

CRO MAGNON 6

By Vorana

Narrative Dialogue by the Lead Character Jude Viruet in Red

1>

An athletically-built man with long brown hair to the shoulders, short bangs, slightly raised cheekbones and a little skin hue, sits at his desk near a window overlooking the New York City skyline. His pen is scratching notes on a pad. His narrating mezzo-tenor voice is very deliberate.

I am Jude Viruet. Some say I am a highly-decorated CIA Officer. I am just a weak man under grace. Many would say that my career as an Air Force Officer and Intelligence Officer is a boring existence. I say that my 40 plus years of life has been quite rich.

Most Americans including me assumed that our wonderful Constitution, checks and balances and National Security infrastructure, were sufficient bulwarks for the survival of our democracy. But through graphic experience I encountered holes in the American dike.

My exposure to this threatening axis began on a warm Spring day. My Agency colleague Carly Stein, a kind and gracious woman who wouldn't hurt a flea, was walking to her car after an event at her Synagogue. It was dark, and the streets of Borough Park, Brooklyn, were quiet as usual. There was one witness to a dark sedan pulling up, fake Nebraska plates. In a flash, there were ninja like figures on Carly and a bag of some kind over her head.

2>

Carly Stein, a plump middle aged woman with long loose green dress, is strapped to a metal chair. A gag covers her mouth as her eyes dart about desperately.

On the other side of a glass wall men huddle; an altered American flag hung on the back wall. The flag has the normal red and white stripes. But the square in the corner does not display the stars; rather, a gaudy black Swastika.

“We are already 5 years into Operation White Sheep,” says Mensa, a 60-ish man with short gray hair, gray goatee in the shape of an inverted triangle, and thick glasses. He is dressed in a sharp brown suit and matching tie. “We’ve had no complications, so who says God isn’t on our side? The return of dominance of our race is only weeks away.”

“Mr. Mensa, we still have an issue with our Imams and Mujahideen, about this White Nationalist and Jihadist Axis,”—an Afghani accent from Omar Mohammad, a tall man with long beard and full Islamic attire, including the cotton pakol cap.

“You cannot break and unbreakable axis, Omar,” Mensa replies. “When we have a decadent, corrupt, teetering US government in common. Standing idly by and spewing useless rhetoric while our Aryan solidarity grows—and your jihadists continue to breed.”

“The problem is this,” Omar continues. “The crusader religion practiced by many of your White Nationalists is stench in the nostrils of our jihadi fighters.”

“No, Omar, tell your leaders not to be swayed by the false Christianity practiced by all these deceived churches. We practice pure, racial identity Christianity. Hagar and Ishmael in the Bible were anointed by God to separate themselves from the fallen Jewish race, and eventually promote the anointed Aryan race. The Jews are evil because they are the offspring of Satan and Eve—and in Genesis it talks about the anointing humans to subjugate the beasts of the Earth. The mud races are not the humans, but the beasts to be subjugated. Omar, go look up Christian Identity. The True Gospel.”

Omar holds Mensa’s stare. “Perhaps the Mujahideen can tolerate that—if you will let us crack down on the crusaders once Operation White Sheep is finished.”

“You ain’t got the choice!” Yells Spirou Mersatos, a muscular man with bald head and arms smothered with tattoos. “You need us. You are nothing without us.”

Mensa grabs Mersatos. “No, Spirou, the correct answer is, this axis translates into total power! Who would resist that? Omar’s jihadists are true warriors, ready to give up their lives. Very few of our White warriors will do that. Our race has a bunch of pampered brats who fail to see the power behind racial solidarity and revolutionary actions! And a bunch of race traitors! How else could America have a half breed Ape President at the beginning of this century, and now a Wetback in the White House!”

Mensa beckons to a short man with curly black hair and trimmed beard. “Bashir, show that Jewish sow in there a little drama. I want to see some fear, some sweat.”

They open a glass door and approach Carly Stein. Bashir draws a pistol and places the barrel against Carly’s nose. Click! A shiver runs down Carly’s body. The four men break out laughing.

Mensa says, “I want you to look at that flag, Ms. Stein, and be assured that you and your people will be worshipping it. Just like your people worshipped in Egypt, licking dust. So let me introduce myself. My name is Pharaoh.”

They remove the gag, and Carly eyes them with contempt. “Everyman.”

“Every what?” Mersatos scoffs.

“Everyman is every ounce of human blood that acknowledges the hardships and atrocities inflicted on our peoples,” Carly says with determination. “Everyman is not flesh and bones; rather, the heart of God, compassion, justice. You are not Everyman. You are monsters.”

“Thank you for the sermon. Now the good news,” Mensa says. “We will let you live. All you have to do is give us every insight and detail of that cesspool of a CIA you work for. Total brain drain.”

“I’m not that stupid,” Carly yells. “To think you would spare my life after I tell you what I know.”

Mersatos says with sarcasm, “You mean, you won’t consider Pharaoh’s offer? After we offer everything you people believe in? Money? Sex? Your soul for the pleasure of one hot meal?”

“Never! Never again.”

3>

I didn’t know Carly Stein well. But I knew her heart when she brought me both flowers and a meal when I was home with pneumonia last year. I felt guilty missing her funeral. But I had already promised my new girlfriend, Jen Mendoza, a trip to Boston that day.

The next working day at our secret New York headquarters we were breaking in a new Officer. The Arundel Team was the name of our Top-Secret Unit. It was coined by Tyger Taelo, the founder of our Unit and my Mentor. Apparently his late Asian wife was from Annapolis, so the name was a family tribute.

Vic Vetaro became like a brother. A large Black guy with a football build and never played football, but had a distinguished tour in the Middle East as a Marine Officer. I met him as we were taking an Agency-sponsored MBA course at Wharton School in Philly—and we just hit it off, working together as close partners from then on. We joined the Arundel Team at the same time. He would never betray a confidence I shared, but could be brutally honest about my shortcomings, for my own benefit. That’s the kind of person we can always trust. Sometimes we can judge character by close associations—Vic’s wife Lauren always has kind words and smile for me; and gentleness and love from above. I have been adopted in his family; kind of like a helpless, lonely relative who can never keep a dating relationship.

Viruet and Vetaro are seated at a long table inside a padded Agency room. Vetaro’s head is very prominent, and is shaved so cleanly that the overhead lights reflect off it. In walks a man no older than 30; neat blonde hair and reddish skin, like some surfer dude. He sits across the table from Viruet and Vitaro.

“Clearance papers?” Viruet asks.

“No papers, sir.” He gives a hand-held device to Viruet.

“Right answer. Good start.” Viruet hits the right button on the device.

“Toby Laginn, Spatial Geography expert, Harvard. Top clearance.”

“Yes sir---I heard about the loss of one of your colleagues. Foul play?”

Vetaro leans forward. “Rule number one: We don’t ask questions when we already know the answer. An unnecessary distraction when we have to make split second decisions sometimes.” Vetaro claps his hands hard. “But yes, that electric current ripping Carly Stein’s body wasn’t happenstance. When I catch the scum who did it, there won’t be enough of a body left to run a current through.”

“Let’s say we are all given code names,” Viruet says. “I am Eagle, Vic is Hawk, Team Leader Taelo is Condor, and you are turkey. Is that okay?”

“Sure.”

“Wrong answer,” says Vetaro. “We are birds and a turkey is a fowl. We can have no inconsistencies on this Team. We are the absolute last defense for the security of the USA. We are the goalies. The bad guys cannot score.”

“We need to get you a job, Mr. Laginn,” Viruet says.

“A job?”

“This is not your job. The Team is your calling. Everyone in the CIA, outside of a handful of deep cover people, know me as the CIA’s EEO Officer. Vic is my Deputy. So we’ll make you Deputy Assistant EEO Officer. Blurring the lines between the cover job and the Team is the quickest way to the unemployment line and losing your clearance.”

“Let’s get started,” Vetaro says. “Jude, where are you from?”

“Well, I was born in Ecuador, but my parents emigrated to Sarasota when my voice was still high.”

“Really? Your English is so good!”

“Okay, Vic. Tell me what it was like growing up in the inner city. And how many of your siblings are in jail?”

“Actually, Jude, I was raised in the middle-class suburbs of Cleveland. And my sister teaches at Yale.”

Viruet leans forward. “Toby, we are on first name basis now. You just witnessed EEO no-nos for your cover job. Two things to remember: One, you get a crash course in political correctness. That is used outside. In here, there are no speech barriers. We are brutally honest with each other, and through our stupidity we learn and grow. The conversations of Arundel Team members are just as protected as your clearance papers. We are family.”

“Yes sir.”

“I’m not a sir. I’m Jude. Now, at 7:45 this morning you poured coffee. At 8:00 you turned on cable news. At 8:15 you had a 22-minute International conversation with your sister in Lausanne.”

“What?”

Vitaro holds up a shiny long cellphone device. “This is what. It’s called a Renland. A devastating instrument. This is the last time we will strip you naked. The Renland can spy on certain nocturnal activities, penetrate steel, even kill. In the wrong hands, abuse potential is limitless. In the right hands, it could save the great USA. That is why there are only 30 in existence, and very few people beyond us even know about it.”

“How do we guard against misuse?” Laginn asks.

“Great question,” answers Viruet. “Internal safeguards and accountability. We had to use those systems just recently.” Viruet pulls up a photo on his Renland and shows it to Laginn. “His name is Spirou Mersatos. He was on a parallel team. Caught red handed using other surveillance equipment to video record sexual liaisons between innocent and unsuspecting people. The worst nightmare for American citizens about the abuse of technology. Mr. Mersatos was shown the door.”

“And for retirement, do not pass Go, or collect even \$200,” Vetaro adds.

Viruet's face grows dire. "There have been rumors of Mersatos's ghost haunting these hallowed halls. So if you ever see this guy, you let me know right away."

Tyger Taelo comes in. Very tall man, casual Far East attire, wavy gray hair and face with Asian features and with some dark hue.

"These CIA hazers give you a hard time, Toby?" His voice is deep and low keyed.

Laginn smiles, "Yes sir."

"Did Toby pass?"

"He flunked," Viruet responds. "But we are two dudes full of grace."

Everyone smiles as Taelo shakes Laginn's hand. "Welcome to the Arundel Team."

After Laginn leaves, Viruet says to Taelo, "I just sent you some very disturbing encrypted files."

"Got 'em. I've already contacted DNI Freeman. Expect a meeting before rush hour today."

4>

Viruet, Vetaro and Laginn walk down a wide fortified corridor. They must pass through three steel doors to reach the Director of National Intelligence, even in the New York Office.

Before Viruet activates the last door with a card, he turns toward Laginn. "Just a reminder. This is not a Team event. We're the EEO staff."

"Assistant DNI Schraeder is in there. He doesn't know about the Team?" Laginn asks. "Sounds like a trust issue."

Viruet gives him a hard look. "You'll see for yourself."

Inside the huge, padded, windowless office has a Star Chamber feel. Seated at a tall raised table are Tyger Taelo, DNI Assistant Bill Schraeder and DNI Marc Freeman. Schraeder is a middle-aged Mr. Silver: silver hair, silver suit, and scaly skin. His eyes and mouth are pinched. DNI Marc Freeman is an older, strappy man with blue suit, trimmed beard, matted black hair, and a pipe in his mouth, violating building codes.

"Mr. Viruet, that big box over there is for you," Freeman calls in a projecting voice. "Mr. Vetaro suggested it. Thought you would need it to store all of your Performance Awards."

"Thank you, sir. But I know for certain Vic Vetaro needs his own box."

Freeman motions the three visitors to the lower chairs in front of the large table.

"I'm confident that this will be a short meeting," Taelo says lowly. "Mr. Director, is it not true that Mr. Spirou Mersatos was terminated from the Agency for misconduct? I have a copy of his termination letter." Taelo hands Director Freeman the letter. "Jude Viruet just showed me documentation that Mr. Mersatos is, as of now, receiving payments out of CIA contingency funds."

“Retirement settlement, perhaps?” Freeman asks. “At one time there was a threat of litigation.”

“Those are Operations accounts, sir,” Taelo clarifies.

“Bill, why wasn’t I informed of this?” Freeman asks.

“This is such an easy explanation, and petty BS for these people to bring it up,” Schraeder says, face reddening. “The contracts are for low-level consulting, to fill in experiential gaps that younger Officers don’t have. Why bother you, sir, with such routine stuff? We have solved Spirou’s performance problem by taking away his surveillance equipment. My family has always taught the value of second chances.”

“How about fifth and sixth chances, Bill?” Taelo says. “Viruet’s research also shows Mersatos’s connections to Greek Neo-Nazi Parties. There’s Golden—whatever, several Party name changes and Mersatos seems to be familiar with all of them.”

Schraeder stands angrily. “Assistant DNI Taelo is beginning to sound like the liberal media. Character assassination from routine intelligence encounters, and whisperers hostile to our National Security. Spirou has not one speck of evidence of racism against him. And you know I would never tolerate White Nationalism in this Agency, with all the years I was active on the Diversity Council. Viruet has caused this needless controversy by poking his nose in areas where he doesn’t belong. What business does an EEO Officer have inspecting Agency Fiscal Records?

“Money drives discrimination, Mr. Schroeder,” Viruet says. “So it is totally job related to inspect how our Agency spends our money.”

“Mr. Director,” Taelo says. “I will let you look at these printed records, and you decide whether these are routine intelligence encounters involving Mr. Mersatos and those Greek Nationalists.”

Taelo hands him a stack of papers. As the others looked on with suspense, Freeman rustles through the papers while toking on his pipe. Finally he lifts his eyes.

“My background makes me an Old Testament, Torah guy. But I know enough about the New Testament to recall Jesus writing in the sand—probably exposing the guilt of men around him. I see in these papers a preponderance of guilt. Bill, you need to terminate the contracts with Spirou Mersatos, effective immediately.”

Schraeder just sits there, stewing. Finally, Taelo looks his way.

“Bill, the meeting is over. Should I escort you out?”

5>

Later, Taelo and Viruet sit at a private upscale restaurant, candles and all. Taelo hands plastic to a tux-clad waiter. A Renland—looking like a fancy cell phone-- rests near his arm; total scramble.

“My daughter Misa tells me you are taking a Masters of Divinity class, Jude. You plan on leaving us soon?”

“Only if some church offers me a half a million or so. Heck, I should have been an NFL quarterback.” Viruet laughs at his comment, but his mentor Taelo twists his mouth.

“The Arundel Team will be handling the Carly Stein case. The killing: who and why? You’ll need another alias soon, Jude. Besides, Bill Schraeder has you on his hit list big time. Don’t know why yet, but it’s real.”

“Oh, I’m terrified of Bill Schraeder,” Viruet mocks.

“Jude, you have a vulnerable area. How long have you been dating Jen Mendoza?”

“A couple months. What does Jen have to do with the Agency? I tell her nothing!”

“Doesn’t matter. Perceptions will dog you, Jude. You certainly know that Jen Mendoza is the Deputy Campaign Manager for Presidential Candidate Louis Brannigan. Worse, people will find out you had a connection with Brannigan.”

“Come on, I took one course with Brannigan at Wharton. Discussed nothing about Agency business. I met Vic there and we became best friends. After the class was complete, it was bye-bye to Brannigan. Haven’t seen him since.”

“I’m putting myself in the mind of the detractors, to protect you. Have you been following Brannigan’s campaign? I know we have continued income disparities in our nation, racism, government and corporate abuses—all that true. But read this man’s political platform: Nationalize banks and major industries; land reform to break up large land holdings; give workers the right to vote bosses out of office. And with real neglect, hardships, and confusion in our nation, Brannigan has tens of millions of followers, making him a serious Presidential candidate.”

“Okay, Tyger. You’ll get an e-mail, and I’ll copy whoever you want, renouncing any connection to the Brannigan campaign.”

Taelo shakes his head. “Not good enough. Relationships can be very emotionally compromising. Jen could draw you into a quagmire. In the eyes of your Intelligence peers, you can be tainted by radical politics—or worse, if we find Mendoza has subversive connections overseas. Then there is the partisan angle: Technically you work for President Jaime Velasquez, who adores you. You risk burning political capital with perceived connections with President Velasquez’s most serious competitor.”

“Last time I checked, your daughter Misa is also very active in the Brannigan campaign.”

“Big difference. She is my flesh and blood, so I can’t unbirth her. Been raising her myself for 15 years since the death of her Mom, so we’re hooked. But I’ve let her and people in the Agency know that I disapprove of her politics and her active support of Louis Brannigan. You have no such constraints.”

“So you want me to break off a relationship---when I have zero involvement with anything that Jen is doing professionally.”

“You got hearts in your eyes, Jude. They may screw you.”

“Bill Schraeder will actually make hay out of an innocent relationship?”

“Will? He has! He’s already sent e-mails to Agency officials about your relationship with Jen.”

“Uncle Jude!”

“Reverend Misa Taelo! What a nice surprise!” Viruet calls back.

A young Asian woman, very tall and thin, walks briskly toward their table. Her hair is jet black and perfectly straight, reaching below her shoulders. In contrast is a long white dress with white clerical collar. Her soft, fair, friendly face beams, as if the whole world is a nice surprise.

She kisses Viruet’s cheek, then sits down. She takes wrapped packages from her handbag, and hands them one each to Taelo and Viruet.

“How many homeless people have you let in your church this week?” Taelo asks his daughter soberly.

“These are gifts for both of you. Out of the immense love I have for you. My father and non-biological adoptive Uncle.” Misa continues to beam; speaking in a measured soprano voice.

Her father quietly puts the gift aside. “Another book with Bible verses, I presume.”

Misa squints her eyes with hurt, even with her frozen smile.

Viruet opens the package. “Oh wow. I listen to this preacher on the radio. Thank you so much, Misa.”

This time Misa gives Viruet a hug.

“We’ve talked this over many times, dear,” Taelo says. “I am not rejecting your faith. I am rejecting your interpretation of it.”

“How would you know?” Misa asks in almost a whisper. “All these years you never tell me about your business dealings. So I guess God is saying, why waste more time discussing my faith activities?”

“Sit down, young lady. I have a question for you.”

She quietly sits down.

“Explain what exactly what you see in this rebel running for President, and why you are so obsessed with helping him ruin our country and economy.”

Misa rubs a tear from her eye. “Louis is a very Godly man, Dad. The one leader I know who passionately cares about all people—inside and outside the womb, people in need, all cultural backgrounds. Biblical, just like Jesus’s example. Uncle Jude, you understand, right?”

Viruet says, “Maybe you can convince me.”

Misa gets up. “Bye, Uncle Jude.” She half waves at her Dad in retreat.

Taelo looks at Viruet with icy eyes. “That was right at my throat.”

“Tyger, how old is Misa?”

“28”.

“You can pound her into submission? How about just a little listening, dialogue. You once told me that her ethnic background is a mixture of Japanese, Korean, Chinese, Vietnamese. Ethnic groups historically at war with each other. But united in peace by the blood of Jesus Christ. I see that peace and unity manifested in Misa. You don’t want me to lose my career. I don’t want you to lose your daughter.”

“How long have I had your back, Jude.”

“Uh-oh, what’s coming?”

Taelo is choking up. “She is all I have. She has the naivety of a fifth grader in a world filled with creeps. A dangerous combination. If I ever lose her.” His voice trails off. “The Director of National Intelligence has me putting out fires so I won’t be here much. Misa connects with you, so please look after her. For heaven’s sake don’t let anything happen to her.”

Viruet gulps hard.

6>

That dinner encounter hit me hard. Tyger and I had frank exchanges, but that one was uniquely brutal. The emotional dependence reference I thought unfair, because my relationship with Jen was very low-keyed; like I don’t want to be a total weekend night hermit. Five dates total. She is a proclaimed Christian, but only God knows for sure.

As a Christian, I recalled passages from Proverbs about fools rejecting advice, but the wisdom of accepting instruction. So I humbly prayed about continuing or severing my relationship with Jen.

Then I considered collateral duties of a CIA Officer hero-designate: equal rights advocate and babysitter. Taking Tyger’s plea to heart—and feeling honored that he would consider me such an integral member of his family to entrust his daughter’s safety to me—I resolved myself to “bodyguard” practice by visiting Misa’s church. The initial shock of Tyger’s request had worn off; Misa was very capable of taking care of herself.

Her church was the First Franciscan Community Church. It was in Manhattan’s Loisaída, where White gentrifiers mixed with longstanding Latino and Chinese residents. The New York traffic was horrendous, so I only caught the very end of her sermon. The attendees, about 300 strong, looked like a poor version of the United Nations. I heard this soft soprano voice carrying across the microphone, and there was Misa, white clerical garb. I first thought she was reading a poem, because of the common refrain: Tears in Heaven; Tears on Earth.

Her hands were extended outward, and there was actually tears in her eyes as she filled in the stanzas—laments like:

- Massive poverty while rich philanthropists fund privileged kids’ music lessons.
- Barons declaring corporate bankruptcy, throwing people by the thousands out of work while they get a Court to let them keep their millions.
- 300% interest loans to poor people living from paycheck to paycheck.
- Environmental toxins forced on minority communities without their consent, while minority kids die of higher rates of cancer.
- Agribusiness forcing small family farmers off their land and into cities for unlivable jobs or homeless shelters.
- Workers going to jobs where they have no power to make decisions or share profits.
- Human traffickers in sex slave trade, while politicians and businessmen sustain this vicious machine with money to feed their illicit sexual appetites.

--Blacks and Latinos having to endure hate crimes decades after the Civil Rights Act.

--Unborn children deaths in the tens of millions.

There were other similar stanzas I couldn't make out, because Misa's voice actually trailed off frequently from genuine grief. I found myself deeply moved by the passion behind her justice pleas. It was the solutions I would have to pray about. I didn't have a clue, with problems and injustices of such a magnitude.

Misa's clearest response came at the sermon's end, when a man called out from the back, "Reverend, God is in control."

Her response: "True, brother. But we are far removed from God's sovereignty and providence. So we are compelled to pray and act."

I tried to get to see Misa, but there was a line of about twenty people for her. I heard a Black woman wailing about her mother in pain and suffering from terminal cancer, and ready to pass anytime. Please come and minister to her!

Misa's response: "I am so sorry. I have a dinner date after this." Then five seconds later, "I will call my friend and cancel. He'll understand. Please give me a few minutes and I'll go with you."

7>

A key part of my bodyguard assignment was building a profile on that former Wharton rabble-rouser, Louis Brannigan. Not surprisingly, he used his business expertise to set up a successful business coop to showcase, for the nation, a successful employee-run enterprise. Louis parlayed that success and notoriety to run successfully for a New York Congressional seat. With two terms and railing about social injustices on C-SPAN and other media, he drew the populist fever of the dispossessed. He had a wife but no kids--allowing him a whirlwind national speaking tour, before the true believers thrust him into the spotlight for a Presidential run. Louis had the faith connection—living proof that allegiance of Evangelicals to one political philosophy was ancient history. Especially with these waves of justice-focused young adults.

The Tyra and Mike Show was a morning fixture on Cable TV news: Tyra a young, engaging Black woman with short hair, and Mike an older White guy with gray hair and a reserved, patrician gait. They were a tag team: Tyra vivaciously presenting an issue, and Mike giving low-keyed analysis. For Tyra and Mike, Louis Brannigan was their frequent troll.

Tyra and Mike are sitting at their news desk. A large camera shot of Central Park hovers behind them.

Tyra: "Mike, we've just learned that Presidential Candidate Louis Brannigan has scheduled an impromptu rally in Central Park. This was not pre-announced, and his supporters have constructed a makeshift stage. His campaign just notified the media an hour ago."

Mike: "This is vintage Brannigan, showing the world he is not owned by anyone. Just last year he staged that last-minute civil disobedience on Broadway to

protest alleged Wall Street abuses. Brannigan’s tactics certainly present security concerns, as there is little time to set up the proper infrastructure.”

Tyra: “The NYPD could technically shut it down, couldn’t they Mike, without the advanced permits?”

Mike: “That scenario just plays into Brannigan’s anti-establishment script, and stirs up a groundswell of sympathy about his disaffected base.”

Tyra: “I think Congressman Brannigan is showing the power of his grassroots, word-of-mouth campaign, as thousands of supporters are streaming into Central Park.”

Later, Spirou Mersatos and Bashir are standing on the roof of a highrise overlooking Central Park. They both wear black flak jackets as they lean against the railing.

Binoculars are pinned to Mersatos’s eyes. Echoes of Louis Brannigan’s amplified speech reach the ears of the two onlookers. From the binocular lens and the naked eye below, Louis Brannigan appears behind a podium, his sloppy brown hair flopping in a breeze. Not even 40, he embodies a Kennedy-esque aura. His brown leather jacket is smothered with cause buttons. A handful of advisors share the stage with him. In front of the stage is a row of blue-clad NYC police officers. Men in dark suits and shades, Secret Service officers, are having terse discussions with advisors on stage, as Brannigan stirs up the crowd.

Mersatos says in his foghorn voice, “Mensa is showing his amazing power, Bashir. He got word of this rally barely before the press showed up. Mensa’s tentacles are everywhere.”

“That’s you and me, too. Mujahideen and Aryan warriors together.” Mersatos and Bashir lock hands.

Mersatos lowers the binoculars. “Tonight every Klan Klavern and Aryan Resistance Cell will be partying. Because that White traitor Louis Brannigan is about to go down. Chaos in New York, chaos in Washington, chaos in America. As the Aryan cobra prepares to strike.”

Bashir takes a black box device out of his pocket, and aims it in the direction of Central Park.

“Spirou, when are you going to explain this weapon to me?”

“There is just one function you need to know. You look into the screen, line up the crosshairs on Brannigan’s face, then push the green button. Then Brannigan’s brain is toasted oatmeal. And I can’t wait. The only thing worse than a mud person is a White person leading the Judah and mud people suppression of the White race.”

Bashir lifts the black box and rotates it in front of him.

“Massive poverty while rich philanthropists fund privileged kids’ music lessons,” Brannigan hoarsely roars with staged anger, as the crowd boos its disapproval. “Barons declaring corporate bankruptcy, throwing people by the thousands out of work while they get a Court to let them keep their millions. 300% interest loans to poor people living from paycheck to paycheck. Environmental toxins forced on minority communities without their consent, while

minority kids die of higher rates of cancer. Agribusiness forcing small family farmers of their land and into cities for unlivable jobs or homeless shelters. Workers going to jobs where they have no power to make decisions or share profits. Human traffickers in sex slave trade, while politicians and businessmen sustain this vicious machine with money to feed their illicit sexual appetites. Blacks and Latinos having to endure hate crimes decades after the Civil Rights Act. Unborn children deaths now in the tens of millions.”

The crowd briefly roars at the apparent sound of celebratory firecrackers. But the cheers abruptly turn to screams and frenzy as people on the stage begin to drop. Bedlam breaks out; people running everywhere. Police and Secret Service Officers are pushing through the crowd.

Tyra in the news studio: “Mike, what are we witnessing? Lydia, can you give us a live feed from down there? What’s going on?”

From the tall highrise, Mersatos and Bashir see violent waves of humanity surging in all directions. Desperate screams from below reach their ears. There are sudden sirens.

“Bashir, what just happened?”

“I don’t know,” Bashir answers breathlessly. “I haven’t taken the shot yet. I swear!”

“One of your jihadists freelancing?”

“Not ours. Omar gave a temporary hold order as we prepare for our glorious takeover. But we cannot control unaffiliated groups or lone wolves.”

Mersatos grabs Bashir’s jacket. “If that’s some crazy Muslim down there, caught in the act of an assassination, that will cause serious complications for Mensa’s plans. There will be a huge backlash against your people, at the most inopportune time for us. Do you like the smell of burning mosques?”

Tyra (in the studio): “We apologize to you viewers. But we don’t have the details. All we know is something terrible has happened at the Louis Brannigan rally in Central Park. Dozens of people have swarmed the stage; lots of law enforcement and medical personnel. We’ve temporarily lost our live feed--.”

Mike (interrupts): “Tyra, we have video of the seconds immediately following the crackling sounds. We are going to run it now, in slow motion.”

About 15 people are standing on the low stage. Then bodies begin to fall. Many advisors are writhing, covering their heads. Louis Brannigan and the woman next to him are prone and not moving. Then Misa Taelo, with her long white clerical garb, suddenly rises, steps over her cowering colleagues, and kneels over Louis Brannigan. She briefly touches him then recoils, before turning to the fallen woman next to Brannigan. This woman’s body is quivering, as Misa takes the woman’s hand. A few seconds later, Misa rises with a look of utter horror as she examines the blood on her hands. Several hands grab her and lead her off the stage. Then dozens of people, including Officers, flood the stage.

Within a half hour, there are over a billion and a half people around the world glued to newscasts. Tyra echoes the words of myriads of other newscasters by announcing, “This is a day of infamy in the United States of America. Presidential

candidate Louis Brannigan has been assassinated. There have been other minor injuries from stampeding crowds. We have two confirmed deaths: Louis Brannigan and his Deputy Campaign Manager Jennifer Mendoza, standing beside him on stage.”

A few minutes later, Tyra announces: “Looks like we have a helicopter landing. Lydia, you’re back with us, right?”

The camera picks up a young, thin, string-haired woman. “This is Lydia Suarez, and we’ve confirmed the arrival of Jamie Bradovchak, the Director of the National Organized Crime Strike Force, better known as NOC (knock), recently authorized by Congress and President Velasquez, to handle RICO cases and other high profile Federal criminal cases. We will be speaking to Director Bradovchak shortly.”

The helicopter lands, and out steps a small entourage, led by a wiry White man with brown hair in tight curls and blue cape-like jacket. As agents on the ground clear away the hovering crowd, Jamie Bradovchak walks briskly up to Lydia Suarez.

“We now have Jamie Bradovchak, Director of the National Organized Crime Strike Force. Thank you for meeting with us.”

“First of all, let me not mince words,” Bradovchak says in a pulsating, clipped voice. “You have a bunch of amateur, reckless campaign leaders that needlessly caused the death of a Presidential candidate and one of their own. This rally never should have happened. We are not living in Andrew Jackson’s presidency. This is a mean world, and proper security structures needed to be put in place. NYPD and the Service did what they could.”

“Can you give us an update on the assassin or assassins?”

“As soon as I got wind of this rally early this morning, I immediately dispatched some NOC agents. One of my agents took down the assassin.”

“Do we have identification?”

“Not yet, Lydia. That will come soon.”

“Just one killer? No more?”

“Just one as far as we know. If there is anyone else out there”—Jamie Bradovchak addresses the camera with piercing dark eyes. “We will find you. And whatever you have read about hell, you will experience it, personally.”

Later, there is human wall of security around the scene of the assassination. Bradovchak approaches the assassin’s body, surrounded by two NOC agents. The dead man has short brown hair, vinyl jacket and blue jeans.

A South Asian agent steps forward. “Automatic pistol bagged and tagged. Assassin is Franklin Gutierrez.”

“Complete profile, cradle to grave. Down to the condiments he puts on his hamburgers,” Bradovchak orders.

“I found this in his pocket.”

Bradovchak inspects a white sheet of paper. A sharpie scrolled the letter “CM” in flowing design.

Bradovchak drops the paper and covers his face. He is a statue.

“Are you okay, Mr. Director?”
He briskly shakes his head. “I’m fine.”

8>

In a CIA New York headquarters room, Viruet and Taelo view on a large screen, the same videotape aired on the Tyra and Mike show. Taelo stops the tape at the exact scene of Misa beholding with horror the blood covering her hands.

“You couldn’t stop her from getting on that stage, Jude?”

“Could you?”

“Sorry. Misa is my weak spot.”

“Yeah, can relate to frailty. The women I date either end up leaving or dead.” Taelo puts his hand on Viruet’s shoulder.

Viruet checks a text message on his phone from Misa--sent to both Viruet and her father. The message reads: I helped kill him. Should have spoken out clearly when Louie and Jen hurried that event.

Viruet texts her back: #1, it wasn’t your decision. #2, you didn’t pull the trigger. #3, your intentions were pure all along. #4, you’re forgiven no matter what.

Two minutes later, Misa’s follow-up text message comes: Thank you, Uncle Jude.

“I activated Renland surveillance on Central Park minutes after the assassination,” Taelo says. “Want to see it?”

“Saw it already. There’s one shot you need to see.”

Viruet hit some Renland buttons, and then a still shot comes up on the screen. Viruet narrates, “If you look at that white paper in the hand of NOC Director Bradovchak, you will see a script letters ‘CM.’ Took me several deep breaths to restore my psyche.”

“What is the CM mean?” Taelo asks.

“It stands for Cro Magnon. It came out of an MBA class at Wharton. The Professor gave us an assignment, with that very trademark--we were never to reveal that to anyone for the rest of our lives. The Professor meant it as a lifetime exercise, so we would be equipped to keep business secrets forever—for the benefit of the company, shareholders, etc.

“It was like a secret fraternity-like ritual. There were only seven of us. We were the Cro Magnon 7. Now the Cro Magnon 6, with Branningan dead. Until now, I have not told anyone else. Can’t say whether any other Cro Mag has shared that secret.”

“Suddenly this ten-year-old ritual pops up now, connected to a Presidential candidate assassin?” Taelo asks with fascination.

“Technically, I’m a murder suspect,” Viruet says.

“You didn’t have to say a word to me. Thank you for sharing. The million dollar question: How did the murderer Franklin Gutierrez get this very secret Cro Magnon emblem?”

I remember walking away, zoned out; my mind flashing back to that Wharton Class 10 years ago. The searing, heart-ripping spirit of Jane Eunsol, one

of the Cro-Mags, suddenly rose from the dead. Jane Eunsol was actually two first names: an English given name and a Korean given name. For reasons I didn't discover till later, Jane decided to drop her surname and use Eunsol as her surname.

I can picture the esteemed Professor Vin Porcaro, that rolly body, round face, crewcut, thundering voice, constant pacing. He had us fill out special name tags. And there we sat in a row: Jude Viruet, Vic Vetaro, Louis Brannigan, Jamie Bradovchak, Jane Eunsol, Wendy Easterling, Gil Gilroy.

“The remainder of the course will constitute a special assignment,” Porcaro boomed from the front of the U Penn classroom. “You are co-owners of a pharmaceutical firm called the Cro Magnon Company. You are sworn to secrecy as co-owners. No one in the world is ever to know about Cro Mag activities. On the blackboard up here is the special Cro Magnon trademark symbol. You are never to share this symbol with anyone for the rest of your lives. That means after this course is over, right to your grave. Keep this vow today, and you can be trusted to confidentiality, whether dealing with business secrets, or even government classified information.

“The first assignment is an exercise in split second decision-making. That can occur in the real world anytime. So I will ask you each a question. You will have ten seconds to answer, in 20 words or less.

“We'll start with those of you who already have full-time jobs outside of this class: Mr. Viruet, Mr. Vetaro and Mr. Bradovchak, in that order.

“The question is: the Cro Magnon Corporation is marketing a new drug. It is very profitable, and medically successful for many patients. But internal studies show that it has caused 5 fatalities in the test run, out of 100 people tested. Do we market the drug? Or do we pull it? Mr. Viruet.”

The younger Jude Viruet had hair cut above his ears and bangs an inch above the eyes. “The profit motive is not worth the loss of lives. Human dignity over material gain. Pull the drug.”

“Mr. Vetaro.”

The younger Vic Vetaro had inch-thick curly hair. “I echo my brother Jude. And add that it shouldn't take 5 deaths in testing to pull the drug. One death means absolute urgency.”

“Mr. Bradovchak.”

Bradovchak's curly brown hair was a little thicker. “It's no secret I am an FBI agent. We are trained not to make determinations on incomplete information. I cannot answer your question without more inquiry into the cause of deaths —.”

“Over the limit, Mr. Bradovchak. Mr. Gilroy.”

Kinky red hair and faraway green eyes. Gauntness in a long face and obvious detachment from the question.

“Ah, let's see. Test the patents, interview the family members, ah, hang out the flag of public opinion, I guess. I don't know...maybe do a survey?”

“Thank you, Mr. Gilroy,” Porcaro said dubiously. “Ms. Eunsol.”

Thick black frizzy hair forming a bell over fine sculptured, cute face. Very short, and wearing a stunning gold dress suit with ample necklace jewelry.

She contorted her face. “As CEO in total control of this enterprise, I would hire Jamie to do the investigation. Did the drugs really cause death? Based on his report, I would make my decision.”

“Mr. Brannigan.”

Sloppy brown hair flowing below the shoulders. Plaid corduroy shirt and ripped jeans. Legs arched over the adjacent desk.

“If it takes two deaths, then there needs to be a criminal investigation into negligent homicide. If I’m working for that company, and see no management action after the first death, then I’m a whistleblower.”

“Ms. Easterling.”

Sleek, slender body and very long blonde hair, thin face, and stunning gold dress suit with more jewelry than Jane.

She rolled her eyes. “Come on. If we stopped the amazing American economic engine just because some poor worker or client dies, where would we be? Like Haiti? Jeez!”

“What would you expect?” Brannigan blurted out. “Her family owns half the State of New Jersey.”

“Enough, Mr. Brannigan. You had your turn.”

“I dissent, Professor. You don’t queue up free speech when human fatalities are involved.”

9>

Jamie Bradovchak was a piece of work. Full of himself, but a 20 year FBI career of amazingly accomplishment, especially busting narco-terrorists and human traffickers. It was natural that President Velasquez would give him the plum NOC Director position when the agency was born.

Jamie had a disabled wife but no other family members. He was known to split time between work and family—balancing the times even if it meant work at midnight. My sense is, it gave him some compassion in spite of his public bravado.

In a large auditorium at NOC Headquarters in Washington DC, Jamie Bradovchak addresses 30 of his supervisory agents. The agents are mostly White, but with noticeable diversity. Bradovchak is standing under a large screen, and mic-ed up while pacing.

“The official word is we declare victory. To the press and the public, we shot the assassin, and that’s the end of it,” Bradovchak says in his pulsating voice. “But we now suspect there is one or more collaborators. That info is not to be conveyed, and the gag order is to be waterproof.”

The script CM appears prominently on the large screen.

“That symbol belongs to a secret order at the University of Pennsylvania. That symbol was not to be given to anyone outside of the handful of members, and the sponsoring Professor, now deceased. Franklin Gutierrez had it. Did Gutierrez get it directly from one of the Cro Magnon members, or a third party because a member violated the vow?”

“We are now stuck, because the Cro-Mag emblem may be totally incidental to the assassination. No evidence of a direct link. Am I right?” He holds a cupped hand to his ear.

Some agents look around. A few smile knowingly.

“Wrong! We pulled all of Gutierrez’s communications, electronic and otherwise. Five minutes before the assassination, he e-mailed his parents saying he probably will never see them again, but is martyring himself to give two benefits to society. First, as a passionate Cuban anti-communist, he is ensuring that the so-called communist Brannigan is not elected. Secondly, he is taking \$100,000 from a so-called ‘sponsoring group’ and giving the \$100,000 to his dying sister, who cannot afford medical expenses.

“That sounds like a direct link to me. The next screen shows the names of the remaining members of this Cro Magnon order.”

Jude Viruet, Vic Vetaro, Wendy Easterling, Jane Eunsol, Gil Gilroy.

“We locate all of these suspects. We don’t arrest them unless we get corroborating evidence implicating one or more of them.”

Bradovchak nods to advance the screen shots.

“Okay, we have hundreds of videos and photos in and around Central Park on the day of infamy. This picture is most interesting.”

The very large rolling video shows Mersatos and Bashir leaning against the railing of the highrise.

“These dudes spent a half hour up there, binoculars aimed at Central Park. Also, there is a menacing-looking high tech device in the hand of the shorter, olive-skinned guy. Darryl, raise your hand, please.”

An older Black agent waves.

“Darryl is our expert that examined the video to read lips. Mostly, heads were turned away from the camera. But two words seem to stand out prominently. Darryl, can you share?”

Darryl stood up and shouts, “Aryan resistance.”

Bradovchak pauses for effect. “Aryan resistance. Comforting. Now, the short olive-skinned guy, we can’t get a make on him. He is an illegal alien, and making a deliberate effort to hide his true identity. If you examine a closeup shot of his fingers, you’ll see that he shaved or burned off his fingerprints. You don’t do that for benevolent actions toward Little Sisters of the Poor.

“Sally, stand please.” An older White woman rises. “Sally Wilson is our expert on photo research. We’ve IDed the bald guy. Tied to the Intelligence community, and the name is”.--

“Spirou Mersatos,” Sally calls. “I’ve a contact in the CIA, for more info in 24 hours.”

“Thank you, Sally, but I’m going higher. I’ll talk to Paul Davenport, Special Assistant to the President, and a member of Jaime Velasquez’s inner circle.”

The screen shows a picture of a dark-hued Black man in his 60’s, short black ‘n’ gray hair and a thick color-streaked moustache. Davenport’s name displays below the photograph.

“Go ahead and show the other members of the Velasquez inner circle. It’s helpful for all of us to know who we may need to depend on in the future.”

Photos of three White males—Mensa, with a reverse triangle beard--a White female and a Latino female appear.

10>

The Nazified American Flag hovers over the large dark room like pagan idol. Mensa, dressed in dark suit, directs attention to a large TV monitor. A video is rolling.

“We got this off underground Aryan resistance Websites,” he says to Mersatos, Omar and Bashir.

There is chanting, Hitler salutes, bonfires burning. Motorcycles doing wheelies, trucks driving in circles, whoops and pumping arms displaying an assortment of weapons.

The camera roves to the right, where a circle of White men surrounds a shimmering fire. These men are in a frenzy, jumping and cheering.

Mensa says, “If you look closely, that moving flame is a human torch. A mud person being scalded to the bone.”

“Who?” Mersatos asks.

“Some Wetback sow. Probably a Mexican invader.”

Mersatos faces his men, his face showing agitation.

“These back-alley Nazis are embarrassing our trained Aryan soldiers. We are getting soft. Bashir, I need you to get our warriors ready for the Operation White Sheep finale. They need to know what blood is before the real action starts. We are sending a message to the world, that they better get used to Aryans slaying their oppressors.

“So pick the best men, and have them randomly kill some mud people. Then leave a White Power message. The Zionist Occupation Government needs to genuinely fear the White race before we finally take control.

“Bashir, make sure that the mud people road kill is always isolated stragglers, so our warriors will not get caught.”

Omar walks over to Mensa and hovers over him, a foot away.

“What?”

“The Imams need the final blueprint for White Sheep. They have been waiting, asking. Our Quran and faith is all about respect. We need that now.”

Mensa beckons him to a marble table. He folds his hands. “In chess, every piece has distinct roles. Rooks, Knights, Bishops, Pawns. Same here. First we have the White Sheep. These are undercover patriots beyond suspicion because they have done nothing that the world would suspect as racist. It took me years to get this network in place. Next, we have the useful idiots. These are people we can manipulate to advance our cause, but they are unaware of the White Nationalist genesis behind their actions. Then we have leveraged leaders. We use useful idiots to use gentle blackmail, so the leaders march in our direction, again without knowledge of Aryan racial identity. Lastly, we have the Aryan resistance soldiers and your jihadists for the final battle and eventually enforcing the Aryan Constitution.” Mensa slaps Omar’s shoulder. “Your mass chaos operation,

perfectly timed, will create such a burden for the weakened decadent American government. Make it easier for us to walk in.”

“And how should the Imams address you? Future leader?” Omar asks.

“Right now just the Ultimate White Sheep. There is not a trace of history for Judah and the mud people to suspect me of being an Aryan Nation leader. I donated to the NAACP and the League of United Latin American Citizens.”

“You did what?!” Mersatos explodes.

“Sometimes you have to take that small step backward to enable the giant step forward. Sit down! Right here!” Mensa calls angrily.

Mersatos sits opposite Mensa.

“The useful idiot I’ve placed in the new NOC agency tells me that the Director, Jamie Bradovchak, has exposed you.”

“No no.”

“My guy has no reason to lie.”

“Then let me take Bradovchak out.”

“He is too insulated, and my useful idiot would never kill his boss for the Aryan cause. Too risky. The White traitor Jamie Bradovchak is a very dangerous man. He is now the opponent’s Queen on the chessboard, and we’ve got to devise a strategy to counter him. Because of your carelessness.”

Omar says, “If there are any more dross in your plan, the Imams need to know about it.”

“Fair question,” Mensa says. “Are there any other opponent Queens out there? Come on, think hard. I don’t want to be blindsided later.”

“There is an agent I worked with briefly on an internal team audit project,” Mersatos says. “I heard from a former colleague: this same agent contacted the leadership to have my consulting contracts cancelled. Don’t know why.”

“Who is this agent?”

“Jude Viruet.”

“What kind of name is that? French? Maybe we can use a useful idiot to turn him?”

“No. He’s a Wetback.”

“Spirou, it seems you now have two government attack dogs after you. We are grounding you, before you destroy Operation White Sheep. You do nothing until the revolution is on. Then, as the Bible says, Saul has slain thousands, David has slain tens of thousands. You will be David.

“I’ve got to locate Viruet. And find a way to make life difficult for him.”

11>

The flashbacks of my intense relationship with Jane Eunsol came as waves. It started as an innocent dinner date two months before the end of the Wharton class. She would keep telling me stories of Far East heroes. I sensed that the yarns were compensation for a deep pain she was feeling. She never shared those deep secrets; it was an ongoing mystery—one that kept drawing me, as if on a string.

Her voice was always low, quiet, like a seductive hum. Never raised in anger, and never criticizing me. Looking back, frank feedback is the mark of a strong

relationship. But the younger Viruet had a streak of narcissism. She was feeding into it, every day.

Outside of my class, I had some very stressful CIA projects. I would look forward to seeing her every evening. A pouting expression growing into a quiet smile. Firm, passionate hugs every time I walked in the door. Then the late evening non-sexual massages. Every day. Her thick hair caressing my cheeks as her hands moved methodically; quiet narrations in my ear about the pressure points we were hitting—followed by velvet kisses to my cheeks.

I remember we found a different ethnic restaurant every time we went out. I can still taste that bean sauce over noodles that she made for me frequently. Still don't know what it is called. Then there was that night we laid in the grass at Fairmount Park. So dark I could only feel her thick hair against my face. The stars were spectacular, and she pointed at several, naming them.

The brick hit me two days after the class ended. There was never a personal goodbye. The note was on my kitchen table. In her large looping writing style, she bled deep contrition in three paragraphs. She was so sorry. None of it was my fault. For reasons she could not divulge, she said she'd never see me again.

In the past ten years, I had only two low-keyed dating relationships. But long hours from pressing national security issues, and my refusal to discuss my work, pushed both women away. Nicely, but still gone.

A smart and persistent reporter made the Cro Mag connection to the assassin Gutierrez. The Cro Mag deep secret was now exposed to the world. But it was barely a blip on the newsreel, because the reporter never made the connection to the \$100,000 payment for the hit. I learned about it from my deep cover NOC contact. Jamie did a great job keeping the lid on the 100 -grand blockbuster.

I kept a casual friendship with one Cro Mag, Gil Gilroy, for five years after the class. I was surprised to see an invitation from Gil, in one of my old e-mails I looked at occasionally. Gil was throwing a Cro Magnon reunion party. Gil billed it the "No Secrets Shindig."

Of course, I accepted--not only out of genuine appreciation for seeing my old colleagues, but for professional reasons; the mystery of the Cro Mag connection to the Brannigan assassination.

It was the next Friday in Gilroy's swank Gramercy Park penthouse apartment. That Friday, the Jane Eunsol flashbacks were raging. My heart came to my throat, at the thought that Jane Eunsol would be there.

12>

The music is loud behind the door Viruet is knocking on. It becomes louder as the door swings open.

"Jude! My brother!" Gilroy applies an instant hug, and that hug drags Viruet ten feet inside. Gilroy's alcohol breath assaults his senses.

"How many other Cro Mags are here?"

“So far Vic Vitaro and Wendy Easterling,” says Gilroy, slurring. “That’s 3, right? Vic could always count as 2, and I’ll worry about math tomorrow. Right now just floating.”

Vic and Wendy are gyrating together to the pulsating music in a large den connected to small kitchen to the right. Besides the few Cro Mags there are about 15 hipsters. Floating like Gilroy. A haze of smoke from cigarettes and marijuana.

“Jane Eunsol coming?” Viruet calls over the music.

Gilroy staggers against Viruet’s ear. “Brother, if you can find Jane, you are miracle worker.”

Gilroy leads Viruet to the kitchen counter, to the open bottles.

“15 brands of whiskey, Jude. And the rule is, nobody leaves until they try them all!” Gilroy staggers again, as Viruet reaches for the orange juice.

In Gilroy, Viruet beholds that same sloppy red hair, spacy green eyes, long gaunt face and colorful clothes that a clown might wear. The difference now are the noticeable cracks on Gilroy’s face. Ten years has aged him.

That’s in contrast to Wendy Easterling, still flailing around with Vic. Her crystal beauty and shining long blonde hair changed not one iota from Wharton.

“Where you working now, Jude? Still in that International consulting firm you told me about at Wharton?”

“I’m now at the Home Warranty Administration.”

“What? Never heard of it.”

“Brand new agency. Very small. Go ahead and check its Website, and you’ll see my name as the equal opportunity guy.”

“Brother, you are tight, like a sowed-up behind. Someone just die in your family?” Gilroy takes some colorful pills from his pocket. “These’ll wiggle your fancy.”

“No thanks.” And he walks away. The burning eyes from smoke draws him to the balcony. Vic quickly joins him.

Distant horns from below piercing the cool Manhattan air as the two agents lean against the tall railing. Vitaro reaches into a paper bag.

“A gift from Lauren. Her patented pumpkin pie, just for you.”

“What did I do to deserve all these frequent delicacies from your wife?”

“Nothing. She always thinks you’re losing weight.” They share a laugh.

“Vic, those piercing recollections about Jane.”

“Yeah, that was intense back then, from what you told me,” says Vetaro.

“Not just occasional zingers—but two days of living color flashbacks.”

“Tell me. Did you ever sleep with Jane?”

“No. I’ve been faithful to Biblical commands on sexual behavior.”

Vitaro says, “In 2 Corinthians 12, God gives the Apostle Paul a constant thorn. It’s not because of any specific sin. It’s to keep Paul humble, and focused on God’s mission. Maybe these flashbacks is God’s exhortation to you, to steer clear of your weakness, and stay focused on your calling: protect our nation. We desperately need laborers to confront the unprecedented evil we face.”

“Thanks, Vic. Paul’s thorn and my women problem.”

“Tell you what. Send me a picture of Jane, and I’ll photoshop it. Add 100 pounds of weight, and give her a moustache.” They laugh.

Wendy Easterling appears at the doorway.

“Jude Viruet. The Boy Scout of Wharton!” A slapping voice. She grabs Viruet’s hand and pulls him. “The action is in here.”

Inside, Wendy pulls him close. Dual assaults of strong perfume and strong alcohol to Viruet’s senses. As the music throbs, Wendy puts her knee close to Viruet’s crotch and rocks.

“With those classroom encounters, Jude, I’ve never seen you dance. I bet you’re good.” Viruet tries to pull away, but Wendy just pulls tighter. “Oh, buff man! You’ve been exercising. I have my own type of exercise. Stick around tonight, and I’ll show you.”

Viruet does a double take at seeing Jamie Bradovchak to his left, with his wife in a wheelchair. They are an island; the frolickers ignoring them.

Wendy puts her mouth close to the reluctant Viruet’s ear. “I was looking at you every day back in Wharton, and thinking, Jane is the wrong girl for you. Craving, craving...and seeing your confidence, knowing whatever you are doing outside that classroom must be special.”

Wendy stops dancing and takes a card out of her purse.

“You’re working now, Jude?”

“Yeah, I have a good job.”

“Call me later. I may have something better for you.”

“Jude!” Gilroy calls from the kitchen, beckoning.

Viruet starts toward Gilroy.

“If you don’t call me I’ll find you and call you,” Wendy says in parting. “I usually get what I want.”

Gilroy takes Viruet past the kitchen and into a small office. A dim light burns on the desk as Gilroy closes the door. They are seated in straw chairs. A picture of Gilroy and his gay boyfriend hover over the desk.

Gilroy says, “You kept your friendship with me five years. No other Cro Mag came close. I really appreciate it.”

Viruet takes a card from his pocket. “As a friend, I’m giving you the address of a church here in Gramercy. The nicest people you can ever imagine. Your opportunity is to receive a high so genuine, so pure, so positive—not like the false highs you get from those chemicals destroying your body and soul. This is a gift of a lifetime. Please accept it.”

Gilroy puts the card on the desk. “Jude, I washed out of stock brokering,” he slurs. “Now I run a private investigation firm. Do you ever wonder how Franklin Gutierrez got our Cro Mag trademark? Have you considered that one of us may have actually ordered the assassination? I am determined to find out.”

Viruet is thinking, God has used this drug-impaired person to create a genuine opening. “How can I help you, Gil?”

“I am telling you this because I trust you. Always admired you. You are the only Cro Mag that I am 100% certain did not kill Louis Brannigan. So let’s talk some more. I’ll give you valuable info as I receive it.”

“Any particular Cro Mag you suspect?”

“Louis Brannigan’s social justice agenda was a direct threat to Wendy Easterling’s corporate empire. She runs the business now. Here’s the scream:

She's now into pharmaceuticals!" Gilroy's head bobs from the booze. "And Jamie Bradovchak is a jerk. Never liked him. I think Jamie always considered Louis an enabler of the bad guys Jamie's fighting."

Viruet leaves and approaches Jamie Bradovchak outside. He offers his hand, but Bradovchak keeps his arms stiff.

"Jude, this is my wife Nora."

"Nice to meet you, Nora." She smiles, but it is twisted from the stroke. She offers her good hand, and Viruet takes it.

"God bless you for the work you are doing to protect us, and caring for your wife, Jamie."

"You and Vic sure kept me honest in the business class," Bradovchak half smiles. "Of all the Cro Mags I wanted to reconnect with, you and Vic topped my list. But now, as a matter of courtesy, you need to know that I will be severing social contacts with you and all surviving Cro Mags after tonight. You are a suspect in the assassination of Louis Brannigan. My agents could be paying you a visit."

Viruet takes the lapel of Bradovchak's open blue blazer. "Last time I checked, you are also a suspect. Nice jacket."

Viruet starts to walk away.

"Where are you working now, Jude?" Bradovchak asks.

"Do your homework," Viruet replies in retreat.

13>

Tyra (at the morning news desk): "The New Brunswick community is still in shock at the senseless murder of Rutgers graduate student Max Bowles." A picture of a young bearded black man appears on the TV screen. "He was found a mile from campus with a bullet in his head. A Swastika was draped over his body. Law enforcement considers this a hate crime. Rutgers has offered a \$10,000 reward for the shooter's capture."

In NOC headquarters, Jamie Bradovchak and a brown-skinned agent examine a video on a TV monitor. It was same video displayed by Mensa from the underground Aryan resistance Website. As the fire from the human torch spreads, Bradovchak's eyes tighten. Dark eyeballs like bullets. He turns to his agent.

"Hector, get this video to Sally. We want detailed close-ups of every one of those degenerates on the video, and the most advanced photo scans the Almighty has ever conceived of."

Tyra (at the morning news desk, 3 days later): "The men you see in handcuffs have just been arrested for the shocking burning murder of Honduran housekeeper Juana Ramirez. NOC Director Jamie Bradovchak issued a press release, saying that over 150 NOC agents were dispatched to three States, including Arkansas, where the brutal murder occurred. According to NOC sources, there have already been 37 arrests, all without incident or resistance. Mike, what do you have?"

Mike: “NOC Director Jamie Bradovchak struck like lightning. He waited until he had verified locations on all suspects, and then swooped down, as in one motion, on all of them. This sends a powerful message about Bradovchak’s zero tolerance stance on the increasing violent White Nationalist movement.”

Tyra: “A throwback to 1963. Sadly.”

14>

Misa called me with her exuberance, about a roving zoo they took to Battery Park. Her follow-up text was full of excitement, saying: Bringing the cuddly animals to the kids. Kool, huh? And then a follow-up message: Uncle Jude, I also want you to meet my nice boyfriend, Jim Badger. Would you join us at Battery Park?

I obliged. When I got there, the sight sent shivers down my body. A seven-foot link fence surrounded a black bear. A blonde kid, probably about five, had fallen into the cage with the bear.

There were about 50 people standing in horror outside the cage. But there was Misa, struggling to pull herself up the fence. Blue sneakers poked around for the right holes, while she tried to keep her long white clerical garb from tearing. Now she reached the top of the fence, teetering. Some people were cheering her on. Cheering?!

Jim Badger, as Misa described him, was a lanky, bald-headed guy with goatee. He was standing about two feet outside the fence. And doing nothing while his girlfriend was risking her life! I wanted to throw him into the Hudson River.

I was already getting about a D minus in bodyguarding. Wow, if Tyger got wind of this, he would be bouncing off the chandeliers.

As I ran toward the fence, Misa threw her left leg over the fence and let herself drop. The bear briefly stirred. Misa made calming motion with her arms, then stooped down to the boy. She prodded the boy toward the fence. He began to climb. Then she began to climb. Suddenly there were many last-minute heroes, helping out.

My relief lasted only a minute, due to the ruder surprise.

A dark sedan roars up to Viruet’s position, inside flasher pulsating. Three suit clad agents jump out, pistols waving.

“Let me see your hands, Mr. Viruet,” calls the lead agent.

“What?! What for?”

“I said raise them! You will get no further warning.” Viruet complies.

“Identify yourself, Officer.”

“Lead Agent Hector Castro, National Organized Crime Strike Force. Now get face down on the ground, Mr. Viruet.”

Viruet reluctantly complies. His hands are pulled back and handcuffs applied.

“What are the charges?”

“Federal warrant for homicide. The assassination of Louis Brannigan.”

The sedan pulls into a nondescript Federal building Viruet is very familiar with from previous assignments. With Viruet walking down the corridor with the agents, a woman does a complete 180, recognizing Viruet but shocked to see him handcuffed.

Viruet is locked into a padded brightly-lit room, and left at a large wooden table. He waits. And waits. Finally the tall steel door opens. Jamie Bradovchak walks in, a blue cape-like jacket covering him. He sits across from Viruet.

They are locked in stares for a minute. Then Bradovchak says, “With all those mock business strategy meetings at Wharton; those friendly sports bets we had; our long faith discussions—you are last person I would ever see capable of this kind of travesty.”

“Thank you, Jamie. Your confidence is not misplaced. I am innocent.”

“How long have you known Franklin Gutierrez?”

“What? I’ve never met him. Never heard of him until news accounts after the assassination.”

“I have photos of you meeting with Frankin Gutierrez.”

“Some burr-up-the-butt creep chewing on my leg.”

“What?”

“Translation: Somebody obviously doesn’t like what I am doing. Since I never met this assassin, someone photoshopped photos to frame me.”

“Why would someone want to do that, Jude?”

“Why does any evildoer with power abuse that power? Happens all the time. So I suggest that we work together to find the criminal setting up this railroad show.”

“We have one more problem: A statement from a private investigator states that \$100,000 from your account was transferred to Mr. Gutierrez.”

“Oh, this frameup is so crude. What account?”

“You tell me.”

“Within five minutes you can have all my account numbers. Then I walk—unless you are going to tell me that I’m to be jailed, and a jury will convict me of murder—on the basis of altered photos and an unsupported statement of some unknown investigator.”

“We’ve enough evidence to hold you until we get more answers.”

Bradovchak stands. “I am leaving now. Give you a couple hours to sit in here and think about being more truthful.”

“Do I get my one phone call?”

“Yes,” Bradovchak says, annoyed.

8:00 PM. Outer offices are dark at the New York NOC compound. Bradovchak leaves his office to check on Viruet, down the hall. He is asleep on the table, so Bradovchak returns to his office.

He finds a tall, prominent Asian man leaning against his desk overlooking Brooklyn Heights.

“Please close the door, Director Bradovchak.”

“No, the door stays open for you to leave. After you explain why you are here.”

Taelo rises, walks past an exasperated Bradovchak, and closes the door.

“Identify yourself right now Mister.”

Taelo pulls out a Renland and smiles. “I’m a friendly guy. You can call me Tony the Tyger.”

“Okay, Tony the Tyger. How’d you get in here?”

“Too easy. You would never understand.”

Bradovchak takes out a cell phone and works the buttons.

“Communications are temporarily disabled. As the phone lady says,”—and his voice jumps into a falsetto, “Sorry for the inconvenience.”

Bradovchak rushes for the door. It doesn’t budge.

“Whoops, temporary lockdown,” Taelo says.

Bradovchak reaches for his ankle pistol, but Taelo is faster, knocking away the gun, lifting Bradovchak and hurling him across his desk. Taelo rushes over to him.

“You get up when I say so.” Bradovchak lays there, in a stupor. “Okay, get up and sit in your chair.” Taelo extends his hand. “Since you didn’t give me a proper welcome, let me do it.” He pulls out an ID. “Tyger Taelo, Assistant Director of National Intelligence.—Whoops, that’s my old title. Pardon me, Deputy Director of National Intelligence.”

Bradovchak smiles, “Whatever you need. Any files. Access to agents.”

“You have an innocent man in custody. I just recently scanned those photos you claim show Viruet meeting with that killer. Those photos are fake, doctored, created by some diabolical force our nation and Intelligence agencies are fighting.”

“How do you know they’re fake?”

“We have the technology. And that so-called investigator statement--his credibility is questionable. His homeland is a nation hostile to the US. He provided no proof of monetary transfer from any Viruet account. You are to release Jude Viruet immediately.”

“I am not bound by your instruction. I report to the Attorney General, not the Director of National Intelligence.”

Taelo smiles. “Oh, about your appointment with a high level official.”

“What appointment?”

“No one told you? Presto, your phone lines work again.” Taelo dials a number on Bradovchak’s desk phone, then hits the speaker button.

“Paul,” came a slow tenor voice on the other end.

“This is Director Bradovchak. Who is this?”

“Paul Davenport, Special Advisor to President Velasquez. Listen, Jamie, the President is temporarily transferring you to the DNI Office. Will confirm with e-mail. You report directly to Tyger Taelo.”

15>

Bill Schraeder, silver suit and silver hair, walks in the dark room adorned with the large Nazi American flag. Mensa, Mersatos, Omar and Bashir are seated at the big table. Omar rises, but Mensa calms him.

“He’s one of our White Sheep. Sit down, Bill.”

“Viruet is loose,” Schraeder says.

“Yeah, thanks to that Savage Taelo,” Mensa says. “I have only one door to unlock before we launch the White Sheep Finale, and you clowns are going to ruin it. If JBrad is an opponent Queen, Taelo is Double Queen. Why wasn’t I told about this man’s capabilities?”

“I did what everything I could,” Schraeder protested.

“Bill, you violated the cardinal rule for White Sheep. When Taelo and Viruet exposed Spirou’s Aryan Greek connections, you should have immediately yielded instead of backing him in front of a Zionist DNI. Your defense of Spirou in that setting leaves you open to charges of White Nationalist sympathies. The very definition of a White Sheep is a sleeper mole with ZERO history of racial insensitivities.---Bill, what’s your next step?”

“Let me try to neutralize Taelo.”

“You can’t handle Viruet, and you want to take on Taelo? That man right now is untouchable—until the Aryan government hangs that troublesome Savage. Right now we just need to eliminate the more immediate threat.”

Schrader’s face lights up. “Viruet? I’d be happy to.”

“Not you, Bill. You really thought Viruet was just an EEO Officer? Bashir, use your best men. Make sure that Wetback Viruet goes down hard.”

16>

Toby Laginn walks sheepishly into the office of Assistant DNI Bill Schraeder. Schraeder is seated behind a battleship of a desk, while relegating Laginn to a worn wooden chair in front of the desk. Schraeder’s silver suit and silver hair are perfectly pressed.

Laginn asks, “Did I do something wrong?”

Then in a dire, droning voice, “No, son. At least not yet, and we both hope that never happens. I called you here to discuss the abusive conduct of an Agency employee. You may be a witness.”

“Sir, I have not been here long enough to”—

“Several staff have seen you in a work capacity with Jude Viruet—although many people here either don’t know or don’t want to talk about it.”

“What did Mr. Viruet do wrong?”

“That’s what you are here for. I don’t want to bias your findings in advance. I need you to do some quiet detective work on Viruet and report it back to me.”

“I don’t know”—

“Mr. Laginn, you are a probationary employee. I am the third highest ranking Intelligence Official in the USA. You need to tell me right now, what are the main assignments Viruet is working on? If you tell me it’s EEO, I will prepare a Memo for Director Freeman’s signature terminating your employment.”

“Besides the EEO, what we’ve discussed so far is human trafficking in China, and student moles the Chinese may be sending over here to undermine our national security.”

“I’m sure there’s more than that. As an incentive, there is a promotion awaiting you once you get me the info I need on Viruet. You will also receive two monetary advances of \$5,000—one immediately, and another when I see good evidence of Viruet’s secret activities.”

“Thank you, sir. Just one thing. Can I get the advances in cash? I want to make sure they are not being traced.”

“I can arrange that. I need weekly updates from you.”

“Yes sir.” Laginn gets up to leave.

“One last thing, and if you repeat what I’m about to say, I will deny it and fire you. Just look at your skin color. You work for a minority. Oh, I believe in equal rights. But really, are those minorities in control going to look after people like you? I, and other people like me who made this nation great, will take care of you until you retire.”

17>

Later, Viruet, Vetaro and Laginn are seated at an Agency roundtable. Taelo looks on from a corner chair. There are bills on the table, and Vetaro is counting, laying down twenties.

Vetaro chuckles, “Four thousand nine hundred eighty dollars. Above all else, that idiot Schraeder must have flunked math.”

“I secretly recorded the meeting,” Laginn says, taking out the Renland.

After playing the recording of the brief meeting, Laginn asks, “What should I do about the money?”

Viruet answers, “You reported the Schraeder meeting to us, turned over the cash, had the brilliance to use the Renland to record the meeting, and refused to expose the Arundel Team. Let’s see if I can count: That would be quadruple loyalty. Worth a Performance Award from us. Keep the cash.”

“No, no,” Taelo speaks up. “Throw in an extra grand.”

“Analysis time, Toby”, Viruet says. “Give us your assessment of Schraeder.”

“He defended that fired officer with White Nationalist contacts in Greece. Then he appeals to me with White solidarity. A reasonable person would suspect that Schraeder has racist sympathies, too.”

“Right on point,” Vetaro says. “Throw in a second extra grand for Toby. I suggest 24-7 Renland surveillance of Schraeder.”

Taelo speaks up. “Nice thought, Vic. I actually turned the Renland on Wild Bill earlier. I found out that he was using the pre-Renland tech weapon to carve out blind spots for himself. He has a much cruder version of current Renland technology. We’ll still light him up, but keep your expectations low.”

“A paranoid guy,” Laginn says.

“He has good reason to be paranoid,” Viruet says.

Laginn says, “There is one problem: Schraeder expects his first briefing next Tuesday.”

“It’s time to eviscerate this problem,” says Taelo. “Let them fire you. Or try.”

Laginn’s mouth is wide open.

“Vic, take the honors, please.”

Vetaro brandishes his Renland and says, “Two other features of this powerful Renland, Toby. First, it can find and call private cell phones, without the receiver being able to trace the source. Second, it can disguise the voice of the caller. Make it sound like Porky Pig.”

Vetaro pushes buttons on the long cell phone-like weapon, then smiles, “voice mail.”

Vic takes a deep breath. “Hello, Mr. Schraeder. This is Toby Laginn. Thank you for your generous offer. But this is a very sensitive job, and it is worth at least another \$5,000 up front. I won’t meet with you next Tuesday unless I get the money. Call me when you have the chance.”

Vetaro disconnects. Laginn is stone cold. Taelo walks over and squeezes Laginn’s shoulders. “Don’t worry. I will be giving DNI Director Freeman a full briefing this afternoon.”

“Director Marc is back in his Washington DC Office,” Viruet says.

“No problem,” Taelo replies. “Oh, and did I mention I will be briefing another person? Higher up?”

Laginn is looking back at Taelo in anticipation.

“Don’t let it cross your mind to ask,” Viruet says.

“Jude, I need you in my office,” Taelo says.

In his substantial office, Taelo hands Viruet a newspaper from his desktop.

Taelo raises his voice, “Check out Page 12. By-line, Misa Taelo. Bold print: ‘Easterling Enterprises Forces Toxic Waste Into Minority Neighborhoods, Pollutes the Raritan River; Human and Environmental Health in Peril.’ Below there is a picture—with obvious sympathy—of about 100 demonstrators outside Easterling Company headquarters.”

“Should I tie her hands so she can’t write?” Viruet asks wryly.

“If that’s what it takes. And what is the Exitare paper?”

“It’s an alternative political newspaper from the Village.”

“Don’t throw PC at me Jude. It’s a radical rag!”

“Are you more worried about her politics, or how the Taelo name is getting press?”

“Her safety!” Taelo yells. “These big money people are very capable of killing her.”

“Tyger. In the US there are very few recorded cases of dissidents being murdered by corporate leaders because of critical press coverage.”

“What did you tell me about your conversation with Gil, the investigator? He thinks Wendy Easterling probably assassinated Brannigan. How much easier would it be for her to murder my daughter? Gil’s words, as you related, were: Wendy Easterling had malice, opportunity, motive and money to ice Louis Brannigan.”

Misa Taelo sits in the quaint office of her church; her clerical gown now a light green, and her pink-painted fingernail roving from Bible passages to an open book.

Wendy Easterling appears at the open door, her gray dress suit perfectly proper.

“We don’t have an appointment, Reverend Taelo. I don’t care.”

Misa offers her hand. “That’s okay. How can I help you?”

Wendy rushes up and slams a copy of *Exitare* on Misa’s desk. “This trash piece, and you never contacted me?”

“We tried, but with your gatekeepers we would need something supernatural to get through to you. We reached out”—

“Lies! Lies! I will send you, your newspaper, and every media and social media outlet the countless statements of New Jerseyans who support this project. What else can I expect from a Pastor that runs a communist cell that masquerades as a church?”

“Please, that’s not fair. My writings have been just as critical of Marxist regimes, if not more so, as American business practices.”

“You people! Your ilk! You don’t care how many decent Americans you step on for your sick social justice agenda. It’s more than delusional! It’s a wrecking ball, hurting people and enterprises!”

“Excuse me, Reverend,” Comes the voice of a large Black man from the doorway. “Is it time for me to escort someone?”

Misa holds up her hands. “It’s okay, Mason.”

“Should we tell your guest that I’ve a New York City-approved license to carry?”

“That won’t be necessary either, Mason.”

Wendy slams more papers on Misa’s desk.

“Sworn affidavits of public and private officials who think my investments are very beneficial.”

“How much?” Misa asks.

“How much what?”

“How much did you pay them for those statements?”

Wendy quiets, as a wicked grin creeps across her face. “You must be reading my mind. I guess even Commie Asians can be very smart.” She pulls a thick envelope from her bag and hands it to Misa. “Call it restoration money. \$10,000. Just for a simple clarification article in your newspaper. I’ll send you the notes to print.”

Misa puts the envelope in her desk drawer. “Thank you for your donation. We’ll forward this to anti-poverty and anti-human trafficking groups we partner with.”

“So when will the retraction be printed?”

“Oh no. That would be unethical. Also, we only accept one-time donations from corporations. Repeat donations could unethically bend our missions toward corporate interests. Nothing personal.”

Wendy takes a card from her purse and slams it on Misa's desk, the ample rings on her fingers passing only 6 inches from Misa's nose.

"Contact number for my lawyer. He never loses. Why don't you do America a favor and go back to China or wherever. I've got lots of connections to deal with people like you."

Mason appears again. "It may be time for that escort, Reverend."

Misa rises and smiles. "Yes. Ms. Easterling, would you be so kind to escort Mason to the Loisaída Food Bank? They would love to hear how Easterling Enterprises can help them, and you would benefit too."

Wendy Easterling storms away, shouting her way down the church corridor. Suddenly Misa runs after her.

"Ms. Easterling!" Misa calls. Wendy turns like an animal ready to spring. "You forgot something."

Misa holds up Wendy's handbag.

19>

Since Jamie Bradovchak rudely interrupted Misa's offer for me to meet her boyfriend at the makeshift zoo, she extended a dinner invitation to me.

Viruet is seated at wooden table in the den of Misa's Loisaída walkup. A portrait of Jesus adorns the wall behind Viruet's seat. Jim Badger, the lanky young man with bald head and goatee approaches from the kitchen. He sets a bowl on the table.

"The accountancy profession doesn't allow for much of anything else, including cooking skills," Badger says in a tenor voice. "The best I can do is mac & cheese."

Misa appears, her ankle length clerical gown a dark gray. Big smile and a hot dish. "Please don't assume Asians only cook Asian food. Lasagna. I think you will like it, Uncle Jude."

Viruet couldn't resist a reference to the incident at the portable zoo. "Jim, are you allergic to bears?"

"No sir. I love bears." It doesn't register with Jim. So Viruet pursues:

"If you're out with Misa, and perceive something threatening, what do you do?"

"Call the police. Otherwise, my parents taught me to always flee from danger."

"They trained you well," Viruet says.

Misa leaves briefly and places a stuffed animal on Viruet's lap. "Koala bear. A sign of peace between the three of us." She glances at both Viruet and Jim, as if sensing the tension.

They are seated, hands folded in prayer, and then Misa suddenly unfolds them.

"First the surprise, Uncle Jude."

Jim pulls a ring from his shirt pocket and places it on the fourth finger of Misa's left hand. Misa beams and displays the modest diamond.

“Congratulations to both of you,” Viruet says graciously. “When is the wedding?”

“Not until you find your love of life, Uncle Jude. You would enjoy a good mate. Can I help?”

“Now my surprise: I just started dating a schoolteacher named Kathy Smith. I met her at my church.”

“No way. You didn’t say a word!” Misa lights up.

“I assumed you consider me too old for this.”

“No, too young.”

“Liar.”

They all laugh.

“Mr. Viruet, what kind of work do you do?” Jim asks.

Viruet hesitates, so Misa answers, “Uncle Jude is a Civil Rights Officer for a government contractor. So I think he’s very understanding of my advocacy work.” Misa’s face drops. “Nice to know someone in my family cares about these issues.— Uncle Jude, I am inviting you to come with me on my advocacy projects. I respect your advice.”

“Anything in particular?”

“Well, yes. Tomorrow night I am meeting very privately with a whistleblower who has sensitive info on corporate abuses. I’ll give her advanced notice that you will join us. Okay?”

Viruet’s mind is saying, Uh Oh! His mouth says, “Count me in. Text me the time and location.”

“Thank you.” Misa reaches across the table with a loose hug.

“Misa, what does your father think of your engagement?”

Misa and Jim look at each other. Then Misa’s eyes rise toward Viruet.

“I haven’t told him.”

Viruet takes the Koala from his lap and puts it on Misa’s lap. “A symbol of peace between you and your father.”

Tears stream from Misa’s eyes. “I’m afraid to. Jim and I both thought it wise to tell you first, and get your wise counsel before we approach Dad.”

Jim says, “Misa’s father has a fierce reputation. I need your feedback on how much to reveal to him. Especially on physicality.”

“What kind of physicality, Jim?” Viruet asks slowly.

“Any kind. Any male touching Misa Taelo anywhere could turn her father into a raging bull.”

“Since you asked my advice, you must be more specific.”

“Kisses on her. Her mouth, of course,” Jim says tensely.

“My lips were closed, not open,” Misa adds.

Viruet manufactures a dire expression. “This is a grave situation. I must see a live demonstration of this offensive physicality.—Come on, you will be doing it in front of hundreds of people at a wedding!”

Jim and Misa squirm. Then Jim leans his mouth toward hers. Misa’s eyes are closed and her lips pucker a little. The kiss lasts about five seconds, with smacking sounds.

Viruet breaks into loud laughter as he circles the table and hugs both of their shoulders. Misa's tears return, but this time tears of joy.

"Could you please bless the food now, Uncle Jude?"

"Yes. Only after you promise me you will tell your father by the end of the week. Or else I will tell him—to make sure he doesn't make me your ex-Uncle."

20>

Kathy Smith approached me first in the narthex of my church. Her friendliness and interest in me made us hit it off. What attracted to me more was her interest in Spanish culture and prayer discipline. It reminded me of the Pastor in my first Master of Divinity course, who told us, when you search for a mate, that future mate must do more than say he/she is a Christian. They must be deeply spiritual, with an absolute love for Jesus. That was Kathy.

Also, her ministry calling was young adults. Her insights would be great for my 'babysitting' assignment with Misa. Then there was the 'physicality': She was an athlete, specializing in running and aerobics. Kathy's presence exuded athleticism: big bones, fresh shiny pale skin, firm calves, Samson-like curly red-Irish hair below the armpits. And body in motion, even when still in conversation.

With the stressful assignments at work—with names like Brannigan, Stein, Schraeder—her hugs and our daily runs together through Manhattan streets and Central Park brought relaxation. Given my training in marksmanship and martial arts, she helped me work on running endurance—something I was neglectful of. The only thing was, every day she would increase the distance of our runs. Kathy cruising, me panting. Kathy was the first person I knew to pray loudly while running.

But on this night, she needed to understand that I would miss her run—sensitive 'babysitting' assignment with Misa and her whistleblower friend. I was off to an underground garage in Elizabeth, New Jersey.

Viruet arrives at the well-lit New Jersey underground garage. Coming down the ramp to Level 2, he sees ample parked cars in the rows: Evidence of late night workers and long term parking.

Everything is quiet. No signs of Misa. Then he feels the gentle shock of the Renland in his pocket. The red alert appears on the Renland screen, along with two photographs. Viruet breathes in his deep sense of trepidation.

He replaces the Renland with a cellphone and dials Misa's number. Voice mail.

Viruet replaces the cell phone with the Renland, and pages Tyger Taelo.

"Yeah Jude," comes the gruff reply.

"I've been tracking Misa on her rendezvous with an activist. I just got an alert from the Renland version of the No-Fly List. Two bad dudes popped up, and the Renland is reporting automatic weapons."

"Coordinates on these dudes, Jude?"

"They're inside the garage, where Misa is!"

"What do you need from me?"

“Discreet backup to clean up a possible mess.”

“Send me your exact GPS,” Taelo says. “There is only Plan A here. That is, you take care of this, and get another nice cash award. Plan B is not an option.”

“Yes sir.”

Before he can send in the location, two shadows race along a row of cars about 30 feet away. Then machine guns are aimed over car roofs.

Viruet instinctively ducks as the bullets fly his way. He hears the zinging off of the metal of nearby cars.

The shooting stops briefly. Bare murmurs of racing footsteps.

A South Asian guard appears on the ramp from Level One, curiously following the noise.

“Get back!” Viruet yells.

Too late. The guard drops to his bloody death from a brief barrage of fire.

Viruet pulls a .45 ACP semi-automatic pistol from his ankle holster, then dives for the ground to locate the feet of the assailants. He sees one of the assailants stationary, his feet two car rows away. Viruet unleashes volleys underneath the cars. The bullets hit the assailant’s foot, as he cries out and collapses.

A second volley of bullets from the other assassin comes Viruet’s way, clanging off of the nearby cars. Viruet feels the stinging in his calf from a ricocheting bullet.

Getting prone again, Viruet sees the wounded assassin being dragged. He unleashes another volley, this time hitting the assassin’s torso, killing him. Another volley from Viruet wounds the second assailant in the foot.

Viruet carefully lifts his head above the cars. The second assassin is limping quickly toward the door of the stairwell. Viruet fires, and one of the bullets finds the assailant’s left shoulder. He still manages to reach the stairwell behind the door.

Like a stalking tiger, Viruet approaches the stairwell while angling himself away from the door. Slowly...slowly.....the door is now two feet away.

Then his cell phone rings. He answers it.

“I know who you are. Jude Viruet,” comes a Middle Eastern accent.

“How did you find out?”

“So easy to track a stone age cell phone.” Viruet breathes from relief that the assassin does not mention the Renland.

“I know who you are,” Viruet counters. “Ali Khan, Pakistan national.”

“I got something you don’t have. A hostage.”

A wave of horror sweeps over Viruet. Simultaneous and intense concern for Misa’s life and his Agency career. “No Plan B,” Viruet mumbles, his face flushing.

He drops to his knee. “Misa! Misa! Tyger, I’m sorry.” His breath is quivering. “God, I cannot handle this. I need your help.”

His cell rings again.

“I’m bringing her out now, Viruet. She is a human shield, and my gun barrel is against her ear. I know how you Americans think. You don’t want to be responsible for the death of an innocent person. One wrong move and you are a murderer!”

The stairwell door cracks open--then opens further from the gentle impact of Khan’s body.

Viruet flushes with instant relief; the hostage is not Misa. It is an older, gray-haired Black woman, obviously a straggler using the lot's stairwell. Still, this is a human life, so Viruet leaps back into immediate alert. He slowly comes within 15 feet of Khan; his gun-toting right hand straight down, and his left hand raised in a calming gesture.

"Stop right there, Viruet."

Viruet complies.

"Drop the gun."

"What happens if I drop the gun?"

"This is not negotiable! You drop your gun now or the hostage dies."

They are locked in tense confrontation for several seconds. Viruet focuses his eyes on Khan's eyeballs. Then, at the precise moment...Khan adjusts his aim on a squirming hostage.....

It takes less than a second. Viruet simultaneously drops to a knee, lifts his pistol, and fires one semiautomatic round.

The woman screams with her hands extended. There is no blood on her. Khan is dead from a head shot.

The woman screams some more. Yet there is not a scratch on her.

Viruet is alerted to a text on his cell. It's from Misa. Change of plans. We're on Level 3.

"Hey! Can I talk to you, please?—Thank you!" Shouts the Black woman as Viruet limps past her into the stairwell.

Viruet finds Misa and a woman about 15 feet from the third level stairwell entrance. They extend big smiles to Viruet, as if he is walking into a tea party. Viruet does a quick double take at seeing Misa in a knee-length blue dress. Yes there is actually something between Misa's neck and ankles, Viruet notices briefly.

"Uncle Jude, this is Martha Abrams, an American hero fighting corporate corruption." Young, idealistic with thick schoolmarm glasses and Kathy Smith-style curly hair flowing to the armpits—except dark brown hair, not red. "Lisa works for Easterling Enterprises. She also works quietly for the AFL-CIA Foundation."

"You mean AFL-CIO."

"No, AFL-CIA," Misa corrects. "The Foundation trains workers on undercover methods to expose corporate corruption."

"What's all that noise downstairs?" Martha asks. "Explosions, yelling."

Viruet smiles. "They just started shooting a wild movie. They kicked me out."

"Uncle Jude! Your leg is bleeding!" Misa says with concern.

"This has not been my day. A stupid dog bit me this afternoon. The dog got the worst of it." He tries to laugh some more over the occupational lie. "Don't worry, I got my rabies shot last year."

"Rabies shot?" Misa is openly amused.

"I mean tetanus shot."

"Uncle Jude, we are entrusting you with backup information as someone who can help us in emergency. Family backup plan," Misa says. "This is never to be discussed outside of this garage. Okay?"

Viruet returns a stern stare. “You got that right. Ms. Abrams, you need to be totally anonymous about sharing this information, for your own safety. As my Ecuadorian journalist cousin once told me, when you’re clandestine, you don’t linger. Now where are you parked? I’ll escort you.”

“Level 1,” Martha says.

“We’ll take the elevator. So as to not bother the production company,” says Viruet. Then, as Misa is pushing the down button, Viruet says, “Do I get a sneak preview of this explosive information?”

Misa replies, “E-mails of people who witnessed Wendy Easterling making threatening comments about Louis Brannigan just days before the assassination.”

21>

Kathy Smith was annoyed that I could not join her for evening runs, with my leg bandaged. I used the dog story on her. Kathy was doubly annoyed when I declined to join her in Syracuse for a super marathon; 50-mile run. It was just too much a time commitment given my sensitive assignments. Kathy was triply annoyed with my vagueness in discussing my work. When I shared this info with Vic Vetaro my trusted partner, he referenced the “curse”—continuation of God’s providential woman problem for me, to keep me focused on my national security calling.

As I rested in the den of my Agency-funded temporary Upper West Side residence, Kathy had the grace, in spite of these differences, to massage my leg. Then I got a call from my old Cro Mag buddy, Gil Gilroy:

“Hey Jude, my partner and good friend. Let me show off the talent and connections of my investigative firm,” Gilroy’s voice sounds surprisingly lucid and sober. “I have a deep throat contact in the National Organized Crime prevention agency, known as NOC. Jamie Bradovchak, when briefing his officers on the Cro-Mag link to the Brannigan assassination, concealed his own Cro-Magnon connection. Anyone who has something to hide cannot be trusted. In my book, that means Jamie Bradovchak joins Wendy Easterling as a prime suspect in the Brannigan murder.”

22>

Misa Taelo is seated in her church office, surfing the Net on her computer. Bashir, with his trimmed beard, appears at the doorway.

Misa rises, her white clerical gown shining behind a large gold cross around her neck.

“Can I help you, sir?”

“Reverend Misa Tyler, right?”

“You almost got it right. That’s T-A-E-L-O—pronounced Tah-AY-Low.”

“Sorry. I got your name as a referral from Middle Eastern cultural contacts. Maybe I messed up the spelling.” Bashir approaches her desk. “Are Muslims allowed to attend your church?”

“Yes, absolutely,” Misa says kindly. “Everyone, no matter their background, will hear the Christian Gospel, and we have doctrinal differences with Islam. Ephesians 4 in the Bible commands us to state our beliefs to everyone, but with gentleness and respect. Truth in love—can I get your name?”

“Messiah.”

“That is quite an interesting and powerful name. Never met anyone named Messiah before.”

“It’s an adopted name I took, because I am very interested in investigating Messiah truth. I need someone to go over the Bible with me once in a while. And relate Biblical teachings to personal challenges I am facing.”

“That is great! I will pray for your spiritual discernment during your research.”

“You came highly recommended by my friends, as someone who is Biblically knowledgeable, but also not hating Muslims. Could you meet me once in a while to answer my Biblical questions?”

“Ah, sure. Will have to check my schedule. But I can certainly commit to one or two preliminary meetings.”

23>

Vic Vetaro said that Jane has me in chains—and that I should know who the Chainbreaker is. So I prayed, and within days that higher power slayed the haunting apparition of Jane Eunsol. God gave me pressing national priorities to focus on—with a love for our country, our people, and compassion mixed with rage about how evildoers were tearing our civilization apart. Kathy Smith also was a nice buffer against the Jane recollections.

All this prepared me for a stunning event one Thursday afternoon.

Viruet is sitting in his den, conducting computer research on his Master of Divinity course. The doorbell chimes. Viruet opens the door.

“Hello, Boy Scout.” It is Jane Eunsol. Viruet stands there, frozen. “Do I get a hug, or at least a handshake?”

They embrace loosely. “Great seeing you, Jane. Please come in.” Viruet’s voice is semi-dazed. He beholds a 10-year-old clone: That same frizzy black hair forming a bell; a stunning gold business dress suit covered with jewelry; siren-like low voice. Her face has matured just a little.

“How did you find me?”

Jane contorts her face. “Dr. Porcaro from the Cro Mag course taught me well. I’ve formed some very good connections.”

“Um, can I get you something? Snack? Drink?”

“This is my treat. I owe it to you after my vanishing act. Circumstances mandated it then. Circumstances have changed now.”

Jane walks into Viruet’s kitchen with a large bag. The brief hiatus allows Viruet a psyche check. He is grateful that his emotions are in check.

Jane returns carrying two cups. “Our favorite: Bubble tea. We drank this together every day, right?” Viruet nods. “Time lapse. Those ten years never existed. Things are really the same now.”

Jane takes oranges out of her large bag and slices them with a small knife. She squeezes them over her forehead, and natural orange juice pours down her face.

Jane laughs, “Remember, I started this ritual after you complained about my strong perfume. We would be sitting at the table after dessert, and I would pour this orange juice on me, draw close to you—made our kisses more enjoyable. You never knew the real reason for the orange ritual.”

“Yes I did. You wanted to seduce me.”

“But you never gave in. That’s how you became Boy Scout. Too bad. But not too late. There is nothing to stop it now, right? I don’t see a ring on either of our fingers.”

“Things are different, Jane,” Viruet replies seriously. “I am in a relationship. My faith requires me to date a Christian.”

“Hmm. According to my recollection, you were a Christian ten years ago.”

“Not as strong. And even Christians succumb to weakness sometimes.”

Viruet smiles, “Jane, you were quite appealing.”

“I’m doing very important consulting work now, Boy Scout. I need you.”

“Actually, I am already working”—

“I know exactly where you are working.” Jane interrupts, causing Viruet to jerk back. “I heard there was a recent Cro Mag reunion.”

“Yeah, Gil couldn’t find you.”

“I have other ways. It had to do with the Brannigan assassination. He brought his death upon himself.”

“What?!”

“He was a dangerous man. I know this sounds cruel. But I’m glad he’s dead. As President of the United States he would have damaged so many lives, especially my clients.”

“I don’t judge character by politics, Jane. Louis Brannigan was a kind, gentle, compassionate man.” Viruet is thinking that a third Cro Mag just leaped headlong into Gil Gilroy’s prime suspect list.

Jane eyes Viruet wickedly. “The next minute will prove that nothing has changed between us. Something you cannot resist. Turn face down for your massage.”

“No.”

Jane’s hands move toward him, anyway. Just then he hears the jiggling of his unlocked front door. Barely before he can look up, Kathy Smith is at the top of the short stairwell, in her brown jogging suit.

“Am I interrupting something?” Kathy asks.

“Actually, yes,” Jane responds.

Kathy steps closer, her eyes on fire. “You both just stepped out of a plane from Orlando?”

Jane shrieks a laugh. “You are a scream. Who are you?”

“This is my girlfriend Kathy Smith,” Viruet says. “Kathy, this is totally unexpected. This is Jane, an old acquaintance from many years ago. She showed up 10 minutes ago.”

“Yes she did. How true,” Kathy says. “This is beyond a verbal goodbye, Jude. I’ll give you a text message and e-mail.”

Kathy is in quick retreat.

“I’ll call you later.”

“Don’t bother!” Kathy is out the door.

“Jane, it would have been very helpful for you to explain the circumstances of your visit,” Viruet says.

Jane’s eyes are wide and hard. “You still are not getting this, Boy Scout. You are in serious trouble, and I am the only one who can help you.”

“What kind of trouble, Jane?”

“You had a relationship with Jennifer Mendoza. I have proof that she was into narcotics trafficking. Cocaine. Very quiet about it. Whether you knew about it or not, doesn’t matter. You are directly or indirectly tied to wrongdoing. That PC, straight-laced government contractor you work for, will not tolerate any Official tied to narco-terrorism. You will lose your job, and your career will be destroyed.”

Viruet’s eyes are riveted on Jane. “What do you expect in return?”

“Your occasional help with work projects involving my clients.”

“If I refuse?”

Jane smiles, “I only think about the positive. Lots of extra money for you, for just some occasional work. Ultimately, you have the best of all worlds: The pleasure of extra cash and my body, while having your dirty secret protected. Now the negative: If you refuse, I will parade the open secret to totally destroy you. I am really into carrots. But I like sticks, too.”

“Jane, I would escort you to the door. But I’m sure you can find it yourself.”

Jane rises. “I know, you need time to consider my offer. But really, you have no choice, Boy Scout.”

“I’ll let you know by the end of the week.”

Later, Viruet is on the Renland for scrambled conversation with Vic Vetaro.

Vetaro says, “With Kathy, besides the continuation of your dating curse, I see it as a circumstantial misunderstanding. Neither one of you did anything wrong. But Kathy’s response was understandable, from her point of view. As for Jane Eunsol, maybe you should pinch yourself.”

“Believe me, I did. The wildest part is, this morning when I woke up, I never dreamed I would be a victim of both labor trafficking and sex trafficking.”

“Huh?”

Viruet says, “Blackmail. She expects me to work for her on special projects, while holding some dirty secret about Jen Mendoza over my head. And she considers me her sex slave. Her attitude from the very minute she walked into my place, is that she owns me.”

“Maybe I need to come over there and take care of you. Seems your flashbacks have grown into full blown hallucinations.”

“Vic, this is real.”

“Okay, I believe you. I always have your back. What’s your plan?”

“Human trafficking—and if it’s me it probably involves other people on both sides—justifies Renland surveillance.”

“I’ll take care of it.”

24>

Later, Jane Eunsol answers the phone in her swank Queens highrise.

“Is Senator Bowers ours now?” Comes a female voice from the other end.

Jane replies tensely, “Yes, I delivered the photos of him with those prostitutes.”

“You’re sure he flipped?”

“Yes, Wendy. That scared look. He is terrified of us now.”

“Good. Let him have those nightmares, about the reaction of his family and constituents if info on his whoring is leaked out. Did you give him the damaging documents about President Velasquez?”

“Yes.”

“How did he react?”

“Indignation, of course.”

“Jane, you sound tense. Are you okay?”

“I am doing my job, Wendy. What more do you expect of me?” Jane disconnects, put the phone down and screams, “What do you want next, Wendy! You have my very soul! I am your rag, and you have squeezed me and thrown me away! You win! Enough! Enouuuughhhh!”

Jane covers her face, panting. “There is no hope. There is no way out.”

Jane runs to a bathroom and snatches a bottle of pills. She proceeds to her balcony. It is dusk, and the Manhattan skyline shines off in the distance. She pours about 10 pills in her hand, and shoves them into her mouth. Then she pours more pills from the container directly into her mouth.

She looks to her left to the adjacent balcony, and is startled to see a White man, about 80 years old, with skimpy hair, cane and clerical collar.

“Beautiful night, isn’t it?” He says.

Jane awkwardly waves as her cheeks bulge. There is a 2-foot gap between the two balconies as he leans toward Jane.

“We’ve talked, but I never had the sense to introduce myself. I’m Pastor Micah.” His voice is frail. “Will you help me celebrate? The Choir Director in our church. What a miracle. She was suffering terribly from cancer, and couldn’t handle the Chemotherapy. She was in an act of suicide. Had a gun to her head. Before she can pull the trigger, members of our church show up with food, little gifts and lots of love. She continues to be encouraged through her Chemo by an unbelievable spirit and friends with a caring attitude beyond understanding. She gets stronger through the treatment. Today, we learn that the cancer is gone! Hallelujah! She will be giving testimony tomorrow on radio station WMCA.— Come on over and celebrate with me.”

Jane leans over the balcony--and spews the pills from her mouth to the ground below.

25>

Jane is waiting in the Manhattan hotel room designated for the rendezvous. It's a suite, and she sits at a round wooden table. Viruet comes through the cracked-open door. He sits across from her at the table.

Jane looks at her watch. "You are ten minutes late, Boy Scout. When we start working together, punctuality will be a premium."

"Oh, sorry."

"I assume you are not stupidly committing an act of occupational suicide, and that we can start discussing these important projects. I have your first payment in my purse."

"Here is my answer, Jane. No."

"I'll give you fifteen minutes to reconsider your reckless decision."

"No use. That decision is final."

Jane directs an icy stare at him, then rises. With each step in retreat, her breathing gets heavier. Viruet senses desperation, unsteadiness.

"You will find that you are no match for me!" She glares, and then opens the door to leave.

The doorway is blocked by a large Black man. Vic Vetaro.

"Excuse me."

"Excuse you," Vetaro answers.

Jane tries to squeeze by, but Vetaro gives her a gentle shove backwards, then closes the door and fastens the chain.

"You don't want to be fighting me, Ma'am."

"Sit down, Jane," Viruet says. Then louder, "Sit down!"

She complies, and Vetaro joins her.

Viruet says, "How many other Congressmen—or people—have you blackmailed?"

"What are you talking about?" Jane protests.

"We have you and Wendy Easterling on tape," Viruet says.

Vetaro leans forward. "What we have on tape are Federal crimes. Human trafficking convicts don't get minimum security jails. You bring those necklaces around the maximum security inmates you'll be spending time with, and those gold pieces will go tighter around your neck."

"What right do you have holding me here? Who are you?"

"What right does a master slave matron have protesting her temporary captivity?" Viruet says. "To answer your question, I'm Superman. He's Batman."

"Batman and Spiderman," Vetaro adds.

Jane's lips and body are trembling. Finally she yells, "Alright, enough! It's over!"

"What's over?" Vetaro says.

Jane asks, "How familiar are you with human trafficking?"

"A little—in addition to what you recently taught me," Viruet answers.

Jane says, “My parents moved to the USA from Korea when I was ten. I got my citizenship, and blended in with the American culture. My parents were very aggressive business owners, and they saw great opportunities for markets in Laos. They moved there, and left me with an American family during my last two years of high school. I stayed in the US and went to college. But my parents also took my younger siblings, who I was very close to.

“Unbeknownst to my parents at the time, the section of Laos they moved to was a hotbed of human trafficking. The local government officials were paid to protect the traffickers. One of the industries my parents partnered with was Easterling Enterprises, now a billion-dollar industry. Wendy Easterling has been quietly running the business for 15 years; her parents basically figureheads rolling in the gravy.

“Wendy saw great opportunity for abuse. Conspiring with the local officials, she basically made my parent’s business indentured servants of her business. My family was not—and still are not—allowed to leave that region of Laos. Wendy took advantage to make me her virtual slave. She reminded me she has the power to have my family members tortured or killed. At first, it was just petty harassment and taunting. Then she forced me to do errands for Easterling Enterprises, for little or no pay. The real serious stuff, with the blackmail and the politicians, just started about a year ago.”

“When you ditched me 10 years ago, it was because you had to jump for an Easterling assignment?”

“Yes, Wendy sent me to Hong Kong. Also, she didn’t want me around you. She was attracted to you.”

“Jude, what is so terrible about human trafficking,” Vetaro says, “Is that paradoxically the trafficking victims are often turned into perpetrators themselves, due to the vicious nature of the system. It can be a diabolical pyramid scheme.”

“Yes,” Jane says quietly. “You get a seared conscience. After a while, it becomes a routine part of life, like going to work or school. Self-preservation trumps everything else.”

“What is your real name?” Vetaro asks.

“Eunsol Lee.—Is there any way you have the power to free my family?”

Viruet says, “We can lie and promise to bring them home. In truth we cannot guarantee a successful liberation operation for your family.”

“Thank you for your honesty,” Jane says.

“Wendy Easterling is a different story,” Vetaro says, eyes blazing.

“Between the event last night, unrelated to this issue, and today’s events, I don’t think all this is accidental coincidence. My parents raised me in both English and Korean speaking churches. I plan to return to those Christian roots.—I’ll help you both any way I can.”

“First, what is this destructive information against President Velasquez?” Viruet asks.

“They claim to have evidence that he is affiliated with narco-terrorists. I saw the evidence, because I am promoting this Presidential smear campaign.”

“Is it true?” Viruet asks.

“I don’t know. All I know is that Wendy and her friends are really out to destroy Jaime Velasquez’s reputation. Wendy has made comments about making serious changes in our government, to restore traditional American culture.”

26>

A small bug of a car stops in front of a modest ranch house in Connecticut. Misa Taelo steps out with her bright white clerical gown. Jim Badger waits in front of the door as the sun begins to set. He takes Misa inside.

“Your meeting with my father went well, so I want to introduce you to my Uncles. These twin brothers own a Savings and Loan. Substantial assets that may come in handy in our future.”

At the end of the hall there is raucous laughter. Jim and Misa step into a den. Carl Badger, large shaved head and sagging cheeks, is seated at a table, eating a pizza. Beside him are two identical heavy men with matted blonde hair, laughing it up like drunken sailors. The smell of alcohol permeates the room. Sideways empty bottles litter the floor.

The frolicking twins don’t seem to notice Jim and Misa. Carl Badger rises.

“Jim, how many times have I told you not to bring guests here without prior notice?”

“Misa is more than a guest, Dad.—Misa, meet my Uncles, Ned and Jed.”

The twins perks up. One bellows, “Lookie here, Ned. It’s Miss Flower Drum Song! Heard a lot about you. Now you’re here!”

Carl Badger says, “Hello, Misa. I owe you a sincere apology. There is important information I withheld at our first meeting. I have not shared this with my son, either. Look, this is not your fault, Misa. You’re a sweet girl. But we have a rich historical family tradition dating back to the American revolution. We are not going to break that chain of purity with an inter-racial marriage. We love to join you people at ball games, movies, work, even invite you over for barbeque. But the Badger family will not contribute to the mongrelization of America. Miscegenation is not in the Badger vocabulary.”

“Miscegen what? Where’d you get that word, Carl?” Calls Ned.

“Miscegen-sippi Queen, Ned. The new name for our Flower Drum sweetie.” They double over in drunken laughter. “Ned, I betcha she can spell it. Those people go to Harvard.”

“And Yale, MIT, yada, yada.”

“Wait, Carl. Cut this cutey a break,” slurs Jed. “We got honorary Whites at our country club! A couple Orien’als, like her.”

Ned gets up and approaches Misa, who quietly recoils. “Show me your palm honey.---Hey you all, she passes! She ain’t no nig or jig!”

Jim approaches Misa and says quietly, “Pay no attention to them. They only act that way when drunk.”

Jed starts up and is playfully jostling with Ned. Jed says, “My turn. Honey, would you honor me with a dance?” He stumbles as Misa backs up some more.

“Jed, first of all, there ain’t no music. Second of all, these people don’t dance. They just do it like rabbits. How many gazillion people are there in China?”

The twins stagger as they slap hands.

“Thank you very much. I am leaving now,” Misa calls. The men quiet down. Misa eyes Jim steadily. “Jim, are you coming?”

Jim hesitates.

Carl Badger says, “That account assistant job can’t sustain your fancy Manhattan lifestyle, Jim, without my assistance. You walk out that door, don’t come back, son.”

Jim hesitates.

“Sit down, Jim!” Jim meekly joins his father at the table.

Misa turns and walks away. Reaching the front door, she stretches it open as if to give it a good slam. She thinks better of it, and closes it gently. But once outside, she takes the diamond off her finger and hurls it hard—a slider--at the closed door.

27>

Tyger Taelo and Viruet sit in a conference room at Arundel Team headquarters, New York, mid-morning. Taelo is focused on a TV monitor, while Viruet is about 15 feet away, doing computer research. Viruet’s cell phone rings.

“Hi, Uncle Jude. This is Misa. Have a few minutes?”

Viruet takes a glance at her occupied father. “Yes, Reverend.”

“I need your prayers. Jim and I just separated. The prayers are for my attitude. I was disrespected, but responded in an un-Christian way. I plan to call Jim today and end the courtship in a more graceful way.”

“What kind of disrespect?”

“I’m not focusing on that. I need prayers and repentance for my anger.”

“Did you ever tell your Dad about Jim?”

Misa’s voice rises a little. “Dad was away on travel most of the week, and gave subtle signals that he isn’t available for conversation even when here. The consummate workaholic.”

“Okay, Jim was a passing ship in the night. Just between the two of us.”

“Thank you, Uncle Jude. If it is not too much trouble, I would like to pray with you briefly, just a few minutes every day. I respect you, and am spiritually uplifted by you. You are the only family member I can reach out to prayerfully.”

“You have a father. You should be praying with him.”

“I think my father believes, but is not practicing. It is the height of absurdity for me to ask my father to pray with me.”

Viruet approaches Taelo. “Tyger, did you ever follow up with my suggestion to have an open conversation with Misa?”

Taelo’s dark eyes harden. “You need to walk in my shoes, Jude. Imagine that you love and cherish another human being so deeply to die for her—and then have that person repeatedly ignore your counsel as an elder, and disrespect you as a father. I’m ready for the conversation with Misa when she understands the command to honor your parents.”

“Here’s the problem, Tyger. You have already lost your daughter. If you do nothing, then you just maintain the status quo of a daughter who has virtually disowned you. The ball is your court.”

Later, Taelo and Viruet are following the newsfeed: A semi-bald man with dark suit is being interviewed:

“Senator Bowers, why do you believe that President Velasquez is involved with wrongdoing?” Asks a woman.

“We have documents, including photographs, of President Velasquez’s dealing with narco-terrorists. At least five narco-barons visited the White House within the last month. These are international criminals, wanted by Interpol and many of our allies. President Velasquez has yet to comment on these credible reports.”

“What is the next planned step for you and your Senatorial colleagues?”

“We are initiating a full-scale investigation of the conduct of our President. We have allies in the House, who plan to initiate a similar hearing, in response to this disturbing evidence.”

The scene shifts back to the newsroom:

Tyra: “Mike, it appears we have a growing scandal in the White House. Just how serious are these allegations against President Velasquez?”

Mike: “Tyra, these attacks against his personal integrity are coming from different sources, many just piling on to the drumbeat of accusations of these illicit White House meetings. It all boils down to the veracity of these photos, and the reason for these alleged meetings with International fugitives. President Velasquez has adamantly denied any wrongdoing or meetings, and says it’s a political witch hunt. He even hints at racial overtones.”

Tyra: “Well, our nation has certainly endured epoch moments of exaggerated negative attacks in the name of politics. We’ll soon know if that’s the case, or whether President Velasquez has engaged in serious wrongdoing.”

Taelo turns off the TV. “Wendy Easterling’s shill gets his moment in the sun,” he says. “How many other cockroaches are going to crawl out of the woodwork? I just completed the Renland analysis on the evidence you extracted from Eunsol Lee. All those photos of supposed meetings between President Velasquez and narcos are fraudulent. Moreover, the conspirators used the exact same technology used to try to link you to the Brannigan assassin. So we know we are dealing with a malicious and well-organized phenomenon.”

Viruet says, “In the short run, we can undercut the attacks on the President by having DNI Freeman give a press conference, and announce that the Intelligence analysis shows that the photos are doctored, and allegations against President Velasquez are false.”

“An option, Jude. But how to deliver this news without exposing the super-secret Renland to the public? Also, since Freeman is a Velasquez appointee, it could backfire, as the public could be whipped into a frenzy about a Presidential coverup.—No we first need an expanded investigation. It starts with this question:

How does Easterling Enterprises get access to such classified high tech Intelligence equipment?"

"There is an obvious government connection," Viruet says. "Maybe inside our own agency."

"We start with the usual suspects," Taelo says. "24-7 Renland surveillance on Spirou Mersatos. Underground, but we'll find him. Also, how to penetrate the partial blackout that Schraeder has set up?"

"Nuclear medicine for Wild Bill," Viruet offers.

Taelo hesitates. "Too radical, without further evidence of serious wrongdoing. If we play that hand too soon, we risk top secret exposure."

"Mouse trap before nuclear medicine."

"Who's the cheese?"

"Me," Viruet says.

"No, I don't want my best agent in such a dangerous situation."

"When have I ever shied away from danger, Tyger?"

"Okay, if you insist. I'll get the proper infrastructure ready.—Also, after the Schraeder encounter I'll have another Arundel guy keep an eye on Misa. Maybe Toby, the new guy. If he agrees."

"Better ensure there are ample Agency assignments while he is watching Misa. We don't anyone getting wind of an abuse of taxpayer funds. More controversy for our President."

"I'll do better than that," Taelo says. "I'll make sure the extra substantial income Toby receives comes out of my own personal assets."

28>

Jude Viruet and Bill Schraeder are seated at a small table inside a brightly-lit office on the second floor of a West Chester County warehouse. Below the office and the steel staircase are parked trucks and industrial equipment.

Schraeder, in his silver suit, examines papers in front of him.

"Do you see, sir, why I suggested that we just meet alone, no one else?"

Viruet says.

"Who is Steve Smith?" Schraeder asks.

"Someone who supposedly works for Wendy Easterling on these Congressional blackmail attempts. I have very little information, Mr. Schraeder. But the statement from Mr. Smith seems to implicate an Agency staff person in these blackmail attempts-for God knows what purpose."

"Someone just gives you this explosive information out of the blue?"

"EEO Officers deal with sensitive stuff. We make lots of contacts, so it should not be surprising. I am trusted, so I can be a lightning rod for people wanting to report corruption."

"Who is the whistleblower who shared this information?"

"You and I have had differences, especially on Spirou Mersatos contracts. But I've always trusted you, Mr. Schraeder, on core Agency values. Now is the time for us to work together to expose this sick plot."

Schraeder sneered, "Work with you, after you stabbed me in the back?"

“I’m so sorry, sir. But this clear and present danger overrides any petty personnel matters—as you called them.”

“Who is the whistleblower, Viruet?”

“I’m sorry sir. He insisted that he not be identified, and remain anonymous.”

Schraeder smiles. “Of all the power plays you and Taelo pulled on me in this Agency, I am shocked at your stupidity, Viruet. That you would actually come to meet me here alone, and even offer to show me you’re carrying no guns! You underestimate just how much I despise you. My my, what gift wrapped vengeance!”

The door opens. Two crewcut men in battle fatigues step in brandishing pistols.

“What’s worse, Viruet, is you have not come here in good faith. You identify yourself as an EEO Officer. You lie, and don’t reveal your true Agency role. So I am to trust you?—This is going to be good.”

“Oh, but I am an EEO Officer, sir. My professional advice is, if you give the appearance of protecting a contractor with Greek Nazi connections, it is further bad form to surround yourself with guys who look like skinhead Nazis.”

The two gunmen step closer.

“That’s your last smart-alec comment, Viruet. Here’s what’s going to happen. You will give me the name of the whistleblower. Or you get a bullet in your groin.”

“I’m the whistleblower, sucker.”

Suddenly the lights go out. It is pitch black inside.

“Find him! Find him!” Comes Schraeder’s frantic voice.

Viruet draws his Renland. The heat draws the light toward Schraeder. It stays on him just for a split second, then picks up one of the skinhead gunmen. There is a quick buzzing sound, and the man drops instantly. The heat and light of the Renland finds the second man—bzzzt, and he is down, too.

The lights come on. Schraeder is wide-eyed at two associates dead on the floor. He opens the door to leave—and runs into Vic Vetaro and Toby Laginn. Vetaro pushes Schraeder back hard.

“The back of that truck is really comfy. Nice pads,” Vetaro says. “Viruet is right. This really is an EEO audit of you, sir! Your racial attitudes! We are his EEO Assistants!”

Laginn, standing behind Schraeder, aims a tiny green gun and pulls the trigger. A small dart enters the back of Schraeder’s neck. He drops immediately.

Laginn stares at the DNI Assistant still on the floor.

Vetaro says, “The drug in that dart is a standard Agency knock out drug going back to the 1960s. I can’t pronounce it.”

Viruet opens Vetaro’s bag, and takes out needles, catheters and IV lines.

Vetaro continues. “The second drug is propofol. Short term nap. The drug after that is onytaxezine-4, the most spectacular truth serum the Intelligence community ever invented. It opens up the brain and the mouth from suspended conscience. Later we administer versed and fentanyl. Happy drugs so you wake up asking wow, what just happened?”

“Nuclear medicine project,” Laginn says tensely. “Is this legal?”

Vetaro replies, "What is the first rule we taught you?"

"Uh, don't ask the question if you already know the answer."

"The plastic in your back pocket is your perpetual answer. Remember, we are National Security Goalies for our great nation. There can be no restrictions on our ability to defend it."

Viruet adds, "If you are a terrorist, violent Nazi, or some other lunatic trying to destroy our civilization, what interrogation would you prefer? Waterboarding? Or a nice Lalaland experience?"

"I get your point," Laginn agrees.

"We got bonus coverage, Toby," Vetaro says. Two more Arundel Team agents come in carrying a stretch hammock. Nestled in the hammock is the unconscious Wendy Easterling.

29>

Later, Jamie Bradovchak and eight multi-ethnic and multi-gender NOC agents storm up the steps of an Upper East Side highrise. They stop outside the designated door.

"We're sure she's here and not at one of her other residences?" A male agent asks. Bradovchak, glares back at the questioning agent, and the other agents get the cue and glare at the agent, too. Bradovchak wears his blue cape, and brandishes a black gun.

"I am taking personal lead on this blockbuster," he says.

Inside the door, Wendy Easterling in blue pants suit is bent over a glass coffee table, snorting cocaine through a straw. The walls are covered with original expensive art, and the designer furnishings are well ordered.

There are firm knocks on the door. She wraps up the remaining cocaine lines in newspaper, then runs to the bathroom and shoves it in the cabinet under the sink. She stops to apply a comb to her shiny long blonde hair.

The knocks come harder. She opens the door.

Bradovchak's badge is held about 4 inches from her eyes.

"May I come in?"

"Are you asking me? I have a choice?" Wendy says, annoyed.

Bradovchak and the agents step inside.

"Can you tell us where you have been the last 24 hours?"

Wendy twists her face. "This is some criminal matter? I've done something wrong? Well, I had an extended fainting spell, and then went to my Doctor to get examined about it. Don't know anyone who can kill or steal or do something terrible in that kind of state."

Bradovchak says, "You made statements about, to use your own words, turning Congressman and other Federal officials, using damaging information to ensure their cooperation."

"Hah! I made no such statements. That is a lie!"

"Do you want to hear the tape recordings of your own statements? Also, we have recordings of telephone calls between you and Eunsol Lee. You know Ms. Lee,

right? You should, because she just signed a 15-page affidavit about your activities.”

Wendy is panting, with eyes darting around, like a cornered animal.

“Wendy Easterling, we have a warrant for your arrest. The charges are violations of Federal statutes on extortion and human trafficking.”

Wendy runs in retreat, opens the balcony door frantically, and within a second leaps over the railing. The agents hear her screams as she soars ten stories down to the street below.

Bradovchak and the agents come to the railing and peer down. Wendy Easterling’s body is sprawled across the roof of a parked car.

“Alive would have been better, right?” Says a female agent. “Get more intel out of her.”

Bradovchak responds, “This individual was worthless. To us or anybody else.”

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Misa Taelo, wearing a green clerical gown, is seated at a rickety table inside a Morningside Heights tenement apartment. Middle Eastern art covers the wall. There is trash and magazines scattered throughout the room. She lifts her eyes from the Bible as Bashir returns from the kitchen.

“Special cake from my country,” Bashir says, offering Misa a piece. She starts to bite, then hesitates at the sight of several roaches along the floorboards. Then she takes a bite.

“Mmmm. Very good, Messiah. Hey, I can get you a Bible in your native language. Some Bibles even come with English on one side of the page and a second language on the other. If you can just write down your language.”

“I still struggle with my namesake, Reverend,” Bashir says contritely. “You really believe in resurrection?”

“Absolutely. After Jesus was crucified, why did they never find a body? With Roman and Jewish leaders hostile to Jesus, surely someone would have found a body, if Jesus’s resurrection was false. Thomas, one of Jesus’s 12 disciples, saw Jesus after the resurrection and expected a ghost. But when he touched Jesus, it was real flesh and bones.”

“I’d like to share my most recent struggles. It’s sexuality. How to relate it to Biblical teachings, and the urges I feel at night. I need wisdom”—

“Messiah, I can’t help you there. I have to get you a male counselor.”

Bashir is staring at Misa. “I am certain you can help me Reverend.”

Toby Laginn is parked in a dark sedan on the narrow street, about 50 feet from Bashir’s tenement building. He dials his cell phone.

“Yeah Toby,” says Tyger Taelo.

“Just checking in, sir. It was easy to talk to Misa earlier once I mentioned I’m a friend of Jude. She’s in a counseling session as we speak. Trying to convert a Muslim.”

“That’s my Misa,” Taelo responds.

“Why won’t you let me be generous?” Bashir says to Misa. “I come from an affluent family, and we want to send you and your family gifts as appreciation for your counseling. Please give me contact information for you and your family members about where to send these gifts.”

Misa’s arms are folded. “As I told you, my father is temporarily AWOL, I will not accept gifts from you, and all cash goes to ministries at my church for people in need. Thank you for your kindness, Messiah.”

“Gotta use the bathroom. Be right back.”

Bashir dials his cellphone. “Mensa, I’ve met three times with that Savage’s daughter. She refuses to talk about Taelo, or give any locations, addresses, anything.”

“We’re way beyond that, Bashir,” Mensa says. “The last piece of White Sheep preparation is in place. The time to move is now! Vladimir Lenin and his Bolsheviks struck instantly, and brought down the weak Russian government within hours. We have the dominoes lined up to do the same. On Wednesday, we hit the first domino. The chaos, the simultaneous hits, the discredited Administration. The Aryan cobra will control American levers of power by Wednesday evening!”

“Mensa, should I keep the daughter as a hostage as leverage? Have hanky-panky fun with her, too? She’s hot beneath the crusader costume.”

“No, no. This is the wake before the Wednesday tsunami. We do nothing to stir the pot and alert the enemy until then. Still, the Savage girl has seen you, so she has to be eliminated.

“This is how you are to do it: Quietly, no blood, no noise, nothing that would create a police scene at your apartment before Wednesday. Use your creative tools.”

“How about black ice acid? It looks just like tea.”

“Perfect. Once the acid kills her, wait until everything is quiet, then take her body out and bury it in an obscure mountain area. But no mess at your place! Once the Aryan Revolution succeeds, we will discreetly alert Taelo about the death of his daughter. A dagger to his heart, after all the trouble he’s caused. I look forward to seeing the look on that Savage’s face! Destroy his soul before we destroy his body—let us know as soon as the deed is done.”

Bashir comes out and finds Misa reading a Bible.

“Be right back. Getting some tea for us.” Bashir says, as Misa smiles.

In the kitchen, Bashir pours tea from a kettle in a tall brown-ornamented tea cup. He takes a large metal urn and pours an identical-looking liquid into an identical tea cup. He quietly puts the cups on the table; the one with the acid right in front of Misa, to the left of her Bible. Then he retrieves the large metal urn, and places it on the other side of Misa’s Bible.

“Thank you, Messiah.”

Outside in the car, Laginn patiently listens to classical music. After 30 minutes, he looks at his watch.

“Here is the answer to your salvation question, Messiah,” Misa says. “Romans 10, verse 9, is the very definition of passing from separation from God, to eternal paradise: believe in Jesus in your heart, profess with your mouth.”

Bashir is fidgeting impatiently, eyes roaming. He discreetly inches the cup closer to Misa.

“Imagine what it is like to never fear death, because of an awesome, perfect God beyond our imagination, and one who always keeps promises!” Misa says excitedly.

“Imagine what you are missing from not tasting my home-made tea! You haven’t touched it. In my culture, accepting the food of a host is a key to his heart. Here”—

Bashir takes a sip from his cup. “Ahhhh.”

“I’m sorry, Messiah. I mean no disrespect. I have a caffeine allergy.”

“Don’t worry. This has no caffeine.”

“Oh.” Misa picks up her tea cup. Bashir raises his cup, a beaming anticipatory smile on his face. They tap cups over the table. Misa draws the cup toward her mouth. Then she sees the tea bubbling. She makes a face and puts the cup down.

Her cell rings.

“Mason! What a pleasant surprise!” Misa gets up and walks to the other side of the room.

“Nothing urgent, Reverend. I was praying, and then this small voice just prompts me to call you, just to tell you how much I appreciate everything you’ve done for me at the church.”

“Surely the calling of the Holy Spirit,” Misa says. “I am shamed. I have not thanked you enough for all you have done for me, the church, and the benevolence ministry.”

Bashir’s phone rings. It is Mersatos on the other line.

“Mensa asked me to give you coordinates on where we bury the Savage girl. We all need to know the location.”

Outside, an alert pops up on Laginn’s Renland. The photo of Spirou Mersatos pops up on the screen. Laginn frantically reaches for his cell, dials.

“Don’t know how, sir—but Misa’s counseling client is in contact with Mersatos.”

“No way.”

“I’m on it.”

“I’ll be there in 15 minutes,” Taelo says.

Laginn runs full speed down the narrow street, past the broken, ajar front door. Leaping over a prone moaning drug addict, he runs up the steps to the second floor to Bashir’s apartment. He takes a deep breath, and knocks normally.

The door opens slowly for Bashir.

“Emergency. I work for the building owner. We have a life-threatening situation with the electrical wiring. Who is the tenant?”

“Nobody. I’m just staying temporarily,” Bashir says, reluctantly letting him in.

Misa is still on the phone across the room, but disconnects at the sight of the visitor.

“Toby? What are you doing here?” Misa asks, surprised.

“We need to evacuate. Building safety,” Laginn says. “Misa, get out now! This building can explode! Go! Go!”

Misa runs out.

“Go at least 4 blocks!” He calls out the door. Laginn closes and locks the door with a chain, keeping Bashir inside.

“What about me?” Bashir pleads, standing a foot away from Laginn. “Let me out!”

“Women and children are cleared first for evacuation, order of the Fire Department. You try to run out there, the police will stop you.”

Bashir sits down, resigned but angry. Laginn walks over and peers at the table.

“Speaking of safety—there is something burning in this cup. The insides are melting.”

Bashir suddenly pulls a knife from his belt, and slashes Laginn across the jacket sleeve of his arm. Laginn instantly tosses the urn into Bashir’s face.

Bashir’s screams are curdling as flesh melts off his face.

A few minutes later, Misa is sitting on a Morningside heights park bench. She smiles quietly with contentment as a gentle, caressing breeze whips her long black hair. A homeless woman wanders over to her. With a smile, Misa reaches into her purse for a \$5 and an Evangelism tract.

Her cell rings.

“Hi, this your Dad.”

“What’s the occasion?” Misa asks.

“Just want to see how you are doing. I love you. Where are you?”

Misa texts her location. A few minutes later, a red cab drops off Taelo near the bench. Taelo moves his imposing frame toward his daughter, then stops halfway.

“Come here.”

She hesitates, then walks toward him.

He clutches a big hug on her. He squeezes and squeezes. She returns the tight hug. Finally they face each other.

“How was your day, Misa?”

“Very nice, low-keyed, blessed. I counseled a very friendly Muslim man. We did have an evacuation issue. Did you hear about any exploding buildings?”

“Nothing like that. Misa, I just want to apologize to you. I have been so narrow and hard headed. Can you forgive me?”

“Yes,” she says, smiling at her Dad for the first time in a while. “Can we put some regular time aside to talk?”

“It’s a done deal, I promise.”

The next morning. Tyra and Mike anchor the morning news. Big black letters “Messiah Murder” occupy the screen above their heads.

Tyra: “New York City officials are calling this the Messiah Murder, and it comes with political overtones. A man, only identified as Messiah, is the victim of a horrendous killing. Acid attack. NYPD has no current suspects. An intense situation—and I don’t think this Messiah will be resurrecting. Mike, you have more information?”

Mike: “Yes. Police investigating the scene apparently found paper and electronic documents referencing very threatening words against President Jaime Velasquez. There was some vague connection to a militia group. Scary stuff.”

Tyra: “We’ve heard the cliché ‘vast right wing conspiracy’ forever—often used flippantly. But this certainly raises questions.”

Mike: “Do you know where the term originated from?”

Tyra (smiling): “Come on, Mike, I wasn’t even born. President Jimmy Carter?”

Mike: “The Clinton family.”

Tyra: “Okay, we will be following this story very closely. With keen interest.”

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D-Day. Wednesday. 10:15 AM.

President Jaime Velasquez is seated with key advisors at a polished roundtable in a White House conference room. Velasquez is an imposing man, wavy brown hair, slightly raised cheekbones, a little color, and blue blazer over blue guyabera shirt.

There is a knock. A tall imposing door swings open. A well-dressed woman with pixie hair brings in two guests: a petite woman with curly gray hair, and a lanky man with a crewcut and pale skin.

“Mr. President,” the pixie haired woman says. “Here are Hilda Rothman and Bob Steiner from the Anti-Defamation League.”

The President lifts his imposing figure and shakes the hands of the visitors. They sit in two vacant swivel chairs, surrounded by the President’s entourage.

President Velasquez says, “I received an advanced briefing, and to underscore both the seriousness of the issue you present, and my deep respect for the work you are doing, I have asked my closest advisors to join us. One is on business travel, and Carla Herrera is ill with the flu. The rest are here.

“Farthest to my right is Paul Davenport, handling constituent affairs, including business, community and relations with government agencies.” Tall and distinguished Black man in his 60s with green suit, Black and gray short hair and thick moustache.

“To my immediate right is Hiram Nestor, my Chief of Staff.” Round face, heavysset frame, shaved sides but fluffy brown hair on top.

“To my immediate left is Cora Vernice, my chief foreign affairs advisor.” A stunning woman, 40-ish, with bright green dress suit and shaggy brown hair.

“Finally to my far left, is Francis Maynor, White Counsel.” A man over 60, with short gray hair, gray goatee in the shape of an inverted triangle, and thick glasses. Mensa extends a handshake to both visitors.

“White Counsel, sir?” Hilda says in a low, gentle voice.

“What did I say? I mean White House Counsel,” Velasquez corrects. “Shows I’m distracted by the subject of the day.” Everyone laughs.

Mensa says jovially, “I thought the President was comparing me to NBA star Larry Counsel—jokingly called White Counsel, as the only White player on the Chicago Bulls.” Everyone laughs some more.

“Now for some serious discussion,” Velasquez said, taut eyes roaming. “I’m sure you have all read news stories of my imminent demise. I assure you I am firmly in control of this Office. My Cuban immigrant parents taught me hard work, respect, faith, morality. Thanks to them, my four year of military service, years heading up a government ethics office, and terms in Congress, have been marked by impeccable integrity—and puts to shame the false, negative, malicious insults coming from cowardly, hidden sources, and influencing cowardly leaders, including many in Congress. I have no fear, because I know I am innocent, and poetic justice will reign at the end. One of the alleged photos of me with a narco carries the same date I was in Costa Rica. That’s proof that evil is closely linked with stupidity.— Now, please share your concerns.”

Hilda says, “First of all, our organization stands in solidarity with the minorities recently murdered by animals who flaunt their viciousness by placing swastikas over their victims. As anti-semitic incidents continue to plague America like an incurable sore, we are uniting with people of color and every decent American in exposing and confronting hatemongers. Wolves hide in forests. These human wolves bring their forests right into our very cities, our neighborhoods, and tauntingly stoke fear. They get away with it because of apathy and self-interest of many national leaders.”

Cora Vernice says, “We stand in solidarity with you. In response to hate crimes, I have already used my contacts in Israel, to identify all Intelligence sources they can share with us, about White Nationalist threats to our nation.”

Steiner says, “This is imminent danger. Hilda and I just met with a high - ranking government official. He told us he has proof of a partnership between White militias and Islamic radicals.”

“United by a common hatred of Israel and everything America stands for,” Hilda says.

Steiner says, “Our source says that this Nazi/Jihadist axis is ready to strike. We should expect terror, he said. Their goal is to create a White homeland. But not before taking deadly reprisals against minority and Jewish leaders. Is America ready?”

Nestor says, “Do you have any proof, documents, of this conspiracy?”

Velasquez says, “Hiram, when other NGOs and business come to my office for consultation, we don’t ask them for Court-related proof about their concerns. The track record and integrity of the Anti-Defamation League is sufficient for me.”

Steiner says, “The man we met with was credible. He showed us his credentials as a member of a US Intelligence agency. He also said there are one or more high-level government officials tied into this Nazi/Jihadist axis.”

Mensa says, “As White House Counsel, I have access to all kinds of government files. I will use my connections, with President Velasquez’s support, to expose any government official even remotely connected to racism, antisemitism or terrorism. I have donated to your organization personally, and stand solidly with you.” Mensa takes calling cards and gives one to each of the visitors. “If you have any further information about these threats, please don’t hesitate to call.”

“Thank you so much, Counselor Maynor,” Steiner says. “We deeply appreciate it.—By the way, may I call you Frank?”

“No, Francis. I was named after a saint, not a hot dog.” Everyone laughs again.

Viruet is seated in a small West Wing room. Head phones cover his ears. He looks at the screen on his Renland—video feed of the two Jewish White House guests shaking hands with the President and Advisors to conclude the meeting.

Velasquez sternly addresses his Advisors. “Those aren’t the only people who have approached me and this office about potential terrorism tied to White Nationalists. I’m tired of the whispers about racists and terrorists hiding the shadows. The stupid allegations against me are secondary, and Congress will do nothing about it. Your total focus, for the foreseeable future, is to expose this racist terrorist vermin and stamp it out.”

Cora says, “I think it’s time we communicate Code Red to all our law enforcement and intelligence agencies.”

“Go for it,” Velasquez says. “Francis, you have been using legal analysis skills to examine all White House records to any clues to links, intentional or otherwise, to racist or jihadi threats. What do you have so far?”

“An incomplete investigation. One of your inner circle has still not provided the key to his office.”

“That would be me, sir,” Paul Davenport says in his deliberate tenor voice. “Been real busy.” He takes a key from a chain. “Duplicate, Francis. But don’t lose it.”

Davenport tosses the key. It lands about 7 feet behind Mensa. “Sorry. Basketball’s never been my thing.”

Mensa glares at Davenport. “Are you gonna get it for me?”

Davenport rises, “I’m gonna get the special National Security Advisor.”

Two minutes later, Davenport returns with Jude Viruet, who sits at the table where Steiner sat before. Viruet wears an expensive brown suit and vest for this Presidential encounter.

Davenport says, “Jude Viruet is the National Security liaison here to give his expertise on this issue.”

“For whom do you work, Mr. Viruet?” Mensa asks.

“That’s not important,” Davenport answers. “Explain your role, Jude.”

“The President asked me to record these proceedings. After all, this is a critical national security issue.”

The Advisors exchange glances.

Viruet continues, “My assignment is to supplement the information provided to the Jewish leaders by the unnamed Intelligence whistleblower. I’ll give the whistleblower a name: Darius.”

“Why Darius?” Mensa asks.

“I like Biblical references,” Viruet says. “Darius was a King who exposed and toppled internal government abuses, while also protecting minorities, including the Jewish people. Call me the Darius Enhancer.—Now, Mr. Maynor.”

Mensa jerks at the sound of his name. “What?”

“The President assigned you to investigate the same potential threats. Let’s you and I work together.”

“Okay.—Mr. President, I do have one significant preliminary finding. It is sensitive, and should not be shared outside this room. It involves someone very close to you.”

“Who?” Velasquez demands.

Mensa says, “You asked me to be impartial and blunt. It concerns Cora Vernice. I have information that, during her visits to Europe, she met with fascist European nationalist groups. Some of those groups have ties to the threatening White militias here.”

Velasquez rises. “Francis, if you have damaging information on Cora, I want it on my desk by tomorrow noon.”

Cora rises, flustered. “That’s all you have to say, Mr. President? I’m under an investigation? This is crap! I will not stand here and be viciously slandered!—Mr. President, are you going to stop this? Or do I hand in my resignation?”

“Cora relax, please,” Velasquez says. “This will be sorted out by tomorrow. Promise.”

“Not good enough, Mr. President.” Cora takes her badge out of her pocketbook and places it on the table.

“I’m not accepting your resignation, Cora,” Velasquez calls as she walks out.

“Sorry, Mr. President,” Mensa shrugs. “Facts are facts.—And what is that in your ear? Partner?”

Viruet answers, “Getting continuous feeds from confidential informants. Darius enhancements.”

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Fifteen minutes later, the pixie-haired woman rushes into the conference room, her face reflecting panic.

“Mr. President, have you looked outside?”

“What am I supposed to be seeing?”

“There are army troops outside the White House, and armour stuff.”

“Hiram, get maximum monitor feeds now,” Velasquez orders.

Within minutes, multiple white screens are lowered in the room. Multiple video shots cover the screens, depicting various locations.

Nestor says, “The ring of soldiers goes from K Street down 18th to Constitution to 14th. They have the White House totally surrounded. And the Capitol. And the Supreme Court.”

“Has anyone from the Pentagon asked those troops what they are doing?”

“Pentagon people are trying to sort this out, too. There have media inquiries with these soldiers outside. They are mostly quiet. A couple of them just said, orders.”

“Orders? Exactly whose Orders, Hiram?”

Nestor shrugs. “We don’t know yet. These troops are doing nothing. Not moving against anyone, not occupying buildings. But they’re on high alert.”

“Nestor, I have two Orders of my own for to convey. One: The Defense Secretary and the Joint Chiefs of Staff are to report to the White House, effective immediately. Two: The Secret Service is put on maximum alert.”

“Yes sir.”

News room headquarters. The Tyra and Mike show.

Tyra: “Mike and I are staying with you, with constant updates. This is an incredible scene. Army troops quartered in different locations of Washington DC. They are not moving. But they are sending a powerful message to the world. This is an ongoing mystery: Who sent them? Why are they there? What’s going to happen next?”

Mike: “This reminds me of a scene from a sci-fi movie: The alien ship arrives and just starts hovering. The whole world is in suspended fascination. Are they friendly aliens? Are they going to attack? Will lasers blast away, killing off all of humankind?”

Tyra: “We remind you that there has been not one casualty, not one act of violence connected to these troop formations. But you have countless millions everywhere, holding their breath, wondering when the other shoe is going to drop.”

Mike: “Tyra, we are going split screen. In both the House and Senate chambers, we have members of Congress, ranting, virtually screaming, for President Velasquez to give them answers about what is going on.”

Tyra: “There’s been no feedback from any Administration Official?”

Mike: “Press corps from all over the world have been contacting the White House, various offices in the Velasquez Administration, including the Pentagon. We’ve heard nothing from Defense Secretary Dials, Homeland Secretary DiNardo, FBI Director Cardenas, NOC Director Bradovchak or DNI Freeman.”

Every TV station is riveted on the troop scene in Washington. Suspended animation. Regular TV shows are interrupted. Even foreign broadcasts, as far away as China, eye the Washington developments with trepidation.

The video feeds and broadcasts depict increasing tension. Crowds of people gather around the soldiers. Most gaze on with curiosity. As the crowd grows, the mood gets angrier. Near the Capitol and the White House, large mobs are just a few feet from the troops. There are loud chants:

“USA! Troops go home! USA! Troops go home!”

Nestor rushes into the conference room where the President, Viruet, Davenport and Mensa are seated.

“Mr. President, you are getting hotline calls from all over the world. The Russian President”—

“Hiram, I am taking no calls until we get this under control, with some answers,” Velasquez answers firmly.

The heavysset Chief of Staff is wide eyed. “Mr. President, you seem so calm, given the potential threats out there.”

“Hiram, you have a job to do. Just do it. How many military Chief of Staff are here?”

“Just two. The others?” Hiram shrugs.

“We wait a half hour. If no more show up, then I will give the two of them a specific Order to send the troops back to their barracks.—And Hiram. Take some deep breaths. People who get excited tend to mess up their assignments.”

“Yes, Mr. President.” Nestor leaves.

“I have just received from critically important intel from Darius,” Viruet says to the President, Davenport and Mensa. “Francis, my partner, get your notepad ready. This is huge.”

“Mr. President, do I have your permission to control the monitor feeds?” Davenport asks. “Hiram is taking care of other details.”

Velasquez nods, and Davenport grabs a fancy remote box.

Viruet gets up, pacing, as he begins his narrative: “That army scene out there is not sustainable. Either a higher Federal authority will intervene to redirect or confront those troops. Or extreme dynamics we do not see will happen.

“Darius thinks it’s latter: dynamics. Extreme and fast moving. Darius has a scenario where White militias and jihadist allies may actually threaten our precious democracy.”

“No way!” Davenport laughs.

“Didn’t say it was happening. But here’s how it could happen. The groundwork takes years. The execution takes hours, like a Hitler blitzkrieg. First, you start a national campaign of character assassination against the President. That includes blackmail used against certain leaders, and high-tech photography scams to frame the President with a serious scandal. Some of these participants have no idea they are working for White Nationalists; they consider themselves Patriots, acting on a charade of information they believe to be true. The blackmail is extra incentive.

“Stay with me. We have a damaged and weakened President. Poll numbers go down. Scandal swirls around him. So the militia leaders move to Phase 2: Use a high level Nazi mole in the Pentagon to station troops around Washington. The message to the public is this: A corrupt President, aligned with murdering narco-terrorists, is staging a military coup so he won’t face justice!

“Phase 3 comes right after Stage 2: Bombs going off all across America; thousands of innocent Americans slaughtered. Now in the eye of the Americans, you have a President who, not only is conspiring with murdering drug dealers, not only threatening our democracy with Federal troops, but has totally lost control of

America! Our country in total chaos, thousands of gory casualties, under a wicked and incompetent President!

“Phase 4 is the final piece. A small militia cadre. They simultaneously assassinate a few politicians and leaders. Then the militia leaders use the altered photography trick again, to manufacture evidence that the President ordered these assassinations!

“So what do he have? A Narcoterrorist allied President; a military dictator; a presider over mass terror and anarchy; and a murderer of dissident American leaders. A monster in the White House! Under these circumstances, the public, and even much of the military, will tolerate a military coup in the US, to clean out this evil.

“When the military moves—led by the highly-placed militia leaders and the Nazi in the Pentagon—Aryan warriors get imbedded in the White House, to cut off the monster’s head.

“Do the military coup leaders suddenly fly the Swastika? No. They promise future elections, to seduce the public. But with White nationalists calling the shots from behind the scenes, the military government turns the screws on the minorities and the Jews. The goal is an Aryan Constitution within 2-3 years.”

“It’ll never happen,” Mensa says.

“I agree with you, Francis. Nazis over-exaggerate their own capabilities. Imagine their own superiority. The American public would rise up to defend democracy, even when faced with a lunatic President. But the White militias are deluded into thinking success is possible. That’s why I think the plot could go forward.”

Mensa says, “Viruet, we need to put you in Rehab. That’s just crazy. Who would be responsible for this so-called Revolution?”

“You’d need a billionaire to fund the slander campaign against the President. You’d need a highly-placed Intelligence Officer to oversee the photo charade. You’d need at least one militia-aligned General, very high up. You’d need a corrupted Secret Service Officer, to let Nazi killers on the White House grounds. Then you have the cadre of militia and jihadist murderers.”

Mensa rises, “Viruet, who is this Darius character?”

“Everything is confidential.”

“We are partners, and I need that information! Jaime, tell Viruet to divulge! Viruet can get us all killed—this country killed!”

“Sit down, Francis,” Velasquez says.

Mensa is hyperventilating as Velasquez picks up a gold phone. “Katy, please bring up lunch from the White House Mess. Bring a double portion for Counselor Maynor. He seems a little frail and sick. And a bottle of Valium.”

Davenport says, “Are you suggesting, Viruet, that mass terror attacks in the US are imminent?”

“Could come within minutes.”

“Interesting,” Velasquez says.

“Interesting?!” Mensa shrieks.

Tyger Taelo and Jamie Bradovchak stand in a triangle-shaped roof on top of a tower. A huge window faces them; a great panoramic view. Fancy high-tech gizmos occupy a table behind them.

“One more accountability check,” Taelo says. “There cannot be one mistake. Do you have exact coordinates of all 27 bombs?”

“Yes. Agents stationed within sight of them.”

“How many agents in total for this operation?”

“350.”

Taelo says, “Operation Chaos is scheduled for exactly 1:30. Simultaneous blasts, like the touching of a minute hand on the number 12. All arrests and bomb interdictions must within 2 minutes of each other. Nationwide.”

“I’ll do better. I’ll show these maniacs what precision’s all about.”

Taelo lifts a powerful telescope. There are scattered resort homes. He focuses on shiny one, built on the slope of a hill. A black-haired woman walks slowly up the driveway.

“Perfect timing. Good job, Jamie.”

“Cro Mags are always well trained.”

In the resort home, several Middle Eastern men are sitting behind computers. There is a large map on the right wall. 27 black Xs cover different parts of the USA. Two bearded men see the thick-haired Asian woman walking up the driveway. They open the door for her.

Eunsol Lee walks in.

“The code, Ma’am.” She holds her phone up, and they let her in.

“Please don’t get too close. Flu bug,” she says. The heavy coat and shivers verify it. The bearded men shrink away.

Omar perks up. “Wendy’s assistant!” He calls to the others. His beard stretches to the chest, and he wears the pakol cap. “Schraeder said you’d be here, to witness this glorious day for the enemies of the Great Satan. Allah has surely found a special place in heaven for Wendy.”

“When is the magic moment?” Eunsol asks.

“14 minutes and counting.”

“Your religion’s suicide actions inspired me to research what Christians teach about suicide,” Eunsol says. “It’s a sin for Christians. There are exceptions. If soldiers are in combat, and an enemy throws a grenade, and a soldier covers it and sacrifices his life to save others, that’s not a sin. In 1 John, Chapter 3, verse 16, Christians are expected to lay down their lives for their brothers.”

“In Islam, similar,” Omar says. “Suicide, martyrdom, blurred.”

Eunsol looks hard at Omar. “Law enforcement officers wanted to raid this place. But that would have been too risky, because you may have had the chance to detonate bombs before the arrests. This is better.”

“What?”

“This.” Eunsol parts her jacket to reveal a bomb strapped to her body. She presses the button.

The explosion is deafening. Yellow and orange flames stretch 30 feet into the air as scarred rubble festers below.

Taelo peers into the telescope, beholding the smoke. “What goes around comes around. What’s good for the goose is good for the scumbag.”

35>

“This is Juan Dimas, and we have breaking news,” an older, distinguished man announces from a cable station’s newsroom. “We have just learned that NOC agents interrupted multiple terrorist plots, disarmed several bombs and arrested over 100 terrorists. This could have been the worst terrorist incident since the 911 attacks. But the heroic actions of these Federal agents apparently averted an American Armageddon. Americans can sleep well tonight—but with one eye open to the potential dangers of future attacks. We don’t know if there are other bombs or terrorists loose out there. We are reaching out to NOC Director Jamie Bradovchak.”

That video appears on the white screen inside the Presidential conference room.

Davenport says, “I’ve got two pre-recorded videos.”

The square on the wall becomes larger. “As you see, a Secret Service Captain is relieving the guard at the 17th Street entrance,” Davenport says. “He looks around carefully. Next you see nine guys going in, one at a time. The Captain is careful to do at least a cursory check on them. I betcha they’re packing heat. Three of them have semi-long hair. Don’t want to make it too obvious they’re skinhead Nazis.”

Another video comes up. “This is 15 minutes later,” Davenport narrates. “As you see, there are the nine guys who came in. With the Captain. They are on the ground. Look close, and you see the handcuffs on them. The militia leaders were slick preparing for regime change. The Secret Service was slickier—is that a word?”

Viruet looks over to Mensa with mock surprise. “It looks like Darius was not dreaming after all.”

A few minutes later, Viruet looks at an action video on the Renland. “Hey, we’ve got live feed! I’ll put it on the screen. It’s from a Capitol hill townhouse.”

He turns up the volume.

“I’ll kill her, I swear!” Spirou Mersatos is standing next to a door, a gun against the head of a young woman; a college student with flowing golden hair. Her eyes manifest fear.

“Drop the guns! Now!” Mersatos yells.

Vic Vetaro comes into view, with three other armed agents. They move slowly toward Mersatos.

“I’ll count to ten! One, two--”

Mersatos stops and shrivels against the wall with the hostage, as the agents creep closer. One aims a gun at his knee. Another aims a gun at his groin. Vetaro aims a gun at his head.

“We’ve got all night, Spirou,” Vetaro says.

Mersatos looks nervously at Vetaro and then BLAM!—a single shot to the head, killing him instantly.

“Okay, I lied,” Vetaro says. “We don’t have all night.”

The white screen on the wall goes blank. Viruet looks over at Mensa, who is staring straight ahead. “Francis, he was the lead enforcer of the Aryan militia geared up for the assassinations and other mayhem. We have the names of all of Mersatos’s colleagues, and the Nazis imbedded in the Defense establishment. About 500 FBI agents are rounding them up as we speak.”

Mensa stirs. “You said we. You’ve been part of this all along? You too, Paul?”

“Call it teamwork,” Davenport replies.

“Yes, teamwork,” President Velasquez adds, hands folded.

Viruet says, “Francis, I have a nice metaphor for you to add to your research notes: The Aryan Cobra was designed as a six-hour shock ‘n’ awe putsch. The Aryan Cobra found the guillotine in just two hours.”

Mensa gets up to leave.

“Where are you going?” Velasquez asks.

“Update my notes, of course. The story of a lifetime!”

“Paul and Viruet, I think you need to help him,” Velasquez adds.

In the White House basement, Viruet, Davenport and the President stand outside a sturdy door.

“The dark room. Just what I suspected,” Velasquez says.

The threesome walk into the dark room. It is dark except for desk lamps. At the end of the room, Mensa sits behind one computer. A General, with squiggly hair and uniform blazing with metals, sits behind a computer to Mensa’s right.

“General Harling!” Nobody told me you were here,” President Velasquez calls.

“Came in last night. Doing some spatial research on Kazak territory, sir. Keep our country, safe.”

“Admirable, General.”

Viruet walks toward Mensa and stops 2 feet from him. “You asked me about the identity of Darius. Okay. Darius is a twin. The first half is Bill Schraeder. Once we caught him cold, he rolled over like a showdog. Gave us the whole scheme. The second half of Darius is Mersatos. Advanced surveillance. His every move, spoken word, phone call, on tape. Then there was Darius’s mistress.”

“Who?”

“I think you know, Francis. Wendy Easterling. The agent who briefed the Jewish leaders was just the Darius messenger.”

“Congratulations, Viruet and Paul—and whoever else worked with you, for your 99% success rate. The 1% just screwed you. My ace, General Harling, has the nuclear codes. We have already typed in all the digits. It will take one second to simultaneously type in the last digit. Then the nuke hits Miami. Now, you all will do exactly what I tell you. President Velasquez, I need you to come here. I have a very specific instruction for you.”

Velasquez walks toward Mensa, then stops silently.

“I am a Tampa Bucs fan,” Viruet says. “Always hated the Dolphins. Go ahead and blow up Miami.”

“I’m dead serious, Viruet.”

“Okay.” Viruet pulls out a Renland. “Mind if I call my aunt in South Beach and warn her?” Viruet forces a smile.

“You’re real funny, aren’t you?” Mensa mocks.

Viruet looks at the General with a grin. “Am I funny General?”

As soon as the General looks at him, Viruet extends his arm toward Harling, then toward Mensa. The Renland hits the marks.

Bzzzt! Bzzzt! Two White nationalist leaders drop.

“Maynor’s still alive. Maybe we can learn something,” Viruet says.

President Velasquez grabs Mensa by the short hairs and lifts his head. His eyes are partially open. “Would I be stupid enough to leave the nuclear code unchanged?”

Viruet adds, “To think that we would ever let you Nazis, racists and terrorists take control of this great nation.”

“Thank you, Paul and Terry,” President Velasquez says, as Secret Service Officers enter. “Accolades for both of you comes later. Right now I’ve a pressing meeting to attend.”

“Where?” Davenport asks.

“Joint Chiefs upstairs. To have them tell the soldiers outside to go home to their families.”

“They’re still there?” Davenport asks.

The President replies, “After Harling ordered the outside troop deployment as part of the Nazi plot, I discreetly ordered the Defense Secretary to endorse the deployment. We make no changes in the outside conditions as we lay the trap for Maynor and his crazies.”

36>

Jamie Bradovchak, shiny blue cape, is fielding questions at the Press Club. Constant camera flashes light him up.

“Did you get all of the terrorists?” Comes a question.

“Yes. So take the train, go to restaurants—don’t let evildoers think they can alter your lifestyle.”

“Those arrested White militia members. How many?”

“About 20. They will face charges of sedition.”

“Were they connected to the terrorists and the bombs?”

“Irrelevant. It’s all over,” Bradovchak says.

“How serious was the threat?”

“About as serious a threat as a cockroach when you step on it.”

“Was President Velasquez ever in serious danger?”

“Constantly. From vicious people engaging in character assassination of a totally innocent man. He is a decent human being with no connection to drug traffickers. The photographs were totally fraudulent.”

“Director Bradovchak, on a different note, you were also investigating the assassination of Louis Brannigan. Any progress on identifying a co-conspirator with Franklin Gutierrez? Recent reports point to a \$100,000 payoff to Mr. Gutierrez.”

“We have identified the late Wendy Easterling as the main suspect. That is based on motive, unaccounted for funds, opportunity and threatening statements made by her toward Mr. Brannigan. However, it is not an ironclad case, and we are technically leaving it open, in case other evidence surfaces.”

37>

Viruet is seated with Gil Gilroy at a quaint Italian restaurant in Queens. The waiter sets orange juice on the clothed table in front of Viruet—and a soda in front of Gilroy.

“Nothing harder?”

“I’m in outpatient Rehab. Been clean since two days after the Cro Mag party. I found a good facility. But am also following up on the substance abuse classes at your church part-time. People are real nice there.”

Gilroy’s red hair is plastered down; his brown suede jacket is sharp and pressed; and his eyes are alert.

“Jamie Bradovchak actually told the world he thinks Wendy Easterling murdered Louie? Jamie is an idiot and a pompous one. Wendy did not kill Louie. JBrad couldn’t get past the position of paper shredder at my investigative firm.”

“You’re so sure, Gil?”

“The reason I invited you to lunch is I’ve solved the mystery of who killed Brannigan. You, my bud, are the first to hear about it. One of my prime investigators is Iranian. He tracked down the \$100,000 paid to Gutierrez. Unbeknownst to you, Jen Mendoza opened up a bank account, with your name as the joint account holder. It’s from that account that the money was transferred to the hit man.”

“Why would Jen want Louie dead?”

“She had a dark side. She was heavily into cocaine dealing. That’s where she got the cash to pay Gutierrez. Brannigan found out about her drug dealing about a week before the New York rally. She was terrified that Louie would expose her. Actually, Louie quietly hired a private investigator to look further into Jen’s dealings. Jen gave Gutierrez the Cro Mag emblem as a distraction. I assume she got Cro Mag info from Brannigan.”

“Bradovchak took me in for questioning. He cited the \$100,000 payment from my account to Gutierrez.”

“That’s explainable, “Gilroy says. “The Iranian sleuth, without seeking my clearance, reported to NOC the transfer of the \$100,000 from Jen’s account—with your name on it.”

“Why did the Iranian focus on me rather than Jen?”

“It’s a cultural thing, Jude. In the eyes of some Middle Eastern people, women are never considered; the man is always responsible for such things.”

“What will you do with the information?”

“Nothing. The killer is dead. I certainly won’t tell that idiot Bradovchak. Let him find out for himself.”

“Next week I’ll invite you and Jamie over for dinner. You can tell him anything you want.”

38>

About a hundred people are crowded into the basement of Tyger Taelo’s beach house on the Jersey Shore. There is a huge pink and white layered cake on a silver table. They all sing Happy Birthday to Misa, as she covers her face.

Viruet is sitting in the back as Taelo claps his hand to get everyone’s attention: “I just want to give a tribute to the greatest daughter God has ever made. I know lots of parents make that claim. But this is different: Misa is actually certified.” He hands her a gold plaque with the bolded certification inside. Fastened to the plaque is a list of hundreds of signatories: Witnesses to the Greatest Daughter in the World. “Misa is the official Mother Teresa of New York. There is not a person in need anywhere in New York that she won’t help.” Taelo hugs his daughter as tears stream down her cheeks.

Later that evening, the music, food and drink flow. People are dancing like the world has no cares. Vic Vetaro is doing his little wiggly thing. About half the guests are Viruet’s colleagues, doubtlessly sharpening their Occupational Lying skills. Misa is sitting quietly off to the side, smiling quietly to herself.

The next day, the guests are gone. Only Viruet, Vetaro and Laginn remain; Toby with elevated favor from Taelo after rescuing Misa from the perilous encounter in Morningside Heights. Wearing beach attire, Viruet, Vetaro, Laginn and Misa enjoy pickup volleyball games. The guys take turns teaching Misa volleyball techniques; Misa is no Kathy Smith.

Inside the house, Viruet shows Vetaro an e-mail on his phone.

“Kathy Smith saying she was too harsh and judgmental. She apologized and suggested a reconciliation meeting.”

Vetaro chuckles, “Your women problems again, Jude. Kathy just schooled you on merciful Christianity. You should have written her first. Some day you’ll learn. Maybe.”

“Yeah, I’ll make sure my response is nicer than her letter.”

“So there’s hope for you and Kathy together!” Vetaro beams.

“Let’s put it this way: I am breaking the curse,” Viruet says, slapping Vetaro’s shoulder.

Later, Viruet is on the desk, taking in the wide beach, and enjoying a steady, warm breeze. Chops and foam mark the Atlantic, as the sun begins to set.

Taelo beckons him inside the quaint den area. They sit down at a marble table.

“Jude, you are the first to know I am retiring in four months. I’ve done my patriotic duty, and now I’m moving on to more fun, less stressful, business pursuits.

I'm a co-investor in an International sporting company. I'll be having a ball, no pun intended, promoting different sporting equipment in different cultural contexts. They even have American football fields in Kenya. Would you consider coming to work for me?"

"Thank you for the offer, Tyger. But you know me: My rise of righteous indignation at some of the hurtful evils we have to face in this world."

"I thought that would be your answer. But I want to honor you with the offer, anyway. Misa says that you share short periods of prayer every day. She is deeply appreciative that you step in as a family member when I am busy. I am very appreciative that you helped bring Misa and I closer together."

"Thank you. Where is Misa? I have a special request during this prayer time."

Taelo walks into the other room, and Misa joins Viruet. She is wearing that same knee length blue dress that she wore in the Elizabeth NJ garage. She sits down with Viruet with a smile and a light touch to his hand.

Viruet says, "My prayer request is this: Kathy Smith and I broke up over a terrible misunderstanding. Recently she sent me an e-mail apologizing for over-reaction, and suggesting that we get together and reconcile."

"I can be your reconciliation Pastor. Clergy do reconciliation meetings all the time."

Viruet reaches into the pocket of his surfer shirt. "I have this ring, a little stone."

"That's a diamond, Uncle Jude," Misa beams.

"I'm not sure how far this will go. But I want to pursue something serious—I need some sisterly advice."

"She needs to know how you feel, how devoted to her you are—I cannot imagine any woman saying no to Uncle Jude."

"Can I practice on you?"

Misa giggles. "I'm not her. I wouldn't know what to say."

"Okay, here goes. Correct me when I'm off: You are very special. You are kind, smiling to light up people's lives, very gentle and sweet."

Misa suppresses a laugh. "Sorry, Uncle Jude."

"You are unique with your passion for prayer. You have a deep compassion for people in need and who are hurting. You are pure. You do not compromise your values. You passionately embrace Gospel truth. You are humble. You know how to laugh. Most importantly, you know how to forgive and reconcile with family and friends."

Misa says, "I need Kathy, too. To learn from her. What an amazing woman! You are truly blessed, Uncle Jude."

"Now, to show my love and devotion, please accept this ring as a symbol of lifetime commitment, and permanent union before God."

Viruet takes Misa's left hand. He slides the ring over her fourth finger.

"What are you doing? This part you need to save for Kathy."

Viruet leans closer. "Who's Kathy? Perfect fit."

Misa starts shaking. "Oh my--what do I do?"

“Just remember what you just said: How can any woman say no to Uncle Jude?” He leans over and gives her a tender hug. Misa returns the hug. Tyger Taelo is standing by the door. He nods very slowly.

39>

This had to be the Guinness Book of Records for graceful separations. Tyger was a prophet to compare Misa to Mother Teresa at her birthday party. Just three weeks after Misa accepted my ring and engagement, she contritely informs me of her new calling from God: Move to Guatemala to minister to poor and sick children. She says, of course I am welcome to join her as her future husband. My calling is national security in the USA, so Guatemala was not an option.

What struck me was the lack of anger, hurt, or even awkwardness. When God gives us different callings, He paves the way for peace, in preparation for them. I asked Misa how she is funding her long-term mission trip. She simply says, without a trace of anxiety, that if God calls, God will provide. I am sure Tyger offered her a nice head start.

My last encounter with Misa was a double date with her, Vic and Vic’s wife Lauren. It was the most fun I ever had. It started with dinner at a fine Italian restaurant; soft lights and candles. With full permission of the restaurant manager, Lauren brought one of her patented desserts: a heavenly peach pie. The highlight of the date was the spiritual high from us visiting a group home for developmentally disabled people. Misa ended the night with a stunning surprise: A plaque for me, similar to the one she just received. Inside the gold frame were the large words in black: “To the Best Friend and Uncle (in quotes) in the world.” Attached to the plaque were “certification” signatures from hundreds of friends.

Misa’s final words were a question: Would I mind if she kept the diamond ring?—as a tribute to our enduring and lifelong friendship. She would place it in a special case.

The message was clear: An open invitation for me to come to Guatemala. At least until God changes plans—which He is known to do, sometimes quite suddenly.

Vic said to me, yes, this is another separation. But yes, the curse is broken.

