorders which destroy people's lives just as painfully during peacetime.

But as for the animal models, they were limited. Leonie recalled in her dream that in the reality Hans came in from the woods and had a private conference with her, and only her. She asked him about the medical details, and he informed her about the human reality, and necessity of it all. How he himself felt himself drugged during his teens and lured into joining the SS after it was discovered by an authority figure someplace that he was a smarter scientist than Einstein, but had to be turned into a less sensitive one. How he discovered soul-twisting agent 235B which had been slipped into his food, then went on a secret diet, curing himself by power of mind and some formulated compounds that competed with 235B for receptor sites on what was left of his brain cells, thus inactivating the 'Conversion Compounds' effectiveness. How he had a golden

opportunity to use the Third Reich's vast medical resources to find cures not only for diseases and injuries it inflicted on the world, but diseases that would be around after the Riech had fallen. And perhaps, to find a cure for the disease of mind that made it possible for the Third Reich to come to power in the first place.

Leonie recalled in the dream about the reality before the dream that she asked Hans if he considered himself a monster or a saint. She recalled that he said he was just a man, doing what was necessary for the common good, as best as he could determine, given where he was and who he was. She recalled asking him how he escaped capture by the Russians, and how he soon after was undetected by the War Crimes Commissions and Canadian Immigration authorities. He said 'I was lucky, and as such, had to spend the rest of my life earning that luck'. She then recalled asking the reclusive scientist who dedicated his life to developing local cures for local people in so many ways, medical and otherwise, why AAA was something he spent so much time trying to develop, yet doing it all alone, and he remained silent, kissing Leonie gently on the forehead with lips that smelled of something strange, then felt tingly, then spreading something into her head that made her feel drowsy as Hans disappeared into the woods again. But one voice came out of the woods which was not hers. "Nine o'clock, at the lodge," she recalled it saying. "No problem," she remembered saying just before she fell into a deep slumber.

From the perspective of 'reality', Leonie was awakened from the dream by a loud ruckus below, which was very real. It was coming from the Bluewater Ski Lodge, the bright lights on the building seeming to be more like blazing infernos than bright celebratory campfires. The sounds from inside were more animal like than human, monstrous and demonic. But more horrifying was the sight of herself on top of the mountain, alone, with Hans' empty box next to her. Her hands shook with fear seeing that the material had gone missing. And that on top of that, the watch on the wrist that had several times been considered a conduit to suicide blasted two numbers into her which amplified the terror and guilt. "Eleven forty," it read. She called out for John and Bill, but both were gone.

She raced for her truck, and attempted to start it. Nothing. It was dead. Unlike the animals in the woods between herself and the lodge, who all seemed to be alive, growling angrily at her, daring her to enter into their domain. Every animal in the woods now seemed to be a beast, intended to devour her. They seemed like demons, residing in a new kind of hell. But, somehow, she knew that she had to go through that hell to get down to the inferno of human suffering below. Somehow. No matter how long it took. An no matter if she would arrive as a live person, or a dead ghost.

CHAPTER 30

Carl's favorite waitress and most faithful drug delivery dude, Billie McClure, had done everything by the numbers. Sauce number 1, agent that turns around depression into assertion, nicknamed 'Primal Fire', to 'afraid to make passionate love to a girl because it

would lead to ballroom dancing' went to Paul. And the other twenty citizens who needed to be pushed off the 'safety first, last and always' cliff in order to find out that they could and should indeed be flying rather than crawling in the dirt. As for long term effects, sprouting of neural fibers would occur over a period of weeks, perhaps months, effecting a long and lifetime cure.

Michele and her subgroup of aggressors got and imbibed spaghetti sauce number 2, 'Mountain Mellow', with those two extra hydroxyl groups on the A and D rings of the molecule that would open their hearts and soften their hard bitten minds. One of the recipients of such was Billie's father, who went on to the people around him at the table about how the reason for the collapse of society was the lack of manhood in men, and the 'sensitization' of boys who were supposed to grow up to be men. Will McClure Sr. didn't recognize the hot looking waitress as his son, and patted him on the ass, winking at him with that 'behind the barn after my wife is sound asleep' grin. Billie, of course, smiled a cordial 'maybe' back to him, giving the boastful cancer survivor an extra ladelful of 'Mountain Mellow', with a bitter heart.

As for number 3, 'Bwain Boost', its most probable effect was to give a kick to the noradrenergic reticular activating system in the brain stem while at the same time accentuating cholinergic transmitters in the association area of the cerebral cortex. Wake up the brain conditioned to under-use, the mind trained to underachieve and the soul lulled into obedient slumber by just life itself. The 'Fire for Algenon' disulfide-linked side-chains of the molecule in the extract seemed to increase IQ points in most every prisoner tested, and every cat assessed. Escapes were more cleverly plotted out from the cages each had been put into in both subsets of subjects. The medicine that would cure dulled-out- Evan McDonald and the other 'nice kids', and lifelessly 'respectable' adults, whose souls wanted to break the rules, or at least examine them, but whose brains had been conditioned to keep their eyes closed and Inner Vision dormant.

Such was the theory, with all three extracts not only activating portions of the brain that life had destroyed but actually growing new nerve fibers that could be used for the rest of life. Lives that would be free of dementia in above the neck, and liberated from trauma-induced paralysis when the 'regrow' factor was isolated and injected into the spinal cord. But when Carl looked at his clock after the main course was over. This 'dance' was about confirmation about what he already knew, stole and would take credit for as he used it to save the world. At least the part of the world he felt was most important. A piece of cake which not only flattened out, but which blew up all over the oven, the kitchen, and in his face.

The band eased their way into a "Doors" motif, the song 'This is the End', sung by a suicidally-depressed, and outwardly-aggressive Sergeant Johnson. It fit the new dance which was establishing itself in the room, the performers playing out their Apocalyptic drama with painful accuracy and deadly precision, finding and allowing expression for the worst rather than the best in those condemned to be in the 'cast' .

Paul sung an 'I am garbage I'm a piece of shit' tune to himself again and again, as did five others of his subset of patients in even more self destructive words. 'Primal Fire' seemed to do nothing except smother the embers that kept them from committing suicide, which by the way they were holding the knives at the tables, many of them were intending to do. Michele's cultural domination of others blew into an 'I'm cool and hip and you will never be' rant that made even Carl feel inferior to her socially, and otherwise. As did at least three other super-hyped people in her subgroup who had received and ingested ample helpings of 'Mountain Mellow'. Evan and two of his subgroup just watched everything with a blank, passive stare. Like people who go to work in the morning and return home to two hours of mindless tv, letting whoever wants to infuse whatever they want to into their slumbering souls.

As for William McClure Sr, who had always been all talk and no action with regard to cheating on his beloved wife Mandi with desperately-lonely ladies, he was grobbling every piece of tail he could get. Smooching each one harder than the next, most particularly when Mandi was looking. The usually meek, God loving, but never fearing, mother to Will's sons and greatest supporter of her husband's broken dreams was drunk, not with booze, but the elixirs infused into her by demons that made all manner of creatively colorful yet insults come out of her mouth. Some were directed at Will, some at God, most at herself. None were directed at Hans. As was none of any aggression in the citizens who had turned into madmen and crazy women, both genders equally out of control.

"This wasn't supposed to happen like this, Billie," Carl muttered through shaking lips to the only one who seemed to care, or understand from safety of the kitchen entrance leading to the main dining hall. "You are sure that you gave them what I asked you to!!"

"What you TOLD me to give them," Billie blasted back, arms folded over a chest filled with rage, and indignation, closing the door behind him/her. "It was YOUR plan, Carl. Which was for us, or you, to prove...what again? Oh, yeah. That you're a smarter scientist than Doc Hans AND the scientists at Stiller Pharmaceuticals AND the professors at U of T who tossed you out of the graduate program you almost finished."

"Which I am, you hybrid bitch!" Carl sneered back. "You were the one who brought me Doc Hans' Tempusvenicum mind-killing extracts. But I was the one who figured out from his notes, and my own scientific intuition, how to refine them to put schmucked brain tissue back together again."

"While good old Uncle Sol is still working with the mind-killing extracts that make people crazy, or dead. Like...what was the extract that you gave Ester?"

"A32," Carl said, checking his subjects outside, from all three experimental groups. They made their way to the door, then stopped, milling about like rats in a cage. Each group displaying its behavior in an even more amplified form, as the music played out the abuse fest, carried out with gestures, words, then fists.

“You could have given her insulin to shut her up, like you gave the others,” Billie said. “It must have felt good to put those Camp Survivors out of their misery. They won’t have anymore nightmares, thanks to you. Right?”

“Yes,” Carl said, listening to the loud ruckus through slits in the kitchen door. He took mental notes on the the subjects who were violating both his expectations and, according to his best assessment, the basic laws of neurobiology.

“But, what did you say?” Billie continued, sashaying over to Carl, stroking his chest, as he was about to exit the kitchen and storm into the dining area. “Truths out of a crazy person’s mouth could make everyone believe they were not true? You did say, that, didn’t you.”

“Yes I did,” Carl asserted, proudly, allowing himself to be stroked, and complimented.

“Someone was eventually going to get rich marketing the rest of the drugs you stole from that old Mountain Man Nazi. Might as well be you,” Billie continued, stroking Carl between his legs, feeling a third limb emerging to say ‘howdy’. “Create the disease, keep the cure in your back pocket. Dole it out to ‘patients’ who deserve it, or who can pay you top dollar. Diseases like cancer, stroke, diabetes and all kinds of psych problems. All of it was YOUR plan. Uncle Sol and Hans were just your pawns. You are the chessmaster. Isn’t all that so, chess MASTER,” Billie continued with complimentary, alluring feline lisp.

“Damn right, all of it,” Carl noted, nodding his head proudly.

“And Uncle Sol is, well what is trying to do now? Create a crime wave and carnage festival somewhere else Constable Carl? Just like Tempusvenicum did in the Camps, in the human experiments that, well probably Hans designed. His brother Jacob, or rather Tristan was too dumb to even think about it. Dumb, stupid Papa Jacob.”

“Papa Jacob was a genius, in his time!” Carl asserted.

“And when it was not his time, you killed him. With insulin. Because it was the right thing to do.”

“He wasn’t himself anymore,” Carl said, a tear about to come down his cheek. “And when he was younger, he said that if he ever became a weakling. Or a coward. Or turned on his own family. He wanted one of us to---“

“---Kill him. Which you did.”

“Because I had to!”

“And what about Hans? How much evidence did you plant in the history books, and how much evidence did Papa Jacob leave with his Nazi collaborators to implicate him in all the atrocities that happened in that Camp?” Billie inquired.

“Enough to be convincing,” Carl said. He turned to Billie and stared her/him straight in the eyes. “You were a dumb ass guy who’s turned into a really smart girl, you know that?” Carl picked up a knife by the handle and felt the sharpness of the blade.

Billie backed up to the door, but didn’t open it.

“So, you know what’s going to happen here?” Carl smirked, snipping off the button’s on Billie’s blouse one by one. Boltlocking the door shut just as Billie tried to open it.

“You’re going to kill me. Right?”

“Correct again,” Billie’s blouse fell to the floor, a half-slip under it, undulating as the skin

“Why? Family ‘honor’? Money? Fame?”

“Right again, to all of the above” Carl said, stealing a last kiss from his ‘beloved’, directly on the lips. “Strange,” he said, smacking his lips as he tasted the gloss. “Ever since you’ve been in here, I can’t stop fucking talking. Whatever is in my head comes out into my lips.” Feeling a strange ghostlike sensation moving up his spine into his neck, he grabbed giant sized wak and smashed the kitchen door to smithereens. “And you out there!” he yelled out to the humanoid lab rats who had disobeyed his mandates and caused him so much unexpected, debilitating self-doubt. You assholes and idiots are supposed to be CURED by those extracts I gave you. You’re supposed to be better people than you ever were! Better, not worse! Better, not---“

Carl stopped ranting, as the voice he heard louder than anyone else’s was his own. Echoing around the room, on loudspeakers fed by microphones which originated on Billie’s chest. “For your eyes only, one last time,” his ‘beloved cowboy’ said, revealing a chest with recently augmented breasts which were size ‘perfect’, and a smile that said ‘last round-up’.

The bull had nowhere to run. The ‘normal’ citizenry in the dining room stopped all of their small talk, and stared at Carl as if he was a defective piece of meat. The ‘defective’ subjects in the three experimental groups snapped out of their performances, congratulating each other on how good a job they did. John distributed pockets of cash to them. In currency that Carl recognized all too well.

“Forty year old American military issue greenbacks and German marks that I stole from Hans’ place after I---”

“You what?” John asked as he came into the kitchen, relieving Billie.

Sergeant Johnson approached, in plain clothes, but backed up with a crew of Cops in uniform.

“I’m...I’m not going to jail! I’m crazy...I was drugged.” Carl protested, trying to find corners of the room to hide in. “Ask Doc Tully!”

“We already did,” Leonie said, having arrived late, pulling the not-so-good doctor from closet in the back of the lodge, with leash attached to dog collar around his neck, his body badly bruised, his bloody wrists cuffed with RCMP bracelets, his suit and white lab coat torn to shreds.

“It was all his idea!” Tully said of Carl. “Faking the patient’s files. Making my patients sick to make it look like Old Doc Hans’ medicine was poison,” he continued, facing all the patients who had been entrusted to his care. “For the greater good, for global justice, ‘Constable Carl’ said. He was in it for the money. And when I wanted my share of it, he tried to kill me too!”

“Wish he had,” Will McClure Sr. said, having survived cancer thanks to Doc Hans’ illegal medicines and Doc Tully’s subsequent ‘cures’ thanks to John keeping him away from the hospital.

“No, you don’t wish Doc Tully died, Dad,” Billie said.

“No, I don’t,” the crusty but still standing veteran rancher said, his heart melting, his mind in the process of a major revolution. “He deserves a chance to be who he is, just as everyone deserves to be who he is...Bill, or I should say, Billie.”

No one in the room smiled wider than Mandi, Will’s husband, when macho father hugged feminized son, or perhaps newly discovered daughter.

Leonie surrendered her canine captive to the Cops, and extended her hand out to John. They felt right for each other now, finally. But two orders of business had to be dealt with before the pleasure of rediscovering who they really were was to happen.

“Any ideas as to where this Uncle Sol is, and what he’s doing?” Johnson asked. “And how we can find him?”

John held up a lipstick container, labeled ‘cinammen surprise’. “Put it inside his cheek this time. His tongue will wag. But better do it fast. In a quiet place. Works better.”

“And what about Old Doc Hans?” Johnson inquired, looking around the room. “No one’s seen him here.”

Leonie saw it more clearly than anyone else. And felt it too. She felt his mind and body missing, but his spirit ever-present. Sorrow and joy in their most intense extremes.

CHAPTER 31

Unlike the characters he emulated in film, Carl Stiller in real life gave up Uncle Sol's locations, plans and the whole operation at Stiller Pharmaceuticals. Maybe it was the truth serum Billie had extracted from Hans' shelf of botanically-derived pharmaceuticals, or maybe it was the deal proposed to the once ultra-cool upward bound professional by the Feds in exchange for his silence and his internment in a psychiatric facility vs. the Pen. Billie hoped that the Docs there could help him, and secretly wished that Carl could be the lover, and friend, she imagined him to be in her weaker or more vulnerable moments. John felt confident that he could eventually figure out what medications could be sent in to untwist Carl's mind, as just one of the many agendas awaiting him in his new position as a senior investigator in the research and development division of the cleaned up company.

As for Hans, he was acclaimed as a hero and a saint by the community who loved him, and needed him, but never really understood him. As for his real history, discovering that was only the beginning of Bluewater opening its eyes to the Wise Old Coot's real reasons for coming there, and remaining for so many decades. Uncle Sol's confession, and the people it led to, revealed the real story about the Old Mountain Man during the War. About how the young Hans was initially duped by medications, inspiring marching tunes, the allure of great-looking uniforms, and of course a plethora of political lies, into joining the SS. How he woke up, from something Real inside himself, and then did the best he could to be humane to prisoners under his care, at great risk to himself. How, once locked into being one of the devil's minions, he did whatever he could to use the Fires of Hell in the service of God, and humanity, in the short and long term. And how he attempted his boldest Promethian endeavor by devising drugs which could convert evil men into good ones, with a clever plan to test the agent on the SS Commanders of the Camp, then working the patient list all the way up to Adolf Hitler himself. Perhaps Stalin, if the Red Army advanced faster than expected.

But did those medications really work? Was medical technology the answer for the disease of human cruelty and ignorance? The burden of figuring that out lay most heavily with Leonie, who now felt herself far older than she ever envisioned possible. Old Doc Hans' medications always worked when it came to treating ailments of the body, but when it came to curing defective minds, that was another story. The three soul-correcting agents Carl had given to his subjects at the Valentine's Day Dance didn't work. This was clear. But why were they in Hans' medicine chest? And did they really work on the patients at the Concentration Camp as poorly as they did on the subjects at the Bluewater Valentine's Hoedown? Leonie needed real life answers, so naturally she asked the ghost behind her for his opinion on the matter. He spoke first.

"You've done well to built the place up again," Hans commenting regarding the cabin, lab and animal hospital which had been reconstructed in his absence on the grounds where he had been burnt out.

“I had lots of help,” Leonie replied, more rebellious than grateful. “But if this place is going to keep going, like you seem to want me to do, I’m going to need YOUR help.”

Leonie reached out to Hans, to feel if he was real or imaginary, but he withdrew, leaving answering that question to her best intuition, or innermost need. He smiles, laughed, then sung. Another Wagner tune, of course, in the original German.

“I don’t understand a fucking word you’re singing, you know,” Leonie snidely said.

“But you feel every beat in der music, ist that not so?” the reply.

“Even though ‘my people’ never evolved their music beyond acopella chanting mit out harmony, mit a steady drum rhythm that only changes by getting faster when der inner angst und energy gets more intense?” the half-Native sixteen-year old Elder observed herself answering, ‘mit’ all of the prepositions converted into German ones, a manner of speaking which she hated but now found herself stuck in, and painfully sustained by.

Hans looked up to the sky, then to the earth, then turned to each of the Four Directions. He muttered a somber prayer to the North, requesting cool winds in August. To the South for whatever warm breezes would be possible in January. From the East he asked that the sunlight be delivered every day with magnificence of its own design, but to keep people from that area of the world as far away as possible. From the West he requested guidance, as it seemed to be the direction calling him loudest, for reasons it never spoke.

Leonie had seen it before, between her ears. The Old Coot, or the visiting ghost, was in the final stages of his life, and journey. “What was that you said?” she reiterated. “The first twenty years of life you learn it, then the next twenty to live it, then the next twenty you teach it. And the last twenty you...leave it. Makes no sense.”

“Sometimes things that are true are not supposed to make sense,” he professed, then realized was true. His took in a deep breath, retrieved his backpack and looked up at the sky again. Straight up, and grounded to the prospect of Flight, as equally sustained by it as he was scared.

“You can stay, you know,” Leonie said. “And I know you want to.”

“Which is the precise reason why I must go.” With that, Hans turned away and with a long-strided march, and dance, began to disappear into the woods. But not before Leonie asked just one more question.

“You will be back, right?” she asked.

“I never left,” he smiled. “Und never will.” And with that, Hans did disappear into the fog that enveloped the woods, remaining for just enough time for him to finish singing the tune. True to the pun that had formulated in Leonie’s exponentially-expanding mind, the opera was over. But the Real Music was only beginning, the ever-increasing Silence

reminding her of that and planting the seeds of that New Opus in her now Ancient Mind which was never more adventurous, compassionate and needed.

In the end, the clouds did have their say. They continued to protect Bluewater from the outside world, and itself. Such places never would make it on the map, but the Universe needed them. Self preservation, perhaps. Or just something that happens, because it does, and because it has to.

END